Tradition and revolt in the poetry of T. S. Eliot

Emanuel Stephen Shaw
Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
TRADITION AND REVOLT IN THE POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
EMANUEL STEPHEN SHAW

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
AUGUST, 1961
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.  T. S. ELIOT AS CRITIC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ELIOT'S REVOLT AGAINST ROMANTICISM</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. ELIOT'S REVOLT AGAINST CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thomas Stearns Eliot's collection of essays, *The Sacred Wood*, appeared in 1920, followed by his most famous poem, *The Waste Land*, in 1922. In the essays Eliot occupied himself with the study of and the reverence for tradition, but in his poetic practice he appeared to reject conventional poetic practices and to institute new ones. This caused critics to declare that the poetry and the criticism were irreconcilable, that Eliot was a traditionalist in critical theory and a rebel in poetic practice.

It is this critical reaction which has created the present writer's interest in revolt and tradition in Eliot. The purpose of this study, however, is not so much to show that there is unity in Eliot's poetic practice and his criticism—although this is an important part of the study—as to show that these two seemingly antithetical elements exist side by side in his poetry.

The first chapter will consist of an analysis of Eliot's literary criticism in which he emphasized particularly his theory of poetry and his concept of tradition. The second chapter will examine the nature of Eliot's revolt against nineteenth century conventions in poetry, and will explain how this revolt is allied with his earlier insistence on tradition in poetry. The third chapter will be an analysis of the poet's revolt against contemporary society which he felt had lost all contact with tradition.

Only the poems preceding "Ash Wednesday" will be considered in the present study because this poem, completed in 1930, represents the beginning
of a change in Eliot's attitude. In the earlier poetry he conveys the cultural problem of his time, while in the poetry after "Ash Wednesday" he turns largely to religion as a means of solving the problem. "Sweeney Agonistes" was published in 1932, but the two fragments which comprise the poem were published separately in 1926 and 1927, the period before Eliot began to emphasize the religious element in his poetry. Therefore, it has been included in the study.

The writer expresses sincere gratitude to the faculty in the Department of English, Dr. N. P. Tillman, Dr. T. D. Jarrett and Dr. Helen Coulbourn, for guidance and help during the period leading up to this study, and especially to Mrs. Lucy C. Grigsby whose suggestions and assistance were invaluable, particularly during the early parts of the study.
CHAPTER I

T. S. ELIOT AS CRITIC

Had T. S. Eliot not become the most famous poet of his time, his literary criticism alone would have assured his distinction as one of the most important figures in English letters. His most famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," compares favorably with Matthew Arnold's "The Study of Poetry" in its treatment of the relation of present to past and in its reflections on the nature of poetry itself. Close analysis reveals that Eliot's criticism has quietly accomplished a revolution, and that it is the first full revaluation of poetry since Arnold's "Essays in Criticism" appeared in 1865.  

His criticisms of other poets—Milton, Dryden, Donne—have done a great deal to redirect taste in poetry. Certainly, no single figure in the twentieth century has exerted such a wide influence on poetry as Eliot in terms of criticism. Moreover, it is largely through his criticism that we attempt to understand his own poetry.

Eliot stands among that small group of critics—Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, Dryden, Samuel Johnson, and Coleridge—who were also creative artists. The result for him has been, however, an extraordinary difference of opinion concerning the relationship of his criticism to his actual poetic practice. Indeed, since the appearance of his first essay he has been the subject of vigorous and heated contention among his literary critics.

---

He has been thought to be at once too traditional and too novel, too orthodox and too revolutionary, a critical Dr. Jekyll and a poetical Mr. Hyde.

The two camps of Eliot critics seem to station themselves at divergent ends of the pole. There are those who attempt to show that there is unity in Eliot by showing how key terms from the criticism may be applied to the poetry, and how the texts of his criticisms are reflected in his poetry. For reinforcement, they use Eliot's own answer to the charge of division: that "while one is concerned with ideals in criticism, one must confront actualities in poetic practice." The other group argues just as vehemently that it is impossible to reconcile the "conservative" criticism and the "radical" poetry. Among those who argue for the wholeness of Eliot are Bradbrook, who states that Eliot's position of authority in shaping literary tastes is due to the "particular consistency and coherence of his work...which is in a very special sense a structural whole," and René Wellek, who states that "Eliot's criticism is much more coherent and systematic than most commentators have allowed." IVor Winters, on the other hand, avers that "Eliot has repeatedly contradicted himself on every

---


2Quoted in Unger, op. cit., p. xii.


important issue that he has touched." The arguments for both sides of the question are numerous and it is not necessary to quote them here.  

Perhaps the controversy will continue to rage in the years to come, for while it has been lessened now it is far from being resolved. Indeed, the many voices show the reaction of the age to its most outstanding poet and most influential critic. Nevertheless, it is not outside the realm of possibility to arrive at a reconciliation between the critical theory and the poetic practice. If we can show that Eliot's critical ideas are exemplified in his poetry, then it is obvious that he cannot be justifiably accused of contradicting his critical ideas in his poetry.

One cause of the difference of opinion concerning Eliot is that many of his critics have been judicial instead of interpretive. The votaries of both sides have been too much influenced by personal prejudice to give valid interpretations. For example, many of those who interpret the criticism as not being consistent with the poetry are in emphatic disagreement with sundry points of the criticism.  

On the other hand, the votaries of the idea of the inherent "unity" of Eliot conveniently make the kind of narrow selection from the prose and poetry which illuminates both, and which shows that both are the products of the same mind and personality.

Another cause of this difference of opinion is Eliot's constant use of the word "tradition" in his criticism. Commentators have been suffi-
ciently confused over Eliot's insisting on tradition in his criticism while seemingly deviating so sharply from established poetic practice in his poetry. If tradition and established poetic practice are to be understood as meaning Victorianism or Georgianism, the charge of division in Eliot is just. But the fact is that Eliot saw no value in adhering to what seemed to him the lifeless conventions of the previous century. Instead, he reached back to what he considered a more stable and dynamic tradition which excluded the Victorians and the Georgians. In that respect he is conventional. That he reacted against the turn that English poetry was taking at the turn of the century accounts for the revolt in his poetry. Thus it is not at all contradictory to see both tradition and revolt in Eliot. We shall attempt to show this in subsequent chapters, but it is necessary to discuss first the criticism itself in order to get a clear idea of Eliot's critical concepts.

Despite the contrariety of opinion surrounding Eliot's criticism, it offers instruction that the reader of his poetry cannot ignore. George Williamson maintains that in the criticism we find concepts of poetry that tell us what to expect in terms of the poet's attitude, material, form and method. Moreover, the poet as critic often reveals as much about himself as he does about the poet under observation.

Though the body of Eliot's criticism is comparatively large, it is not all concerned with the theory and function of poetry; and if we attempt

1 A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot, p. 27.

2 Ibid.
to show the relationship between the criticism and the poetry, it is necessary to ferret out that portion which deals with theories of literature. His general theory of literature is set forth in "The Perfect Critic," "Imperfect Critics," and "The Function of Criticism"; his specific theory of poetry is contained in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Three of these essays appeared in The Sacred Wood (1920) and the other, "The Function of Criticism," appeared in Selected Essays (1930). This, of course, does not mean to imply that all of what Eliot has to say concerning literature is contained in these essays. Rather, it is meant to suggest that the above mentioned essays contain his only stated theories of literature from which we may clearly draw conclusions about his poetic concepts. It is not intended here merely to show that Eliot's poetry and criticism are closely related, but also to show that he very clearly had a theory of poetry which is invaluable in the interpretation of his poetry.

The first aspect of Eliot's theory of poetry is what he calls the "impersonal theory." He tells us that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." This is a concluding statement from Eliot's essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." What seems to be a leading statement is in effect the conclusion drawn from previous statements, and this is precisely what confuses those pragmatic critics

1 Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 47.
who believe that an author should state his purpose and then proceed to
follow it. We must grant that Eliot's criticism works much in terms of
negatives, restrictions and qualifications, and if an apologia is neces-
sary it must be concerned with his lack of a general critical terminology.
According to Bradbrook, "the critic, like the poet, found himself in a
waste land, and had little upon which he could rely in the way of equip-
ment."¹ His principal indebtedness was to the French critics of the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the metaphysicals, and the
critical prefaces of Henry James.² Bradbrook further states that

He was engaged upon an exploration of the principles
of criticism as well as an examination in detail of
the work of those poets to whom he as a poet was most
particularly indebted.³

Consequently, it seems imperative that we attempt to coordinate Eliot's
critical theories in terms of a unified statement which extends further
than the questions, "what is poetry?" and "what constitutes a good poem?"--
questions with which every critic must of necessity deal.

There are two major points of departure in attempting to "categorize"
Eliot's theories of poetry: tradition and depersonalization of the artist
with such subsidiaries as the "key terms" to which he refers from time to
time in his criticism. This idea is supported by D. S. Savage, who states

¹Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 47.
²Ibid., p. 48.
³Ibid.
that "the pivotal viewpoint of Eliot the literary critic may be said to be one of 'Impersonalism,' allied with a devotion to Tradition."¹

Eliot tells us that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."² He further states that it is only in the process of depersonalization that art approaches the condition of science. In his "impersonal theory" he compares the mind of the poet to a catalytic agent in a chemical reaction. This well known analogy sufficiently sums up the "impersonal theory," and explains what Eliot means by the condition of art approaching science:

When a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide... the two gases form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of the platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: has remained inert, neutral and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum.³

Or again,

The poet's mind is, in fact, a receptacle for seizing and storing the numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.⁴

These "feelings, phrases, images," as H. R. Williamson states, are partly drawn from the works of other poets (traditional experience) and partly from the individual experience of the writer.⁵


³Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁴Ibid., p. 49.

This extinction of personality is heresy to those people who believe that a poet's first duty is to "look into his heart and write," and to those who believe that poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion recollected in tranquility." According to H. R. Williamson, "it is surely a fallacy to suppose that, because an emotion is strongly felt, therefore it is bound to be communicated strongly; that the genuineness of an experience is some sort of guarantee of genuine art in its expression."¹ For indeed we may assume that as much emotion lies behind the ineffectual rhyming of a rank amateur as behind the masterpieces of Shakespeare and Milton. The amateur's failure to communicate is not due to his lack of emotion or personality, but to his artistic poverty. As H. R. Williamson states:

The great actor who moves vast audiences to pity or to terror is not himself moved. Indeed, it is, in the main, true to say that the extent to which he can move his audience depends on the extent to which he can remain unmoved and therefore free to concentrate his attention on his technical means of communication.²

For the poet as well as for the great actor, "emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him."³ Eliot says that

The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotion at all.⁴

¹The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 47.
²Ibid., p. 48.
⁴Ibid.
It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting.\footnote{Ibid., p. 51.}

The question immediately arises as to how the poet is to communicate emotion in poetry. Eliot again clearly gives the answer:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.\footnote{T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," \textit{The Sacred Wood}, p. 92.}

We need only to go to the poetry to see an example of what he means by this passage. What better way of communicating the barrenness, aimlessness, and futility of an existence characterized by trite social obligations, than

"I have measured out my life with coffee spoons?"

In these lines, as H. R. Williamson states, the perfect objective correlative is found.\footnote{The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 49.}

The statement that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; not the expression of personality but an escape from personality" becomes clear once the objective correlative is understood. The line quoted above is from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Prufrock is a gentleman, no longer young, who is growing weary of the society in which he monotonously passes his days. He has grown tired.
of the artificiality and shallowness of tea-party life. The quotation sums up his attitude toward this type of existence. The poet is not emotionally concerned about "coffee spoons," nor is his personality embodied in Prufrock's dilemma. He has escaped from both emotion and personality and has succeeded in communicating to the reader a complex emotion that reflects the personality of the age. ¹

Summarily, the impersonal theory tells us that a poem is not merely self-expression, but an experience which exists apart from the poet, and which is ordered and creates itself in other minds by an "objective correlative." For a poem is not a personal letter from one individual to another, but a "composition in which the writer ceases to exist as such and becomes the medium of an experience that belongs to all who read and understand."² This immediately evokes a consideration of the second pivotal leg of Eliot's criticism, tradition. For, in regarding the poet's mind as a medium rather than a personality, Eliot separates the man and the poet, experience and art. Man and experience may exist without tradition, the poet and art cannot.³

Tradition fascinated Eliot from the beginning, and he has had much to say on this subject throughout his career. His ideas on tradition deal with the nature of tradition, as we are shown from the title of the essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Again, if we concentrate on what

¹Ibid., p. 55.
³Ibid., pp. 29-30.
Eliot is saying rather than on what we believe should be true, his ideas are strikingly clear.

The first requisite of the poet is the historical sense, including a realization of the meaning of tradition. This sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous order.¹

This, as H. R. Williamson points out, is neither difficult nor revolutionary; for it is achieved on a lower plane by most of us.² A man who has never heard of Shakespeare will feel insulted if he is referred to as a "Shylock"; a man to whom Cervantes means nothing may recognize a quixotic action. Thus, we find that Shakespeare, Cervantes and others share a "simultaneous order" even to the nonspecialist.

The reader of poetry must go further than "the man in the streets." He should develop a cognizance of the great works of the past and their relationship to the present. The poet, being on a higher plane than the reader or the critic, must be acquainted with the whole of living literature because it is a necessary part of his contemporary experience. Such is Eliot's point of view in regards to tradition—a point of view that becomes clearer when we understand what he means by "the whole of living literature." The list of authors given by Ezra Pound which is "the result of twenty-seven years thought on the subject" corresponds roughly to Eliot's own reading and offers a good starting point.³

Pound's "minimum basis for a sound and liberal education in letters" is Confucius; Homer; Ovid, Catallus and Propertius; the Troubadours and Minnesingers; Dante and his circle; Villon; Voltaire's critical writing; Stendahl; Flaubert; Gautier, Corbière and Rimbaud. To Pound these are the "masters" who either start with a core of their own and accumulate adjuncts, or digest a vast mass of subject matter, apply a number of known modes of expression, and succeed in pervading the whole with special quality or some special character of their own, and bring the whole to a state of homogeneous fulness. 1

The "minimum" will be supplemented by the addition of great writers of lesser intensity including, of course, English writers.

In addition to the concept of "living literature," here illustrated by Pound's "minimum basis for a liberal education in letters," Eliot conceives also a "simultaneous order" of which he says:

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. 2

The existing order is complete until a new work of art arrives. Then

For the order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. 3

This process, according to Williamson, is easily illustrated by referring again to the list given by Pound. The entire text of Mr. Williamson's statement is quoted here:

1Ibid., p. 144.
3Ibid.
Each of the writers he mentions brought into existence something which was not in the world before. The civilization which knew only Homer lacked a vision and a sensibility which the civilization which knew both Homer and Dante possessed. But the work of Dante in no way invalidated the work of Homer; it only altered its significance, modified it by relating it to the new thing.¹

If the reader comes to understand this view of tradition, he will have little trouble understanding the individual poet's contribution to it. Eliot attacks those who "dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors,"² and who "endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed."³ But if we "approach a poet without prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."⁴ Continuing in the same essay, Eliot states:

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition.⁵

This idea of tradition is expanded and redefined in After Strange Gods. Whether Eliot is attempting to make amends for the confusion caused by his earlier position, we are not prepared to say. Neither is it important.

¹H. R. Williamson, The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 44.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid.
What matters is that here he tells us explicitly what he means by tradition. He tells us:

What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits, and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place.

He adds that

We are always in danger, in clinging to an old tradition, or attempting to re-establish one, of confusing the vital and the unessential, the real and the sentimental. Our second danger is to associate tradition with the immovable; to think of it as something hostile to all change; to aim to return to some previous condition which we imagine as having been capable of preservation in perpetuity, instead of aiming to stimulate the life which produced that condition in its time.

And most important:

What we can do is to use our minds, remembering that a tradition without intelligence is not worth having; to discover what is the best life for us not as a political abstraction, but as a particular people in a particular place; what in the past is worth preserving and what should be rejected; and what conditions, within our power to bring about, would foster the society that we desire.

It seems obvious, then, that when Eliot advocates a knowledge of the "masters," he is not being merely pedantic. He is pointing out to us "what should be preserved" among our traditional relics. And we cannot justifiably accuse him of "plucking out the plums that pleased himself" when we examine the "plums" that he has plucked. Who among us will not agree that Homer and Dante, for example, are a part of our "living" literature?


2 Ibid., pp. 21-22.

3 Ibid., p. 22.
Stated briefly, tradition involves ferreting out the most representative literature and preserving it by incorporating it as a part of a "simultaneous order." The individual poet's contribution to it is an important one. He cannot simply restate, for his work would not be new and would therefore fail to be a work of art. On the other hand, he cannot "innovate illogically" giving no regard to tradition. His part, according to H. R. Williamson, is to "express contemporary consciousness in a depersonalized manner by a reference to tradition and to communicate emotion by presenting an objective correlative based on both past literature and present experience."  

Throughout Eliot's criticism, he uses such "key terms" as autotelic art, thought and emotion, poetry and belief, dramatic element, metrical innovation, auditory imagination, objective correlative, and tradition, all of which help to explain his basic critical theories. These terms are of little consequence when isolated from the basic critical canon. There are some, however, that are of such significance that they should be discussed separately. "Auditory imagination" is such a term. Of "auditory imagination" Eliot states:

What I call the 'auditory imagination' is the feeling for a syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.  

---


2 The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 60.

Moreover, the rhythm of poetry should evoke a sensitivity to not only the music of words but a feeling for their connotations, and according to Matthiessen,

A poet's rhythm will... indicate at once his particular union of past and present, his double possession of 'the most ancient and the most civilized mentality' in the depth of his awareness of the primitive magic of sound joined with his quickening sense of 'the new and surprising' of the characteristic manifestations of life in his own day. 1

In short, Eliot believes that poetry can communicate before it is understood, that it can work its incantation upon the ear before our minds can record the nature of what we feel. 2 He decries the lack of musical qualities in verse and believes that such qualities are fundamental virtues of poetic style.

That Eliot is concerned with the right selection of words for tonal effect is shown in the following quotation from an uncollected essay:

Whatever words a writer employs, he benefits by knowing as much as possible of the history of those words, of the uses to which they have 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 this: in getting as much as possible of the whole weight of the history of the language behind the word. 3

This passage is perhaps somewhat overstated, but it does tell us that the poet has a "feeling" for words—a feeling which is exemplified in his poetry. To Eliot, a word is not a fixed entity. Rather, it brings with it varying colors from all previous usages, and the colors and energy that flash forth are determined by the stress and context. 4

1Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 82.
2Ibid., pp. 81-82.
3Quoted in ibid., p. 83.
The sensitive awareness of words, as Matthiessen states, is not merely a subtle refinement. Distinction in phrasing is created by distinction of sensibility. The principal reason for Eliot's preoccupation with language is that he believes that development in language is tantamount to development of feeling. He believes, moreover, that words and thought cannot be separated, and in this striving toward a union of "sense and sound" he is not unlike the metaphysicals.

To sum up Eliot's idea of the auditory imagination, he believes that poetic rhythm has powers of incantation which precede thought and meaning and then combine with the latter to form a "poetic whole." This poetic rhythm can be executed only through the right "phrasing," the right choice and placement of words in the poem.

It is neither possible nor necessary to enumerate the whole of Eliot's critical terminology in this treatise, but since much of his poetic practice is concerned with metrical innovation it seems necessary to include what he has to say in his criticism on this subject. In the first place, he has told us in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that the poet cannot afford to innovate illogically. Innovation is a complementary process and never exists for its own sake. It is important only insofar as it contributes to the overall projection of the work to the reader and adds to the "newness" of the work. Eliot buttressed his opinions in the 1936 essay, "In Memoriam":

Innovation in metric is not to be measured solely by the width of the deviation from accepted practice. It is a

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 86.}\]
matter of the historical situation; at some moments a more violent change may be necessary than at others. The problem differs at every period. At some times, a violent revolution may be neither possible nor desirable; at such times, a change which may appear very slight, is the change which the important poet will make. The innovation of Pope, after Dryden, may not seem very great; but it is the mark of the master to be able to make small changes which will be highly significant, as at another time to make radical changes, through which poetry will curve back to the norm.¹

Eliot not only effected innovations in terms of metrics, but also in terms of diction, imagery and symbolism. These aspects, however, will be considered in a discussion of the poetry itself.

The critical tenets that we have discussed up to this point have been extracted from Eliot's earlier essays. The latest volume of essays, *On Poetry and Poets*, has little value for the present discussion. Most of the essays in this volume were written long after the most important poetry was published, and do not serve any useful purpose in helping to explain the poetry. Moreover, they tell us little about Eliot's overall critical position that has not been explained in the earlier essays. This, however, does not mean that we can dismiss the later essays as unimportant. Neither can we support the charge that Eliot has declined in critical power. Many of these later essays are important in that they show the evolution of Eliot's critical tenets, but this would constitute a lengthy study within itself. The main concern here, as has been pointed out, has been to discuss the criticism with a view toward understanding the poetry.

¹Eliot, "In Memoriam," *Points of View*, p. 54.
Up to this point, we have observed in Eliot the basic ideas that should prepare the reader for an intelligent reading of his poetry. We have shown that he is a conscious artist who has speculated about the nature and function of poetry. From the ideas contained in the criticism, we have seen that he is one who believes that poetry is neither all novelty nor all repetition, that it is something that is only achieved through the fullest exertion of one's power.

The examination of Eliot's criticism has not been exhausted, but the theories on which the poems rest have been, I think, sufficiently covered. Stated briefly, the theories of poetry that we have examined emanate from two main points of view: (1) that poetry is an expression of contemporary consciousness in a depersonalized manner by referring to tradition, and (2) that a poem communicates its emotion by the use of an "objective correlate" based on past literature and present experience.

The next two chapters will deal with Eliot's poetic practice. His concept of tradition, as stated in his criticism, will be discussed in relation to his poetry along with his seemingly antithetical tendency toward revolt.

---

CHAPTER II
ELIOT'S REVOLT AGAINST ROMANTICISM

In an analysis of poetic practice in Eliot's early work, it is necessary to view his poetry in relation to the background against which it appeared. Even though the nineteenth century romantic tradition in poetry was passing, the early twentieth century reader had definite ideas as to what form poetry should take. He still expected the poet to treat in his verse his own emotions about conventionally "poetic" subjects. To him, poetry was a "popular philosophy" clothed in beautiful sounding words. The Georgians, and even the imagists, made no attack upon these expectations, and until such an attack had been made, there could be no departure from this tradition whose poetic possibilities were being exhausted. We are not to assume that all of the poetry of the late nineteenth century was in itself bad, but according to Daiches, "it had been so fully explored throughout the previous century that diction was becoming standardized and thus fundamentally unpoetic and inorganic." Moreover, the poet was compelled to remain in a restricted area in terms of both subject matter and form. A few nineteenth century poets, such as Browning and Gerard Manly Hopkins, attempted to transgress the established pattern, but their immediate influence was negative and ineffectual.

Eliot was the first poet to consciously and effectively break away from the nineteenth century limits in form and subject matter. He not only

---

2Ibid., p. 107.
found new and different subjects for poetry, but he showed himself capable of handling language in new and stimulating ways. He threw out the "dregs" of the nineteenth century which had survived into the twentieth because of his objections to "the whole general direction which civilization had taken," and because of his desire to go back to "an earlier tradition with which he was more in sympathy and which alone provided him with a basis for creative activity."¹

The result was explosive. An audience conditioned to the watered-down Tennysonian tradition and nurtured by such Georgian poets as Rupert Brooke and John Drinkwater could neither understand nor appreciate the radical nature of:

There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate; 
Time for you and time for me, 
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of toast and tea.²

In his two-fold attack on nineteenth century tradition in poetry, Eliot employed as subject matter themes which implied criticism of the emptiness and flabbiness of modern life and thought, while in technique he used every means to avoid the flabbiness which he was criticizing.³ Thus he rebelled against the outmoded Georgian tradition in terms of what he wrote and how he wrote it. In the above quotation from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," he not only presents a picture of the aimlessness and

¹Ibid., p. 109.

²T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," The Complete Poems and Plays (New York, 1952), p. 41. All subsequent references to Eliot's poems are made to this edition and are entered without his name.

³Daiches, op. cit., p. 115.
the impotence of drawing room society,—indeed an unconventional subject for poetry—but he also uses imagery that is not found in Georgian poetry.

Eliot's imagery became more and more heterogeneous, and moods were evoked by a clash of wit and increased indirection. The images used in "Portrait of a Lady" and "Prufrock" are drawn from the kind of life exemplified by the protagonists in these poems. In "Prufrock," the declaration that:

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo,

is symbolical of the vulgar pretentiousness of drawing room society. The women live an aimless and futile existence, but they talk no less of Michelangelo.

His use of imagery in two later poems, "Gerontion" and "The Hollow Men," also illustrates how far Eliot had departed from his predecessors. He uses two kinds of images, those taken from the kind of life he is presenting (and criticizing) and those which are presented as symbols of that kind of life without having a literal connection with it. The latter kind is evidenced in the opening lines of "Gerontion":

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
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.
My house is a decayed house.

---


The old man, Gerontion, through whose impersonal consciousness the poem takes place is not presented as a typical part of the life Eliot is describing in the way Prufrock is in the earlier poem. His "decayed house" and "dull head" are symbolic of the civilization he is describing, not a part of it as the "tea and cakes and ices" are a part of the drawing room atmosphere in the Prufrock poem. Gerontion's reaction to the situation is:

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

As Daiches states,

The symbolic images that flit through the old man's mind add up to a picture of modern life. Life without the organizing spirit, without religion, is nothing but a dry and meaningless desert.

The dryness symbol has been for Eliot the basic symbol of life without faith and hope, just as water and the sea are symbols of primal life.

The images used in "The Hollow Men" are also used to present a symbolic picture of an age without belief, without value, without meaning:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet ever, broken glass
In our dry cellar.

---

1 Daiches, op. cit., p. 117.
2 "Gerontion," p. 23.
3 Daiches, loc. cit.
4 "The Hollow Men," p. 56.
As Daiches states, the precision and cogency with which Eliot uses imagery in this poem ("hollow"—there is nothing of their own within; "stuffed"—all within is borrowed, artificial; "leaning together"—they have no independent volition) show how effectively he utilized imagery to evoke patterns of meaning and association. His use of primordial or archetypal imagery will be discussed in a later section.

Not only is the imagery that Eliot uses different, but the transition between images is handled in a different manner. Daiches states that:

The images are not in themselves 'poetic'; that is, they have none of the standard suggestions or associations which had come to be popularly considered essential in poetry throughout the nineteenth century.2

The reader is given no preparation for the juxtaposition of the contraries:

There will be time to murder and create,3
This music is successful with a "dying fall,"4
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing,5

and

Her hand twists a paper rose,
That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,6

which create an element of shock and surprise, and, as a result, he cannot read the poem in the light of conventional expectations.

1Daiches, op. cit., p. 124.
2Ibid., p. 110.
6"Rhapsody on a Windy Night," p. 15.
Daiches also maintains that:

It is a simple fact that Eliot's poetry has to be read so much more carefully than that of the Georgians. We are not carried along on a murmuring stream with our eyes and ears half shut; the meanings flash and glitter and change and shock, and we must be alert, responsive, intelligent, if we are to follow.¹

These qualities in Eliot account for his being credited with the initiation of the "cerebral" school of poetry.

Eliot's method did not simply spring like Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus, but came about as a result of many influences. For example, he brings together in his poetry the tradition of the English seventeenth century poets and the French symbolists of the late nineteenth century.² "The form," he says, "in which I began to write, in 1908 and 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."³ So from Eliot's own admission, the most obvious immediate influence on the early poetry is the French symbolist, Jules Laforgue, and the influence is as much in the emotional attitude as in the technique of verse.⁴ Moreover, Laforgue determined many of the images and the general manner of treatment.⁵ There are numerous parallels between Eliot and Laforgue which bear out these similarities. The conclusion of "The Love

¹Daiches, op. cit., p. 111.
³Quoted in ibid.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid.
Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is as follows:

I grow old...I grow old...
I shall wear the bottom of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon
the beach.
I hear the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us and we drown.\(^1\)

The conclusion of the early version of Laforgue's "Legende" reads:

"Hier l'orchestre attaqu\^a
Sa derni\'ere polka."

Oh! l'automne, l'automne!
Les casinos
Qu'on abandonne
Remisent leurs pianos'...\(^2\)

Phrases, verroteries,
Caillots de souvenirs.
Oh! comme elle est maigrie!
Que vais-je devenir?...

Adieu! Les filles d'ifs dans les grisailles
Ont l'air de pleureuses de funerailles
Sous l'autan noir qui veut que tout s'en aille.

Assez, assez,
C'est toi qui as commenc\^e.

Va, ce n'est plus l'odeur de tes fourrures.
Va, vous moindres clins d'yeux sont des parjures.
Tais-toi, avec vous autres rien ne dure.

Tais-toi, tais-toi,
On n'aime qu'une fois"\(^2\)

\(^1\)"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," p. 7.

\(^2\)Quoted in Wilson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 342.
Here, as Edmund Wilson states, Eliot reproduces Laforgue's irregular metrical scheme almost line for line. Moreover, the subject of Laforgue's poem—the hesitations of a man too timid to make love to a woman who provokes his ironic pity at the same time that she arouses his stifled emotions—resembles the subjects of "Portrait of a Lady" and "Prufrock." In addition, certain lines of Laforgue are translated or adapted by Eliot. Laforgue's "simple et sans foi comme un bonjour" becomes "simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand" in Eliot's "La Figlia Che Piange"; and

La, voyons, mam'zelle la Lune
Ne gardons pas ainsi rancune

is adapted to

Regard the moon
La lune ne garde aucune rancune.

The method which Eliot inherited from Laforgue is the instrument of mood that connects his emotional attitude with that of the seventeenth century metaphysical poets. The method is summed up by Williamson as:

The assumption of an ironic mask or attitude, mock-heroic in effect and wit, expressing a fixed mood, often by dramatic means. It indulges in self-mockery or ridicules serious feeling; it represents mixed reactions to things, the subjective mocked by the objective, the discrepancy between appearance and reality. It sees boredom and horror, the frustration or derision of latent feeling, the shams of life; it dissimulates sympathy for their victims.

---

1 Ibid.
2 The interpretation of Laforgue's poem is from ibid.
3 Quoted in ibid., p. 343.
Laforgue is not the only French writer who had a great deal of influence on Eliot's method. The influence of Corbière, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé is seen in the 1917 poems, and in the 1920 volume there is a technical resemblance to Gautier. The English influences include John Donne and the Jacobean dramatists. Since these influences have been instrumental in the formation of Eliot's method, it seems necessary to devote a portion of this study to an analysis of some of them. It is also important to note that Eliot did not rebel alone, that he was closely connected with certain European writers of the last half of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries.

As the Western world expanded in wealth and prosperity during the nineteenth century, the industrialization of our civilization became increasingly distasteful to the writer and the artist. The new society regarded the writer as an instrument to please its vulgar tastes. The vulgarization of literature through pulp magazines, the adaptations of Renaissance and Gothic architecture to public buildings, such as railroad stations and libraries, were examples of the extent to which taste had fallen. Consequently, the artist rebelled and tried to alienate himself from the vulgar pretentiousness and sterility that encompassed modern man.

The first of these was Charles Baudelaire whose Les Fleurs du Mal in 1857 showed a revulsion against modern bourgeois life, a revulsion which is also seen in a more tempered fashion in Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary.

1Louis G. Locke, John Pendy Kirby and M. E. Porter, Literature of Western Civilization (New York, 1952), II, 476.

2Ibid.
Baudelaire's conception of the pervasive ennui of modern life anticipates Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Hollow Men," and his conception of the city—creation of modern industrial civilization—as a place of despair in "Sois Sage, O Ma Douleur" is similar to Eliot's attitude in the "Unreal City" of The Waste Land.

Baudelaire did not influence Eliot's method to a great extent, but his impression upon Eliot's spirit was tremendous. Matthiessen suggests that the reason why Eliot seems to have been stirred so much more by Les Fleurs du Mal than by any other poetry written in the nineteenth century is contained in the italicized passage in which he acknowledged his debt:

> 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.

Baudelaire's intensity is the result of what Eliot calls "having a sense of his own age" which Eliot feels to be one of the fundamental tests of great poetry.

Just as Baudelaire saw the sordidness of nineteenth century Paris, Eliot saw twentieth century London in the same light. Baudelaire writes:

> The City wears a somber atmosphere
> That brings repose to some, to some distress.
> Now while the heedless throng make haste to press
> Where pleasure drives them, ruthless charioteer,

---

1 Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 16.
2 Ibid.
4 Ibid., passim.
To pluck the fruits of sick remorse and fear,  
Come thou with me, and leave their fretfulness.¹

In *The Waste Land* Eliot writes:

Unreal City,  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, ²
I had not thought death had undone so many.²

The only difference in the two poems is that in Baudelaire's poem, the city "brings repose to some," whereas in Eliot there is no repose in the "unreal city" where death has undone so many.

Another French symbolist from whom Eliot gained much in the way of form and content was Tristan Corbiere whose "Les Amours Jaunes" appeared in Paris in 1873. This volume was received with complete indifference and a year after its appearance the writer died of consumption.³ Only thirty-two at the time of his death, he had been extremely eccentric and maladjusted. A rebel in every sense, he performed such pranks as leading a pig down the streets decorated with ribbons.⁴ Moreover, he did everything to divorce himself from conventional society by seeking the company of sailors, customs-men, harlots and other unconventional characters. A rebel in everyday life, his poetry was also the poetry of a rebel. Edmund Wilson states that Corbière's poetry was:

Often colloquial and homely, yet with a rhetoric of fantastic slang; often with the manner of slapdash doggerel, yet sure of its own morose artistic facts;

³Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 341.
⁵*Tbid.*
full of the parade of romantic personality, yet incessantly humiliating itself with a self-mockery scurrilous and savage.¹

At least one of the elements mentioned by Wilson, the use of doggerel rhyme, is evidenced in Eliot's "Le Directeur":

Le directeur
Consevateur
Du Spectateur
Empeste la brise.
Les actionnaires
Reactionnaires
Du Spectateur
Conservateur
Bras dessus bras dessous
Font des tours
A pas de loup.²

Corbière had been labeled insane until Paul Verlaine paid tribute to him in "Les Poètes Maudits," which was one of the most important critical events in the development of Symbolism.³ In addition to this tribute, Verlaine himself adopted much of Corbière's method, continuing the tradition of Symbolism. Laforgue, who was mentioned earlier, also did much to carry on the tradition adopted by Corbière and Verlaine.

These French poets brought to Symbolism a new variety of vocabulary and a new complexity of feeling.⁴ And it is from this "new Symbolism" that Eliot in part derives. As Wilson states, it is from the conversational-ironic tradition of the Symbolism of Corbière and Laforgue, rather than from the high aesthetic tradition of Arthur Symons that Eliot derives his

¹Ibid.
²"Le Directeur," p. 28.
³Wilson, op. cit., p. 342.
⁴Ibid.
his method. This conversational-ironic tone is seen in the quotation below:

"Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
What life is, you who hold it in your hands";
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
"You let it flow from you, you let it flow,
And youth is cruel, and has no remorse
And smiles at situations which it cannot see."* 

Aside from the similarities of Eliot to individual members of the Symbolist movement, he has an affinity to the movement as a whole in terms of revolt. The Symbolists revolted against Parnassian literature, characterized by Verlaine as having "...sa perfection technique, ses vers sculpturaux, ses rimes opulents, son archéologie hellénique, romaine et hindou." The Symbolists, in revolting, were attempting to give spirit and variety to French poetry after it had become stereotyped with the Parnassian poets, and Eliot attempted to do the same for English poetry which had likewise become stereotyped.

One cannot afford to overlook the influence of Théophile Gautier who from 1917 to 1919 was the basis for Eliot's metrical pattern perhaps more than was any other poet. This is shown by Eliot's use of the strict quatrain that had been adopted by Gautier. One may note the indebtedness of Eliot's "The Hippopotamus" to Gautier's "L'Hippopotame" by comparing

---

1Ibid.


the first stanzas of the two poems. Gautier’s poem begins:

L'Hippopotame au large ventre  
Habite aux jungles de Java  
Où grondent, au fond de chaque antre,  
Plus de Monstres Qu'on n'en rêva.¹

The first stanza of Eliot’s poem reads:

The broad-backed hippopotamus  
Rests on his belly in the mud;  
Although he seems so firm to us  
He is merely flesh and blood.²

It is interesting to note that this is the only instance in which Eliot slavishly followed a rhyme pattern in his poetry, adopting Gautier’s quatrain with two rhymes. He used Gautier’s quatrain in other poems ("Whispers of Immortality," "Sweeney Erect," and "A Cooking Egg") but in these poems he does not adopt the alternate rhyme scheme; the rhyme in the first and third stanzas is omitted.

Among the English influences on Eliot are John Donne and the metaphysical poets along with the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and dramatists.³ In fact, the relation of Laforgian poetry—which includes that of Verlaine, Corbière and, to a lesser extent, Baudelaire—to seventeenth century metaphysical poetry has been discussed at length by Eliot.⁴ The reason that we get "a method curiously similar to that of the 'metaphysical poets'" is that our present age, like the seventeenth century

... comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing

upon a refined sensibility, must produce various
and complex results. The poet must become more
and more comprehensive, more allusive, more in-
direct, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary,
language into his meaning.¹

Eliot names Laforgue and Corbiere as being "nearer to the school of
Donne than any modern English poet," having "the same essential
quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of trans-
forming an observation into a state of mind."² This quality is exemplified
in Eliot's own poetic practice.

It is easy to see how Donne appealed to Eliot. According to Mat-
thiessen, Donne

Strove to devise...a medium of expression that would
correspond to the felt intricacy of his existence,
that would suggest by sudden contrasts, by harsh
dissonance as well as by harmonies, the actual sen-
sation of life as he had himself experienced it.³

Moreover, Donne was Eliot's seventeenth century equivalent in revolt.
Whereas Donne revolted against the superficial beauty of Spenser's The
Faerie Queene⁴ and the Petrarchian conventions of Wyatt, Surrey and
Sidney, Eliot revolted against the banality of Georgian verse. The simi-
larities between Eliot's technical devices and those of Donne have been
noted by Matthiessen:

The conversational tone, the vocabulary at once
colloquial and surprisingly strange...; the rapid
association of ideas which demands alert agility

¹Ibid., p. 248.
²Ibid., p. 249.
³Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 10.
⁴Ibid., p. 13.
from the reader; the irregular verse and difficult sentence structure as a part of fidelity to thought and feeling; and especially, the flash of wit which results from the shock of such unexpected contrasts.¹

Here again we see the close relationship of Donne and the metaphysicals to Laforgue and the French Symbolists. In both schools there is the demand for compression of statement, for eliminating all inessentials, and thus for an effect of comprehensiveness to be gained by synthesizing a great deal of experience into a single moment of expression.² This condensation of form is permeated by sharp contrasts and makes use of the element of surprise. These qualities may be seen in almost any one of Eliot's poems. The passage below illustrates his skill at compression of statement:

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.³

Eliot has characterized in six short lines the emptiness of an existence where life means nothing and where the world ends

Not with a bang but with a whimper.⁴

Thus there is a connection between Donne, Laforgue and Eliot, a connection which includes not only technical discipline but similarity of attitude as well.

¹Ibid., p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 15.

³"The Hollow Men," p. 56.

⁴Ibid., p. 59.
A word should also be said about the later sixteenth century dramatists. Webster in particular exerted some influence on Eliot in terms of his "plagiarism" (a passage in *The Dutchess of Malfi* is composed entirely of extracts from Sidney's "Arcadia"). Eliot saw in this technique one of the means by which his poetry could be made to approximate "a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written." The use of allusion and quotations from other poets will be discussed in detail in a later section.

The indebtedness of Eliot to other later sixteenth century dramatists has been noted by O'Connor who states that:

> The disillusionment and the sense of harsh realities troubling and disrupting the idealisms of Middleton, Marston, Webster and Ford are repeated in Eliot. His language, like theirs, is colloquial, realistic, highly imaginative, and caught in a similar metrical pattern. These dramatists, like Donne, experienced the tension inherent in a society that is troubled by growing disbelief and shifting attitudes.²

In these respects, "Gerontion" is one poem by Eliot which definitely shows the influence of the later sixteenth century dramatists:

> Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign!"
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,Swaddled with darkness; In the juvescence of the yearCame Christ the tiger.³

This and similar quotations which show a technical resemblance to sixteenth century dramatists (especially in the use of highly imaginative language), also represent the disillusionment of an age sapped of its belief.

---


It would be impossible to give an individual analysis of all the writers who have influenced Eliot. However, the point that he has been strongly influenced by and is aligned with many European poets has sufficiently been made. It is important that we do not attempt to relate Eliot's poetry to any one particular influence or source, for in almost every instance he has transformed his "borrowed material" into a superior product. Moreover, emphasis should not be placed on showing Eliot's likeness to any other poet, but rather on showing how he has aligned himself with certain traditions in which he saw certain intrinsic values. It is also relevant to point out that there is in every group or individual influence that we have considered the element of revolt.

Analysis of Eliot's poetry has been purposely limited in relation to influences. Closer attention will be given to analysis in terms of his overall poetic practice.

One may summarize Eliot's literary background as comprising the three periods of "metaphysical" poetry which he has distinguished: Medieval: school of Cavalcanti or Dante; Renaissance: school of Donne; Modern: school of Baudelaire or Laforgue.¹ In terms of the poetry under discussion the last two are important. The Dantean influence is seen more clearly in the later poems, such as "Ash Wednesday," which we are not considering in the present study. In view of these facts, it seems that Eliot shows himself to be both conservative and conventional in terms of literary background.

¹This information is taken from reports of Eliot's Clark Lectures, which were never published. See George Williamson, A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot, p. 54.
As paradoxical as it seems, it was Eliot's conservatism, his strong adherence to tradition, which led him to revolt. According to Daiches,

His sense of the effeteless of twentieth-century liberal humanism, which constituted his response to the disintegration of traditional values which was taking place at ever increasing speed in post-Victorian England, and not only in England, impelled him to try to get in touch with a more stable past in terms of which the present might be condemned and remedied.

In this attitude we find his conservatism. He fostered in his poetry as in his criticism a sense of order, of pattern and of tradition. This led to his revolt against the sloppiness of the poetry of his time—a revolt that led him to look for a new and complex poetic discipline. Thus we get in Eliot:

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends,
Not with a bang but a whimper,2

instead of:

Lord, not for light in darkness do we pray,
Not that the veil be lifted from our eyes,
Nor that the slow ascension of our day
Be otherwise.

---

1Daiches, op. cit., p. 116.
We do not crave the high perception swift,
When to refrain were well, and when fulfill,
Nor yet the understanding strong to sift
The good from ill.

Not these, O Lord. For these thou hast reveal'd
We know the golden season when to reap
The heavy-fruited treasure of the field,
The hour to sleep.

Not these. We know the hemlock from the rose,
The pure from stain'd, the noble from the base,
The tranquil holy light of truth that glows
On Pity's face.

We know the paths wherein our feet should press,
Across our hearts are written Thy decrees:
Yet now, O Lord, be merciful to bless
With more than these.

Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribb'd and edged with steel,
To strike the blow.

Knowledge we ask not—knowledge Thou hast lent,
But, Lord, the will—there lies our bitter need,
Give us to build above the deep intent
The deed, the deed.1

In examining the two extracts we find a difference not only in attitude but a contrast in the manner of presentation. We find that the regular soft beat of Drinkwater's lines produces an atmosphere wherein emotions dissolve into a lethargic, but comfortable, vagueness.2 At the end, as Williamson states, we experience a kind of "uplift"—a spurious uplift of the kind we receive after singing a hymn.3 But there is no comfort in

---

1 John Drinkwater, "A Prayer," Poems (New York, 1925), pp. 43-44. The lengthy abstract from Drinkwater's poem has been made to avoid a loss in validity by quoting separate stanzas out of context.


3 Ibid.
Eliot's poem. We cannot thank God for the things we know, for we know nothing

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act.2

One also sees here that Eliot uses words which actually mean something and which necessitate thought on the reader's part. There are no naked words like "idea," "reality," "motion," "act," "conception" and "creation" in Drinkwater's poem. Rather, his poem is clothed in a plethora of descriptive words, such as "perception swift," "understanding strong," "golden season," and "tranquil holy light," which tend to reduce the cogency of the meaning of the poem.

The adjectival emphasis of Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke and the other Georgians is absent in Eliot who is laboriously careful in his search for the mot juste. Indeed, the language that he uses is strange and unusual,3 and that is precisely what has made him "difficult" to those reading him for the first time. The difficulty of Eliot, according to Hilton, arises from two important factors:

(1) the necessity of startling the reader into an awareness of that which Mr. Eliot wishes us to see and feel, and (2) his spiritual and technical descent from the metaphysicals and the Elizabethan dramatists.4

---

1Ibid.


4Ibid.
Eliot exemplifies an ability to express emotional relationships in language that is arresting and alive. It is also because of this ability that his poetry seems difficult at first reading. When a poet tries to say new things in new words, the reader must make a deliberate attempt to follow him; old emotional habits must be stretched and a new set of associations and references must be made. The reader of Georgian poetry was perhaps familiar with

Let us go then you and I
When the evening is spread out against the sky,

but the next line:

Like a patient etherized upon a table;

sufficiently jolts him. The picture of evening is not presented for the reader to visualize in terms of conventional emotional experiences, but it is presented to prepare him for a new attitude and a new experience. The reader then realizes that the poem introduced by these lines, as Spencer states, is unlike anything he has read before.

Eliot's desire to identify himself with the past, to make his poetry part of a continuous tradition, led to another radical element in his poems, the use of allusions or quotations. He was, as Daiches states

led to introduce types of allusiveness, references to earlier representatives of the European and other cultural traditions, images based on multiple suggestions depending on simultaneous evocation of a great variety

---

2 Ibid.
3 "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," p. 3.
4 Ibid.
5 Spencer, op. cit., p. 60.
of earlier events in cultural history.\(^1\)

This use of allusion and quotation is a very important aspect of Eliot's technique, and "it is an important element in the particular tone we get from his poetry."\(^2\) "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" illustrates how and for what purposes he uses allusions. First the epigraph:

Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la-laire—nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus—the gondola stopped, the old palace was there, how charming its grey and pink—goats and monkeys, with such hair too:—so the countess passes on until she came through the little park, where Niobe presented her with a cabinet, and so departed,

is composed of several sources to summon up the lost glory of Venice. There is the portion of song in Gautier's "Sur Les Legunes"—the motto on an emblematic candle in a St. Sebastian by Mantega ("nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus"), along with allusions to James' The Aspern Papers, Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's," Shakespeare's Othello, Ruskin and many others.

From the first stanza we gather that the scene is Venice, that Burbank, with his Baedeker, has good intentions, and that he succumbs to the charms of Princess Volupine, not out of his own volition, but through force of circumstance:

Burbank crossed a little bridge
Descending at a small hotel;

\(^1\)Daiches, op. cit., p. 116.

\(^2\)Spencer, op. cit., p. 61.

\(^3\)"Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," p. 23.
Princess Volupine arrived,
They were together, and he fell.¹

The whole poem is a picture of contemporary Venice, its gradual decline from past glory to its present place as a haven for tired love-makers and cheap sight-seers,² like Bleistein who appears in stanza four:

But this or such was Bleistein's way:
A saggy bending of the knees
And elbows, with the palms turned out,
Chicago Semite Viennese.³

Eliot's Venice is decayed and, like Princess Volupine, morally consumptive:

Princess Volupine extends
A meagre, blue nailed, phthistic hand.⁴

Venice becomes a symbol for the cheapness of contemporary civilization kept alive only by vulgar cosmopolitan promoters like the "Chicago Semite Viennese" whose

....lustreless protrusive eye
Stares from the protozoic slime
At a perspective of Canaletto.⁵

But the Canaletto declines like

The smoky candle end of time,⁶
because it has only commercial interest. "Money in furs" holds sway in

¹Ibid.
²Bullough, op. cit., p. 137.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid.
⁶Ibid.
in modern Venice, and everything that was once noble has been undermined by commercialism. *Nil nisi divinum stabile est.*

On the decline of Venice—personified even in the suggestive name of the Princess—Burbank speculates, wondering who clipped its lions (from St. Mark's).¹

> Who clipped the lion's wings  
> And fle'd his rump and pared his claws?²

His meditations on "Time's ruins, and the seven laws" refer to Ruskin's laws of growth and decay, which depend upon the morals of the age.³ Thus Eliot compressed into a few stanzas the whole history of decline and fall. According to Spencer,

> To be brief, and at the same time panoramic, was the poet's problem, and a method of indirect allusion, a kind of associative shorthand, was the best means to solving it.⁴

This technique of allusion goes hand in hand with the use of the prefatory motto, as we have seen in the preceding example, and also to the selection of a title. The function of the prefatory motto in Eliot's poetry—often a quotation from some earlier poet, from the classics or from the Bible—is to set the mood or tone with reference to which the symbols and images that occur within the poem are to be interpreted.⁵


²"Burbank with a Baedeker; Bleistein with a Cigar," p. 24.

³George Williamson, loc. cit.; See also Ruskin's *Stones of Venice and Seven Pillars of Architecture.*

⁴Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁵Daiches, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
The motto is not merely placed before the poem as a mark of erudition but as a device to elucidate the poem proper. Williamson states that the prefatory motto--along with the title--prepares the reader for the experience of the poem.¹

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the title first suggests irony. The words "love song" with their romantic connotations are juxtaposed with the rather unromantic businessman's name, "J. Alfred Prufrock," which suggests the qualities that the protagonist is ultimately shown to possess. The quotation from Dante in the prefatory motto heightens the irony:

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giamaai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.²

The serious context of Dante's Inferno is transposed to the lighter context of Prufrock's love song.

In the twenty-seventh canto of the Inferno the flame of Guido da Montefeltro is asked to identify himself "so may thy name on earth maintain its front." He replies in the words of the epigraph: "If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since none ever did return alive from depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee."³ If

²"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," p. 3.
³The translation of the epigraph is taken from Williamson, A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot, p. 58.
the epigraph relates to Prufrock it must be an extended metaphor which will gradually unfold. 1

The poem is a dramatic monologue. The "I" is the speaker, but who is the "you"? The title suggests a lady, but the epigraph suggests something supernatural, something on a submerged level. We gather from the first stanza that it is evening, but it is an evening "etherized like a patient on a table." The speaker is presumably concerned with love and the character of the metaphors, "half-deserted street," "one night cheap hotels," suggests the kind of love with which he is concerned. To him the pursuit of love—or amatory intrigue—is an "overwhelming question." The pause after "question" suggests hesitation on the part of the "I" and it would seem that the "you" has the urge while the "I" is afraid. The "you" has challenged the speaker's hesitation, and the speaker responds with

Oh, do not ask, "what is it?"
Let us go and make your visit. 2

In short, the speaker is telling the "you" not to ask questions, but to go along with him to make their visit while he still has the courage. Their visit is to a place where

In the mom the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo. 3

We become aware now that the "you" is not an anticipated sexual partner,

1Ibid.
3Ibid., p. 4.
but the submerged self of the speaker. The sexual partner is perhaps to be one of the "women with white, braceleted and bare arms." While the "you" urges him on, the speaker can only find salvation in time:

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—

He wonders if he should disturb the "universe"—the universe of cake and tea and intellectual pretentiousness. For if he dares to make an advance to the women, he feels that he will be ridiculed:

/They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"/
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
/They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!"/

But the irony is that he is ridiculed by the "eternal Footman" who chides him for his inability to carry out his amorous intent; for in the final reckoning the timidity of the "I" conquers the "you," the amorous self. Now it becomes clear how Eliot has transposed the epigraph from a literal to a psychological meaning. Prufrock is addressing himself to the submerged "you." As Williamson states, his song is the song of a being divided between passion and timidity; it is never sung in the real world. Prufrock can speak freely the same as the flame of Guido because "none ever did return alive from this depth." Guido speaks from a literal inferno, while Prufrock speaks from a psychological torment—an inferno of frustration and emotional conflict.

---

1Ibid., p. 4.
2Ibid.
The method of "Portrait of a Lady" is much the same as that of "Prufrock." Here again the accent is on irony. In the "Portrait" the epigraph is drawn from Marlowe's The Jew of Malta. In the scene from which it is taken, Barabas defeats the friars who are attempting to enumerate his crimes. Whenever the friars attempt to accuse him directly, he interrupts and names the crime for them. The epigraph reads:

Thou hast committed--
Fornication: but that was in another country,
And besides, the wench is dead.¹

The first line is spoken by one of the friars and the other two by Barabas.

Barabas' attitude is in startling contrast to that of the youth in the "Portrait." Barabas has committed fornication. So what? That was in another country and the wench is dead. The youth, on the other hand, worries over a situation that has not even taken place:

Well! and what if she should die some afternoon,
Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;
Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand
With the smoke coming down above the housetops;
Doubtful, for a while
Not knowing what to feel or if I understand
Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon...
Would she not have the advantage, after all?
This music is successful with a "dying fall"
Now that we talk of dying--
And should I have the right to smile?

His pervasive moral perturbation is contrasted to the callous attitude of Barabas, and the contrast makes for the kind of mordant irony intended by the poet.

²Ibid., p. 11.
Thus in Eliot's use of the epigraph and allusions we are able to see both of the qualities under consideration—tradition and revolt. There is revolt in his use of this technique, and tradition in his drawing on past literatures and cultures for material. It must be pointed out that the epigraph and allusions had been used in poetry before Eliot, but they had not been used in the same way for the same purpose as Eliot used them. In Eliot there is the combining of title, epigraph, quotation and the stanza itself into a single complex of meaning.

Much the same method is used in such poems as "Mr. Appolinax," "La Figlia Che Piagne," "Gerontion," and "A Cooking Egg," but it is in The Waste Land that Eliot resorts to the use of allusion more than in any other poem. Indeed, some commentators feel that the allusions only serve to clutter up the poem. One would not attempt to make a listing of all the allusions and quotations employed in this poem, for as Babette Deutsch states, they range from the Buddhist Fire Sermon to the Hebrew Scriptures, from musical themes of the Wagnerian music dramas to the wares of the music halls, from Vergil to Verlaine.

However, the walls of The Waste Land have not been plastered with allusion merely for the sake of decoration. Rather, Eliot tries to epitomize in a single work of art a sensitive man's reaction to the whole of experience. There were two methods by which he could have done this—

---

1Daiches, op. cit., p. 117.


4H. R. Williamson, The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 82.
expansion and compression. James Joyce in Ulysses uses the first method when he takes more than seven hundred pages to describe twenty-four hours in a man's life. Eliot uses the latter method by taking less than five hundred lines to present a panorama of civilization from the earliest times to the present.

It is also in The Waste Land that Eliot uses allusion in many instances for the purpose of contrast. In the first section of the poem, "The Burial of the Dead," the motif of the recurrence of life out of death is presented:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.¹

April (conventional symbol of life and rebirth) is presented as "the cruellest month" because it destroys the tranquilizing effect of winter (death):

Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.²

A meaningless conversation is then interspersed:

And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,  
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,  
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,  
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.

Thus immediately the contrast between the banal and the sublime is established, a contrast which is thematic in the entire poem. There is also

¹Ibid., p. 83.  
³Ibid.  
⁴Ibid.
the contrast between optimism and pessimism. The happy quotation from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*:

```
Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?
```

is followed by a pessimistic line from the same opera:

"Oed' und leer das Meer." 

The contrast between past and present is personified in Madame Sosostris, the only descendant of the wise necromancers of the past era. She is "now the wisest woman in Europe." That she uses the Tarot pack of cards (once having a religious significance) for vulgar fortunetelling is an indication of the depths to which spiritual values have descended in contemporary civilization. The section ends with an allusion to the superstition of planting corpses with crops to insure fertility, and the Dog (an assistant to rebirth in the Egyptian Osiris myth) connects the incident with this myth which is concerned with resurrection of life. From these associations, we get the idea that something is amiss in this "Unreal city," that someone is being crucified. In the first place, Madame Sosostris is using the Man with Three Staves (identified by Eliot in the notes as The Fisher King, symbol of rebirth or resurrection) for her vulgar purposes. Moreover, The Hanged Man, a God symbol, is

---

1Ibid., p. 38.

2Ibid.

absent from her pack of cards. Secondly, we see that not only myth and legend, but the very Scriptures themselves, have been desecrated.

The office workers who:

**Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,**
**To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours**
**With a dead stroke on the final stroke of nine,**

regard the "stroke of nine" as perhaps the beginning of a dull routine of work; whereas in Luke (23:44) the "ninth hour" is important because it represents the culmination of the period of darkness following the crucifixion of Christ:

\[44 \text{ And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.}\]

The last line of the first section:

"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"\(^2\)
is also the last line of the preface to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* which names all the sins of the world, the most deadly of which is ennui, which leads to all the others. Eliot's quotation of this line evokes the feeling that boredom is a causal factor in the spiritual and cultural desolation of the Waste Land. The quotation from Dante, "I had not thought death had undone so many," suggests the life-in-death quality of its inhabitants. The symbols and allusions combine to convey the idea that there is no tradition, no religion, no culture in the Waste Land. There are only death and desolation.

The "A Game of Chess" sequence is an indictment of the meaninglessness of contemporary love in which there is neither a spiritual nor a mythical

---

\(^1\) *The Waste Land*, p. 39.

significance. The section begins and ends on the note of contrast. At the beginning, the "grand dame" at her toilet is contrasted with Cleopatra. At the end of the section the farewells of the frequenters of a London pub:

Goodnight.
Ta ta. Goodnight. Goodnight,

are contrasted with Ophelia's sweetly spoken:

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies,
good night, good night.²

The introduction of Philomel in this section is done to symbolize unholy love, lust, betrayal, and the transmutation of suffering into beauty. In the ancient myth, Philomel was violated by a king and transformed into a nightingale, but the nightingale "filled all the desert with inviolable voice" (in contrast to the violable body). To the present world, there is no transformation; there is only:

'Jug Jug' to dirty ears'³

The section called "The Fire Sermon" will be discussed in the chapter on criticisms of modern society, for it is in this section that Eliot presents his most serious indictment of modern love. The short fourth section, "Death by Water" forms a contrast to "The Fire Sermon," a contrast between the symbolism of fire and the symbolism of water.⁴

---

¹Ibid., p. 43.
²Ibid.
³Ibid. p. 40.
A consideration of "Dans le Restaurant" from which the fourth section is taken is relevant to a discussion of it. The conclusion of "Dans le Restaurant" is:

Phlébas, le Phénicien, pendant quinze jours noyé,  
Oubliait les cris des mouettes et la houle de  
Cornouaille,  
Et les profits et les pertes, et la cargaison d'étain:  
Un courant de sous-mer l'emporta très loin,  
Le repassant aux étapes de sa vie antérieure.  
Figurez-vous donc, c'était un sort pénible;  
Cependant, ce fut jadis un bel homme, de  
haute taille,  

while "Death by Water" reads:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,  
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell  
And the profit and loss.  
A current under sea  
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell  
He passed the stages of his age and youth  
Entering the whirlpool.  
Gentile or Jew  
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,  
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and  
tall as you.

In "Dans le Restaurant" a dirty old waiter confides to a diner the story of his earliest sex experience. He begins by describing the rainy season in his country:

Dans mon pays il fera temps pluvieux,  
Du vent, du grand soleil, et de la pluie.  

He was only seven at the time and the girl involved was even younger. He continues but is interrupted by the diner:

Mais alors, vieux lubrique, à cet âge...

1"Dans le Restaurant," p. 32.  
2 The Waste Land, p. 46.  
3"Dans le Restaurant," p. 31.  
4Ibid., p. 32.
The waiter continues that "le fait est dur." A big dog interrupted him and he had to stop midway. The diner responds that it is a pity but "tu as ton vautour!" At this time the diner, thoroughly disgusted, gives the old waiter ten sous for a bath and orders him to clean himself up.

"The Fire Sermon" provides the waiter with his ultimate cleansing. Phlebas, the Phoenician, is drowned, deprived of his lust and greed.

The relationship between the two poems is summarized by Williamson, who states that:

In the rainy season, when nature is renewed, Phlebas experienced the stirring of sex, and was giving it expression when he was frightened and frustrated. Later, in another country, he is debilitated, dirty, in need of "the wash-day of the beggars"; but he has this memory and his greed. Finally he is drowned, subjected to a painful cleansing.1

The final section, "What the Thunder Said," begins on a pessimistic note. He "who was living is now dead," and contemporary man is dying spiritually. "He who was living" refers to Jesus and also to the slain Vegetation God, Osiris, Adonis and "The Hanged Man" of the Tarots; he is the eternal renunciation of the flesh by which alone life can come, the stupendous paradox of salvation by life alone.2 The contrasting of the rock (spiritual sterility) with the water (universal emblem of the beginning of life) suggests that the sterility of the Waste Land is complete:

Here is no water but only rock. 3

---

3 The Waste Land, p. 47.
Moreover, the "falling towers" of the Near East and Europe illustrate that the civilizations that began in Greece and the Holy Land are now falling into decay:

Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal.¹

What is left of this decay is the Waste Land, distorted, perverted and nightmarish:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.²

The protagonist asks what he must do to gain spiritual revival, and the thunder answers from an old Indian legend: Datta (give), Dayadhvam (sympathize) Damyata (control.) The poem ends with the Sanscrit benediction, Shantih, which is a rough equivalent to "the peace that passes understanding." But this seems to be mere madness to modern man ("Hieronymo's mad againe") because our age has lost its contact with the past and has become spiritually sterile. Thus from these illustrations it is clear that the allusions which we have discussed, along with many others, the analysis of which time and space will not allow, are used by Eliot to evoke vast associations which otherwise would have taken volumes to convey effectively.

¹Ibid., p. 48.
²Ibid.
Quotation and contrast not only appear in individual scenes of The Waste Land, but as Spencer has noted, they also form the fundamental structure of the whole poem. To give his work a unity of reference, Eliot uses the old myth of a land whose soil is barren and its people starving because its king has been wounded and thereby made impotent. He acknowledges his debt to Jessie L. Weston’s From Ritual to Romance and Fraser’s The Golden Bough in his notes to the poem. Moreover, he took from these sources "a frame on which to hang the dubious present and show it up, not a narrative frame as of Ulysses, but a thematic and symbolic frame."

In The Waste Land Eliot also illustrates his awareness of Jung’s concept of a racial unconscious which responds to certain "archetypal" images such as water, rivers, dryness and the tortured waste of oceans. Jung’s explanation of archetypes is as follows:

It is a great mistake to believe that the psyche of a new-born child is a tabula rasa in the sense that there is absolutely nothing in it. Inasmuch as the child comes into the world with a differentiated brain, predetermined by heredity and therefore also individualized, its reactions to outside sense stimuli are not just any reactions but are specific, as a particular (individual) selection and form of apperception necessarily involves. These faculties can be proved to be inherited instincts and even preformations conditioned by the family. The latter are the a priori, formal conditions of apperception based on instincts. They set their anthropomorphic stamp upon the world of the child and the dreamer. They are the

1Spencer, op. cit., p. 65.

2Ibid.

archetypes, which blaze a definite trail for all imagination and produce astonishing mythological parallels in the image of a child's dreams and in the schizophrenic's delusions and even to a lesser degree in the dreams of both normal and neurotic persons. It is not a question of inherited ideas but of inherited possibilities for these.¹

Of the character of archetypes, he states:

Archetypes resemble the beds of rivers, dried up because the water has deserted them, though it may return at any time. An archetype is something like an old watercourse along which the water of life flowed for a time, digging a deep channel for itself. The longer it flowed the deeper the channel, and the more likely it is that sooner or later the water will return.²

In addition, Eliot has discovered from the anthropological studies of Fraser and others how the emotional and perceptive needs of the "unconscious" (referred to by Jung)³ are fulfilled by the mythologies of primitive folk.⁴ In The Waste Land he shows how certain symbols, archetypes, appear among people widely separated in time and place (as in the similarities between the mythical slain Vegetation God and the Crucifixion of Christ). Consequently, as Taylor states, the most sophisticated poetic style touches the springs of the most primitive feelings.⁵

Miss Weston maintains in her book that the Grail Legend (which concerns the quest for the Holy Grail by a Pure Knight in order to save the land and king from desolation and disaster) has its origins in the most primitive of all cults—the fertility rite. She traces the Legend from its

²Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
origins to the Rig-Veda hymns, to the mystery religions of the Roman empire through its subsequent modifications by Christianity. This is the interpretation that Eliot accepts, at least for the purpose of *The Waste Land* and it is in this context that his references to India, Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece and Rome are explainable.

One more important area in which there is the element of revolt is the method in which he uses music in his poetry. Despite his cerebral appeal, as one critic has noted, critical accounts show that Eliot is concerned with drawing upon music in his verse. That Eliot drew on a musical pattern in his *Four Quartets* is a locus classicus of Eliot criticism, but it is also evident that he employed music in earlier poems.

In Eliot's poetry, as we may expect, the music is different from the music employed in Victorian and Georgian verse. For example, the sing-song musical rhythm of Drinkwater's "Roundels of the Year":

```plaintext
And here some sound of beauty, here
Some note of ancient, ageless wrong
Reshaping as my lips were strong,
  I caught the changes of the year
In soft and fragile nets of song,
  For you to whom my days belong.
```

is countered by Eliot with

```plaintext
0 0 0 0 that Shakespeherian Rag--
It's so elegant.
So intelligent.
```

At times Eliot's dependence upon music is formal and intellectualized:

"This music crept by me upon the waters"
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.

---


O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline;¹

but it is, as Lenhart states, also the "source of the strange and
portentious emotionalism that moves the reader";²

Grishkin is nice; her Russian eye
Is underlined for emphasis;
Uncorseted, her friendly bust
Grishkin has a mainsonette.³

The investigator is not sufficiently knowledgeable in music to note
the parallel between The Waste Land and a symphony,⁴ but the synthesizing
of poems, prayers, popular songs ("That Shakespeherian Rag" was a popular
song in 1912)⁵ the voices of sages, and the voices of the public houses
into a "symphony of despair" does resemble the combining of the different
parts to form a musical symphony. In addition, the recurring themes
(such as the drowned Phoenician sailor) also suggest a symphonic pattern.

It is also significant to point out that the poet began with "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and on the verge of old age wrote
his Four Quartets—all suggesting a musical analogy. Certainly, the
"Preludes" differ from the Preludes transmitted by "the latest Pole...
through his finger tips"⁶ but they are, as Deutsch notes, equally

¹Ibid., p. 45.

²Lenhart, op. cit., p.

³"Whispers of Immortality," p. 32.

⁴See Deutsch, Poetry in Our Time, and F. Wilson, Six Essays on
the Development of T. S. Eliot.

⁵W. Lewis, Class lecture delivered at Pennsylvania State
University, June, 1958.

nostalgic. The repetitious transitions in "Rhapsody"—"Twelve o'clock," "Half-past one," "Half-past two," "Half-past three"—represent what Eliot means by the statement: "There are possible transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet."  

Neither is Eliot's use of music in his poetry limited to classical sources. Morris Freedman has pointed out his use of jazz rhythms in his poetry. Freedman states that:

One of the most prominent characteristics of jazz lyrics set to music is the caesura—accented, aspirated, or voiced. In popular song the pause is indicated in singing. In verse not set to music, the pause is achieved through such means as punctuation, the insertion of extra letters, or the breaking up of the line unit.

This is illustrated in The Waste Land where "Shakespearean" becomes "Shakespeherian." In "Sweeney Agonistes" the pause is established by breaking up a line and then reconstructing it:

Under the bamboo
Bamboo bamboo
Under the bamboo tree
Two live as one
One live as two
Two live as three
Under the ban
Under the boo
Under the bamboo tree.

1Deutsch, op. cit., p. 173.
4Ibid., pp. 419-20.
5"Sweeney Agonistes," p. 81.
Eliot effects pauses in the following by the repetition of "little":

**SWEENEY:** I'll convert you!
   Into a stew.
   A nice little, white little, missionary stew.
**DORIS:** You wouldn't eat me!
**SWEENEY:**
   In a nice little, white little, soft little,
   tender little,
   Juicy little, right little, missionary stew.  

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the jazz rhythms is an insistent, monotonous repetition. In the following stanza, every line has a phrase that is repeated:

Oh I'm so sorry. I am so sorry
But Doris came home with a terrible chill
No, just a chill
Oh I think it's only a chill.

Rhyme serves to buttress the beat of jazz rhythms, and a rhymed word becomes the heaviest sound in the line. Moreover, rhyme in jazz rhythms appears close together and achieves a clanging effect, as in:

Where the breadfruit fall
And the penguin call
And the sound is the sound of the sea
Under the bam
Under the boo
Under the bamboo tree.

Thus in music, Eliot found a natural language, and part of the strength of his poetry, as Deutsch notes, is that it can remind us of music and does

---

1Ibid., p. 80.


3"Sweeney Agonistes," p. 75.

4Freedman, *loc. cit.*

5"Sweeney Agonistes," p. 81.
not ignore the savage noises that too often hideously interrupt it.¹

The investigator feels that Eliot's use of jazz rhythms represents the element of revolt in his poetry. Just as he uses urban imagery to reflect his distaste for city life, he uses jazz rhythms to point up the lack of good taste in contemporary society. When the typist in "The Fire Sermon" sequence of *The Waste Land* puts a record on the gramophone, she only hears: "0 0 0 0 0 that Shakespeherian Rag." The jazz rhythms in the quotations from "Sweeney Agonistes" are used in connection with vulgar and sordid scenes in a house of prostitution. Thus Eliot uses jazz rhythms to suggest undesirable elements of contemporary existence.

There is, however, a positive use of jazz rhythms in Eliot's poetry. He attempts to reproduce colloquial dialogue and to bring into his poetry the idiom of conversation.² In doing this, he jars the reader into attention and makes the poetry constantly alive.³ The reader, in turn, gets not only the dictionary meaning of the words used but also their musical significance. Moreover, there is a kind of humor inherent in Eliot's use of jazz rhythms:

I grow old...I grow old...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.⁴

In this quotation the humor produces an ironic grimness because of the contrast between the dancing movement of the rhythm and the seriousness

³Ibid.
of the plight of a man who has been rendered impotent and inactive by his environment.

Here, then, is ample illustration of tradition in Eliot. He has employed the "whole of living literature," myth, religion and the arts, to convey his idea of and attitude toward the culture of his own time. Here is also revolt—revolt against the disintegration of traditional values. The reverence for tradition instigated a revolt that extended to all areas of poetic presentation—versification, imagery and subject matter. However, if we have only suggested up to this point that Eliot's revolt was not wholly aesthetic, the point should now be made more clearly. For indeed there is much social criticism in Eliot's poetry (although it would be inaccurate to designate this aspect as an end in his poetic practice). He had "a sense of his own age," a pronounced social consciousness. The next chapter will deal with the poet's revolt against his societal milieu.
CHAPTER III

ELIOT'S REVOLT AGAINST CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

A consideration of Eliot's revolt against contemporary society is important in a study of revolt and tradition in his works. His denouncement of contemporary society shows that he was no more in sympathy with the aridity of the life around him than he was with the decline of literary values.

Eliot wrote more concerning social criticism in his prose works, but it is clearly evident that there is also in his poetry certain criticisms of modern society. He did not merely attack certain elements of society with which he was not in sympathy. Rather, he threw all aspects of the contemporary world into a bolus and denounced it as arid. His main criticism is that the present world has lost all contact with vital religious, cultural and spiritual forces.

Eliot's criticism of modern society in his poetry began with his caricatures of the "genteel tradition" in Boston and culminated with "The Hollow Men." His early caricatures, "Cousin Nancy," "Aunt Helen," "Mr. Apollinax" and "The Boston Evening Transcript," depict the anxieties, social embarrassments and the vacuity of polite society. The world he displays is the world of Henry James' novels, where society ladies breathe their invitations:

---

1Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 9.
Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon
You have the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do—
With "I have saved this afternoon for you":
And four wax candles in the darkened room,
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,
An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb
Prepared for all the things to be said or left unsaid;

where a vulgar Jew and a decayed nobleman drive their social bargains,

The rats are underneath the piles.
The jew is underneath the lot,

and where one concludes that

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

Eliot is only mildly disturbed with "Cousin Nancy" who

... smoked
And danced all the modern dances;

and "Aunt Helen" whose fatuous decorum died with her and

... the footman sat upon the dining-table
Holding the second housemaid on his knees—
Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived;

but he is visibly disillusioned with "Prufrock" whose

'No! I am not Prince Hamlet'

echoes the plight of modern man. Disillusion becomes despair in The Waste Land:

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones,

5"Aunt Helen," p. 17.
and in "The Hollow Men":

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.1

Of course, Eliot himself would disavow any criticism of life in his poetry. His retort to Arnold's dictum that "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life," is:

At bottom: that is a great way down; the bottom is the bottom. At the bottom of the abyss is what few ever see, and what those cannot bear to look at for long; and it is not 'a criticism of life'. If we mean life as a whole—not that Arnold ever saw life as a whole—from top to bottom, can anything that we can say of it ultimately, of that awful mystery, be called criticism? We bring back very little from our rare descents, and that is not criticism.2

He also writes in "Thoughts After Lambeth":

I dislike the word "generation." When I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed 'the disillusionment of a generation,' which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.3

Such statements, which should not at all be taken seriously, have caused such acute critics as Elizabeth Drew4 and Cleanth Brooks5 to deny

5Brooks, op. cit., p. 166.
that there is any criticism of life in Eliot's poetry. This, the investigator feels, is a fallacy. If Mr. Eliot did not criticize the social environments "refined beyond the point of civilization," he certainly expressed his disapproval; if he did not express disillusionment in *The Waste Land* he expressed disenchantment. Moreover, it seems more logical to view this poem as a recapitulation of the "boredom, and the horror, and the glory" of post-war London than as a "timeless myth." That Eliot retreated into a world of myth is evidence that he saw much of the boredom, more of the horror and less of the glory.

Eliot could no more avoid being affected by the War and the post-war years than could any other man of sensibility. The "war to end all wars" succeeded in placing a reduced value on human life. Men looked in horror at the needless waste of life and property. The War broke out in 1914 and its impact on life and letters was tremendous. John Masefield, considered one of the most modern poets in the period just before the War, became a conscientious objector and for some reason was rewarded for this by being named Poet Laureate.\(^1\) Although he claimed to be a realist, Masefield was recognized by younger literary critics after the War as the typical English Victorian dressed in rough clothes.\(^2\) Moreover, he wrote of low characters as if they were typical English idealists who had been misled.\(^3\) All of

---


\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Ibid.
Masefield's characters either reform or die. In one poem he has a character say:

I have drunken the red wine and flung the dice.  
Yet once in the noisy ale-house I have seen and heard  
The dear pale lady with the mournful eyes,  
And a voice like that of a pure grey cooing bird.  

Here the protagonist, once a party to all the vice that abounds in Masefield's poetry, has now become capable of spiritual perception. Moreover, the passage from "The Window in the Bye Street" shows that Masefield was actually a sentimentalist rather than a realist:

Jimmy walked home with all his mind on fire,  
One lovely face forever set in flame.  
He shivered as he went, like tautened wire,  
Surge after surge of shuddering in him came  
And then swept out repeating the one sweet name  
"Anna, oh Anna," to the evening star.  
Anna was sipping whiskey at the bar.

While Masefield and the poets who were past the age of conscription continued to hold up the old virtues of the nineteenth century in their poetry, the young poets were in trenches. And during and after the War, the feeling of the individual's helplessness in society began to be felt everywhere. In England and in America romantic naturalism was changed into pessimistic determinism. Biology and psychology already seemed to have shattered man's belief in his greatness and goodness, and the War came along to underscore man's inhumanity to man. As stated by one

---

3Anderson and Walton, op. cit., p. 187.
commentator,

The war caused men to have a sense of frustration, of insignificance, and in the period which followed just after the close of the conflagration, men everywhere were seeking unsuccessfully to make adjustments, to get their bearings, to find a new way of life which would offer peace, security and happiness. Even as this search was being made by some optimistic souls, the greater portion of mankind...was unable to overcome its bitterness and its sense of uselessness and frustration. Naturally, this situation led to despair.

Soon, as Anderson and Walton state, a number of younger poets were to describe all cities as sewers and all men as sex-driven creatures closely akin to lower animals.2

Eliot came along and surveyed this situation in The Waste Land, for as Miss L. Clemmons states, "The Waste Land is a ... sensitive man's reaction [italics mine] to this philosophy of despair." But to view Eliot as the originator of a cult of post-war pessimists is erroneous. That he pictures the age in his poetry cannot be denied, but he does not, as Anderson and Walton state, sum up in his poetry "the pessimism then current in the literature of both countries [England and America] concerning the values of human life under industrialism." Eliot does not align himself with these post-war pessimists. Instead he captures their spirit in his poetry and shows it up as one more ignoble aspect of contemporary society. The investigator feels that Eliot's main concern was the creation of a work of

---


2Anderson and Walton, op. cit., p. 187.

3Clemmons, op. cit., p. 23.

4Anderson and Walton, loc. cit.
art, and that the social criticism was an inevitable part of the presentation.

Regardless of the position that one takes regarding Eliot as a critic of society, it is sufficiently clear that much of his earlier poetry presents a dreary picture of life in the great modern cities. The city, unfocused, unordered, oscillates from fastidious impotence:

And would it have been worth it, after all,  
Would it have been worth while,  
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,  
After the novels, after the teacups and after the skirts that trail along the floor—  
And this, and so much more?—

to crass vulgarity:

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees  
Letting his arms hang down to laugh  
The zebra stripes along his jaw  
Swelling to maculate giraffe.

It moves from the drab:

The morning comes to consciousness  
Of faint stale smells of beer  
From the sawdust-trampled street  
With all its muddy feet that press  
To early coffee stands,

and the banal:

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens,  
And along the trampled edges of the street  
I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids  
Sprouting despondently at area gates,

to the sordidness of Sweeney who

Tests the razor on his leg  
Waiting until the shriek subsides,

---

2 "Sweeney among the Nightingales," p. 35.  
3 "Preludes," p. 12  
4 "Morning at the Window," p. 16.  
while

The epileptic on the bed
Curves backward, clutching at her sides.  

Added to this horrible scene are Mrs. Turner, who feels that the shrieking epileptic will do the house "no sort of good," and Doris who

... towelled from the bath,
Enters padding on broad feet,
Bringing sal volatile
And a glass of brandy neat.  

City life is lived among "half deserted streets" and "one-night cheap hotels," where every street lamp "beats like a fatalistic drum." The city is peopled by such specimens as Sweeney, "broad-bottomed, pink from nape to base," and by ladies, such as Doris, who

Find themselves involved, disgraced,
Call witness to their principles,
And deprecate the lack of taste.  

It is also peopled by the cautious and fastidious Mr. Prufrock whose only "overwhelming questions" are

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare eat a peach?  

and by the Lady in the "Portrait" who weaves her web of possessiveness and self-pity:

"And so you are going abroad; and when do you return? But that's a useless question.

---

1Ibid.
2Ibid.
3Ibid.
You hardly know when you are coming back,
You will find so much to learn."
We must leave it now to fate.
You will write at any rate.
Perhaps it is not too late.
I shall sit here, serving tea to friends.""\(^2\)

The Waste Land presents a more sustained picture of the dreariness of modern, mechanized life, where people are incognizant of the means to spiritual fulfillment. In the words of Walter Fuller Taylor,

West-European society, so completely typified in the vast impersonality of London, is envisioned by the poet as a kind of limbo of vanities, peopled by automata who have lost the sharp human tang of both good and evil, have lost, indeed, the sense of life itself.\(^3\)

Moreover, the dreariness of the great modern cities is the atmosphere of The Waste Land. We are aware of the millions performing inconsequential routines and wearing their souls down in labors which never bring them profit. But this waste land has another aspect. It is not merely a place of desolation, but also of anarchy and despair. For

In our post-war world of shattered institutions, strained nerves and bankrupt ideals, life no longer seems serious or coherent—we have no belief in the things we do and consequently we have no heart for them.\(^4\)

Of all this spiritual grayness, the Waste Land of Jessie Weston's Grail Legend is a suitable symbol. In Miss Weston's account of the Grail Legend an impotent "fisher king" rules over a land of sterility, drouth, rock, sand

\(^1\)"Portrait of a Lady," p. 10.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 11.
\(^3\)Taylor, op. cit., p. 410.
\(^4\)Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York, 1931), p. 106.
and desolation. This legend finds an excellent parallel in the barrenness and sterility of contemporary life as Eliot pictures it.

A further extension of the impression of the sterility and impotence of modern existence is presented in "The Hollow Men":

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man’s hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.1

Taylor sums up Eliot's commentary on the contemporary man and his world as follows:

Eliot's poems from "Prufrock" through "The Hollow Men" are... detail in a single, larger, over-all portrayal of the bleakness of contemporary mass-existence. They turn upon contemporary culture a hard, gray light of disenchantment that dissolves its misty illusions of happiness through progress or salvation by service, and that reveals, harsh and bare, the stark outlines of a rootless, robot-like experience of living.2

Moreover, Taylor maintains that:

To have written so, Eliot must have hated profoundly the life he portrayed, must have hated it not with the fierce indignation of a Swift, but with a cool, aloof anger that could harden in expression into a gem-like wit. For, at last, it is the expression, the poetry of these poems that we remember more than the disenchantment; the poet's blend of wit, imagination, and intelligence at last subdues and creatively uses his refractory material. Our pleasure in the final clarity of his vision outweighs our revulsion from the object of it, and in the very act of the clear and entire comprehension of ugliness we escape its control and with Eliot assert over it the superiority of art.3

---

1"The Hollow Men," p. 57.
2Taylor, op. cit., p. 410.
3Ibid., p. 411.
Thus in seventy years the "darkling plain" of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" had become the arid desert, a dismal perspective which seemed to possess nothing but illimitable horizons of ennui and despair.

In this attack on modern civilization, Eliot uses the past as a yardstick, which again points up the traditional elements in his poetry. His belief in the superiority of the past shows his reverence for tradition. The element of revolt is evidenced by his denouncement of the entire sphere of contemporary social activity. According to Edmund Wilson,

Eliot feels at every turn that human life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has become ignoble, sordid or tame, and he is haunted and tormented by intimations that it has once been otherwise.¹

Malcolm Cowley states that:

The poet is saying that the present is inferior to the past. The past was dignified; the present is barren of emotion.²

In "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," as we have seen in the previous chapter, a morally phthistic princess, a vulgar Austrian Jew and a vulgar American Jew are the only remnants of Venice the olden and the golden. In "A Cooking Egg" the poet asks after his visit upon an old fashioned, proper and prim maiden:

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?³

and returns the answer himself:

Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.⁴

³"A Cooking Egg," p. 27.
⁴Ibid.
In this same poem, Madame Blavatsky and Piccarda de Donati belong to the vacuous contemporary world, whereas they were originally a Russian Theosophist and a spiritual guide in Dante's Paradiso respectively.¹

In "Lune de Miel" the poet presents the travellers from Terre Haute amid their battle with the summer heat and the bedbugs of Ravenna, but he makes them unaware that:

Moins d'une lieue d'ici est Saint Apollinaire
En Classe, basilique connue des amateurs
De chapitaux d'acanthe que tournoie le vent.²

In this manner he contrasts the travellers and their mundane situation with the noble crumbling beauty of "la forme précise de Byzance," with which they apparently have no connection. In "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" the grossness and aridity of the modern clergyman:

Polyphiloprogenitive
The sapient sutlers of the Lord
Drift across the window-panes.
In the beginning was the Word,³

are contrasted with the pure religious feeling of a picture of the baptism of Christ,

Designed upon a gesso ground⁴

by

A painter of the Umbrian school.⁵

²"Lune de Miel," p. 29.
³"Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," p. 33.
⁴Ibid., p. 34.
⁵Ibid.
The point that the poet is trying to make is that the modern church has been degraded. In contrast to the baptism of Christ, Sweeney who

... shifts from ham to ham  
Stirring the water in his bath,

gets his baptism at home and suggests in his actions the cause of this degradation.

"Sweeney Among the Nightingales" presents another brilliant contrast between the noble past and the tawdry present. The entire poem conveys a sense of foreboding as in the Agamemnon story. Two girls are supposed to be plotting Sweeney's death, and the cosmic imagery (horned gate: the gate of lechery or death; Orion: killed by Diana) indicates that death is imminent. But whereas Agamemnon could cry: "Ay me! I am smitten with a mortal blow," Sweeney does not have a cosmological sense of his doom and only responds to sensual impressions. He "sprawls at the window and gapes" until:

The waiter brings in oranges  
Bananas figs and hothouse grapes; 2

then

The silent vertebrate in brown  
Contracts and concentrates, withdraws. 3

He now recognizes danger (his uncollected laughter of the first stanza is now a "golden grin" circumscribed in wistaria) but he perhaps never perceives the sense of his doom. Where agamemnon cries "I am smitten,"

1Ibid.
2"Sweeney Among the Nightingales," p. 35.
3Ibid.
Sweeney effects a "golden grin." Thus in typical fashion, Eliot paints a brilliant contrast between the sordid intrigue in Sweeney's milieu and the tragic and classical symbol of the doom of the House of Atreus. To heighten the contrast, the poet lets the songs of the nightingales and their "liquid siftings" fall with brilliant impartiality.

The sense of the inferiority of the present is conveyed in a more sustained manner in The Waste Land. The poem abounds in contrasts between the present and the past. In fact, one of the basic themes is that

While the land had once been fertile, it is not now, and that although formerly life had been beautiful, whole, spiritualized, it is now ugly, disorganized, decadent.

Moreover, Eliot seems to sum up in The Waste Land the attitudes that he had advanced in his earlier volumes. But technically, he sought to give the ideas he had rehearsed in his earlier volumes a more universal context of meaning by adopting as the framework of the poem imagery drawn from Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance.²

In the first section of the poem there is the dismal fact that the contemporary world's only representative of the prophets of old is:

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,³

who

Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards.⁴

³Clemmons, op. cit., p. 29.
²Locke, Kirby and Porter, op. cit., p. 797.
³The Waste Land, p. 38.
⁴Ibid.
One of her comments is

Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself;
One must be so careful these days,'

—lest this wisdom fall into the wrong hands. The irony of the situation
is that the wisdom of clairvoyance has fallen into the hands of the Madame
herself.

The second sequence of the poem examines modern love on two levels.

The love affair of the "grand dame" with her plea:

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think," 2

and the affairs of the working class to whom love only means a good time:

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said, 3

are equally sterile when we make the inevitable comparison with Cleopatra
suggested by the first line:

The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne . . . 4

It is, as Anderson and Walton state, that the sordid tale of the gossiping

---

1Ibid., p. 39.
2Ibid., p. 40.
3Ibid., p. 41.
4Ibid., p. 39.
women in the London pub scene with its ugly symbols of infidelity, abortion and faded marriage represents the same sterility among the poorer people as that which renders bleak and monotonous the opulence and beauty of the wealthy woman's life. Eliot treats the most unsavory aspects of modern conjugal relations in the pub scene:

But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling. You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique. (And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face, It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said. (She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

In "The Fire Sermon" the poet further advances the theme of the sterility of modern love. Indeed, this sequence evokes the feeling that we, like Tiresias, are really walking among "the lowest of the dead." The section opens with a reference to Sappho's lyric on evening which brings all things home, but here evening only brings the typist home to teatime, to clear away her breakfast, light her stove, lay out the food beside the window where she has spread "her drying combinations, touched by the sun's last rays." As Deutsch states,

The allusion to Sappho underscores the contrast between the dead Greek lyricist's immortalization of love and the contemporary stenographer's facile, futile yielding to the clerk of the one bold stare.

The bored typist responds to the advances of her lover with complete

---

1 Anderson and Walton, op. cit., p. 187.
2 The Waste Land, p. 42.
3 Deutsch, op. cit., p. 162.
4 Ibid.
indifference:

He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavors 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. ¹

After the affair, she has only one "half-formed thought":
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."²
And what does she do?
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.³

The allusion to Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield ("When lovely woman stoops to folly") underscores a contrast between the conventions of the eighteenth century and those of the present century. The "lovely woman" in Goldsmith's novel is a young woman who has yielded to a rash impulse to surrender, while Eliot's typist engages in sex only to appease her tedium—all in vain.

The contrast between the promiscuous and perfunctory nature of modern love and the sublimity of love in the past is also illustrated in the allusion to Spenser's wedding song ("Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song"). Here in the modern Waste Land there are no shepherds singing to

¹The Waste Land, p. 114.
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
nymphs, but "merely friends who have left no address." The reference to Marvell's "Coy Mistress" serves its purpose: Instead of hearing "Time's winged chariot" all the modern ear hears is

The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.¹

The allusion to Marvel is combined with an allusion to Day's "Parliament of Bees," whose "sounds of horns and hunting" has been changed to "horns and motors." Actaeon will not be brought face to face with Diana, goddess of chastity; Sweeney is to be brought to Mrs. Porter, hardly a symbol of chastity.²

Halfway through the section we learn that the narrator is Tiresias, the blind seer, who has been both man and woman. He is the historical expert on the relationship of the sexes:

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all Enacted on this same divan or bed....)³

The fact that he is the commentator is ironical. In Oedipus Rex, it is Tiresias who recognizes that the curse which has come upon the Theban land has been caused by the sinful sexual relationship of Oedipus and Jocasta. Oedipus' sin has been committed, and knowledge of it brings horror and remorse. The horror of the act which Tiresias witnesses in the poem is that if it is not regarded as a sin at all--it is perfectly casual, is merely the copulation of beasts.

¹Ibid., p. 43.
³The Waste Land, p. 44.
All that we have witnessed in this section (through the eyes of Tiresias) has to do with lust and the sins of the flesh. We have at the end of the section a quotation from St. Augustine ("O Lord Thou pluckest me out") and a reference to a Buddhist fire sermon ("burning"—the world of the senses is a world of fire)—examples of Eastern and Western asceticism. The imagery which both St. Augustine and Buddha use for lust is fire, and what we have witnessed in the various scenes of "The Fire Sermon" is the sterile burning of lust. The wisdom of the East and the West comes to the same thing on this point: there must be an asceticism—something to check the drive of desire.¹ Thus, the religious symbols point out that the modern world has been gripped by lust, and the use of such modern industrial symbols as "motors," "horns," "automatic hand," and "gramophone," indeed suggest that love has been reduced to mechanical concupiscence.

From this attitude it is clear that Eliot sees in the modern world nothing of the spiritual and cultural magnificence of past ages, of traditional values. In the final passage he declares that the present age has no water (the source of rebirth):²

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains,
Which are mountains of rock without water,³

and that the rocks themselves are empty of the old symbolism, in which, according to Anderson and Walton, they were often the home of the gods.⁴

---

¹Ibid.
²Anderson and Walton, op. cit., p. 239.
³The Waste Land, p. 47.
⁴Anderson and Walton, loc. cit.
The contemporary world is a world upside down, a world where voices sing out of the "empty cisterns and exhausted wells." But we are given by the poet three keys to grace: give, sympathize, control. The fact that modern man is no longer capable of these actions contributes to the note of despair. Thus *The Waste Land* is both a denial and an affirmation. The poet suggests that to solve the social, cultural and religious problem, the people of the modern waste land must turn away from the lust and materialism that has gripped them and return to the spirituality of the past, to tradition. And despite the utter despair in his presentation, he is not himself resigned to the acceptance of this spiritual desolation. Rather, he revolts against it, and at the end he prays for "the peace that passes all understanding."

Such is the nature of Eliot's social criticism. It is important to note, however, that his attack on contemporary society does not end with his earlier poetry, but that "The Hollow Men" represents a significant change in his poetry. In most of the poetry after this piece, he has been less concerned with the waste-land of contemporary society and more concerned with religion as the way to redemption from it. For even though there are a few exceptions, the bulk of Eliot's poetry after 1927-1928 shows that the revolt he set out to achieve had been accomplished by this time and that the poet was therefore able to recommend an avenue through which modern man might achieve a fuller and richer life.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The foregoing treatise had as its purpose the study of the elements of tradition and revolt in T. S. Eliot's poetry. Its intention was to examine Eliot's theory of poetry, as revealed in his literary criticism, which revolves around his concept of tradition, and to examine this same concept—along with the element of revolt—as evidenced in his poetic practice. The study has shown that these two seemingly opposite elements of tradition and revolt exist side by side in his poetry. In fact, the insistence on tradition accounts for the revolt; for, as the study has shown, Eliot was attempting to slough off what he considered the lifeless conventions of the late nineteenth century and to return to the main stream of Western literary tradition. This amounted to a flat rejection of the clichés and worn-out literary materials of the Victorians and the Georgians.

As a result of the revolutionary aspect of Eliot's poetry, many commentators label him as being antitradiutinal as well as contradictory. They charge that he talked of tradition in his criticism while being extremely radical and therefore antitradiutinal in his poetic practice. The present study has shown, however, that Eliot is far from being antitradiutinal, that rather he has aligned himself with the central traditions of European literature and culture. The revolt in his poetry—as in his criticism—reflects directly his preoccupation with tradition, for his rebellion was not against essential tradition but against the debilitating effects of
nineteenth century poetic practice which was itself in rebellion against the past tradition.

The study also touched on the outstanding influences on Eliot's poetry in terms of both form and content. In keeping with his ideas of tradition, Eliot has not only followed in the footsteps of certain "masters" of European literature, but he has drawn on what he calls "the whole of living literature" by using in his own poetry allusions and quotations from a large variety of literary works from various times and countries.

Eliot's revolt, as we have seen, was also directed against contemporary society. He revolted against those elements in it which he believed had brought about the decline of moral, spiritual and intellectual values of the modern world, and again the belief in tradition is responsible for the revolt. In criticizing the present, Eliot contrasts it with the past, and thereby shows the inferiority of the contemporary world to the past.

Stated briefly, the present study has been centered around three main areas: (1) Eliot's criticism, a major aspect of which is his theory of poetry, and which is concerned with the depersonalization of the artist and tradition; (2) his consequent revolt against contemporary romanticism; and (3) his revolt against contemporary society which naturally followed.

In attempting this study the writer has allowed Eliot to be his own arbiter, and has thereby avoided much of the confusion surrounding the question of "unity" in his poetry and criticism which inevitably arises out of judicial criticism. The result of this examination shows that both tradition and revolt are to be found in Eliot's poetry and that there is consistency, nevertheless, between his criticism and his poetry since the
basis of his rejection of the practices of contemporary poetry was his deep reverence for the main lines of tradition in Western literature and culture.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES

Anthologies


Critical and Expository Works


Unpublished Materials


Lewis, Oscar W. Class lectures delivered at the Pennsylvania State University, Summer, 1958.