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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF T. S. ELIOT

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The Achievement of

T. S. ELIOT

An Essay on the Nature of Poetry

F. O. MATTHIESSEN

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For

KENNETH *and* LAURETTE MURDOCK

What does the mind enjoy in books? Either the style or nothing. But, someone says, what about the thought? The thought, that is the style, too.

CHARLES MAURRAS

We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy.

W. B. YEATS

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION (1935)

MY DOUBLE AIM in this essay is to evaluate Eliot's method and achievement as an artist, and in so doing to emphasize certain of the fundamental elements in the nature of poetry which are in danger of being obscured by the increasing tendency to treat poetry as a social document and to forget that it is an art. The most widespread error in contemporary criticism is to neglect form and to concern itself entirely with content. The romantic critic is generally not interested in the poet's work, but in finding the man behind it. The humanistic critic and the sociological critic have in common that both tend to ignore the evaluation of specific poems in their preoccupation with the ideological background from which the poems spring. All these concerns can have value in expert hands, but only if it is realized that they are not criticism of poetry. In combating the common error, my contention is that, although in the last analysis content and form are inseparable, a poem can be neither enjoyed nor understood unless the reader experiences all of its formal details, unless he allows the movement and pattern of its words to exercise their full charm over him before he attempts to say precisely what it is that the poem means. The most fatal approach to a poem is to focus merely on what it seems to state, to try to isolate its ideas from their context in order to approve or disapprove of them before having really grasped their implications in the poem itself. Consequently, my approach to Eliot's poetry, and to poetry generally, is through close attention to its technique. I agree with Mallarme that 'poetry is not written with ideas, it is written with words,' as well as with the assertion that what matters is not what a poem says, but what it *is.* That does not mean that either the poem or the poet can be separated

from the society that produced them, or that a work of art does not inevitably both reflect and illuminate its age. Nor does it imply that a poet is necessarily lacking in ideas, or that the content of his work, the material he chooses to write about, and the interpretation he makes of it, is without cardinal significance in determining his relation to life and to the currents of thought in his time. But even that significance is obscured, if not distorted, by the criticism that pays heed solely to the poet's ideas and not to their expression, that turns the poet into a philosopher or a political theorist or a pamphleteer, that treats his work as a specimen of sociological evidence, and meanwhile neglects the one quality that gives his words their permanence, his quality as an artist.

In my evaluation of Eliot's poetry I have not been concerned with tracing the development of his thought, nor with his criticism except in so far as it throws light on his own poetical theory and practice, though the evolution both of his critical tenets and of his conception of the relation of the individual to society would make a good subject for another book. In order to give my book as close a unity as possible, I have consciously made an experiment in its organization. I have tried to write the whole as one connected essay, with each section closely interweaving with what goes before and what follows. Indeed, the division into chapters is simply a convenience, in order, through their titles, to stress some points that I am most interested in establishing. My desire for a sustained condensed effect has also caused me to make use of notes for some passages of more technical analysis, as well as for longer illustrations. These notes are intended to be integral elaborations of the text, but those readers who, like myself, are irritated at the distraction of being repeatedly referred to the back of the book, are asked to postpone that act at least until the end of each chapter. For unless the essay stands clearly on its own feet, without aid from the notes, it will not stand reading at all.

PREFACE TO THE 1947 EDITION

IN THE dozen years since I undertook this book much more criticism of Eliot has been written, most notably by Cleanth Brooks in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), and several other studies are now projected, including one by Delmore Schwartz. My own views of the poet have inevitably undergone some change, but though I may now see limitations of which I was not conscious in my first absorption in Eliot's earlier work, I am even more impressed by the contemplative depth in his subsequent production. My growing divergence from his view of life is that I believe that it is possible to accept the 'radical imperfection' of man, and yet to be a political radical as well, to be aware that no human society can be perfect, and yet to hold that the proposition that 'all men are created equal' demands dynamic adherence from a Christian no less than from a democrat. But the scope of my book remains what it was before. I have not written about Eliot's politics or religion except as they are expressed through his poetry.

If I were writing the book now, I doubt that I would use the same compressed method of presentation, and I should certainly not introduce so many notes. But those notes still seem useful for their original purpose of providing a running commentary on my sub-title, on my conception of 'the nature of poetry,' I have therefore left most of them untouched, and the only revisions of my earlier text are designed to simplify some of its more cumbersome sentences, in which, as I can now see, I was flagrantly thinking out my material as I wrote it.

The first six chapters are still meant to stand as a whole, as an estimate not SQ much of particular poems as of Eliot's poetic method. I have now added two chapters on his chief

work of the past decade. That on his Quartets first appeared in *The Kenyan Review* (Spring 1943). That on his Plays has just been written.

F. O. M.

October 1946

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (1935)

I WANT to thank the subject of my essay not only for his generous permission to quote from some unpublished lectures, but also for the great benefit of conversation during his recent year at Harvard. I am also thankful that my first introduction to Eliot's poetry came through my friends, the poets Phelps Putnam and Maxwell Evarts Foster, who made me listen to it read aloud, thus enabling me to feel from the outset its lyric sound and movement, instead of letting me begin by losing the poetry in a tortuous effort to find a logical pattern in its unfamiliar structure. I am particularly indebted to my friend and colleague Theodore Spencer, with whom I have discussed these matters ever since our first meeting nine years ago. I am afraid that he will find here more than one of his remarks, unacknowledged, but I hope not garbled. I want also to thank Walter and Esther Houghton, Perry and Elizabeth Miller, Eleanor McLaughlin, Louis Hyde, Russell Cheney, W. Ellery Sedgwick, Harry Levin, and Cesar Lombardi Barber, fellow discoverers. I am grateful to David W. Prall for having turned his trained eye on the last two chapters; and many pages have benefited from the vigorous onslaught of Russell Davenport, who takes exception to much that I have said here and elsewhere, or am likely to say in the future. Among other contemporary critics I am most conscious of my obligations to the work of I. A. Richards and Edmund Wilson, not simply for their own remarks on Eliot, but, more importantly, for stimulus and challenge during the past several years.

I want also to thank Harcourt, Brace and Company for permission to quote extensively from Eliot's work.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888, the seventh and youngest child of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Chauncy Stearns. The Eliot family, which is of Devonshire origin, goes back in America to Andrew Eliot (1627-1704), who, emigrating in middle life from East Coker, Somerset, was enrolled as a member of the First Church of Beverly, Massachusetts, in 1670. Apparently a cordwainer by trade, he was frequently chosen as Selectman, and finally as Town Clerk. He was a juror against the Salem witches at the same time that Hawthorne's ancestor was one of the judges who condemned them, but afterwards made a public recantation and greatly reproached himself for his delusion. The poet's direct ancestors were for several generations mainly merchants of Boston, though the Rev. Andrew Eliot, D.D. (1718-78), a strong Congregatioiialist and an enemy to Episcopalianism, was minister of the North Church, and was elected president of Harvard but declined to leave his congregation. The poet's grandfather, the Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot, D.D. (1811-87), a second cousin of Charles William Eliot, had gone out to St. Louis directly after his graduation from the Harvard Divinity School in 1834, and had established the first Unitarian church in that city. A man of great activity in public service throughout a long career, he was a balanced but firm opponent of slavery, and was instrumental in keeping Missouri in the Union. He likewise founded and helped to build Washington University (which would have been called Eliot University except for his objection), and became its Chancellor in 1872. Among his extensive writings, which were mostly of an ethical and philanthropic nature, was a sermon on 'Suffering Considered as Discipline,' From his large

family of children two of his four sons entered the ministry; the youngest became a lawyer. His second son, Henry Ware Eliot (1841-1919), who was named after one of the foremost figures in New England Unitarianism, graduated from Washington University in 1863, and became connected with the Hydraulic Press Brick Company of St. Louis, of which he later was president. He was married in 1868 to Charlotte Chauncy Stearns (1843-1930), the daughter of a commission merchant and trader of Boston, and the descendant of Isaac Stearns, who had come out with John Winthrop in 1630 as one of the original settlers of the Bay Colony. The poet's mother was a woman of keen intellectual interests, whose published work comprised a full-length biography of her father-in-law and a dramatic poem on the life of Savonarola.

T. S. Eliot prepared for college at the Smith Academy in St. Louis (a department of Washington University), as his only brother had done eight years before him; and spent one final year at Milton. Entering Harvard in the autumn of 1906, he was thus in the same class with John Reed, Bronson Cutting, Stuart Chase, and Walter Lippmann. He was an editor of the undergraduate literary magazine, *The Harvard Advocate,* to which he contributed a few poems, was elected Class Odist, and belonged to various literary and social clubs. Among the members of the Harvard faculty those who most clearly left their influence upon him were Irving Babbitt and George Santayana. After completing his college course in three years Eliot continued his study of philosophy in the Harvard Graduate School. The year 1910-11 was spent in Paris, reading French literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne. He returned to America in the autumn of 1911, and passed the next three years again at Harvard, extending his study of metaphysics, logic, and psychology to include also Indie philology and Sanskrit. In the year 1913-14 he was appointed as an assistant in Philosophy at Harvard. At the end of that year he was awarded

a travelling fellowship, and was in Germany during the summer before the outbreak of the War. In the following winter he was at Merton College, Oxford, reading Greek philosophy. About this time he began to contribute reviews to *The International Journal of Ethics;* and two technical essays, one on Leibniz and one on Leibniz and F. H. Bradley, were published in *The Monist* in 1916. His first mature poems to appear in print were 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prutrock' in Harriet Monroe's newly established journal, *Poetry,* April-September 1915; 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' in Wyndham Lewis's *Blast,* July 1915; and in Ezra Pound's *Catholic Anthology—so* called because it collected in that same year work of such diverse poets as Yeats and the Imagists—there were included, in addition to Trufrock,' 'Portrait of a Lady,' 'The *Boston Evening Transcript,'* 'Hysteria,' and 'Aunt Helen,'

He had been married in the spring of 1915, and during the next year was, according to his own report, 'teaching French, Latin, lower mathematics, drawing, swimming, geography, history, and baseball' at the Highgate School near London. Shortly thereafter he changed his occupation to banking and 'dealt with documentary bills, acceptances, and foreign exchange' in Lloyds Bank, Ltd. In 1918 he registered for the U.S. Navy, but was not taken into service owing to poor health. He became an assistant editor of *The Egoist* from 1917 to 1919, and a frequent contributor to *The Athenaeum* during 1919 to 1921, the brief period of J. Middleton Murry's editorship. His range of contributions to a great many other magazines gradually extended from *Lloyds Bank Economic Review* to *Vanity Fair.* In 1923 he became editor of a quarterly review, *The Criterion,* which he continued to conduct until shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. He is now a director of the publishing house of Faber and Faber. In 1927, as a result of his growing interest in the English Church and State, he be-

came a British subject. In September 1932 he returned to America for the first time in eighteen years, having accepted the appointment of Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard for 1932-3. Since that time he has lived for the most part again in London, though he has made two or three other trips back to this country.

Eliot's poetry has been published in volume form as follows: *Prufrock and Other Observations,* 1917; *Poems,* 1919; *Ara Vos Prec,* 1919, which is a collection, with additions, of the two previous volumes, and which, with the exception of one inferior poem that Eliot has not reprinted, is reproduced in *Poems,* 1920; *The Waste Land,* which won the *Dial* award, 1922; *Poems,* 1909-25, which included all his previous work and added 'The Hollow Men,' 1925; *Collected Poems,* 1909-35, which added, among others, *Sweeney Agonistes,* 1927, *Ash Wednesday,* 1930, 'Burnt Norton,' 1934, and the choruses from *The Rock,* 1934; *Murder in the Cathedral,* 1935; *The Family Reunion,* 1939; *Four Quartets,* 1943. Appearing concurrently with his poetry, Eliot's most important criticism has been included in: *The Sacred Wood,* 1920, collected chiefly from *The Athenaeum, The Egoist, Art and Letters,* and *The Times Literary Supplement* (London); *Homage to John Dryden,* 1924, three essays which had originally been written for *The Times Literary Supplement; For Lancelot Andrewes,* 1928, the contents of which had appeared variously in *The Times Literary Supplement, Theology, The Dial,* and *The Forum; Dante,* 1929; *The Use of Poetry,* 1933, Eliot's eight Norton lectures; *After Strange Gods,* 1934, three lectures delivered in the spring of 1933 at the University of Virginia; *Essays Ancient and Modern,* 1936; *The Idea of a Christian Society,* 1940. The bulk of the first four of these volumes was included, along with several additional pieces, in *Selected Essays,* 1917-32.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF T. S. ELIOT

I

TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT

It is part of the business of the critic ... to see literature steadily and to see it whole, and this is eminently to see it *not* as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time, to see the best work of our time and the best work of twenty-five hundred years ago with the same eyes.—Intioduction to *The Sacred Wood.*

IN *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy,* T. S. Eliot stated that his aim was to develop further the theme of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' which is probably his best-known essay. Nearly thirty years have now elapsed since it was written—and over thirty since his first notable poem, 'The Love Song of J. AHred Prulrock'—a detail which underscores the fact that it is no longer accurate to think of Eliot's work as new or experimental.' Indeed, with younger readers 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is now as much of a classic as Matthew Arnold's 'The Study of Poetry'; and putting those essays side by side one can observe that Eliot's is equally packed with trenchant remarks on the relation of present to past, as well as on the nature of poetry itself.

It is illuminating to go further and juxtapose the whole range of these writers' achievements. For, by so doing, one becomes aware of the extent to which Eliot's criticism has quietly accomplished a revolution: that in it we have the first full revaluation of poetry since *Essays in Criticism* appeared in 1865. Arnold's observations on the historical course of English poetry, his classification of the romantics of the age just before him, his dismissal of Dryden and Pope as authors of an age of prose, his exaltation of Milton, and his depreciation of Chaucer on the score of lacking 'high seriousness'—all of these views, sensitively elaborated, not only

persuaded his generation but also, as Eliot has remarked, largely remain as the academic estimates of to-day. It is worth noting that A. E. Housman, who professed not to be a critic, also held most of them in his widely read lecture of 1933, 'The Name and Nature of Poetry,' Housman's enthusiasms remained those of the time when he was an undergraduate: he could see nothing in the seventeenth-century metaphysicals but perverse over-intellectualization, and he almost paraphrased Arnold's remarks on the school of Dryden. Moreover, when one goes through the names of the principal English critics since Arnold's death and since the brief plunge into the dead alley of aestheticism in the 'nineties, it is apparent that such representative work as that of Saintsbury, Whibley, or Bradley, or even that of W. P. Ker, was historical rather than critical, in the sense that it was engaged with description and categorization, filling in the outlines traced by Arnold, and only incidentally, if at all, raising any new questions. In America, Irving Babbitt, also indebted to Arnold (more, perhaps, than he recognized), was concerned with the relation of the artist's thought to society, but not at all with the nature of art.[1] In the years just before the First World War, the speculations of T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound brought a new quickening of life which prepared the way for Eliot's own development; but there was no detailed intensive re-examination of the quality and function of poetry until the publication of *The Sacred Wood* in 1920.

It could not be wholly clear then, but it has become so now, that the ideas first arriving at their mature expression in that volume definitely placed their author in the main line of poet-critics that runs from Ben Jonson and Dryden through Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, and Arnold. In fact, what has given the note of authority to Eliot's views of poetry is exactly what has made the criticism of the other writers just named the most enduring in English. They have

not been merely theorists, but all craftsmen talking of what they knew at first hand. When Dryden writes about Chaucer, or Coleridge about Wordsworth, or Eliot about Donne, we may not agree on all points, but we take them seriously since we can observe at once their intimate understanding of what they are saying. With the generation of readers since the First World War, Donne has assumed the stature of a centrally important figure for the first time since the seventeenth century; and his rise has been directly connected with the fact that Eliot has enabled us to see him with fresh closeness, not only by means of his analysis of the method of metaphysical poetry but also because he has renewed that method in the rhythms and imagery of his own verse.

When Eliot is thought of in connection with Arnold, probably the first thing that comes to mind is his reaction to the famous statement that the poetry of Dryden and Pope was 'conceived and composed in their wits, genuine poetry is conceived ... in the soul'; his brief retort about poetry 'conceived and composed in the soul of a mid-century Oxford graduate.' In addition, one has the impression of deft, if inconspicuous sniping, kept up over quite a few years. What Eliot has attacked principally is not the conception of poetry as criticism of life; indeed, no one lately has taken that phrase very seriously except in so far as it throws light on Arnold's own poetry. The main offensive has been against certain jaunty inadequacies in Arnold's thought and, in particular, against his loose identification of poetry with religion. And yet, in his most recent remarks about Arnold, Eliot has recognized him as a friend, if not as a master; as one whose work at its best, both in verse and in criticism, has more to say to us than that of any other poet of his time.

Consequently, in any effort to gauge Eliot's achievement, to indicate just what traditions have entered into the shaping of his talent, it is important to remind oneself of the actual closeness of these two writers in the qualities of mind which

they value. It might almost be either who remarks that 'Excellence dwells among rocks hardly accessible, and a man must almost wear his heart out before he can reach her,' For certainly there is in each a full understanding of the unremitting discipline for the critic in learning 'to see the object as it is'; an equal insistence on the current of fresh ideas in which a society must move as a primary condition for the emergence of mature art; an equal veneration for French intelligence; and, again and again, a similar scoring, not by logic, but by flexibility, resilience, and an intuitive precision. In addition, in more than one notable passage, such as those which reflect on the lonely relation of the thinker to society, there is almost an identical tone. When Arnold realizes that in a sense the critic's goal is never reached, that it is kept in sight only by unending vigilance, he says: 'That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness: but to have desired to enter it, to have saluted it from afar, is already, perhaps, the best distinction among contemporaries; it will certainly be the best title to esteem with posterity,' And Eliot takes up the echoing theme:

> It is not to say that Arnold's work was vain if we say that it is to be done again; for we must know in advance, if we are prepared for that conflict, that the combat may have truces but never a peace. If we take the widest and wisest view of a Cause, there is no such thing as a Lost Cause because there is no such thing as a Gained Cause. We fight for lost causes because we know that our defeat and dismay may be the preface to our successors' victory, though that victory itself will be temporary; we fight rather to keep something alive than in the expectation that anything will triumph.

Although Eliot relates to the central values stressed by Arnold to a degree which has not heretofore been recognized, it would be misleading to slur over the equally marked divergences between them. The chief difference

separating in quality both their criticism and verse is suggested in Eliot's remark that 'Arnold's poetry has little technical interest,' With Arnold, in so far as you can make such a division, the emphasis is on substance rather than on form.[1] Such emphasis led him into his attempted definition of poetry as criticism of life, a phrase which would apply equally well to a novel as to a poem, and which wholly fails to suggest the created vision of life which constitutes the essence of all art. The same emphasis also runs through Arnold's essays, where he gives us estimates of the value to the human spirit of poetry and of individual poets, but, although he frequently refers to 'the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth,' no detailed or even incidental examination of the precise nature of those laws emerges.'With Eliot, the emphasis is on form. His essays on various Elizabethan dramatists, for example, are not concerned with the full-length rounded estimate, but with close technical annotation of detail,' It is possible that he may sometimes regret his too sharp reversal: 'The spirit killeth, but the letter giveth life'; and yet it represents the intensity of his dissatisfaction with the copious expansiveness of Arnold's age, with Swinburne and Tennyson far more than with Arnold himself,'In v thoughtful reaction, Eliot's method is spare and economical. He watches with the trained eye of the hawk, and then swoops on the one point that will illustrate the quality of the whole. His brief essays present in clearest outline the segment of the curve from which the complete circle can be constructed. ' -'

It is this preoccupation with craftmanship that has enabled him to relish so fully the virtues of Dryden. But Dryden's power has been, so to speak, simply one of Eliot's incidental discoveries. The principal elements entering into his revaluation of poetry can be most briefly described in terms of the poets who have left the deepest and most lasting mark

on his own work: the seventeenth-century English metaphysicals, the nineteenth-century French symbolists, and Dante.[2] Such a combination of interests, which he possessed even before his earliest published work, might at first glance seem not only unlikely but exotic for a young man of New England stock, born in St. Louis and educated at Milton and Harvard. But actually they are not so. They relate organically to his background, though an adequate demonstration of that fact would require a still unwritten chapter of American intellectual history,[8] and might even surprise Eliot himself. Yet it is not to be forgotten that the symbolist movement has its roots in the work of the most thoroughly conscious artist in American poetry before Eliot, Edgar Poe; and that, therefore, in Eliot's taste for Baudelaire and Laforgue as well as for Poe, the wheel has simply come full circle. It is increasingly apparent that the renaissance of the New England mind, from Emerson and Thoreau to Emily Dickinson, felt a deep kinship with the long buried modes of thought and feeling of the seventeenth century; in fact, Emily Dickinson's poetry, especially, must be described as metaphysical. I do not suggest that Eliot is directly indebted to any of these writers; indeed, he once remarked to me both of his sustained distaste for Emerson, and of the fact that he had never read Miss Dickinson.

It must be noted, however, if only by way of parenthesis, that there is one author who grew out of the New England tradition to whom Eliot is greatly indebted. When he first began to write he could find among living artists of the older generation no poet who satisfied him, but, as Ezra Pound has remarked, it was Henry James, as well as Conrad, who taught them both 'that poetry ought to be as well written as prose.' In Eliot's case James taught him even more than that. In his tribute shortly after the novelist's death,[4] Eliot spoke of him as 'the most intelligent man of his generation,' by which he meant that, undistracted by 'ideas,' James had

maintained a point of view and had given himself wholly to the perfection of his craft, and that he had reflected on the novel as an art 'as no previous English novelist had done,' In addition, Eliot was fascinated by the way in which James did not simply relate but made the reader co-operate; by the richness of his 'references'; by the way, for example, in *The Aspern Papers.,* he managed to give the whole feeling of Venice by the most economical strokes. Indeed, Eliot has said that the method in this story—'to make a place real not descriptively but by something happening there'—was what stimulated him to try to compress so many memories of past moments of Venice into his dramatic poem, superficially so different from James, 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar,'[6] And what is even more significant, Eliot has perceived that James's 'real progenitor' was Hawthorne, that he cannot be understood without Hawthorne, that the essential strain common to them both was 'their indifference to religious dogma at the same time as their exceptional awareness of spiritual reality,' their 'profound sensitiveness to good and evil,' their extraordinary power to convey horror.[6]

This brings us back to the point that no more than Henry James can Eliot be understood without reckoning with the Puritan mind. Its special mixture of passion overweighed by thought (as well as the less attractive combination of high moral idealism restrained by practical prudence that was probed by Santayana in 'The Genteel Tradition'); its absorption in the problem of belief and its trust in moments of vision; its dry, unexpected wit; its dread of vulgarity, as perplexing to the creater of 'Sweeney Erect' as to Henry James; its consciousness of the nature of evil, as acute in 'The Turn of the Screw' as in 'Ethan Brand' or 'Gerontion'; its full understanding of the dark consequences of loneliness and repression which are expressed in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as well as in *The Scarlet Letter;* its severe self-discipline and sudden, poignant tenderness, to be found

alike in Jonathan Edwards and in the author of *Ash Wednesday*—*such* attributes and preoccupations are common to the whole strain to which Eliot inextricably belongs. The natural relation of Dante to many elements in that strain is at once apparent. It need only be added that from Longfellow through Charles Eliot Norton, Santayana, and Charles Grandgent there was an unbroken line of Dante scholarship at Harvard. It may be that in the end Eliot gained a more challenging insight into the technical excellences of *The Divine Comedy* through conversations with Ezra Pound, but, at all events, in the preface to his own introduction to Dante he lists as his principal aids all the names which I have just mentioned.

To arrive- not only at Eliot's debt to tradition but at an understanding of what he has himself added to it, it is essential at least to suggest more specific reasons why he has been attracted to these particular poets, and the exact use he has made of them. The need is more real in Eliot's case than it would be in most, since his own verse bears everywhere evidence of how his reading has been carried alive into his mind, and thus of his conception of poetry 'as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written.'[7] Holding such a conception of the integral relation of the present to an alive past, believing that it is necessary for the poet to be conscious, 'not of what is dead, but of what is already living,' he naturally also believes that one of the marks of a mature poet is that he should be 'one who not merely restores a tradition which has been in abeyance, but one who in his poetry re-twines as many straying strands of tradition as possible,' Perhaps the process would have been more compellingly described as 'fusing together' rather than 're-twining'; for only by some such process can the poet's work gain richness and density.

It is hardest to suggest in brief compass the extent of Eliot's feeling for Dante, since he has himself devoted

many careful pages to defining exactly what he means by calling him the most universal poet in a modern language. That he does so regard him is of considerable significance in throwing light on what qualities Eliot most values in poetry, especially since he dwells chiefly on the power of Dante's precision of diction, and of his clear, visual images. He does not hesitate to say that he believes Dante's simple style, his great economy of words, makes him the most valuable master for any one trying to write poetry himself. That he does not believe this style simple to attain is indicated by his laconic sentence: 'In twenty years I have written about a dozen lines in that style successfully; and compared to the dullest passage of the "Divine Comedy," they are "as straw." ' It is also apparent, in view both of 'The Hollow Men' and of the direction towards which he has been moving since *Ash Wednesday,* that although he carefully avoids saying that either Shakespeare or Dante is the 'greater,' he is himself drawn more closely to the latter, who, though he did not embrace so wide an 'extent and variety of human life,' yet understood 'deeper degrees oi degradation and higher degrees of exaltation,' It would be glib to say that in *The Waste Land* and 'The Hollow Men' Eliot wrote his *Inferno,* and that since then his poems represent various stages of passing through a *Purgatorio;* still such a remark may possibly illuminate both his aims and achievement. ''

\ It is easier to illustrate the impact made upon Eliot by the more restricted qualities of seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry, particularly since they have also appealed to many other readers of to-day. For it is not accidental that the same people who respond to Proust and Joyce have also found something important in Donne. The remark that we have in the work of this poet 'the fullest record in our literature of the disintegrating collision in a sensitive mind of the old tradition and the new learning' might very well have been made about *The Waste* Land.[8] For, as has been fre-

quently observed, Donne's poetry also was born in part out of an increase of self-consciousness. His probing, analytic mind was keenly aware of the actual complexity of his feelings, their rapid alterations and sharp antitheses; and our more complete awareness of the sudden juxtapositions of experience, of, in Eliot's phrase, 'the apparent irrelevance and unrelatedness of things,' has drawn us strongly to him. The jagged brokenness of Donne's thought has struck a responsive note in our age, for we have seen a reflection of our own problem in the manner in which his passionate mind, unable to find any final truth in which it could rest, became fascinated with the process of thought itself. Eliot's earlier enthusiasm for this element in Donne's mind is now considerably qualified in view of his own growing desire for order and coherence; as is also some of his first response to the realization that we have in Donne the expression of an age that 'objects to the heroic and sublime and objects to the simplification and separation of the mental facuities.' But that such qualities have been deeply felt by a whole generation of readers since 1918 is demonstrated by the fact that even a character in Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* could quote from a metaphysical poem. It may be that in reaction against Donne's previous neglect our generation has gone to the extreme of exaggerating his importance; and yet it would be hard to overestimate the value of his discoveries as an artist. What he strove to devise was a medium of expression that would correspond to the felt intricacy of his existence, that would suggest by sudden contrasts, by harsh dissonances as well as by harmonies, the actual sensation of life as he had himself experienced it. In sharp revolt against the too superficial beauty of *The iFaerie Queene* and the purely 'literary' conventions of the sonneteers, he knew that no part of life should be barred as 'unpoetic,' that nothing in mature experience was too subtly refined or too sordid, too remote or too commonplace to serve as material

foxippetry. His great achievement lay in his ability to convey 'his genuine whole of tangled feelings,' as in 'The Extasie,' the extraordinary range of feeling—from the lightest to the most serious, from the most spiritual to the most sensual—that can inhere in a single mood. This 'alliance of levity and seriousness' by which, as Eliot has observed, the seriousness is not weakened but intensified, 'implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience'; it involves 'a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible.' Such recognition demands a mind that is at once maturely seasoned, wise and discerning—and imaginative, a combination sufficiently rare to cause Eliot to maintain that 'it is hardly too much to say that Donne enlarged the possibilities of lyric verse as no other English poet has done.[9]

But Donne's technical discoveries did not belong to him alone. They were a product of a whole mode of thought and feeling which has seemed to Eliot the richest and most varied that has ever come to expression in English. He has described this mode as a development of sensibility, 'a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling,' which means that for all the most notable poets of Donne's time there was no separation between life and thought, and that their way of feeling 'was directly and freshly altered by their reading.' Such interweaving of emotions and thought exists in Chapman and Webster, and in the dense, masterful irregularity of the later plays of Shakespeare. It was as true for these poets as for Donne that 'a thought was an experience' which modified their capacity of feeling. As a result they could devour and assimilate any kind of experience, so that in their poetry passages of philosophical speculation stimulated by Montaigne or Seneca throb with as living a pulse as their own direct accounts of human passion.l Indeed, one has only to turn to Montaigne and *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure,* or to North's *Pin-*

tarch and *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus,* for complete examples of how reading as well as thought could be absorbed as vital experience.

How entirely Eliot believes such a capacity to be the only right state for the mature poet is emphasized by his extended comment that 'when a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.' That such a conviction concerning the creative process has sprung from one of Eliot's most recurrent discoveries about the nature of life is revealed when we find him writing, in a very different connection: 'It is probable that men ripen best through experiences which are at once sensuous and intellectual; certainly many men will admit that their keenest ideas have come to them with the quality of a sense perception; and that their keenest sensuous experience has been "as if the body thought." ' He was led to that reflection in contrasting the qualities of Henry James and Henry Adams, a contrast that brings out once more the elements that Eliot is continually stressing as characteristic of the greatest art. It also reveals a certain similarity that he felt between James and metaphysical poetry, thus making more apparent why he has been attracted to both and indicating the relations between two strands in his tradition. Deeply impressed by the acuteness of Adams's intelligence, Eliot yet felt a lack of full ripeness in his writing when compared with that of James. He expressed his distinction between them thus: 'There is nothing to indicate that Adams's senses either flowered or fruited. . . Henry James was not, by Adams's standards,

"educated," but particularly limited; it is the sensuous contributor to the intelligence that makes the difference,'[10]

In perhaps the most exciting phrase in all of his criticism, Eliot has called this rare fusion a way of feeling thought 'as immediately as the odour of a rose.' Such a capacity was possessed by later men in the seventeenth century, by Crashaw and Vaughan, and, in Eliot's account, found its last mature poetic voice in Andrew Marvell. The one thing common to the whole group, so diverse in their gifts and points of view, is, in Eliot's regard, 'that firm grasp of human experience, which is a formidable achievement of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets.' He adds a further remark: 'This wisdom, cynical perhaps but untired (in Shakespeare, a terrifying clairvoyance), leads toward, and is only completed by, the religious comprehension'—a remark more heavily freighted with implications for his own development than would have been apparent at the time it was written, in 1921, the year before the publication of *The Waste Land.*

Similarities between Eliot's technical devices and those of Donne have been often observed:[11] the conversational tone, the vocabulary at once colloquial and surprisingly strange—both of these a product of Eliot's belief in the relation of poetry to actual speech, and paralleling his use of 'non-poetic' material; the rapid association of ideas which demands alert agility 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. But actually the manner in which sudden transitions are made in Eliot's verse owes much more to the method of the French symbolists.[12] I. A. Richards has spoken of *The Waste Land* as 'a music of ideas,' a phrase which suggests Eliot's particular attraction to Laforgue. By both poets connecting links are left out, as they are not by Donne, in an effort to utilize our recent closer knowledge of the working of the brain, of its

way of making associations. That is to say, Eliot wants to suggest in the rhythms of his verse the movement of thought ip a living mind, and thus to communicate the exact pattern of his meaning not so much by logical structure as by emotional suggestion. He is aware that such a method is dangerous, that it can easily lead into the false identity, Toesie, musique, c'est meme chose,'[13] which caused the vague obscureness of so much of Mallarme's verse. But Eliot is equally sure that poetry can approach the condition of music without sacrificing its definite core of meaning so long as it has 'a definite emotion behind it.'[14] He has understood the many-sided problem of the poet. He knows that he must not sacrifice either sense to sound, or sound to sense: 'Words are perhaps the hardest of all material of art: for they must be used to express both visual beauty and beauty of sound, as well as communicating a grammatical statement.'[15]

In the preface to his translation of Perse's *Anabase* Eliot takes pains to point out that the French poet's suppression 'of explanatory and connecting matter' is not at all owing 'to incoherence, or to the love of cryptogram,' but to the deliberate belief that he can secure his most concentrated effect by the ordered compression of his sequence of images. Eliot is likewise convinced that 'there is a logic of the imagination as well as a logic of concepts,' and, as he states elsewhere, that the one test of whether the sudden contrasts and juxtapositions of modern poetry are successful or not 'is merely a question of whether the mind is *serre* or *delie*, whether the whole personality is involved,' For, in words that take on greater significance the more one examines Eliot's own work, 'it is the unity of a personality which gives an indissoluble unity to his variety of subject,'

' The principal quality which drew Eliot to the symbolists is one they possess in common with the metaphysicals, 'the same essential quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind,'^This

quality might be defined more technically as 'the presence of the idea in the image,' a definition with which I shall have more to do below. In both schools there is the demand for compression of statement, for centring on the revealing detail and eliminating all inessentials, and thus for an effect of comprehensiveness to be gained by the bringing to bear of a great deal of packed experience onto a single moment of expression. In the symbolists there is an increased allusiveness and indirection, a flexibility in their verse designed to catch every nuance of their feeling. Such technical agility fascinated Eliot, especially in Laforgue, since it was coupled there with an unusual verbal adroitness—a combination of 'recondite words and simple phrasing,' which is also to be found everyhere in Eliot's own early work; and likewise with a mocking-serious, worldly-aesthetic attitude which spoke directly to his own youthful sophistication. As a result, Trufrock,' in the movement of its verse, its repetitions, and echoes, and even in its choice of theme, seems of all Eliot's poems to have been written most immediately under Laforgue's stimulus!(though brought to a finished perfection of form which Laforgue's more impromptu verse scarcely attained); just as the verse of 'Gerontion' reveals the fullest impression of Eliot's mastery of the Jacobean dramatists. '

»The condensation of form that was demanded both by Donne and the symbolists logically builds its effects upon sharp contrasts, and makes full use of the. .element of surprise, which Eliot, as well as Poe, considers to have been 'one of the most important means of poetic effect since Homer,' It is always one of the prime functions of poetry to break through our conventional perceptions, to startle us into a new awareness of reality. As Hulme observed, 'poetry always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process,' In the poetry that Eliot most admires, poetry which has secured a union of thought and emotion, there will in-

evitably be an unexpected bringing together of material from seemingly disparate experiences^ The reading of Spinoza and the smell of cooking will very possibly both enter into the full expression of a state of feeling, just as the most refined speculation from the Church fathers, a vivid detail from contemporary exploration, and the most coarsely sensual flash of wit unite in a single stanza of Donne's to make the expression of his love a concrete, living thing, very different from an abstract statement. Eliot's own kind of witty surprise is created in such a line as

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

'I have measured out my life'—the general, platitudinous reflection is suddenly punctuated with an electric shock which flashes into the mind of the reader, in a single, concrete, ironic picture, Prufrock's whole futile way of existence.[18]

But if the details of Eliot's style show everywhere the mark of his responsive mastery of the later symbolists, as well as of the metaphysicals, the impression of Baudelaire upon his spirit has been even more profound. The reason why he seems to have been stirred more deeply by *Les Fleurs du Mai* than by any other poetry written in the nineteenth century 4s, I think, suggested by the words which he has italicized in the sentence that indicates the nature of this 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.

For |Baudelaire's intensity is the result of his having 'a sense of his own age,' a quality not easy to analyse, but one which, as Eliot stresses it again and again in the course of discussing very different poets, is revealed to be one of his fundamental tests for great poetry. | Such a sense is at an

opposite pole from a familiarity with the surface details of a time, or from a sense of fashion. When Eliot finds that Blake possessed this sense as well as Villon, it is seen to consist in a condensed, bare honesty that can strike beneath the appearances of life to reality, that can grasp so strongly the intrinsic elements of life in the poet's own day that it likewise penetrates beneath the apparent variations of man from one epoch to another to his essential sameness,'Eliot is quite aware that the degree of consciousness on the artist's part of such a sense has varied greatly in different ages,' that whereas the great French novelists from Stendhal and Flaubert through Proust were deliberately occupied with analysing conditions of society as well as the individual, with chronicling 'the rise, the regime, and the decay of the upper bourgeoisie,' on the other hand, it is in the very lack of such consciousness of social change and decay, 'of corruptions and abuses peculiar to their own time, that the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists are blessed. We feel that they believed in their own age, in a way in which no nineteenth- or tweptieth-century writer of the greatest seriousness has been able to believe in his age. And accepting their age, they were in a position to concentrate their attention, to their respective abilities, upon the common characteristics of humanity in all ages, rather than upon the differences,'

But in any age the thing of highest importance for the poet is to 'express with individual differences the general state of mind, not as a *duty*, but simply because'—if he possesses that rare, unyielding honesty which alone will give his work depth—'he cannot help participating in it.' In such fashion Eliot dwells repeatedly on the integral relation of any poet's work to the society of which he is a part, to the climate of thought and feeling which give rise to his expression. In line with such reflections Eliot can say: 'The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time.[17] Thus Dante, hardly knowing it, became the voice of the thirteenth cen-

tury; Shakespeare, hardly knowing it, became the representative of the end of the sixteenth century, of a turning point in history.' f

'In the case of Baudelaire, this ability to go beneath appearances to the most recurrently pervading elements in life was the result of the peculiar dogged strength with which he felt the torturing impact of the great modern city upon the lonely individual.[1] For the very intensity of his suffering enabled him to see through the slogans of his age in a way that Victor Hugo, for example, could not; enabled him to cut beneath its 'bustle, programmes, platforms, scientific progress, humanitarianism, and revolutions which improved nothing' to a real perception of good and evil. Such a perception Eliot defines, in *After Strange Gods,* as 'the first requisite of spiritual life.' It is very close to Yeats's mature discovery that we begin to live only 'when we have conceived life as tragedy.' For both Yeats and Eliot recognize that there can be no significance to life, and hence no tragedy in the account of man's conflicts and his inevitable final defeat by death, unless it is fully realized that there is no such thing as good unless there is also evil, or evil unless there is good; that until this double nature of life is understood by a man, he is doomed to waver between a groundless, optimistic hopefulness and an equally chaotic, pointless despair. Eliot has learned from his own experience that the distinguishing feature of a human life consists in the occasions on which the individual most fully reveals his character, and that tho^e are the moments of intense 'moral and spiritual struggled It is in such moments, rather than in the 'bewildering minutes' of passion 'in which we are all very much alike, that men and women come nearest to being real'—an affirmation which again underscores his inheritance of the central element in the Puritan tradition. And he has concluded that 'if you do away with this struggle, and maintain that by tolerance, benevolence, inoffensiveness, and a redistribution or increase

of purchasing power, combined with a devotion, on the part of an elite, to Art, the world will be as good as anyone could require, then you must expect human beings to become more and more vaporous,'

It is their penetration to the heart of this struggle between the mixed good and evil in man's very being, and thus to the central factors in human nature, which forms a common element between the three strains of poetry that have affected Eliot most deeply, between such writers as Dante, Webster, and Baudelaire.) And consequently, when at the end of the first section of *The Waste Land,* Eliot's lines contain allusions to all three of these poets, he is not making a pastiche of his reading, or arbitrarily associating unrelated fragments:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!
'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
'You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable-mon frere!'

He wanted to present here the intolerable burden of his 'Unreal City,' the lack of purpose and direction, the inability to believe really in anything and the resulting 'heap of broken images' that formed the excruciating contents of the post-War state of mind. But his city is Baudelaire's city as

well, 'ou le spectre en plain *jour raccroche le passant*[1]; *it is the* modern megalopolis dwarfing the individual. And it is given an additional haunting dimension as a realm of death in life by being linked with Dante's Limbo, the region of those dead who while on earth had 'lived without praise or blame,' who had not been strong enough in will or passion either to do good or evil, and so were condemned for ever to wander aimlessly, in feverish, useless motion. And as this throng moves through the murky streets of wintry London, as dark at nine as at dawn, on its way, presumably, to jobs in shops and offices, the poet encounters one with whom he has shared experiences and now shares memories of war. The sense of the agonizing, since futile, effort to escape those memories, to bury those dead for good, is increased by a reminiscence of the dirge in *The White Devil*, one of the most poignantly terrifying passages in Webster's tragedy. And thus the three principal strains of poetry which have spoken so intimately to Eliot merge in a moment of acutely heightened consciousness. Eliot is not making mere literary allusions. He is not 'imitating' these poets; nor has he mistaken literature for life. Each of these references brings with it the weight of its special context, its authentic accent of reality, and thus enables Eliot to condense into a single passage a concentrated expression of tragic horror. And lest the reader think that such an awareness of the Unreal City is something special to the reading and experience of the poet, he, as well as Stetson, is reminded that it belongs both to Eliot and Baudelaire, and to himself, as part of the modern world, as well.

NOTES

(In making citations from Eliot's essays I have given the detailed reference only in the case of those not included in his

half dozen small volumes, which are mentioned in my Biographical Note, or in his one-volume collection of *Selected Essays*, 1917-1932.)

i. I have cited only the outstanding figure. Paul Elmer More expounded the same general doctrine as Babbitt, with greater distinction as a stylist, but with less challenging vigour. Also following the lead of Arnold, More learned much from French criticism, especially from Sainte-Beuve, who was his model in the long series of *Shelburne Essays.* But there is a significant distinction between them: Sainte-Beuve was a psychologist, More was primarily a moralist.

Among other works of American criticism, Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming of Age,* 1915, holds a position of particular importance for having awakened a fresh interest in our own past for a whole decade of readers. But Brooks has always been a social critic, preoccupied with the conditions affecting the creative life rather than with analysis of the nature of literature itself; and my generalization concerning *The Sacred Wood* still holds.

2. A complete account of the traditions which have affected Eliot's poetry would have to consider his revulsions in addition to his enthusiasms, for the very fact of reacting against a thing inevitably leaves a mark of its impact upon you. Just as Coleridge and Wordsworth still display some traces of the eighteenth-century poetic diction they had so violently rejected, and Donne cannot be fully understood without the Elizabethan sonneteers who were his foil, so the course of Eliot's development can be charted only by reckoning with such figures as Shelley and Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites, poets by whom he did not escape being influenced during the formative years of his adolescence. Indeed, part of the reason for writing his essay on Swinburne's poetry seems to have been to give the rationale of his own reaction from it.

For a revealing description of the various stages in the growth of Eliot's interests in poetry, from boyhood through adolescence to maturity, see the 'Note on the Development of "Taste" in Poetry' appended to the first of his Norton Lectures.

3. I have attempted to sketch that chapter in *American Renaissance* (1941), particularly in 'The Metaphysical Strain.'

4. This was published in *The Egoist,* January 1918.

5. This brief indication of the essentially dramatic quality of Eliot's poetry (no less than in James's stories) will be developed in my third chapter.

6. Eliot's observations on the basic relation between James and Hawthorne were made in an unpublished lecture on the former, given at Harvard in the spring of 1933 in a course on Contemporary Literature. (The lectures on Pound, Joyce, and Lawrence to which I refer below were also part of this course. It was a great advantage for me to have access to Eliot's notes for these lectures, for which I am indebted not only to Eliot himself but also to Theodore Spencer, who collaborated in the course.)

Eliot's estimate of Hawthorne is further revealed in a review of the second volume of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* which he wrote for *The Athenaeum,* 25 April 1919:

> Neither Emerson nor any of the others was a real observer of the moral life. Hawthorne was, and was a realist. He had, also, what no one else in Boston had—the firmness, the true coldness, the hard coldness of the genuine artist. In consequence, the observation of moral life in *The Scarlet Letter,* in *The House of the Seven Gables,* and even in some of the tales and sketches, has solidity, has permanence, the permanence of art. It will always be of use; the essays of Emerson are already an encumbrance. The work of Hawthorne is truly a criticism—true because a fidelity of the artist and not a mere conviction of the man—of the Puritan morality, of the Transcendentalist morality, and of the world which Hawthorne knew. It is a criticism as Henry James's work is a criticism of the America of his times, and as the work of Turgenev and Flaubert is a criticism of the Russia and the France of theirs.

In speaking of James's effort to present evil in 'The Turn of the Screw,' Eliot remarked that among other novelists only Hawthorne, Dostoevsky, and the Conrad of 'Heart of Darkness' were comparable in their 'essential moral preoccupation. . . Evil is rare, bad is common. Evil cannot even be perceived but by a very few,'

For further development of Eliot's relation to his American background, see *American Renaissance:* 'From Hawthorne to James to Eliot,'

7. As relevant first comment on the important question of what is living and what is dead, on what precisely is meant by 'experience,' I want simply to present the following passages from Eliot:

There is a shallow test which holds that the original poet goes direct to life, and the derivative poet to 'literature.' When we look into the matter, we find that the poet who is really 'derivative' is the poet who *mistakes* literature for life, and very often the reason why he makes this mistake is that—he has not read enough. The ordinary life of ordinary cultivated people is a mush of literature and life. There is a right sense in which for the educated person literature *is* life, and life *is* literature; and there is also a vicious sense in which the same phrases may be true. We can at least try not to confuse the material and the use which the author makes of it. (Introduction to the Poems of Ezra Pound.)

We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this 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. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity. ('Tradition and the Individual Talent,')

One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate, mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest. ('Philip Massinger.')

I hope that the point of view outlined in these passages receives adequate justification in the course of my essay, since such a point of view is crucial to any understanding of the value of history, and of what is meant by 'tradition'—a word that has been so misused by academic worshippers of the past that it is necessary to demonstrate how it can have life. Eliot's first discovery of its vitality took the following expression (in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'):

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. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical 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 existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.

The position outlined in this passage is carried to a more comprehensive maturity in *After Strange Gods.* Consequently I return to it in my sixth chapter.

8. It was made by Professor H, J. C. Grierson in connection with Donne's 'Second Anniversary,' in the Introduction to *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1921).

9. Eliot has written of Donne not only in his essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets' but also in a review in *The Nation and Athenaeum,* 9 June 1923. In addition he contributed an essay on 'Donne in Our Time' to *A Garland for John Donne,* ed. Theodore Spencer (Cambridge, Mass., 1931). His Clark Lectures, delivered at Cambridge, England, in 1926, on the metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century in comparison and contrast with that of the Italian thirteenth century have not yet been published. Perhaps the most trenchant evaluation of the nature of metaphysical poetry that he has made is in his poem, 'Whispers of Immortality,' Certainly there has never been a more suggestive discernment of Donne's quality than in the two quatrains:

Donne, I suppose, was such another
Who found no substitute for sense;
To seize and dutch and penetrate,
Expert beyond experience,

He knew the anguish of the marrow
The ague of the skeleton;
No contact possible to flesh
Allayed the fever of the bone.

10. Eliot made this contrast in a review of *The Education of Henry Adams,* in *The Athenaeum,* 23 May 1919.

In the light of the similar quality that Eliot detects in James and the seventeenth-century poets, it is not surprising to find that he refers to James elsewhere as 'un romancier m^taphysique.' (See his 'Note sur Mallarme' et Poe,' *La Nouvelle Revue Frangaise,* November 1926.)

11. Particularly by George Williamson, *The Talent of T. S. Eliot* (University of Washington Chapbooks, No. 32, Seattle, 1929). Williamson also furnishes an interesting example of the fructifying power of Eliot's criticism, since in the Preface to *The Donne Tradition, A Study in English Poetry from Donne to the Death of Cowley* (Cambridge, Mass., 1930) he tells how, having first been fascinated by Eliot's kinship to Donne, he thus 'became absorbed in the Donne tradition through a contemporary poet,' That the whole point of view for Williamson's valuable study of the seventeenth century grew organically from a few of Eliot's packed remarks indicates also the great further potential value that Eliot's criticism may have for literary scholarship. A much needed, detailed critical estimate of the whole group of Elizabethan dramatists could take its fresh line of departure from Eliot's brief essays.

12. The qualities by which Eliot was drawn especially to Laforgue and Corbiere, as well as in some degree to such of their more recent followers as Jean de Bosschere and Guillaume Apollinaire, have been outlined by Rene' Taupin, *L'Influence du symbolisme français sur la poesie americaine* (1910-20) (Paris, 1929), pp. 211-40. Although Eliot has since reacted strongly against the *fin de siecle* aestheticism with which Arthur Symons diluted his translation of Baudelaire, he nevertheless still recognizes his early indebtedness to Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899):

I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt. But for having read his book I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue and Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine, and but for read-

ing Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbiere. So the Symons book is one of those which have affected the course of my life.

Eliot's earliest published poems, those contributed to *The Harvard Advocate* in the years 1909-10, already begin to show the mark of Laforgue.

13. The phrase is actually that of the Abbe Bremond, *La Poesie pure* (Paris, 1926), p. 23; but it compresses Mallarme's persistent belief in the possibility of developing 'un art d'achever la transposition, au Livre, de la symphonic,'

14. The whole passage, from Eliot's early essay on 'Ezra Pound, His Metric and Poetry,' 1917, is relevant to an understanding of Eliot's own position, then in process of formulation:

> Such a relation between poetry and music is very different from what is called the 'music' of Shelley or Swinburne, a music often nearer to rhetoric (or the art of the orator) than to the instrument. For poetry to approach the condition of music (Pound quotes approvingly the dictum of Pater) it is not necessary that poetry should be destitute of meaning. Instead of slightly veiled and resonant abstractions, like
>
> *Time with a gift of tears,*
> *Grief with a glass that ran—*
>
> of Swinburne, or the mossiness of Mallarme', Pound's verse is always definite and concrete, because he has always a definite emotion behind it.

That Eliot has believed MaHarme in danger of being overrated by the English reader While more expert poets among the symbolists were being ignored, did not prevent him from writing an extremely acute note on the common attributes of 'metaphysical' poetry shared by Donne, Poe, and Mallarme'. (See *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise,* November 1926.)

15. From the same essay on Pound.

16. This particular line is also an example of Eliot's use of the conceit, the distinguishing device by which the metaphysical poets made both their witty and imaginative connections between things apparently unlike. Eliot himself has pointed out, in his essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets,' how this kind of unexpected linking can score its effect 'by brief words and sudden contrasts'; or again by 'a development of rapid association of

thought which requires considerable agility on the part of the reader,' Donne's most characteristic use of the conceit is perhaps not to be found in the condensed form of a single line—though many of these are as memorable as 'A bracelet of bright hair about the bone'; but rather in 'the elaboration ... of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it,' Such is his famous comparison of two lovers to a pair of compasses—a comparison seemingly so grotesque, but actually, in the context of the poem, so effective. A comparable example of the elaborated conceit in Eliot is his description of the fog in terms of a cat:

The yellow jog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys.
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

There is no point in entering here into further technical analysis of the nature of the conceit—a task which has been well carried out by George Williamson on the lines adumbrated by Eliot. But it is essential to emphasize that by writing in this way neither Donne nor Eliot is engaging in intellectual stunts or decorating his verse with brilliant but pointless ingenuity. For the conceit exists not just to shock or startle, though that is one of its valuable attributes. It is an integral element of the metaphysical style since it is the most compelling means of making the desired union of emotion and thought by bringing together widely divergent material in a single image. Instead of being ornamental, it is wholly functional: only by its use does the poet feel that he can express the precise curve of his meaning. If the reader objects that the meaning would be much better conveyed in plain speech without resort to such tortuous comparisons, let him bear in mind Hulme's remark that 'Plain speech is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors . . . that it can be made precise,'

To a greater degree than the objective decorative comparison the conceit enables the reader to *feel* the mind of the poet actually working; it is an image wherein the imaginative act itself has become analytical. Consequently, as Williamson has con-

eluded (and a good deal of what I have just written is a condensation of his account): the elaborated conceit is successful 'when the idea and the figure become one'; the condensed conceit is successful 'when the image is the very body of the thought.' In both cases the test is the very one which Hulme applies to the question of sincerity in poetry: 'If it is sincere in the accurate sense, when the whole of the analogy is necessary to get out the exact curve of the feeling or thing you want to express—there you seem to me to have the highest verse, even though the subject be trivial and the emotions of the infinite far away.' (For other passages from Hulme which closely parallel Eliot's own views of the nature of poetry, see Chap. HI, note i, below.)

Eliot's conceits sometimes have the look of being too studied; that is to say, of coming into existence not because the poet's mind has actually felt keenly an unexpected similarity between unlikes but as though he too consciously set out to shock the reader. Such an objection might be made against the opening lines of Trufrock':

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table.

Even though the reader can perceive wherein the comparison holds, he may still have the sensation that it is too intellectually manipulated, not sufficiently felt. But in the general texture of his verse Eliot really depends very little upon elaborate conceits: the double description of the cat and the foggy evening, whereby both are present to the reader with a richly heightened acuteness, is by far his most conspicuous use of the device in its expanded form. His usual way of surprising the reader into a new perception of reality is by means of the nuance rather than the conceit, by the rapid associations of his shifting thought, and by the accomoanving deft and subtle exactness of his verbal contrasts:

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)

Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
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 limpid description of the evening, with its romantic associations heightened by the echo of Stevenson's 'Requiem' as well as by the emulation of some lines of Sappho (of which Eliot tells us in a note), is suddenly startled into a new aspect by the introduction of the typist. It is worth observing that this effect of surprise is made partly by the equally sudden shift in syntax, whereby 'the typist,' at first the object of 'brings,' becomes in turn the subject of 'clears,' Such breaking through the rules of conventional grammar, as the irregular lines break through conventional versification, corresponds to Eliot's remark that 'the structure of the sentences [of the metaphysical poets] is sometimes far from simple, but this is not a vice; it is a fidelity to thought and feeling,'

Throughout the passage there is a similar weaving back and forth from phrases embodying traditional loveliness to phrases rising from sharp, realistic perceptions of the actual city. 'Out of the window perilously spread'—the adverb quickens anticipation, which is quickly disappointed by 'her drying combinations'; but at once another association of beauty is brought by the phrase 'touched by the sun's last rays,' So, too, the word 'divan' raises all its glamorous connotations from the Orient, which are instantly broken into by the realization that this is the kind of perfected folding divan that can be bought at a bargain at Selfridge's or Macy's, and which is designed to do double work. So, too, with the expression 'expected guest': the classic connotations of the ceremonious relation between host and guest and the anticipation of the arrival are immediately jolted by the appearance of 'the young man carbuncular,' And here, possibly, should be noted another kind of contrast: the full, deep vowel-sounds of the adjective corresponding to the natural beauty of the thing, so unfortunately altered by its human analogy.

His 'one bold stare' is an example of how great a range of meaning can be packed into a phrase when it has a double rela-

tion in the syntax, when, in this case, it modifies both 'arrives' and 'clerk,' For it thereby not only describes him at the moment of his arrival but also suggests the whole contour of his character: that this stare is perhaps his one distinguishing trait. And thus we are prepared for the summation of him in one of Eliot's most brilliantly effective condensed conceits:

One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.

His arrogance and cheapness, his brash vulgarity, his strutting show of confidence which gives itself away at every move and betrays an inner ignorance and insecurity—all these reflections are suggested to the reader by the unexpected comparison to the awkward angle at which the crass new-rich man wears his hat.

The final effect of the whole passage, it should be noted, is not to weaken the force of either half of the contrasting terms. The beauty of the evening is not destroyed by the city. The situation of the girl is not being caricatured or mocked: its pathos is underlined by the contrast between her surroundings and those of traditional 'romantic love,' The juxtaposition and union of opposites (according to Grierson the distinguishing feature of metaphysical poetry) produces likewise here the result of intensifying both. The whole scene is presented with an extraordinary fullness of actuality.

Such manner of minute analysis is not meant to imply that Eliot's verse is a kind of special art. Indeed, equally careful reading—as Richards has demonstrated in *Practical Criticism—is* demanded of any poem in which a mature author has utilized all the resources of language and feeling at his command. This would be true of the Odes of Keats as well as of the later plays of Shakespeare.

17. As Eliot notes, an expression very close to this was used by Remy de Gourmont in speaking of Flaubert: 'II n'y a de livres que ceux ou un ecrivain s'est raconte lui-meme en racontant les moeurs de ses contemporains—leurs reves, leurs vanites, leurs amours, et leurs folies,' In any full account of the development of Eliot's critical theory it would be essential to dwell on his early obligations to de Gourmont, of whom he remarked in his essay on 'The Perfect Critic': 'Of all modern critics, perhaps Remy de Gourmont had most of the general intelligence of

Aristotle. An amateur, though an excessively able amateur, in physiology, he combined to a remarkable degree sensitiveness, erudition, sense of fact and sense of history, and generalizing power,'

What Eliot gained from reading such books as *Le Probleme du style* and *La Culture des idees* is best shown in his further remark that de Gourmont was 'the critical consciousness of a generation,' who could 'supply the conscious formulas of a sensibility in process of formation,' It is worth noting, however, that in recent years Eliot has referred to de Gourmont much less frequently; and certainly Eliot's matured critical ideas are more complex and resilient than de Gourmont's, precisely as his mind is of tougher fibre.

Eliot's more demonstrably enduring debts are to such thinkers as Irving Babbitt, Charles Maurras, and T. E. Hulme. Ants Oras has dealt with some of these relations of Eliot's thought in his informative if somewhat pedestrian study of *The Critical Ideas of T. S. Eliot* (Tartu, Esthonia, 1932).

But behind any tangible debts and obscured by their sharp divergence of approach, there is to be discovered everywhere in Eliot's work his kinship to Matthew Arnold, a kinship to be noted in their views of the relation of the individual to society, as well as on such matters as the importance of wholeness of structure in a work of art.

II

THE PROBLEM FOR THE CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

IN such a passage as the conclusion of 'The Burial of the Dead' Eliot reveals the way in which he himself possesses 'a sense of his own age,' that 'peculiar honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is peculiarly terrifying. It is an honesty against which the whole world conspires because it is unpleasant,' Eliot used those words in describing Blake, and a further extension of the passage is likewise relevant to his own aims in *The Waste Land* (which he was to publish two years after this essay): 'Nothing that can be called morbid or abnormal or perverse, none of the things which exemplify the sickness of an epoch or a fashion, have this quality; only those things which, by some extraordinary labour of simplification, exhibit the essential sickness or strength of the human soul,'

In Eliot's earlier work, in such a poem as 'Sweeney among the Nightingales,' or, more particularly, 'A Cooking Egg,' it at first looked as though he was so absorbed in the splendours of the past that he was capable of expressing only the violent contrast between its remembered beauty and the actual dreary ugliness of contemporary existence, that he was merely prolonging one mood inherited from Flaubert in viewing human life crushed into something mean and sordid by bourgeois 'civilization,' But on closer examination it appears that his contrasts are not so clear-cut, that he is not confining himself to voicing anything so essentially limited and shallow as the inferiority of the present to the past. He is keenly aware of our contemporary historical consciousness, and of the problems which it creates. The modern

educated man possesses a knowledge of the past to a degree hardly glimpsed a century ago, not only of one segment of the past, but, increasingly, of all pasts. If he is sensitive to what he knows, he can feel, in Eliot's words, 'that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer . . . has a simultaneous existence.' But also, owing to the self-consciousness which results from so much knowledge (scientific and psychological as well as historical and literary), he will have a sense in any given moment, as Eliot has remarked of Joyce, 'of everything happening at once,'

Such a realization can lead either to chaos or to a sense of the potential unity of life. The difficulty with our knowledge to-day consists in the fact that instead of giving the individual's mind release and freedom, the piling up of so many disparate and seemingly unrelated details can merely oppress him with their bewildering variety, with 'being too conscious and conscious of too much,'[x] with the futility of any certainty, or, as Eliot has reflected, with the feeling that 'everybody is conscious of every question, and no one knows any answers,' The problem for the artist is to discover some unified pattern in this variety; and yet, if he believes as Eliot does that poetry should embody a man's reaction to his whole experience, also to present the full sense of its complexity. He can accomplish this double task of accurately recording what he has felt and perceived, and at the same time interpreting it, only if he grasps the similarity that often lies beneath contrasting appearances, and can thus emphasize the essential equivalence of seemingly different experiences. Such understanding and resultant emphasis constitute Eliot's chief reason for introducing so many reminiscences of other poets into the texture of his own verse. In this way he can at once suggest the extensive consciousness of the past that is inevitably possessed by any cultivated reader of to-day, and, more importantly, can greatly increase the implications of his lines by this tacit revelation of the

sameness (as well as the contrasts) between the life of the present and that of other ages.[2]

This emphasis is a leading element in the method of *The Waste Land,* whose city, as we have seen, is many cities, or rather certain qualities resulting from the pervasive state of mind bred by mass civilization. But the structure of the poem embraces more than that. In his desire to make available for poetry the multiplicity of the modern world in the only way that the artist can, by giving it order and form, Eliot had discovered a clue in anthropology, in its exploration of ancient myths. It was not accidental or owing to any idiosyncrasy that he was affected profoundly by his reading of such a work as *The Golden Bough,* since the investigations of anthropology along with those of psychology have produced the most fundamental revolutions in contemporary thought and belief. It is noteworthy that Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* appeared in 1920, at the very time when Eliot was seeking a coherent shape for the mass of intricate material that enters into his poem. For reading that book gave to his mind the very fillip which it needed in order to crystallize.[3] What he learned especially from it was the recurring pattern in various myths, the basic resemblance, for example, between the vegetation myths of the rebirth of the year, the fertility myths of the rebirth of the potency of man, the Christian story of the Resurrection, and the Grail legend of purification. The common source of all these myths lay in the fundamental rhythm of nature—that of the death and rebirth of the year; and their varying symbolism was an effort to explain the origin of life. Such knowledge, along with the researches of psychology, pointed to the close union in all these myths of the physical and spiritual, to the fact that their symbolism was basically sexual—in the Cup and Lance of the Grail legend as well as in the Orpheus cults; pointed, in brief, to the fundamental relation between the well-springs of sex and religion.

The consequence of so much knowledge presents a condensed example of the general problem of the modern consciousness outlined above. When the investigations of anthropology reveal that surface differences between the customs and beliefs of mankind tend to mask profound resemblances, the result is both a freeing and a destruction. Taboos are removed, but sanctions wither. The purity of the Grail legend seems lost in symbols of generative significance; and yet at the same time it takes on a rich depth of primitive force that was wholly lost by Tennyson's denatured picture-book version. In such a perception of the nature of myths, of 'a common principle underlying all manifestations of life,'[4] Eliot found a scaffold for his poem, a background of reference that made possible something in the nature of a musical organization. He found the specific clue to the dramatic shaping of his material when he read in Miss Weston of the frequent representation of the mystery of death and rebirth by the story of a kingdom where, the forces of the ruler having been weakened or destroyed by sickness, old age, or the ravages of war, 'the land becomes Waste, and the task of the hero is that of restoration,'[5] not by pursuing advantages for himself, but by giving himself to the quest of seeking the health and salvation of the land.

The poem thus embodies simultaneously several different planes of experience, for it suggests the likenesses between various waste lands. Its quest for salvation in contemporary London is given greater volume and urgency by the additional presence of the haunted realm of medieval legend. The name of the battle where Stetson fought is that of one in which the Carthaginians were defeated, pointing the essential sameness of all wars. The opening of the final section in particular furnishes an example of the way Eliot is portraying the equivalence of different experiences by linking together various myths:

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience.

Reminiscence here is not only of the final scenes in the life of Christ and of the gnawing bafflement of his disciples before his appearance at Emmaus. The vigil of silence and the agony of spiritual struggle are not limited to one garden; they belong to the perilous quest of Parsival or Galahad as well. The 'shouting and the crying' re-echo not only from the mob that thronged Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion, but also, as is made clearer in ensuing lines, from the 'hordes swarming over endless plains' in revolt in contemporary Russia. In the 'thunder of spring over distant mountains' there is likewise a hint of the vegetation myths, of the approaching rebirth of the parched dead land through the life-giving rain. Thus he who 'is now dead' is not Christ alone, but the slain Vegetation God; he is Adonis and Osiris and Orpheus.[6] And with the line, 'We who were living are now dying,' the link is made back to the realm of death in life of the opening section, the realm which focuses all the elements of the poem and resounds through all its lines, the waste land of contemporary existence, likewise waiting for salvation, salvation that can come only through sacrifice, as is revealed in the final apocalyptic command reverberating through 'What the Thunder Said': 'Give, Sympathize, Control.'

As a result of this method of compressing into a single moment both the memory and the sameness of other moments, it becomes apparent that in 'The Fire Sermon,' the

section of the poem which deals in particular with the present and the past of London, no sharply separating contrast is made between them. Squalor pollutes the modern river as it did not in Spenser's Trothalamion'; but there are also glimpses of beauty where

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.

And, conversely, although mention of Elizabeth and Leicester brings an illusion of glamour, closer thought reveals that the stale pretence of their relationship left it essentially as empty as that between the typist and the clerk.

Use of such widely divergent details in a single poem indicates the special problem of the contemporary artist. Faced with so great a range of knowledge as a part of the modern consciousness, he can bring it to satisfactory expression in one of two ways, either by expansion or compression. It can hardly be a coincidence that each of these ways was carried to its full development at almost the same time, in the years directly following the War. Joyce chose the first alternative for *Ulysses* and devoted more than a quarter of a million words to revealing the complexity involved in the passage of a single ordinary day. In the following year Eliot concentrated an interpretation of a whole condition of society into slightly over four hundred lines. That Eliot was aware of similarities in their aims is indicated in a brief essay which he published during the year after the appearance of *The Waste Land* on 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth,'[7] He recognized how important it had been for Joyce to find a scaffold for his work in the structure of the *Odyssey* when he remarked that:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible in art.

The utilization of such a discovery would clearly differ for the novelist and the poet. With the example of the nineteenth century behind him, Eliot naturally felt that, if the long poem was to continue to exist, there must be more to distinguish it than length, that its energy must be increased by the elimination of everything superfluous. To convey in poetry the feeling of the actual passage of life, to bring to expression the varied range and volume of awareness which exists in a moment of consciousness, demanded, in Eliot's view, the strictest condensation. Above all, the impression of a fully packed content should not be weakened through the relaxed connectives of the usual narrative structure. Whatever may have been right at the time of the composition of *The Ring and the Book,* it was apparent to Eliot that to-day 'anything that can be said as well in prose can be said better in prose,' Poetry alone, through its resources of rhythm and sound, can articulate the concentrated essence of experience, and thus come closest to the universal and permanent; but it can do so only through the mastery of a concentrated form. Though he approaches the question with a much broader understanding of all the factors involved than was possessed by the author of The Poetic Principle,' Eliot is at one with Poe in his insistence on the necessary economy of a work of art, in his belief that a poem should

be constructed deliberately with the aim of producing a unified effect. Consequently, after composing the first draft of *The Waste Land,* his revisions shortened it to less than two-thirds of its original length, in order that he might best create a dramatic structure that would possess at the same time a lyrical intensity.

That Eliot does not hold up such a method of construction as an ideal necessarily to be followed is indicated by an extended comment at the very close of *The Use of Poetry:*

> To return to the question of obscurity: when all exceptions have been made, and after admitting the possible existence of minor 'difficult' poets whose public must always be small, I believe that the poet naturally prefers to write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible, and that it is the half-educated and ill-educated, rather than the uneducated, who stand in his way: I myself should like an audience which could neither read nor write. The most useful poetry, socially, would be one which could cut across all the present stratifications of public taste—stratifications which are perhaps a sign of social disintegration. The ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social 'usefulness' for poetry, is the theatre. In a play of Shakespeare you get several levels of significance. For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually. And I do not believe that the classification of audience is so clear-cut as this; but rather that the sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once, though in different degrees of consciousness.

This is the kind of passage which tantalizes and infuriates pragmatic critics of the sort who believe that a good author should simply decide what he wants to do and should then go ahead and do it. They would declare such reflections either to be disingenuous or to damn out of hand the validity of Eliot's own work. But one of the fundamental secrets of art as of life is that the mature artist finds his strength partly by

coming to recognize and reckon with his limitations. Just as an individual starts by accepting certain technical conventions of a given art as a means of facilitating his search for a form that will enable him to embody what he wants to express, so, as he grows in the practice of that art and as he comes to closer grips with his own character, he will know that there are only certain things that he is best fitted to do, and that he can do those adequately only through selection and long perseverance.

Eliot's extreme awareness of the boundaries of his own work is very similar to Hawthorne's detached perception of the contrast between the bustling everyday Salem which surrounded him, and the realm of dim lights and dark shadows which he was meanwhile creating in *The Scarlet Letter*. Eliot's preference for a very different kind of poetry from that which he is capable of writing likewise recalls Hawthorne's repeated statement that the novels lie really liked were not his own tenuous explorations of the soul, but the solid beef-and-ale stories of Trollope. This unusual degree of detachment which reverberates with loneliness, but which brings with it in compensation a special development of spiritual understanding, has grown organically out of the conditions of American life, out of the isolation of the individual from the centre of European culture. Kindred isolation enabled Thoreau and Emily Dickinson to study themselves with such rare mastery. It has also enabled Poe and Henry James and Eliot, all of them possessing the excessive provincial consciousness of elements in literary tradition which Europeans would have taken for granted—and ignored—by that very consciousness to lead their European contemporaries into a more penetrating comprehension of the nature of art.

When he wrote that passage on the different levels of appeal,' Eliot had experimented with drama only in his un-

finished *Sweeney Agonistes.* He knew that poems like *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday,* richly significant as they may be on all the higher levels, virtually ignore flie level of the pit. But the fact remains that the sincere artist writes not the way he would, but the way he must. And the most important value of the artist to society, and the one element that lends his work enduring significance, is to give expression to the most pervading qualities of life *as he has actually known it.* That Landor and Donne have appealed to restricted audiences defines but does not destroy their excellence. And no one would think of quarrelling with Lucretius for not reaching a 'popular' level.

If, in severest analysis, the kind of poetry^MoJMiyrites gives evidence of social disintegration, he has expressed that fact as the poet should, not by rhetorical proclamation, but by the very feeling of contemporary life which he has presented to the sensitive reader of his lines. And he has presented this not merely as something which the reader is to know through his mind, but is to know primarily as an actual physical experience, as a part of his whole being, through the humming pulsating evidence of his senses.

But when a poet is as conscious of his aims and effects as Eliot has revealed himself to be in his remarks on *Ulysses* as well as in *The Use of Poetry,* there is always the suspicion lingering in the minds of some readers that his way of giving order to the content of his work is too intellectually controlled and manipulated, that what he says cannot be wholly sincere because it is not sufficiently spontaneous. It may be that the large task which Eliot set himself in *The Waste Land* 'of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy' of contemporary history, caused some of the experiments which he made to gain that end to appear too deliberate. Certainly some of his analogies with musical structure, in particular the summa-

tion of the themes in the broken ending of the final part, have always seemed to me somewhat forced and over-theoreticaflkBut this is very different from saying that he is a too conscious artist. Indeed, such a charge would overlook the fact that some of the poetry of the past which across the remove of time seems most 'spontaneous,' that of Chaucer, for example, was actually a product of long experimentation in poetic theory fully as calculated as Eliot's. The greatest narrative poem in the language, *Troilus and Criseyde*, beats with equally genuine emotion in the passages where Chaucer is translating Boccaccio directly and in those where he is manipulating the structure of the Italian's poem to suit his own ends.

Despite some of the protests of the nineteenth century on behalf of the untutored genius, it still appears that the more conscious the artist the better, if that consciousness implies the degree to which he has mastered the unending subtleties of his craft. But I have mentioned Chaucer also to point a difference in modern art. As my paragraphs on our highly developed historical sense tried to indicate, Eliot as a poet is not only inevitably acquainted with a great range of possible techniques, as all expert poets since the Renaissance have increasingly been; he is, in addition, highly aware of the processes of the mind itself. This particular kind of consciousness is in part what led him to feel the necessity of grounding the structure of his longest poem in something outside himself, in an objective pattern of myths.

Ulysses, to be sure, furnishes an even fuller example of how a contemporary artist has mastered the problem of consciousness in a similar way. When one contemplates the overwhelming elaborateness of Joyce's construction, the almost unbelievable degree to which he worked out the parallel of even the smallest details in his narrative with those in the *Odyssey* (to say nothing of his intricate scheme of correspondences between the sections of his work and various

colours, arts, bodily organs, and so on), one begins by wondering why his huge creative power was not stultified by this fantastic heaping up of seemingly pointless erudition, of practically none of which is it necessary for the reader to be aware in order to follow with full understanding the progress of Bloom's and Stephen's day. But finally one realizes that the very *completeness* of this arbitrary external structure may have been the one thing that gave to Joyce's scholastic mind, deprived of faith but still possessing the ingrained habits of logical formal thought, the greatest creative release possible to him, by providing him with an entire scaffold—and one which has the advantage of being one of the best stories in Western civilization—on which to build his work.

And in case there should be some feeling that either Joyce or Eliot has revealed a kind of bookish weakness in turning for his structure to literature rather than to life, it should be recollected that Shakespeare himself created hardly any of his plots, and that by the very fact of taking ready-made the pattern of his characters' actions, he could devote his undivided attention to endowing them with life. It is only an uninformed prejudice which holds that literature must start from actual personal experience. It certainly must end with giving a sense of life; but it is not at all necessary that the poet should have undergone in his own person what he describes. Indeed, the more catholic the range of the artist, the more obviously impossible that would be. The poet's imagination can work as well on his reading as on the raw material of his senses. It is a mark of human maturity, as Eliot noted in his discussion of the metaphysical poets, that there should not be a separation in an individual's sensibility between reading and experience any more than between emotion and thought.[8]

NOTES

1. F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London, 1932), uses a similar phrase on p. 94. Mr. Leavis's interpretation of Eliot, though acutely perceptive of certain details to which I have been indebted particularly in this chapter, suffers from a certain over-intensity. He seems to be writing continually on the defensive as though he were the apostle of modern art to an unappreciative world. As a result his criticism, though eager, is somewhat wanting in balance and perspective.

2. This matter of Eliot's use of his reading (a hint of which he picked up from the symbolists, but which he has carried to far greater lengths) has been a stumbling-block to so many readers of his poetry that it requires further comment. On the one hand are those who believe that it is impossible to understand him without possessing the ability to recognize all his varied allusions, and who, therefore, indifferent to the seemingly hopeless and unrewarding task of tracing down both the wide and specialized range of his particular equipment of knowledge, have given him up as 'a poet for the learned,' On the other hand are the smaller body of readers who have done the greatest disservice to his reputation—I mean those who regard his poetry as a kind of hidden mystery for the cognoscenti. They cast the snob-vote for him. 'What?' they ask, 'you haven't read *The Golden Bough?* You don't own a Tarot pack? You haven't studied the Upanishads? You didn't even recognize that allusion to Verlaine? Why, my dear, how can you expect to understand Mr. Eliot?'

The shortest answer (which, I hope, is given full confirmation during the course of my essay) is that you begin to understand Eliot precisely as you begin to understand any other poet: by listening to the lines, by regarding their pattern as a self-enclosed whole, by listening to what is being communicated instead of looking for something that isn't. On the particular matter of what is accomplished by Eliot's literary allusions, and what equipment is necessary to comprehend them, consider the opening passage of 'The Fire Sermon':

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept. . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

If one reads these lines with an attentive ear and is sensitive to their sudden shifts in movement, the contrast between the actual Thames and the idealized vision of it during an age before it flowed through a megalopolis is conveyed by that movement itself, whether or not one recognizes the refrain to be from Spenser. If one does have the lovely pictures of his Trothalamion' in mind, there is then added to the contrast a greater volume and poignancy. In like manner with the startling quickening of pace in the final two lines and the terrifying shudder they induce: it is not necessary to refer this effect to Marvell's 'Coy Mistress,' although if the effect of the sudden shift in cadence in that poem is also in the reader's ear, there is again a heightening.

In neither of these cases is anything demanded of the reader different in kind from what is demanded by Milton's 'Lycidas.' A single careful reading of that poem can fascinate the reader with its extraordinary melodic richness and make him want to press on to a full comprehension of its intricate form, of the way its structure builds up through a series of climaxes. But this can be understood only through some knowledge of the whole elaborate convention that Milton inherited from the classical and Renaissance pastoral. In particular, there are many passages, the fullest relish of which depends upon the reader's bringing with him the memory of the way a similar situation has been handled by Virgil and Theocritus. In addition, certain well-known lines require for the grasp of their sense at least as much literary annotation as any passage in Eliot. For instance,

Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.

The wealth of mythology compressed into those lines would require a long paragraph if it were to be elucidatec^ in prose.

The point with any poem is that if the reader starts by being enchanted by the movement of the lines, then gradually his mind can furnish itself with the information necessary to understand what they are telling him. In the case of the modern reader of a poem in a Renaissance tradition, this means reminding himself of certain mythological details once common property among educated readers, but now increasingly forgotten. In the case of reading a contemporary poet, it is more a question of accustoming yourself to an unfamiliar procedure that breaks through your preconceptions of what poetry should be (as Wordsworth broke through preconceptions inherited from the eighteenth century). As Eliot remarked in the Conclusion to *The Use of Poetry:*

The uses of poetry certainly vary as society alters, as the public to be addressed changes. . . The difficulty of poetry (and modern poetry is supposed to be difficult) . . . may be due just to novelty: we know the ridicule accorded in turn to Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, Tennyson and Browning—but must remark that Browning was the first to be *called* difficult; hostile critics of the earlier poets found them difficult, but called them silly. Or difficulty may be caused by the reader's having been told, or having suggested to himself, that the poem is going to prove difficult. The ordinary reader, when warned against the obscurity of a poem, is apt to be thrown into a state of consternation very unfavourable to poetic receptivity. Instead of beginning, as he should, in a state of sensitivity, he obfuscates his senses by the desire to be clever and to look very hard for something, he doesn't know what—or else by the desire not to be taken in. There is such a thing as stage fright, but what such readers have is pit or gallery fright. The more seasoned reader, he who has reached, in these matters, a state of greater *purity,* does not bother about understanding; not, at least, at first. I know that some of the poetry to which I am most devoted is poetry which I did not understand at first reading; some is poetry which I am not sure I understand yet: for instance, Shakespeare's. And finally, there is the difficulty caused by the author's having left out something which the reader is used to finding; so that the reader,

bewildered, gropes about for what is absent, and puzzles his head for a kind of 'meaning' which is not there, and is not meant to be there.

It is also relevant to note how the passage from 'The Fire Sermon' is an example of Eliot's way of suggesting sameness at the heart of contrast. 'The nymphs are departed': the first use of that statement, followed as it is by the line from Spenser, serves to build up the pastoral atmosphere: 'The river nymphs are departed with the oncoming of winter,' But as the ensuing lines present the picture of the present Thames in summer, the statement takes on another meaning: 'The age of romantic loveliness is gone,'

Then, when the statement is repeated a few lines later, the nymphs themselves have altered; they have now become decidedly flesh and blood. But the feeling expressed is not that the past was wholly noble and the present base. Instead, it is being suggested, if only in a minor undertone, that this glimpse of present life along the river, Depressingly sordid as it is being human cannot be wholly different from human life in the past. And, concurreritly, the idealized Elizabethan young men and women who appear as attendants in Spenser's marriage songs begin to be seen with new eyes. They cannot be wholly unlike the present idle young men about town and their nymphs; and this touch of humanity removes them from the realm of the abstract and endows them with actuality. In such a manner the undertones of this 'resembling contrast' have grown directly from the depth of Eliot's psychological perception into the nature of life, of the way, for example, in which nobility and baseness are inextricably mingled in even the finest individual.

3. A point necessary to mention is that an appreciation of Eliot's poem is not dependent upon reading Miss Weston's study. I had been enjoying *The Waste Land* for several years before an interest in exploring the effect of Eliot's reading upon his development brought me to *From Ritual to Romance.* As a result of having read that book I can now follow more distinctly the logical steps by which Eliot was led to compose his structure, and can also perceive in detail the kind of stimulus and release that the book gave to his mind. I am also enabled to understand more fully how some of the widely disparate details fall into the completed pattern. For example, I had previously taken the presence of the 'wicked pack of cards' in the opening section to

be simply a sharp dramatic device by which Eliot introduced his characters and at the same time stressed the point of their shifting identity: that, observed under varying and contrasting appearances, human beings remain essentially the same throughout different ages. I have never seen a Tarot pack (and, if I had to bet, my money would say that neither had Eliot himself). But Miss Weston mentions that its four suits are Cup, Lance, Sword, and Dish, which thus correspond to the sexual symbolism of the Grail; and that the original use of these cards was 'not to foretell the Future in general, but to predict the rise and fall of the waters which brought fertility to the land' (p. 76). Through such knowledge the emotional relevance to the poem of this 'wicked pack' is obviously increased.

But with the exception of a few such illuminating details, I question whether Miss Weston's valuable study has enabled me to feel the poem more intensely. For nearly everything of importance from her book that is apposite to an appreciation of *The Waste Land,* particularly her central emphasis on the analogous ways by which various myths express the mysteries of sex and religion,has incorporated into the structure of the poem itself, or into Eliot Notes. Unlike many sections of Pound's *Cantos, The Waste Land* does not require recourse to the poet's reading in order to become comprehensible. Its structure is pre-eminently self-contained.

The very presence of the Notes may seem to give a denial to that assertion. They are certainly an extremely artificial device, though not without precedent in English poetry, as *The Shepherds' Calendar* could illustrate. But Spenser's desire to have his poems rival the works of classical antiquity even to their appearance in a volume with annotations by the anonymous E. K. (who was most probably Spenser himself or at least a close collaborator), does not play any part in Eliot's intention. His Notes are simply a consequence of his desire to strip the form of his poem to its barest essentials in order to secure his concentrated effect. Such elimination, particularly when added to his method of using his reading as an integral part of his experience, demanded certain signposts of elucidation if the reader was to follow the exact course. And, as I have already indicated in my discussion of the closing lines of 'The Burial of the Dead,' it is obviously necessary, for *full* understanding of some of his passages, to be aware of the special context of his allusions to

other poets. In all cases when Eliot thinks that context essential to the reader of *The Waste Land* he has given the reference, as in this instance to the *Inferno, The White Devil,* and *Les Fleurs du Mai.* In the case of some of his less familiar allusions where the actual phrasing of the original constitutes part of his effect, he has also quoted the relevant passage. For example:

> *But at my back from time to time I hear*
> *The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring*
> *Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.*

These lines, by themselves, without the need of any reference,, etch a sharp description of the surroundings of 'the dull canal . . . round behind the gashouse.' Most present-day readers of poetry would be able to supply the surprising contrast:

> *But at my back I always hear*
> *Time's winged chariot hurrying near,*

so that Eliot simply mentions 'To His Coy Mistress' in a note. But to enable the reader also to hear this 'sound of horns' in a double way, it is necessary for Eliot to add the lines from the little-known Elizabethan poet, John Day:

> *When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear*
> *A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring*
> *Actaeon to Diana in the spring,*
> *Where all shall see her naked skin. . .*

And no matter how much one may object to the existence of the Notes in general, it would be hard to deny the flash of tightly packed wit that is struck by the incongruous contrast between the 'naked skin' of Diana and that of Mrs. Porter.

Some of the more general references in the Notes help to sharpen the outlines of Eliot's structure. The self-consuming burning of sterile passion which is the theme of 'The Fire Sermon' receives added emphasis from the pertinent reminder of the expression of that theme by Buddha and St. Augustine, though no reading of their work is required for understanding the poem. I have not yet read the Upanishad from which Eliot borrowed the onomatopoeic representation of 'what the thunder said'; but it is perfectly clear from his own lines what an excellent 'objective correlative' he found in that legend.

My own chief objection to the Notes is the occasional tone of

what Eliot himself, in relation to passages in *The Sacred Wood,* described as 'pontifical solemnity,' But that impression should be qualified by the admission that some of the notes which struck me at first as useless pedantry or deliberate mystification of the reader, particularly the one on Tiresias, I now recognize as very useful to the interpretation of the poem. The objection to stiffness in phrasing still remains, but this quality was perhaps clue in part to Eliot desire to state the necessary details as briefly as he could; and owing to the largeness of his~"uri3ertaking in this poem and the inevitable limitations of his own temperament, this was possibly the price he had to pay in order to avoid what he would have considered muffling the energy of his poem by extended connecting links in the text itself.

The stiffness_may also be due to Eliot's,. shyness at speaking in his own person, a quality which has likewise taken itself out in the occasional ponderous over- and under-statements in his Prefaces, and in his *Criterion* Commentaries. In these Notes it crops up in a curious double-edged irony, where he appears to be mocking himself for writing the note at the same time that he wants to convey something by it. Certainly the note on the hermit-thrush which tells us that it is *turdus aonalaschkae pallasii* and quotes a description from Chapman's *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America,* would seem as though it were the desperate effort of }. Alfred Prufrock himself to say something important, but ending only in irrelevance. But actually the note ends with a telling sentence: 'Its "water-dripping song" is justly celebrated,' By that sentence Eliot has given a suggestion of the very sound from which his lines took rise (as remarked at the close of my chapter on the auditory imagination); and for ornithologists even the passage from Chapman would have the advantage of exact description.

Comparable to Eliot's use of Notes in *The Waste Land* is the frequent presence, throughout his work, of epigrahs for individual poems-though this device is not at all open to the objection of not being sufficiently structural. Again the intention is to enable the poet to secure a condensed expression in the poem itself, as well as to induce the reader to realize, even from the moment before the poem begins, that in reading poetry every word should be paid full attention. In each case the epigraph is designed to form an integral part of the effect of the poem; and in the most successful instances a subtle aura of

association is added. 'Mistah Kurtz—he dead'—the harrowing climax of Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,' his expression of utter horror, epitomizes in a sentence the very tone of blasphemous hopelessness which issues from 'The Hollow Men.' And certainly the closed circle of Prufrock's frightened isolation is sharply underlined by inscribing this speech from the *Inferno:* 'If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since, if what I hear be true, none ever did return alive from this depth, without fear of infamy I answer thee.' Prufrock can give utterance in soliloquy to his debate with himself only because he knows that no one will overhear him. The point of calling this poem a 'Love Song' lies in the irony that it will never be sung; that Prufrock will never dare to voice what he feels.

And as a final detail to this note on Notes, it is worth observing that Eliot uses his titles as well as his epigraphs as integral elements in his effect, to reiterate his belief that in writing poetry every word on the page should be designed to count. Often, in the earlier poems, the aim of the title was to surprise the reader out of all complacency. Thus 'Sweeney among the Nightingales,' which is in itself a condensed metaphysical conceit; thus also the double meaning of 'Sweeney Erect,' 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar' dramatically sets a stage; but in this case the ensuing epigraph which is largely composed of phrases from other writers referring to events in Venice—for example, from *Othello, The Aspern Papers,* and Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's,' though calculated to call up the reader's usual wide range of associations with that city, is too much of a pastiche to be very effective. And lastly, the startling 'A Cooking Egg' requires for its comprehension the occult knowledge that an egg which is no longer fresh enough to be eaten by itself, but must be used in cooking, is so described with the accent on the participle. Thus the title relates to the epigraph from Villon, which also tells the age and condition of the hero of the poem:

> *En l'an trentiesme de mon aage*
> *Que toutes mes hontes j'ay beues. . .*

4. Weston, p. 36.

5. Ibid., p. 21.

6. This point was noted by Hugh Ross Williamson, *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1933), p. 135. Mr. Williamson's book, though not wholly decisive in its critical observations, is a useful manual of relevant explanation, to which I have been frequently indebted.

7. *The Dial*, November 1923, pp. 480-3.

8. Since writing this paragraph I have re-read the passage in Henry James's essay 'The Art of Fiction' which expresses so exactly the relation between literature and experience which I have attempted to elucidate that I reproduce it here. In addition, it indicates once again a fundamental sameness in point of view between James and Eliot. James's rejoinder to the statement that 'the novelist must write from experience' runs as follows:

> It is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience. . . What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spiderweb, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. Greater miracles have been seen than that, imagination assisting, she should speak the truth about some of these gentlemen. I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a *pasteur*, some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. She had got her impression, and she evolved her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French; so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality. Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you

give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it—this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, 'Write from experience, and experience only,' I should feel that this was rather a tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, 'Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost !'

III

THE 'OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE'

What is *not* interesting, is that which does not add to our knowledge of any kind; that which is vaguely conceived and loosely drawn; a representation which is general, indeterminate, and faint, instead of being particular, precise, and firm. . . What are the eternal objects of poetry, among all nations and at all times? They are actions; human actions.—Matthew Arnold, Preface to *Poems*, 1853.

IF the natural demands of their mediums took Joyce and Eliot to the opposite poles of expansion and compression, the qualities of experience they were endeavouring to present were enough alike to lead to marked parallels in certain of their qualities of expression. As Eliot observed in an unpublished lecture on the method of *Ulysses* (1933): 'In some minds certain memories, both from reading and life, become charged with emotional significance. All these are used, so that intensity is gained at the expense of clarity,' There could not be a closer annotation of Eliot's own method, and I therefore want to consider some of its implications. It is no longer necessary, as it would have been, before the lyrical impulse of his poetry had been generally perceived, to spend much time defending Eliot's work against the charge of being over-intellectualized. He has himself taken pains on many occasions to point out that the concern of the poet is never with thought so much as with finding 'the emotional equivalent of thought'; that the essential function of poetry is not intellectual but emotional; that the business of Dante or Shakespeare was 'to express the greatest emotional intensity of his time, based on whatever his time happened to think.' All that he insists is that the more intelligent the poet is the better, since he is thus likely

to be wider in his interests and more mature in his expression of them. He believes also that 'fundamental brain-work' can be justly demanded of the reader, particularly since 'our civilization, as it exists at present . . . comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results,' But purely in terms of the elements of tradition which Eliot has attempted to bring to fresh expression in his own poetry, it is by now apparent that his principal desire is not for intellectual density but for richness and subtlety of emotional impression.

But in his effort to convey the full intricacy of the moment, in his own partial sacrifice of clarity for range of implication, it is perhaps still necessary to show that he is not making obscure or arbitrary associations which are too personal to be followed by the reader. Actually Eliot was not being in the least paradoxical when he stressed the importance to the poet of Dante's power to create 'clear, visual images,' For he has repeatedly insisted that 'the poet does not aim to excite—that is not even a test of his success—but to set something down,' What he means by that is the prime importance of concrete presentation of carefully observed details. (It should not be forgotten that the title of his first book was *Prufrock and Other Observations.)* He is therein close to Hulme's conviction that 'the great aim is accurate, precise, and definite description,' ' close to Ezra Pound's preoccupation in finding the exact fresh word, related also to the sharp visual discoveries of modern painting from Cezanne to Picasso. Eliot compresses his descriptions so tightly that you have to give them time to unfold in your mind:

> *The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf*
> *Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind*
> *Crosses the brown land, unheard.*

It takes many readings of 'The Fire Sermon' before you see how complete a picture of the river's desolation is revealed to you from the moment of those opening three lines: the tearing away of the lovely ampleness with which summer trees form a canopy over the stream, leaving the bleak bareness of autumn; the sinister undertone that is started by seeing the leaves as drowning fingers clutching at the bank; the utter desertion conveyed by the fact that the wind is unheard. It is as true of these lines as Eliot found it of Coleridge's imagery stored-up from the voyagers that 'it is usually the accurate images, the fidelity of which may still be recognized, that are the most telling.'

To be sure, Eliot's observations are not primarily of physi£al objects; his most sustained analysis is applied to states of blind and emotion. But he holds none the less that permanent poetry is always a presentation of thought and feeling 'by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world.' In his view the poet's emotions are not *in themselves* important; as he remarked in elucidation of Valery, 'not our feelings, but the pattern which we make of our feelings is the centre of value,' The lasting poem is not the result of pouring out personal emotion, for '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 of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked,' This passage will not yield its full significance without careful reading; but it is already a *locus classicus* of criticism.[2] It furnishes, for example, the exact clue to the triumph of *Samson Agonistes,* to Milton's complete success there in finding a dramatic situation that would externalize his own emotions and thus give them universal stature. On the other hand, failure to find an adequate 'chain of events,' and a consequent confusion of purely

personal feelings with those of the hero is what leaves Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* so vague and vaporous. And the reason why 'Gerontion' is the most mature, balanced work of art among Eliot's earlier poems is that he hit upon a situation in the sombre brooding of the old man that enabled him to set down a particular statement of life in concrete objectified form.

He is not writing in his own person: [8] the situation of Gerontion is even farther from his own than that of the middle-aged Prufrock had been when Eliot created him while still in his early twenties. I do not mean that elements of Eliot's own experience, of his own thought and feeling, do not enter into these characters; in fact, the source of some of the wittiest irony in Trufrock' would seem to spring from Eliot's detached ability to mock also the supercultivated fastidious young man from Harvard. But the point is that the hero of the poem is not such a figure; and that, as a result, Eliot's rapier thrusts have full play with no risk of becoming clumsily involved in purely personal associations. By Choosing a character apart from his immediate experience he has been able to concentrate entirely, not on his own feelings, but on the creation of his poem. Thus everything important which he had to say about a certain kind of frustration and longing also found its articulation in this objectified transmuted form; just as the double feeling of his repulsion from vulgarity, and yet his shy attraction to the coarse earthiness of common life have found their complete symbol in Sweeney. And so, in like fashion, Eliot can project into the thoughts of Gerontion an expression of one of his most moving, recurrent themes: the horror of a life without faith its disillusioned weariness of knowledge, its agonized slow drying up of the springs of emotion,

It should now also be clear that his understanding of the value of the 'objective correlative' was what caused Eliot to base the dramatic lyric intensity of *The Waste Land* in the

externalized structure of parallel myths. It also led him to give the poem even further focus by sifting it through the eyes of a central observer, Tiresias—a device which Eliot may have learned in part from Henry James's similar use of Strether in *The Ambassadors.* As Eliot states in a note, 'What Tiresias *sees,* in fact, is the substance of the poem.' And Tiresias is the exact symbol for such haunting inclusive consciousness: only Tiresias, who had experienced life both as a man and a woman, who, though blind, possessed the torturing faculty of being able to foresee the future, could contain in his vision the ranges of life in a great metropolis. Only his infinitely sensitive power to 'foresuffer all' could embrace the violent contrasts (and samenesses) that are now packed into the compass of a few square blocks: the dead luxury of the upper class, the vast uninspired bourgeois existence, the broken fragments of the talk of the poor overheard in a bar. Incidentally, the clearest perception of Eliot's range in ability to fit his style to his subject is furnished by the remarkably different manners in which he presents these three classes of society. Perhaps the sharpest dramatic effect in the whole poem lies in the contrasting halves of 'The Game of Chess,' the abrupt shift from an elaborately sensuous style that can build up an atmosphere of cloying richness to one which catches the very cadences of Cockney speech in a pub. And then, in the next section, in order to suggest the huge commercialized world that lies between these two extremes, Eliot portrays the characteristic scene between the typist and the clerk, and suggests the denatured quality of their life by a deliberate mechanization of his rhythm, as well as by the first continuous use of rhyme in the poem, which, being unexpected, contributes to heighten his effect. At the same time, beneath all these contrasts in appearance, are being stressed the similar human situations in which all these different people are found: they are all playing the

same stale game, burning alike with sterile desire. They stand in common need of regeneration.

Eliot's steady emphasis on the importance of wholeness of construction perhaps explains best why it is fair to separate Pound and Eliot by saying that 'Pound avait etudie la diction poetique, Eliot etudie le style.'[4] This distinction is not intended in the least to minimize Eliot's very great obligations to Pound, or the stimulus which he received from the slightly elder poet's first enunciation of his poetic theory in the years when Eliot was just out of college. Pound dwelt on the necessity of distinct presentation of something concrete; on accuracy and economy of language—'to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation'; and, regarding rhythm, on the necessity of composing 'in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome,' [5] That Eliot has followed all three of these technical principles is to be seen everywhere in his work.

Pound also defined the nature of an image in such a way as to stress the union of sense and thought, the presence of the idea mthe image: 'An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.' That definition would seem to be in the direction of the 'objective correlative,' and would certainly apply directly to what Eliot was trying to do, for instance, in such a line as

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

But the trouble is that Pound virtually stopped short with the definition of details; and it remained for Eliot to bring such technical discoveries to their full fruition by building them into an architectural whole. This limitation of Pound's may help to explain why his greatest success has been in his, translations, where he had an external structure to rely upon and could give his entire care to his extraordinary verbal and rhythmical expertness; as well as why his *Cantos*, though they have already proved a school of versification for younger

poets, are comparatively formless; and why his most living original poems are the *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* series of 1920, which show how Pound, in his turn, had begun to feel the influence of the method of Eliot.

A passage from 'Gerontion' will furnish perhaps the best example of the kind of hard precision with which Eliot's reliance upon 'a set of objects' enables him to thread together the range of his associations:

I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.

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 juveiscence of the year
Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
With caressing hands, at Limoges
Who walked all night in the next room;

By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.
Vacant shuttles
Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
An old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob.

The transitions are sudden, but, in terms of the context, unmistakable. There could hardly be a more effective way of stressing the intimate connection between the mysteries of religion and sex than by linking together the Christian story with the upsurging energies of spring. Yet it is also 'depraved' May, and suddenly we are aware that it is not just the Holy Communion that is being eaten and drunk 'among whispers': that last phrase also relates to the empty,

slightly sinister cosmopolitan world in which Gerontion's life has been betrayed, his passion and ardour have been divided and lost.[6] The series of glimpses of various figures in this world illustrates what Eliot tries to convey by his use of images. His design is to give the *exact* perceived detail, without comment, and let that picture carry its own connotations. As he said once in conversation, the images here are 'consciously concrete'; they correspond as closely as possible to something he has actually seen and remembered. But he also believes that if they are clearly rendered, they will stand for something larger than themselves; they will not depend for their apprehension upon any private reference, but will become 'unconsciously general.'

A similar example of his use of imagery is provided by a passage in the final poem of *Ash Wednesday,* which is also notable in revealing the direction in which Eliot had travelled in the ten years intervening since 'Gerontion.' His technique is greatly simplified: the quick contrasts of Donne and Laforgue have been replaced by something nearer to the limpidity of Dante. He wants to embody the reflection that although he desires to focus his mind upon God, although his spirit, in its ascent of the purgatorial mount, does not want to be distracted any longer by sensuous beauty, still,

though I do not wish to wish these things,
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savor of the sandy earth

It is impossible to divorce the reflection from the imagery. Exact description of memories of the varied loveliness of the New England coast expresses the very sensation of his distraction, of his turning, in spite of his will, away from the contemplation of God. He is momentarily forgetful of the penance of humility appointed for Ash Wednesday; for he has been lured back to the human realm of desire and loss by the enchantment of the senses.

I do not want to give the impression of trying to make Eliot's poetry seem easy, or of trying to demonstrate that his lines possess just one restricted meaning. Indeed, by his own account of the 'consciously concrete' and 'unconsciously general,' it is apparent that he believes that poetry should suggest much more than it can state directly to the mind. However, recognition of this impalpable element in poetry, of the fact that its range of meaning inevitably varies for different readers, does not diminish in the least the poet's responsibility to centre on the specific and distinct. Eliot notes that speaking of 'the incommunicable' in literature may often mean merely 'the vague and unformed.' His understanding of the fact that 'suggestion' is of doubtful worth unless radiating from a solid core of meaning, lies behind his analysis of why a confessedly slight poem like Marvell's 'The Nymph and the Fawn' is so much more satisfactory than William Morris's comparable effort in 'The Nymph's Song to Hylas':

> The effect of Morris's charming poem depends upon the mistiness of the feeling and the vagueness of its object; the effect of Marvell'spoem upon its bright, hard precision. . . The verses of Morris, which are nothing if not an attempt to suggest, really suggest nothing; and we are inclined to infer that the suggestiveness is the aura around a bright clear centre, that you cannot have the aura alone.

This necessity to concentrate on something definite is exactly what Eliot means by his repeated statement that the evoca-

tion of emotion by means of complete, concrete objectification is the only right way of expressing emotion in art.

The way in which Eliot secures both definiteness of statement and indefiniteness of suggestion by building his imagery upon an objective structure can be seen in the third poem in *Ash Wednesday:*

At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.

At the second turning of the second stair
I left them twisting, turning below;
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Damp, jagged, like an old man's mouth drivelling,
beyond repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.

At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind
over the third stair,
Fading, fading: strength beyond hope and despair
Climbing the third stair.

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only.

The symbol of the stair is perfectly concrete whether or not we identify it with Dante's purgatorial mount. For, in either case, the rhythms give us the feeling of difficult climbing movement; and each turning of the stair presents a distinct

stage of spiritual struggle. The sinister horror of what he saw below him at the first turning is heightened by the very ambiguousness of the expression, 'the same shape,' Does it mean a spectre that he has been fleeing from and has felt to be pursuing him up the stair? Or, more terrifying still, does it mean his own very likeness, thus stressing the obsession with self, the inability of the individual to escape from the bonds of his own identity? Such thoughts constituted one of the principal torments for the poet of *The Waste Land*, who had

heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only,

who was unable to break through the circle of his own loneliness by giving himself up to any belief, and so, with nothing external or absolute to base his life upon, felt himself mocked equally by hope and despair, since both were equally groundless. In keeping with such reflections, the damp blackness of the second turning could represent the state of mind voiced in 'The Hollow Men,' although, speaking strictly, the utter emptiness which pervades that poem would seem to belong more entirely to an *Inferno*. But with the next turning, the poet has moved on to a third state, forgetting his despair in a glimpse of the loveliness possible in this world, and yet looking now to something 'beyond hope and despair,' to faith which shall sustain him, to his salvation through divine grace.

In such a manner Eliot's images are at the same time both exact and suggestive in their portrayal of these three spiritual stages. It is more than likely that he meant the turnings of his stair to represent something even more definite, to remind the reader that they correspond in general to the three main divisions of Dante's hill of Purgatory.[7] At the foot of the hill were those whose sin had been the greatest, who had been guilty of love distorted, those who had loved evil things instead of God, those whose self-absorbed pride had shut

them off from Him. Higher up were those whose love of God had been defective; higher still, the least gravely sinful, those who had loved excessively things which should take only a secondary place in the affections, among them the sensual and lustful. (A hint of the correspondence between these particular qualities of excess and Eliot's third stair is underscored by the image describing the window itself 'bellied like the fig's fruit.') Such a reminder that the stages of the soul which Eliot is depicting correspond also to a completely developed pattern of philosophic and religious thought, would remove the experience from anything purely personal, and would thus enable it to possess a more universal significance.

Perhaps the most important thing that is revealed by applying Eliot's conception of the 'objective correlative' to his own work is the essentially dramatic nature of all his poetry. What is said by one of the speakers in his 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' certainly seems expressive of one of his own most sustained beliefs:

> What great poetry is not dramatic? Even the minor writers of the Greek Anthology, even Martial, are dramatic. Who is more dramatic than Homer or Dante? We are human beings, and in what are we more interested than in human action and human attitudes? Even when he assaults, and with supreme mastery, the divine mystery, does not Dante engage us in the question of the human attitude towards this mystery—which is dramatic?

In the terms of this description the dramatic element in poetry lies in its power to communicate a sense of real life, a sense of *the immediate present—that* is, of the full quality of a moment as it is actually felt to consist. It was Ezra Pound's great service to modern poetry to rescue the lyric from musical prettiness by his reaffirmation of the importance of such direct presentation of actuality, by his determination, as he declared in his manifesto 'Against the Crepuscular Spirit in Modern Poetry,' to substitute 'for dreams

—men,'[8] This ability to portray the very character of life is rare since it depends upon a firm grasp of experience, and thus demands from the poet a unified sensibility, .a capacity of feeling that can closely interweave emotion and thought. It likewise demands a mature realization of the existence of both good and evil, an understanding that life takes on dramatic significance only when perceived as a struggle between these forces. Thus, despite Pound's emphasis on 'human action,' his failure to distinguish between individual responsibility for evil and social circumstance has the result of making his journalistic conception of Hell in the *Cantos* utterly lacking in tragic dignity—a Hell, as Eliot has remarked, 'for the *other people,* the people we read about in the newspapers, not for oneself and one's friends,' Such a Hell not only robs any implied Heaven of all authenticity, but also inevitably renders much of Pound's observation of human beings 'trivial and accidental,'

In the light of these reflections it becomes apparent that the ability to convey a sense of human reality is also destroyed by any facile idealization, or by any effort to escape into a dream world through the hypnosis of sound. The dramatic quality is also wholly lost by the merely reflective poet who, instead of making a union of emotion and thought, instead of thinking in images and thus bringing a living body to his ideas, tends to put his images aside and to fall back on abstract rhetoric when he comes to deliver his statements:

We look before and after
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.[9]

These reflections perhaps also make clear why it is accurate to say that Donne is a dramatic poet but not Spenser; that the songs of Campion and Shakespeare are dramatic but not

those of Swinburne,[10] or why Keats at the time of his death was increasingly absorbed with the desire to write plays;" or why, among poets of seemingly equal stature like Wyatt and Surrey, the ability to cut through graceful Renaissance decoration of sentiment to a bare statement of immediate emotion is what gives a few poems of the former their heightened vitality.[12]

In defining Eliot's particular dramatic quality it is relevant to quote Remy de Gourmont's briet characterization of symbolism, in his *Book of Masks:* 'a tendency to take only the characteristic detail out of life, to pay attention only to the act by which a man distinguishes himself from another man, and to desire only to realize essentials, results,' There could hardly be a better account of the way in which Eliot endeavours to portray 'human action and human attitudes,' He sets out to make his characters actual by confining his description of them to a perceived significant detail or characteristic gesture. This is the method by which he lets us conceive the nature of Princess Volupine by means of a glimpse of her outstretched 'meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand,' Or again, he creates the dramatic relevance of the figures who throng Gerontion's memory by the way he shows each of them in action. He wants to intermingle description and event in the manner in which they actually associate in a person's impressions; this is the intention emphasized by his statement that he was stimulated by Henry James' exampte in *The Aspern Papers* to try 'to make a place real not descriptively but by something happening there,' What 'happens' in Eliot's shorter poems is frequently no more than a single observed impression: a girl standing at the top of a stairway 'with a fugitive resentment' in her eyes; a young man handing his cousin the evening paper. Yet, as also in James, there is something both pictorial and dramatic in this single impression, something acutely revelatory of the people described. As James remarked in 'The Art of Fiction':

What is a picture or a novel that is *not* of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it? It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident, I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character.

These sentences might describe the effect of Eliot's 'La Figlia che Piange' equally as well as that of one of James's own stories. The more one thinks of Eliot in relation to James, the more one realizes the extent of the similarities between them. They are similarities of content as well as of method. Both James and Eliot, no less than Hawthorne, are mainly concerned with what lies behind action and beneath appearance. In their effort to find the exact situation that will evoke an impression of the inner life, they are occupied too in expressing like states of mind and feeling. Prufrock's rankling inability to give himself to life and the kind of frustration embodied in Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady' find their parallels many times in James. But even more significant is the realization that the qualities of spirit that rise above frustration in Eliot's later poems, as well as in James's *Portrait of a Lady* or *The Wings of the Dove*, are those which affirm the value of renunciation, sympathy, and tenderness. These qualities have long been dominant in the American strain. All three are to be found in Emily Dickinson, if with a somewhat different effect than in Hawthorne; and the two last are Whitman's most enduring tones in 'When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed,'

NOTES

i. Hulme was killed in action in 1917, and his essays on "Humanism and the Religious Attitude,' 'Modern Art and Philosophy,' and 'Romanticism and Classicism,' written just before the First World War, were not published until 1924, under the

general title of *Speculations.* Eliot had not known Hulme personally, though he had heard much about him from Pound; and he had not read any of Hulme's essays before they were published, by which time Eliot's own theory of poetry had already matured. Nevertheless certain sentences, from 'Romanticism and Classicism' in particular, foreshadow so exactly a number of the principles which Eliot has also believed in that it is interesting to marshal them here. Especially interesting since a parallel development of thought to many of the same ends helps to make clearer why Eliot felt the urgent necessity of fresh poetic experiment, and indicates that his reaction against the loosely prevailing standards of taste and value was not idiosyncratic but part of an emerging general state of mind.

I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming.

The period of exhaustion seems to me to have been reached in romanticism. We shall not get any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention. . .

Exactly why this dry classical spirit should have a positive and legitimate necessity to express itself in poetry is utterly inconceivable to them [i.e. to those who 'think that verse means little else than the expression of unsatisfied emotion '] . . . It [the necessity] follows from the fact that there is another quality, not the emotion produced, which is at the root of excellence in verse.

There are then two things to distinguish, first the particular faculty of mind to see things as they really are, and apart from the conventional ways in which you have been trained to see them. This is itself rare enough in all consciousness. Second, the concentrated state of mind, the grip over oneself which is necessary in the actual expression of what one sees. To prevent one falling into the conventional curves of ingrained technique, to hold on through infinite detail and trouble to the exact curve you want. Wherever you get this sincerity, you get the fundamental quality of good art without dragging in infinite or serious.

Hulme also formulated the contrasting views of 'romanticism' and 'classicism' which Eliot has likewise followed:

Put shortly, these are the two views, then. One, that man is intrinsically good, spoilt by circumstance; and the other that he is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent. To the one party man's nature is like a well, to the other like a bucket. The view which regards man as a well, a reservoir full of possibilities, I call the romantic; the one which regards him as a very finite and fixed creature, I call the classical.

For further ramifications of this aspect of Eliot's thought, see below, Chap, iv, note 2.

2. Eliot formulated this passage in the course of his discussion of 'Hamlet and His Problems,' as a result of his dissatisfaction with the obscurities of that play, with Shakespeare's partial inability there to handle his 'intractable' emotional material by finding an adequate objectification for it.

3. Sufficient warning to critics against the direct reading of a poet's life (or the critic's own prepossessions) into a poet's work is furnished by Eliot himself in the course of his discussion of 'the fatigued Shakespeare, a retired Anglo-Indian, presented by Mr. Lytton Strachey,' and of 'the messianic Shakespeare, bringing a new philosophy and a new system of yoga, presented by Mr. Middleton Murry.' I trust that Eliot's comment may be of use to such critics as Granville Hicks, whose whole treatment of Eliot in his history of recent American literature consists in identifying the poet's own life with some of the lines which express Gerontion's despair, and thereupon summarily dismissing him as of little value since he has no message of hope for contemporary America.

I admit that my own experience, as a minor poet, may have jaundiced my outlook; that I am used to having cosmic significances, which I never suspected, extracted from my work (such as it is) by enthusiastic persons at a distance; and to being informed that something which 1 meant seriously is *vers de societe;* and to having my personal biography reconstructed from passages which I got out of books, or which I invented out of nothing because they sounded well; and to having my biography invariably ignored in what I *did* write from personal experience; so that in consequence I am inclined to believe that people are mistaken about Shakespeare just in proportion to the relative superiority of Shakespeare to myself.

This passage might also be pondered by C. Day Lewis, who tried to argue seriously, in *A Hope for Poetry,* that Trufrock' should be read as an allegory of Eliot's own life, not only up to the time of the composition of that poem, but also since.

4. Rene Taupin, work cited, p. 215.

5. These three propositions, along with Pound's other principal observations on the art of poetry, are to be found in the section called 'A Retrospect' in the volume of essays, *Pavannes and Divi-*

sions, 1918. They had, however, appeared previously, from 1912 onward, especially in 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste,' in *Poetry,* March 1913.

Eliot has written in detail about Pound not only in the Introduction to his selection from Pound's poems published in 1928, but also in the earlier, little-known pamphlet, *Ezra Pound, His Metric and Poetry,* 1917, in which he suggests what he himself had learned from Pound's craftsmanship. It is worth recalling that Eliot not only dedicated *The Waste Land* to 'il miglior fabbro,' but that in *After Strange Gods* he still believes that Pound 'is probably the most important living poet in our language,'

Any detailed study of Eliot's background and development would find a fertile field in determining how many of his tastes and opinions first crystallized as a result of his early close association with the author of *Personae.*

6. The way in which Eliot combined fragments from many lives into the character of the old man may be observed in his borrowings from *The Education of Henry Adams* and from A. C. Benson's biography of Edward Fitzgerald. The passage in Adams (which was pointed out to me by Robert G. Davis) comes at the beginning of the chapter describing his settling in Washington, and the richness of its spring so foreign to a New Englander:

> The Potomac and its tributaries squandered beauty. . . Here and there a Negro log cabin alone disturbed the dogwood and the judas-tree. . . The tulip and the chestnut tree gave no sense of struggle against a stingy nature. . . The brooding heat of the profligate vegetation; the cool charm of the running water; the terrific splendor of the June thundergust in the deep and solitary woods, were all sensual, animal, elemental. No European spring had shown him the same intermixture of delicate grace and passionate depravity that marked the Maryland May. He loved it too much as if it were Greek and half human.

Eliot's theme is, of course, the loss of such ecstasy when cut off from the roots of faith.

The passage in Benson (which was noted by Morton Zabel) occurs where he is weaving together some excerpts from Fitzgerald's letters, and making interpolations of his own: 'Here he sits, in a dry month, old and blind, being read to by a country boy, longing for rain:—"Last night … we heard a Splash of

Rain, and I had the book shut up, and sat listening to the Shower by myself—till it blew over, I am sorry to say, and no more of the sort all night. But we are thankful for that small mercy,'" Benson's words virtually form the opening lines of Gerontion's soliloquy; and as Zabel added, in a letter to me, Benson's 'whole book, with its picture of Fitzgerald in his pathetic, charming, and impotent old age, pondering on the pessimism of Omar, and beating out the futility of his final years, may have crystallized in Eliot's mind the situation … of "Gerontion." ' It is notable that both the Adams and Fitzgerald passages contain allusions to water, the absence of which life-giving source was to be one of the chief symbols of *The Waste Land.*

7. This interpretation was first suggested to me by Mr. Robert Lehman, of Cincinnati, Ohio.

8. In this aim Pound was enthusiastically indebted to Browning, as his poem 'Mesmerism' declares. This enthusiasm of Pound's Eliot does not seem ever especially to have shared, though he has remarked, in an unpublished lecture on the late nineteenth-century background for modern poetry, that Browning was the only poet of that period 'to devise a way of speech which might be useful for others,' that what he had to teach lay in his 'use of non-poetic material,' in his reassertion of 'the relation of poetry to speech,' And for the eventual writer of the literary history of the twentieth century, Eliot's handling of the dramatic soliloquy, a form that has been called 'the most flexible and characteristic genre of English verse,' cannot be divorced from the impetus furnished by *Men and Women* to *Personae.*

9. The distinctions that I am trying to establish concerning the nature of the dramatic quality in poetry are sufficiently complex to demand several illustrations as the conclusion of the notes to this chapter.

Eliot himself, in his essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets,' made a similar use of the term 'reflective poet' in his contrast between the writer who can turn his varied interests and speculations into poetry, and the writer who 'merely meditates upon them poetically':

> The difference is not a simple difference of degree between poets. It is something which had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual

poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. . . The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocmative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced, they reflected. In one or two passages of Shelley's 'Triumph of Life,' in the second 'Hyperion,' there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility. But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated.

By way of contrast with the passage of rhetorical reflective poetry that I have quoted, an example of thinking in images which sustains a full dramatic quality would be the passage on Time in *Troilus and Creissida:*

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms "for oblivion,
A great-sized monster of ingratitudes:
Those scraps are good deeds past; which are devour'd
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
As done: perseverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright: to have done, is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
In monumental mockery. Take the instant way;
For honour travels in a strait so narrow
Where one but goes abreast: keep then the path;
For emulation hath a thousand sons
That one by one pursue: if you give way,
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
Like to an entered tide they all rush by
And leave you hindmost;
Or, like a gallant horse fall'n in first rank,
Lie there for pavement to the abject rear,
O'errun and trampled on: then what they do in present,
Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop yours;
For time is like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,
Grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles,
And farewell goes out sighing. O! let not virtue seek
Remuneration for the thing it was;
For beauty, wit,
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating time.

And Dante, even in his passages of intricate philosophical speculation, still uses the most concrete imagery as a 'means of making the spiritual visible,' For example, consider the prolonged simile that enables him to put his discourse on the Freedom of the Will, and on the Soul (in the sixteenth canto of the *Purgatorio),* into the simplest, sensuous terms:

> From the hands of Him who loves her before she is, there issues like a little child that plays, with weeping and laughter, the simple soul, that knows nothing except that, come from the hands of a glad creator, she turns willingly to everything that delights her. First she tastes the flavour of a trifling good; then is beguiled, and pursues it, if neither guide nor check withhold her. Therefore laws were needed as a curb; a ruler was needed, who should at least see afar the tower of the true City.

This passage is of further interest in that Eliot was indebted to it in his 'Animula,' in the opening lines which constitute the one full expression he has made of the nature of childhood:

> *'Issues from the hand of God, the simple soul'*
> *To a flat world of changing lights and noise,*
> *To light,, dark, dry or damp, chilly or warm,*
> *Moving between the legs of tables and of chairs,*
> *Rising or falling, grasping at kisses and toys,*
> *Advancing boldly, sudden to take alarm,*
> *Retreating to the corner of arm and knee,*
> *Eager to be reassured, taking pleasure*
> *In the fragrant brilliance of the Christmas tree,*
> *Pleasure in the wind, the sunlight and the sea;*
> *Studies the sunlit pattern on the floor*
> *And running stags around a silver tray;*
> *Confounds the actual and the fanciful,*
> *Content with playing-cards and kings and queens,*
> *What the fairies do and what the servants say.*

10. Campion's verse owes its peculiarly exquisite music not only to the fact that it was meant to be sung, but primarily to the circumstance that it was written during the one period in English history when the art of poetry was closely allied to the art of music. Nevertheless, as Eliot himself has noted, there is never a confusion between Campion's poetic and his musical effects. His images are fresh and clear and convey a distinct meaning at the same time that his rhythm creates a pure beauty of sound. His verse is an excellent example of Eliot's rather

understated dictum that 'for poetry to approach the condition of music … it is not necessary that poetry should be destitute of meaning.' Sense in Campion is not sacrificed to sound; his most musical lines still present a sharp dramatic picture:

When thou must home to shades of underground,
And there arrived, a new admired guest,
The beauteous spirits do engirt thee round,
White lope, blithe Helen, and the rest,
To hear the stories of thy finish'd love
From that smooth tongue whose music hell can move,

Then wilt thou speak of banqueting delights,
Of masques and revels which sweet youth did make,
Of tourneys and great challenges of knights,
And all these triumphs for thy beauty's sake:
When thou hast told these honours done to thee,
Then tell, O tell, how thou didst murder me[1]

Swinburne's aberration was that he tended to blur together sense and sound, to use language merely as musical incantation. As a result he seldom gives us 'clear, visual images'; he uses the most general words more for their association than for any precise denotation; and he rarely conveys the feeling that he has observed any immediate object. For example,

,' shall never be friends again with roses;
I shall loathe sweet tunes, where a note grown strong
Relents and recoils and climbs and closes,
As a wave of the sea turned back by song.
There are sounds where the soul's delight takes fire,
Face to face with its own desire;
A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes;
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long.

This may seem an unfairly extravagant choice of lines, though they are from 'The Triumph of Time,' and if you don't pay much attention to what they say, their movement can produce upon you the full effect of Swinburne's peculiar hypnotic jag. And even in his most celebrated work, as in the opening chorus from 'Atalanta,' there is the same tendency to lose any clarity of out line in the intoxication with sound:

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins. . .

It is not surprising that Eliot concluded in 1920:

> Language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified. They are identified in the verse of Swinburne solely because the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment. . . Only a man of genius could dwell so exclusively and consistently among words as Swinburne. His language is not, like the language of bad poetry, dead. It is very much alive, with this singular life of its own. But the language which is more important to us is that which is struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects, as, for instance, the prose of Mr. James Joyce or the earlier Conrad.

11. It is debatable whether Keats would have been able to realize this ambition. Certainly his attempt in 'Otho' revealed very little grasp of dramatic structure or of the exact nature of a scene; and, though the fragment of 'King Stephen' showed a marked advance in such respects, the fact that, unlike Shakespeare, he had no living traditions of the stage to rely upon, would have remained a heavy liability. Nevertheless the peculiar kinship between the quality of his imagination and that of the younger Shakespeare—a kinship that has been recognized by such diverse critics as Matthew Arnold and Middleton Murry—lies in Keats's ability to present with such fullness the impressions of all his senses that they embody a whole way of viewing life. For example, he can convey in three lines in a letter to his friend Reynolds a completely experienced perception (aural and kinaesthetic as well as visual):

> *A white sail shows above the green-head cliff,*
> *Moves round the point, and throws her anchor stiff;*
> *The mariners join hymn with those on land.*

Such lines are essentially dramatic; they give you the feeling of sharing immediately in an event. They possess the very quality which Eliot values most highly in both the metaphysicals and symbolists, the quality of 'transforming an observation into a state of mind.'

'Endymion' and even 'Hyperion' may seem somewhat vaporous owing to an inadequate conception of the struggle between good and evil. But the suffering out of which the final Odes sprang endowed Keats with a deep knowledge of that struggle,

and made them dramatic lyrics of the highest order, in a way in which 'Epipsychidion' is not. (Though, as Eliot also has noted, Shelley's last poem, the unfinished 'Triumph of Life,' revealed him on the verge of a more adequate understanding of human nature, and, concurrently, with a growing ability to escape from rhetorical abstraction and to clothe his thought in more accurate images.)

The one passage that shows what Keats might have accomplished in writing plays is the fragment, apparently addressed to Fanny Brawne, which he left on the margin of the manuscript of 'The Cap and Bells':

> *This living hand, now warm and capable*
> *Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold*
> *And in the icy silence of the tomb,*
> *So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights*
> *That thou would [st] wish thine own heart dry of blood*
> *So in my veins red life might stream again,*
> *And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—*
> *I hold it towards you.*

These lines might have been spoken by a character in an Elizabethan play.

12. Surrey did a great service to the development of English poetry by his pioneer experiments in blank verse, and by his naturalization of the conventions, and some of the melody, of the Italian love lyric. But Wyatt, though less technically facile, was able on a few occasions to break through these highly restricted 'literary' conventions, whicn prescribed for the lover simply the Petrarchan tones of adoration and complaint, and to give voice to feelings much closer to emotional reality. His best poem deserves to be better known. It is contained in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, but given there in the 'edited' form in which it was published, after Wyatt's death, by Richard Tottel in his famous *Miscellany*. Tottel devoted his efforts to smoothing away irregularities of accent in order to make the lines conform to a more conventionally musical pattern. This was unfortunate, since a good deal of the poem's peculiar vigour, its note of directness, and its dramatic expression of passionate scorn depend upon the very halting irregularity of the rhythm, its sudden starts and heavily weighted pauses;

They flee from me that sometime did me seek,
With naked foot stalking in my chamber.
I have seen them gentle, tame and meek,
That now are wild and do not remember
That sometime they put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanks be fortune, it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once, in special,
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small,
Therewith all sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said: 'Dear heart, how like you this?'

It was no dream; I lay broad waking:
But all is turned thorough my gentleness
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;
And I have leave to go of her goodness;
And she also to use neiu-fangleness.
But since that I so kindely am served,
I fain would know what she hath deserved.

Surrey can be considered the forerunner of Daniel and the general run of Elizabethan sonneteers; Wyatt, at his best, foreshadows Donne's kind of love lyric as well as Shakespeare's sonnets. Thus Wyatt and Surrey can provide another example of my attempted distinction between dramatic and reflective poetry (developed in note 10 above), between poetry that communicates emotion and poetry that merely talks about communicating it, a contrast that could be carried through other periods of English poetry, between such various poems as *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Castle of Indolence;* Blake's 'Echoing Green' and *The Deserted Village;* the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and *In Memoriam; The Waste Land* and *The Testament of Beauty.*

IV

THE WAY A POET COMMUNICATES HIS MEANING: THE AUDITORY IMAGINATION

The sense of musical delight with the power of producing it is a gift of the imagination —Coleridge.

THE foregoing account of Eliot's use of images and of the method by which he fuses them into an organic structure leads directly to the way in which he believes that a poet communicates his meaning. Though the images in the lines quoted from 'Gerontion' are predominantly visual, the passages from *Ash Wednesday* underscore the fact that Eliot's observation is not simply with his eyes. What bothers him most in Arnold's poetry is the thinness of the musical quality; and in pointing out that Arnold never emphasizes such quality as one of the fundamental virtues of poetic style, he develops the most searching passage that I know on what he calls the 'auditory imagination':

> the feeling for 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. Arnold's notion of 'life,' in his account of poetry, does not perhaps go deep enough.[1]

Eliot's realization that the feeling for rhythm is 'far below the conscious levels of thought' elucidates what he meant when remarking, in connection with *The Divine Comedy*, that 'poetry can communicate before it is understood,' That is to say, it can work upon the ear the depth of its incanta-

tion; it can begin to stir us by its movement before our minds can say what it is that we feel. And Eliot's enumeration of so many qualities inhering in the pattern of the syllables reveals how much he implies when asserting that the primary means of testing a new poet is by whether or not he possesses an individual rhythm. For as he remarked, as a result of his study of Donne, 'a style, a rhythm, to be significant, must also embody a significant mind, must be produced by the necessity of a new form for a new content,' In the additional light of the above detailed description, a poet's rhythm will also indicate his particular union of past and present, his double possession of 'the most ancient and the most civilized mentality' in his awareness of the primitive magic of sound joined with his quickening sense of the new manifestations of life in his own day. His rhythm, therefore, must embody an acute feeling both for the music of words, and for their richly varied connotations.

Eliot has said that his own poems have often taken their inception from some cadence running through his head. One minor but revelatory instance is how his feeling for syllable and rhythm, encountering a striking passage even in prose, seems to have started the movement of his 'Triumphal March.' It gives us thereby a glimpse of his own auditory imagination in action. I began reading Charles Maurras's *L'Avenir de I'Intelligence* largely because Eliot had recommended it as one of the standard expositions of the classical point of view.[2] It opens with an ironic account of how each new tawdry journalistic triumph is now greeted in the streets with procession and applause. A mediocre writer is represented as talking excitedly:

—Y avez-vous pris garde? dit-il, les yeux serres, le chef de I'Etat s'etait fait representer. Nous avions la moitie du Conseil des ministres et les deux prefets. Tant de generaux! Des regiments avec drapeau, des musiciens et leur banniere. Sans compter beaucoup de magistrats en hermine et de professeurs, ces derniers

sans leur toge, ce qui est malheureux.—Et les soldats faisaient la haie?—Us la faisaient.—En armes?—Vous l'avez dit.—Mais que disait le peuple?—II n'en croyait pas ses cent yeux!

I have given a whole paragraph in order that the reader can also sense the possible way in which Eliot's ear quickened at 'Tant de generaux'; and can perceive not only the source from which he took his final marching line: 'Et les soldats taisaient la haie? ILS LA FAISAIENT'; but, more importantly, the source from which he incorporated something of the sensation of movement that he transformed into the rhythms of his verse. In calculating what elements a poet's ear takes from the sources of his inspiration, it should also be observed that Eliot transformed the context here into quite a new pattern of his own, utilising, however, a suggestion of the futile bustle of the crowd to contrast with the momentary vision of the serenity of his hero.[8]

Still in the light of his account of the auditory imagination, we are now enabled to understand more completely what he meant when, in outlining Swinburne's defects, he declared that 'language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified.' That remark emphasizes again the union of sense and thought which struck him as the chief virtue of the metaphysicalsXIt takes on greater significance if placed beside another observation on language 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 already been applied. Such knowledge facilitates his task of giving to the word a new life and to the language a new idiom. The essential of tradition is this: in getting as much as possible of the whole weight of the history of the language behind his word.[4]

Such feeling for words on Eliot's part is what endows him with the quality singled out by Clive Bell, his unfailing distinction in 'phrasing.' He knows that a word is not a fixed

counter, that it brings with it varying colours from all its previous usages, that precisely what colour and energy flash forth from it in his poem depends on what stress he gives it, and on its exact position in the context. He was aware, before Richards and Empson began their exploration of ambiguities, that a word can carry different shades of meaning at once, that its connotation is extended or shifted according to its relation to the moving procession of other words which precede and come after. Thus, in the passage quoted from 'Gerontion,' the utter shift in the implication of the phrase 'among whispers,' when it is seen in the light, not only of what went before, but of the lines which follow. With the figurative expression, 'the word . . . swaddled with darkness,' the picture of the Christ child is also present to the imagination; and so with 'Judas'—in this context it cannot stand merely as the name of a flowering tree—it too is caught up in the whole tone of betrayal and in turn reinforces it. It will do the reader no good to protest that he wants his words to behave themselves and have simply one meaning at a time; for no more than people can words be brought into close relationship without effect upon each other'. And one test of a poet's skill lies in the degree of his awareness of what effects he has caused in his lines, of what forces the flow of his rhythm has made his words release. One of the most characteristic examples in Eliot's poetry of the power of his auditory imagination, both for beauty of sound and for imbedded richness of connotation, is the opening passage of 'A Game of Chess':[1]

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as

The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laqueana,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad hght a carved dolphin swam.

It is not accidental that he starts with an allusion to Shakespeare's Cleopatra, since his intention is to heap up an impression of Renaissance splendour and luxuriance. Little by little all the senses are bathed 'in rich profusion'; in fact, a comparison of the sensuous fullness of this passage with Keats's description of perfumes in 'Lamia' would not make Eliot's lines seem thin.[5] Apparently we are being given an entire sensation of magnificence; we might still be in the Renaissance; nothing intrudes to break the spell until the word 'synthetic'—in this context neutral, denatured, 'modern.' From that point (as the section goes on beyond the part quoted), the actual situation is gradually revealed. This is not Cleopatra, but a cosmopolitan society woman at her dressing table. All this opulence merely surrounds a weak meaningless existence. Gradually also the atmosphere itself is revealed as heavy and overpowering. There may be a reminiscence of the barge on the Nile; the senses may be *'drowned* in odours,' the 'carved dolphin' may *swim* in the 'sad light'; but all these references serve finally to remind you that there is no freshening water in this parched waste land.

This intricately sensitive awareness of words is not merely a subtle refinement. Distinction in phrasing cannot exist un-

less it has been created by distinction of sensibility. The principal reason why Eliot believes that it is important for the poet to know as much about language as possible is because he also believes that 'every vital development in language is a development of feeling as well'; that words and thought cannot be separated; that it follows necessarily that, since Racine and Baudelaire are the two greatest French 'masters of diction,' they 'are also the greatest two psychologists, the most curious explorers of the soul.' For only by releasing the magical possibilities in words can the poet impart the feeling that he has sunk 'to the most primitive and forgotten,' that his thought and emotions have returned 'to the origin' and have brought back a deeper sense of life.[6]

Observations like these, as well as the poetry they illustrate, extend the import of the poet's 'sense of his own age,' and the way in which he makes it articulate. Eliot knows that no experiment in art is valuable unless it is psychologically necessary, that no great innovator has cared for novelty for its own sake but, like Shakespeare, 'has been driven on, step by step, in his innovations, by an inner necessity, and that the novelty of form has been rather forced upon him by his material than deliberately sought.' This intimate inner necessity is bound up with the history of the age in which the poet lives, with its main movements of thought and of feeling. For, as Eliot has noted of Wordsworth's revolution in poetry, 'Any radical change in poetic form is likely to be the symptom of some very much deeper change in society and in the individual,'

Such an approach leads to the reason for Eliot's own irregular verse. He knows that the main point about new poetry is always 'how disturbing it is to the conventional consciousness,' that the shock tends to be 'by its syntax more than by its sentiments,' and that, speaking strictly, versification 'is essentially a disturbance of the conventional language,' What fascinated his ear in the early seventeenth-

century poets was the 'constant evasion and recognition of regularity,' the reliance on the iambic pentameter line and yet the continual skilful withdrawing from it. What strikes him as an essential quality in the most interesting verse is this very hesitation between regularity and irregularity, in correspondence to a psychological perception of the precarious balance that constitutes life itself: 'It is this contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony, which is the very life of verse,' The clamour for 'free verse' which was rising from some of the Imagists at the time when Eliot was beginning to write found in him its most penetrating critic.[7] For he has believed from the start that 'there is no freedom in art,' that 'freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation,'

Yet he has also recognized a debt to the theorists of *vers Libre:* their good effect was not to free verse, but to quicken the realization that there were other ways of writing it than in the prevailing conventional Georgian modes. They demonstrated that the constant expectation of rhyme had 'thickened the modern ear,' and no doubt helped to carry Eliot forward in his perception that 'rhyme removed, much ethereal music leaps up from the word,' But whereas they stopped in that discovery, Eliot went farther and observed that 'this liberation from rhyme might be as well a liberation of rhyme'; that once rhyme was no longer dully expected, it could then be used 'for a sudden tightening-up, tor a cumulative insistence, or for an abrupt change of mood'—an observation that was doubtless reinforced later by his reading of Hopkins, whose technique of sprung-rhythm has been one of the principal 'discoveries' for poets since the First World War. What Eliot learned from the 'new poetry' was that reaction against 'the erudite complexities' of Swinburne's versification should lead to more

form and not less. This was one of the reasons why he was stimulated to write several of the poems in his 1920 volume in the tight quatrains of Gautier as a corrective to the flowing excesses of *vers libre,* to write compact verse in which the mind of the poet should be actually felt to be moving.

Thus Eliot's technical experiments are seen never to be merely imitations of other poets. As a craftsman he believes that the most satisfactory verse ever written in English, in the later plays of Shakespeare or the tragedies of Webster, broke through the conventional pattern of blank verse, often 'at the moments of highest intensity,' in order to encompass a necessary shade of the poet's meaning. And with this perception goes his knowledge that 'a man who devises new rhythms is a man who extends and refines our sensibility; and that is not merely a matter of "technique." '[8] Eliot is aware that there are unexplored, probably not wholly explorable, connections between a poet's rhythm and what can loosely be called the rhythm of his age. In the light of history, it is not just a coincidence that the melodious extravagant opulence of the Spenserian stanza was devised as a reflection of the age of Elizabeth; nor that another whole age responded to the sensible balance of the *Essay on Man.* No poet is wholly conscious of attempting to make these connections; he only knows that his inner ear responds to a certain pattern of sound as being right for what he has to express. Eliot has pointed out the folly of trying to be modern by copying the journalistic details which separate the present from the past; he knows that 'one is not modern by writing about chimney-pots, or archaic by writing about oriflammes.' Far deeper perceptions are required; their nature is adumbrated in Eliot's account of the auditory imagination. A further suggestion is added in his remark that 'perhaps the conditions of modern life (think how large a part is now played in our sensory life by the internal-combustion en-

gine!) have altered our perception of rhythms,'[9] These conditions lie behind the cadences of his occasional effective machine-images:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi, throbbing waiting,

as well as behind the deliberate mechanization of:

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

For this is part of the idiom, the stimulus for which came from Baudelaire, to express moments of fragile beauty in the city, but more often the overwhelming oppression of its weight. The conditions of modern life not only affect machine-imagery; they lie equally behind the syncopated rhythms of *Sweeney Agonistes* and the rich and broken music of *Ash Wednesday.*

And finally, Eliot's conception of the auditory imagination, his understanding of the fact that poetic rhythm by means of its power of incantation is able to renew one of the most primitive elements of man's experience at the same time that it gives expression to the last subtle nuances of civilized feeling, is of particular interest in throwing light on one of the most profoundly suggestive statements that he has yet made of his own aims as an artist. He was stimulated to this statement by a reflection in one of Lawrence's letters that 'the essence of poetry with us in this age of stark and unlovely actualities is a stark directness, without a shadow of a lie, or a shadow of deflection anywhere. Everything can go, but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, to-day,' Upon these sentences Eliot has remarked:

This speaks to me of that at which I have long aimed, in writing poetry; to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem *points at,* and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get *beyond poetry,* as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music.* We never succeed, perhaps, but Lawrence's words mean this to me, that they express to me what I think that the forty or fifty original lines that I have written strive towards.[10]

One passage that Eliot must have had in mind when making those remarks is that of the bare but musical lines in the final section of *The Waste Land,* the creation of which seems to have taken rise from his memory of the sound of the 'water-dripping song' of the hermit-thrush, thus giving another glimpse into the way in which his own auditory imagination works:

> *,',' there were the sound of water only*
> *Not the cicada*
> *And dry grass singing*
> *But sound of water over a rock*
> *Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees*
> *Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop drop*
> *But there is no water*

NOTES

1. Yeats's reaction against Arnold's conception of poetry seems to have been on similar, though less defined grounds: 'I believe that all men will more and more reject the opinion that poetry is a "criticism of life," and be more convinced that it is a revelation of a hidden life,'

2. The first indication of the direction in which Eliot's thought was going as it moved away from the region of 'The Hollow

Men,' 1925, was given in 'The Idea of a Literary Review,' the leader in *The New Criterion,* for January 1926. Eliot stated there what he meant by 'classicism,' a word which has been rendered so nearly meaningless by the variety of connotations it has picked up since the Renaissance that it requires a fresh definition at every use. I have therefore deliberately excluded it from my text, particularly since Eliot himself has recognized, in *After Strange Gods,* how much confusion both this word and its equally protean opposite, 'romanticism,' are capable of causing. The following passage, however, reveals what Eliot implies in his use of the term, and how much more resilient his conception is than that of the new Humanists:

> I believe that the modern tendency is toward something which, for want of a better name, we may call classicism. I use the term with hesitation, for it is hardly more than analogical: we must scrupulously guard ourselves against measuring living art and mind by dead laws of order. Art reflects the transitory as well as the permanent condition of the soul, we cannot wholly measure the present by what the past has been, or by what we think the future ought to be. Yet there is a tendency—discernible even in art—toward a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason. If this approaches or even suggests the Greek ideal, so much the better: but it must inevitably be very different. I will mention a few books, not all very recent, which to my mind exemplify this tendency:
>
> *Reflexions sur la violence,* by Georges Sorel; *L'Avenir de Vlntelligence,* by Charles Maurras; *Belphegor,* by Julien Benda; *Speculations,* by T. E. Hulme, *Reflexions sur VIntelligence,* by Jacques Maritain; *Democracy and Leadership,* by Irving Babbitt. Anyone who is acquainted with two or more of these books will understand my use of the word 'tendency,' for the theories and points of view are extremely different.

Nevertheless, each of the books cited would have definite importance for anyone setting out to trace the development of Eliot's thought.

3. To suggest to those unfamiliar with the poern the way in which its rhythm was started moving by Maurras's prose, the opening and closing lines will serve. It begins:

Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves, hones' heels
Over the paving.

And the flags. And the trumpets. And so many eagles.
How many? Count them. And such a press of people.
We hardly knew ourselves that day, or knew the City.
This is the way to the temple, and we so many crowding the way.
So many waiting, how many waiting? what did it matter, on such a day?

The concluding lines are quoted in the course of my analysis of the poem on pp. 139-40. The mocking tone in Maurras's paragraph is also suggested in the lines that follow immediately after the prolonged recital of the innumerable machines of war:

> *What a time that took. Will it be he now? No,*
> *Those are the golf club Captains, these the Scouts,*
> *And now the* societe gymnastique de Poissy. . .

There are several other instances when prose passages seem to have started cadences in Eliot's mind that were ultimately transformed into new patterns. The opening lines of 'The Journey of the Magi,' which establish the rhythm of that poem, are taken, with comparatively slight alterations, from one of the Sermons of Lancelot Andrewes. Another passage from Andrewes contains the first hint of the movement of the lines on 'The Word' which begin the fifth section of *Ash Wednesday.* (Both these selections from the Sermons are quoted by Eliot in his essay on Andrewes.)

One of Ruskin's letters to Susan Beever about Rose La Touche, the little girl with whom he fell in love when himself in middle life, seems very suggestive of some of the material that enters into 'A Cooking Egg': 'But, Susie, *you* expect to see your Margaret again, and you will be happy with her in heaven. I wanted my Rosie *here.* In heaven I mean to go and talk to Pythagoras and Socrates and Valerius Publicola. I shan't care a bit for Rosie there, she needn't think it.'

My friend John Finley, Jr., pointed out to me a certain similarity between the following sentences from Rupert Brooke's description of the first shocked impression made upon one of his friends by the announcement, 'We're at war with Germany,' and 'the heap of broken images' that set the tone of the opening of *The Waste Land:*

My friend ate and drank, and then climbed a hill of gorse, and sat alone, looking at the sea. His mind was full of confused images, and the sense of strain. In answer to the word 'Germany,' a train of vague thoughts dragged across his brain. The pompous middle-class vulgar-

ity of the buildings of Berlin; the wide and restful beauty of Munich; the taste of beer; innumerable quiet, glittering cafe's; the *Ring;* the swish of evening air in the face, as one skis down past the pines; a certain angle of the eyes in the face; long nights of drinking and singing and laughter . . . certain friends; some tunes; the quiet length of evening over the Starnbergersee.

In these last two cases, however, it is wholly a question of the possible suggestion of some of the material which Eliot's imagination seized upon, and transmuted into a new context; not of any effect on the actual movement of his lines.

It seems apparent that, to an even greater extent than most poets, Eliot has been sensitively responsive to the rhythms of other writers. This can be observed not only in the lines from other poets that he has woven into the texture of his own verse, but also in more generalized debts. Frequently, in reading an Elizabethan play, one can come across passages that must have echoed in his ear, and have formed a deeply buried substratum for his own different effort. Read, for example, this passage from *The Changeling* which Eliot quoted in the essay on Middleton that he wrote eight years after 'Gerontion':

> *0 come not near me, sir, I shall defile you*[1]
> *I that am of your blood was taken from you*
> *For your better health; look no more upon't,*
> *But cast it to the ground regardlessly,*
> *Let the common sewer take it from distinction.*

And then read these lines from Eliot's poem:

> *I that was near your heart was removed therefrom*
> *To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition*
> *I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it*
> *Since what is kept must be adulterated*[9]

The content of the two passages is not at all the same; but the contexts they rise from both express a horror of lust, and thus adumbrate the possible reason why Middleton's cadences stirred in Eliot's memory at the moment that he was shaping his lines.

In like fashion, a passage from Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* has asserted itself near the conclusion of 'Gerontion':

> *fly where men feel*
> *The burning axletree, and those that suffer*
> *Beneath the chariot of the snowy Bear . . .*

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

C. L. Barber has suggested this possible connection: 'chariot' has been transformed into 'circuit' quite naturally in the modern poet's more scientific, less mythological image, while 'the sense of suffering turns "snowy" into "shuddering"; and Eliot's whole conception of a catastrophe comes out in the description of the breaking apart of Chapman's concentrated suffering "beneath the chariot"—maybe,'

4. In *The Tyro,* No. 3, 1922.

5. This comparison was suggested by Laura Riding and Robert Graves in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London, 1927), pp. 170-71. The passage from Keats reads:

Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room
Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume:
Before each lucid pannel fuming stood
A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
Whose slender feet wide-swerved upon the soft
Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke
From fifty censers their light voyage took
To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose
Along the mirror'd walls by twin-clouds odourous.

6. That Eliot has long pondered this conception that the mature artist must combine 'the most ancient and the most civilized mentality' is shown by an observation which he made fifteen years before writing the passage on 'the auditory imagination,' in a review of Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* (in *The Egoist,* September 1918): 'The artist, I believe, is more *primitive,* as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries, his experience is deeper than civilization, and he only uses the phenomena of civilization in expressing it,'

7. The most detailed statement of his views is contained in his 'Reflections on Vers Libre,' *The New Statesman,* 3 March 1917. I have also quoted a few phrases from an unpublished lecture on Ezra Pound.

8. This sentence is from 'Isolated Superiority,' a review of Pound's *Personae* in *The Dial*, January 1928. Such a remark reveals the principal quality on which Eliot bases his claims for the value of Pound. He knows that Pound's translations are not merely technical exercises, since 'if one can really penetrate the life of another age, one is penetrating the life of his own.' Indeed, 'one of Pound's most indubitable claims to genuine originality' is the way in which he brings to life the Provencal and early Italian poets. He sees them 'as contemporary with himself, that is to say, he has grasped certain things in Provence and Italy which are permanent in human nature. He is much more modern, in my opinion, when he deals with Italy and Provence, than when he deals with modern life.'

This last passage, from Eliot's Introduction to Pound, rounds from another angle onto the question of a poet's 'sense of his own age' as well as onto the relation between literature and life. Therefore I want to quote it even further:

> . . . When he deals with antiquities, he extracts the essentially living; when he deals with contemporaries, he sometimes notes only the accidental. But this does not mean that he is antiquarian or parasitical on literature. Any scholar can see Arnaut Daniel or Guido Cavalcanti as literary figures; only Pound can see them as living beings. Time, in such connections, does not matter; it is irrelevant whether what you see, really see, as a human being, is Arnaut Daniel or your greengrocer. It is merely a question of the means suited to the particular poet, and we are more concerned with the end than with the means.

These reflections have immediate bearing on one of the perennial fallacies of American criticism. Only the narrowest conception of realism can hold that an author necessarily acquires any sovereign virtue by recording the surface details of a middle-western city instead of those of eighteenth-century Peru. Shakespeare's Roman generals are no less 'timeless Englishmen' than his inhabitants of the forest of Arden. The characters in Cooper's historical novels are not as wooden as those in his satires of contemporary life: his one living figure, the Leatherslocking, owes whatever vitality he possesses to the fact that he is the imaginative symbol for a whole stage of American life and aspiration, a stage which Cooper knew only in memory. Goethe's Faust is as entirely a nineteenth-century German as Marlowe's is an Elizabethan.

To be sure, the author of a poem or novel dealing with another period or place than that in which he lives runs greater danger of tripping over properties, of mistaking costumes for people, of producing a *tour de force* or a mere museum piece. It is probably more rewarding as a rule for a writer to try to strike to the heart of life by the gradual difficult mastery of his own immediate surroundings. But it is an entire misconception of the way that the shaping imagination works to assume that a man's observation is limited to what is before his eyes; or that, once having observed, he cannot cast his findings into a transmuted guise with an enhancement rather than a loss of their energy; or that he cannot discover his symbols of living reality in memory and myth as well as in the headlines.

9. Eliot made this observation in 1926 in the course of his brief introduction to *Savonarola,* a dramatic poem written by his mother, Charlotte Eliot. As Eliot remarked, in elucidation of his belief that 'a work of historical fiction is much more a document on its own time than on the time portrayed': 'This Savonarola is a disciple of Schleiermacher, Emerson, Channing, and Herbert Spencer'—a remark which describes some of the intellectual background of the world into which Eliot was born.

10. These remarks were included in an unpublished lecture on 'English Letter Writers'—primarily on Keats and Lawrence—which was delivered in New Haven, Conn., during the winter of 1933-

V

THE INTEGRITY OF A WORK OF ART

Flaubert incorporait toute sa sensibilite a ses oeuvres. . . Hors de ses livres, ou il se transvasait goutte a goutte, jusqu'a la lie, Flaubert est fort peu interessant —de Gourmont.

Of Shakespeare notably, of Jonson less, of Marlowe (and of Keats to the term of life allowed him), one can say that they *se transvasaient goutte a goutte,* and in England, which has produced a prodigious number of men of genius and comparatively few works of art, there are not many writers of whom one can say it —Eliot.

ELIOT'S particular sense of his age is revealed with growing clarity as you read connectedly through his work. You are left with the impression of his preeminent quality as one of integrity, of an extraordinary wholeness within his limits. What gives authority to the interpretation of life emerging from both his poetry and his prose is the fact that it is authentic, that it corresponds not to any preconceived standard of what he *ought* to think or believe, but to what he has actually felt and understood by listening to himself, by studying the deepest elements in his nature. It cannot be affirmed too often that one of the greatest values of poetry consists in this very authenticity. By giving an exact expression to the thing he has perceived and felt, whether it be the glimpse of a ship coming to anchor or a complex meditation on the fear of death, the poet fulfils one of his most primitive functions. Among the earliest uses of verbal art was the charm, where, by means of his skill in finding just the right words, the gifted savage was able to exorcise an evil spirit or to propitiate a good one. This power of words to enchant remains only as a metaphor. But it is still true that the most moving poetry performs a kindred service by the fullness with which it wins for us a vision of loveliness, or with which, in describing ugliness and

horror, it thereby lifts from us their burden. And the secret of this power remains the same: it lies in the accuracy by which the poet, utilizing every resource lurking in word and rhythm, manages to convey a heightened sensation of the object itself.

As his epigraph for the opening essay in *The Sacred Wood* Eliot used this sentence from de Gourmont: 'Eriger en lois ses impressions personnelles, c'est le grand effort d'un homme s'il est sincere,' That Eliot recognizes this particular kind of sincerity to be among the rarest of human attainments is manifested by his praise of an author with whose view of life he would have little sympathy: !^i\ Hemingway is a writer for whom I have considerable respect; he seems to me to tell the truth about his own feelings at the moment when they exist.'^[1] But for Eliot it is not enough to tell the truth about one's own feelings, great gift though that is, and possible only to a man who is fully alive, who has cut through all conventionality and abstraction, who is endowed both with sensitiveness and with unusual technical expertness. For if such a gift is to result in valuable expression, it is necessary that the feelings themselves should be part of a balanced pattern of life; or, to put it in the terms of the epigraph from Maurras which Eliot used at the opening of his introduction to Dante: 'La sensibilite, sauvee d'elle-meme et conduite dans Fordre, est devenue un principe de perfection.' ',In view of my lasting impression both of Eliot's sincerity and coherence, I am increasingly puzzled by the two most prevalent false approaches to him, by those critics who welcomed the poet of The Wa*ste Land* as a modern prophet for having voiced our disillusion, and now damn him because he moves towards faith; as well as by those more traditionally faithful souls, largely academic, who deplored his earlier work as dangerously radical, and now welcome him with hosannas.l am also unable to understand those who, like Paul Elmer More,[2] find an inconsistent cleavage between the

qualities of his verse and criticism. Not only does the quiet assurance of his work in both mediums give you the sense throughout, as Edmund Wilson observed, that Eliot has thought connectedly and persistently 'about the relations between the different phases of human experience';[3] but, in addition, his criticism steadily illuminates the aims of his verse, while his verse illustrates many aspects of his critical theory. The only relevant distinction that can be made between them is one he himself has suggested: 'In one's prose reflexions one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality.'

It is certainly apparent that the same preoccupations have pervaded his work from the beginning. What renders the character of Prufrock not just grotesque or absurd but poignantly real is that as a result of a gradual accumulation of undertones and especially of the final dramatic lines, one can glimpse, beneath the banal surfaces and futile indecisions of his life, his perception of beauty, his understanding of the meaning of love and sympathy, if an utter inability to gain them. From that early poem onward, through the much deeper accents of 'Gerontion' *and The Waste Land*, the prevailing theme of Eliot's poems is the emptiness of life without belief, an emptiness that finally resounds with sickening fear and desperation in 'The Hollow Men.' Though they could hardly have been forecast before their appearance, the religious poems follow in natural sequence from such persistent absorption in the nature of spiritual reality. They are scarcely poems of easy faith; they mark rather the direction in which the poet's experience is leading him, that he has ascended step by step from the pit of his Inferno. They voice the desire for belief, the understanding of its importance to the human spirit, the impalpable movements of the poet's mind from doubt towards acceptance, his gradual compre-

hension of what, encountering it in Baudelaire, he has called 'the greatest, the most difficult of the Christian virtues, the virtue of humility,"This desire and understanding re-echo liirough *Ash Wednesday,* and suggest one reason why so many references in that series of poems are to the structure of the Catholic Mass. For the more Eliot has reflected on life, the more he has understood that 'every man who thinks and lives by thought must have his own scepticism, that which stops at the question, that which ends in denial, or that which leads to faith and which is somehow integrated into the faith which transcends it,' And the words with which he ended his introduction to the *Pensees* of Pascal are seen to have great bearing on himself: 'I can think of no Christian writer, not Newman even, more to be commended ... to those who doubt, but who have the mind to conceive, and the sensibility to feel, the disorder, the futility, the meaninglessness, the mystery of life and suffering, and who can only find peace through a satisfaction of the whole being,'[4] Such satisfaction for Eliot could not lie in Hawthorne's or Henry James's 'awareness of spiritual reality' with an indifference to dogma. He needed to find something in which his mind as well as his emotions could rest.[5]

But not only have Eliot's explorations of the soul followed a consistent, if difficult, path; he has given them further unity by the unusual degree to which he has composed his work around certain focal points. The line from Dante that appears among the fragments shored against his ruins in the broken ending of *The Waste Land,* Toi s'ascose nel foco die gli affina,' is not there by chance. The passage from which it comes has been returned to by Eliot many times:

'Ara vos prec, per aquella valor
que vos guida al som de I'escalina,
sovegna vos a temps de ma dolor'
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina.

> ('And so I pray you, by that Virtue which leads you to the topmost of the stair, be mindful in due time of my pain,' Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.)

Am vos prec was the title that he gave to the collection of his verse in 1919. The words, 'Sovegna vos,' appear in *Ash Wednesday;* the section of that poem quoted above was first published separately under the title *Som de I'Escalma;* and, indeed, the theme of the speech sounds repeatedly through the whole sequence. The lines were spoken by the Provencal poet Arnaut Daniel, in the twenty-sixth canto of the *Purgatorio,* which describes the penance of the lustful. The fact that Eliot has reminded his reader of this canto on such widely separate occasions indicates that it has spoken deeply to him of what he knows to be central factors in human life. His way of indicating this knowledge also characterizes what he considers valuable in an individual's experience. He objects to 'confessions,' to the way in which a Rousseau dwells on an emotion, not because of any intrinsic importance but merely because he himself has felt it. On the contrary, Dante, Eliot believes, 'had experiences which seemed to him of some importance; not of importance because they had happened to him and because he, Dante Alighieri, was an important person who kept press-cutting bureaux busy; but important in themselves; and therefore they seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value,'

The mood of 'Gerontion,' which also recognizes the intimate relation of sex and religion, is not far from the tone of these lines of Dante; but there is this distinction: in the reflections of the old man there is a full acceptance of suffering, but not the realization embodied in Eliot's later poems that 'the souls in purgatory suffer because they *wish to suffer,* for purgation,' (The tenacity of Eliot's preoccupations is revealed further by recalling that he made this statement just

before quoting once more, in his essay on *The Divine Comedy*, the Arnaut Daniel lines.)

These lines also connect directly with Eliot's belief that the creation of poetry itself springs out of suffering, a reiterated belief which helps define the particular nature of his poetry. He seems to hold as a self-evident psychological truth that all art is an effort 'to metamorphose private failures and disappointments,' that even Shakespeare 'was occupied with the struggle—which alone constitutes life for a poet—to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal,' Eliot is convinced that life for the perceptive individual must be painful; in his view, the relative thinness of Arnold's lines is owing to the fact that Arnold knew the discipline of culture, but not enough of the discipline of suffering. He goes ort to elucidate that the primary thing for the poet 'is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory. The vision of the horror and the glory was denied to Arnold, but he knew something of the boredom,'

One factor to be firmly grasped in this account of the origin of poetry is that the poet's suffering has no especial value in itself; it brings him an understanding of human life, and is thus material for art; but to become poetry it must be transformed from something personal into something of wider validity. That is to say, in a sentence from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' which like so many statements from that compact essay has taken on deeper significance in the light of Eliot's later writing, 'The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates,' Nor is any premium put upon the poet's suffering beyond the necessity of recognizing that, though pain is not desired by man, it is actual. What drew Eliot to Baudelaire was in part his 'strength merely to

suffer. He could not escape suffering and could not transcend it, so he attracted pain to himself. But what he could do, with that immense passive strength and sensibilities which no pain could impair, was to study his suffering,'

Eliot realizes that such a view of life is a limitation, that it is very unlike the balance of Dante, but likewise that what gives it reality is its comprehension of existing evil, which implies at least by contrast the possibility of a positive state of good. Eliot has acknowledged that he arrived at a full appreciation of the *Paradiso* much later than of the *Inferno* owing to his hatred of the 'cheerfulness, optimism, and hopefulness' of the nineteenth century, which left him with 'the prejudice that poetry not only must be found only *through* suffering but can find its material only *in* suffering.' The strength of his dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of the previous generation's conception of the relation of good to evil is again paralleled by Yeats's horror at the brittle superficial optimism of such a view of life as Shaw's, who once appeared to him in a dream in the form of a sewing-machine, 'that clicked and shone, but the incredible thing was that the machine smiled, smiled perpetually.'

Eliot's conception of poetry as rising out of suffering suggests the limitations of his own. It is not easy to think of Homer or Chaucer or Dryden as considering poetry in this way (there is a conspicuous lack of comment on Chaucer in Eliot's criticism); and it is notable that both Dante and Shakespeare found their material in many other states of feeling as well. Eliot's view emphasizes the fact that the elements of tradition which have seemed most alive to him, in the symbolists as well as in the metaphysicals, and which have consequently given the most immediate stimulus for the shaping of his own verse, are relatively narrow and strained in their dramatic intensity. But recognition of his limits once more points to his wholeness within them: where

since Tourneur or Middleton has there been such bare sustained dramatic verse of the first order as in lines like these:

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What's not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think
Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.
Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house.

And where in modern poetry are there characters realized with such convincing defmiteness as Prufrock and Sweeney? The completeness with which Eliot has been able to suggest them within the compass of extremely few lines might indicate how much shrewd perception is packed into their dramatic portrayal. Certainly both represent so widely pervasive elements in modern city life that they can stand almost as symbols. They are as unlike as two characters could well be; and the very chasm between them is typical of the harsh social disruption which characterizes the city near which Eliot spent the years of his adolescence. On the one hand, he could observe the timid inhibitions of Prufrock, regretting situations unexplored but prevented from giving himself to anything emotionally real by an excessive fastidiousness—his only residue of the Puritan conscience. Such

a figure would belong to Eliot's description of Boston 'society' as 'quite uncivilized, but refined beyond the point of civilization,' At the other extreme there is 'apeneck Sweeney,' whose prototype Eliot has said he first saw in a bar in South Boston, and an enduring impression of whom is provided by one brief description:

> *Sweeney addressed full length to shave*
> *Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base,*
> *Knows the female temperament*
> *And wipes the suds around his face.*
>
> *(The lengthened shadow of a man*
> *Is history, said Emerson*
> *Who had not seen the silhouette*
> *Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.)*

And if it is objected that a middle-aged dilettante and a tough Irishman of the sort whose eyes are 'assured of certain certainties' are hardly widely typical of the life of greater Boston, and that they still don't become so even when you add Miss Helen Slingsby the maiden aunt, and Cousin Harriet with her *Transcript,* sporting Miss Nancy Ellicott who rides to hounds and dances 'all the modern dances,' the palace of dowager Mrs. Phlaccus and the teas of Professor and Mrs. Channing-Cheetah; not forgetting Rachel *nee* Rabinovich, Doris 'towelled from the bath,' and Sweeney's other sinister companions from the international underworld—the answer is that even though they by no means do typify the whole life of the city, nevertheless they acutely suggest many of the fragments into which that whole is broken.

When Eliot was creating these figures, he doubtless had no feeling of giving them representative value beyond the fact that he was making ironic poems out of some of his most compellingly recurrent, if painful, perceptions. But partly tor that very reason the complete difference between Prufrock and Sweeney is significant of the dangerously violent

contrast that confronts any sensitive observer of the city: the thin upper-class 'culture'; the life of the half-educated mass, full-blooded but brutalized. This split yields eloquent evidence for the charge that Emerson himself brought against American life—that it was rich and salty on the common levels, but that it had a repeated tendency to become arid and bleached at the top. The dry intellectualized distrusting of the emotions, which Emerson recognized as the worst blight that had been left by waning Puritanism, still prevails in the vestiges of the genteel tradition, and thus produces distorted lives in which thought and feeling find no harmony. And the jagged cleavage that separates such lives from that of Sweeney and the mass of the populace is sufficient measure of our continued failure to establish anything like a balanced social order.

In drawing attention to the symbolic value of Eliot's two most striking characters there is no intention to suggest that he has created anything like a complete world. Indeed, it is questionable whether any poets in English except Chaucer and Shakespeare have succeeded in so doing. But some readers object that Eliot's view of life is peculiarly narrow; they object to his describing contemporary existence as a waste land. Most of the force of that objection is lost, I believe, when it is understood that he is not thus characterizing the present as distinct from the past, but is probing the implications of certain tragic elements inherent in the very nature of life.'Éliot himself gave a warning against the misreading of his poem in a brief comment which he made in 1931: 'I dislike the word "generation," which has been a talisman for the last ten years; 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,' Eliot appears to be striking there at the cliche

phrase, 'the lost generation,' which, at the moment it was coined by Gertrude Stein, had some relevance to the attitude behind the powerful but narrowly dated stories of Ernest Hemingway; but which, as it has been thoughtlessly if sentimentally repeated, has become increasingly meaningless. There is a great difference between an understanding that tragedy is at the heart of life, and an adolescent self-pitying of one's own generation as being especially unfortunate. The anarchy and futility of war inevitably heighten the sense of the horror in existence; but for this sense to have significance, it must be part of a total vision of the meaning of lite.

The value of the tragic writer has always lain in the uncompromising honesty with which he has cut through appearances to face the real conditions of man's lot, in his refusal to be deceived by an easy answer, in the unflinching, if agonized, expression of what he knows to be true. The effect of such integrity is not to oppress the reader with a sense of burdens too great to be borne, but to bring him some release. For, if it is part of the function of every great artist to transform his age, the tragic writer does so not by delivering an abstract idealization of life, but by giving to the people who live in the age a full reading of its weakness and horror; yet, concurrently, by revealing some enduring potentiality of good to be embraced with courage and with an ecstatic sense of its transfiguring glory. Through the completeness of his portrayal of the almost insupportable conditions of human existence, he frees his audience from the oppression of fear; and stirring them to new heart by his presentation of an heroic struggle against odds, he also enables them to conceive anew the means of sustaining and improving their own lives. Only thus can he communicate both 'the horror' and 'the glory,'[6]

Consequently, objection to Eliot's particular limited kind of tragic vision would logically have to be brought also against such writers as Webster or Hawthorne; and could be

made only as a result of that 'systematic judgement' which Arnold found the most worthless of all critical attitudes: the judgement which falls farthest from seeing the object as it is by dismissing a poet for not meeting certain preconceived requirements, that would reject Dryden for not being like Shelley, or Eliot for not giving the same affirmation of life that you find in Keats. In contrast to this attitude, the final way of judging a poet is by the authentic value of what he has actually done; and to gauge this while remembering that, as Eliot himself knows, one of the greatest services of poetry lies in its power to 'make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world,'

But for many readers who were delighted by the satiric bite of Eliot's earlier poems, and for those who even accepted the present as a waste land in a sense that he hardly meant it,[7] there has grown up a barrier against further appreciation of his work in the fact that he has begun to write religious poetry. For an objection to religious poetry is a widely spread prejudice of to-day. It is felt that the acceptance of dogma is a retreat from facing our present problems, felt most keenly by those who have accepted the even stricter dogma of Karl Marx. In consequence, as Allen Tate phrased it in the only intelligent review of *Ash Wednesday* that I found in any of the well-known periodicals: 'The reasoning that is being brought to bear upon Mr. Eliot's recent verse is as follows: Anglo-Catholicism would not at all satisfy me; therefore, his poetry declines under its influence. Moreover, the poetry is not contemporaneous; it doesn't solve any labor problems; it is special, personal, and it can do us no good,'[8]

It is not my purpose here to attempt either to justify or disparage Eliot's entrance into the Church. My point is the

same as Tate's: that for an appreciation of Eliot's poetry the question of our own acceptance or rejection of his doctrine remains irrelevant. This point is fundamental to any understanding of the nature of art, and hence is one of the cruxes of my interpretation of Eliot. It therefore requires some further elaboration. My contention is not that what a poet believes is without importance in determining his relation to the intellectual history of his day. Certainly the principal element in what Eliot means by the poet's 'sense of his own age' is, as we have seen, the way in which he is able 'to express the greatest emotional intensity of his time, based on whatever his time happened to think,' Now one test that might be used in determining the differing rank of poets is the degree to which they possess such a sense: thus Dante is a much more inclusive and catholic poet than Baudelaire in proportion to the greater extent to which he voiced the preoccupations of his contemporaries. Another application of this test would show that any one who set out to-day to write a poem based on the exact scheme of the universe which Dante followed would inevitably betray in every line his lack of any sense of his age, and so of any real understanding of human life. But there is always the danger of applying such a test too abstractly and externally. Particularly in approaching the work of a contemporary there is the risk that, unless his mind seems to be moving along the accustomed grooves of rationalistic scientific thought, and especially if, as in Eliot's case, he reasserts the mystery of life in religious terms, the modern reader will at once jump to the conclusion that he can have nothing valuable to say. But, although it is essential for the artist to observe humanity under the guise of his time, the way he interprets what he observes admits a wide margin of variance. What Blake *saw* was very different from what met the eyes of other men in the eighteenth century; and yet, at this distance, his is revealed to be the profound knowledge of human emotions.

For, paradoxically, part of what is meant by saying that a great poet gives expression to the life of his time depends on the way in which he reverses many of its popular maxims and cuts through the mass of conventional opinion and prejudice.

What must be remembered in any discussion of the relation of a poet to his age is the truth of the sentence with which Eliot followed the remark quoted in the last paragraph: 'Poetry is not a substitute for philosophy or theology or religion,' It has a function of its own, a function 'not intellectual, but emotional,' the nature of which can be apprehended only in terms of the effect produced by its combination of rhythmical movement with the sound and sense of words—elements which I have sought to analyse in my foregoing chapters. One of the surest ways to fail to understand a poem is to begin by trying to tear the thought from the context in order to approve or disapprove of what it seems to express. For the important thing, as Richards has reaffirmed, is 'not what a poem says, but what it *is';* and the only way of knowing what it does express is by a sustained awareness of all the formal elements of which it is composed. Only in this way, by experiencing the poem as a whole, and then by evaluating it 'from the inside,' so to speak, by trusting the evidence of your senses for its effect, can you determine whether or not the poem is alive; and thus, in turn, whether or not the poet has a sense of his age, whether what he believes and imagines about human destiny springs from a direct contact with life. A continuously original rhythm cannot be faked; it can arise only from the poet's own response to physical and emotional movement. False diction, words that are not wholly felt, words whose implications are not understood by the poet, artificial metaphors, manufactured symbols—all quickly betray themselves to an eye experienced in the texture of verse. A borrowed structure which has not been fully assimilated—either of thought or

of form—will give itself away as baldly as an affected gesture or a secondhand emotion.

The kind of approach to poetry for which I am contending was outlined in part by the demands that Eliot stressed in his early essay on 'The Perfect Critic,' He indicated there the false approach that is made by the reader who likes 'one poet because he reminds him of himself, or another because he expresses emotions which he admires'; who, in brief, simply uses art as an outlet for his egotism. In contrast to that attitude, it is Eliot's conviction that 'the end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed; thus we aim to see the object as it really is and find a meaning for the words of Arnold,'

The attitude expressed in that sentence may seem somewhat stiff; it may seem to remove poetry too completely from everyday life. It is probable that Eliot had such a sentence in mind when, in a new preface to *The Sacred Wood* written in 1928, he regretted a certain tone of 'pontifical solemnity' in these earlier essays. In the intervening eight years he had come to understand more fully 'the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and of other times';[9] to understand likewise that the enjoyment of poetry cannot be wholly divorced from the beliefs it expresses. He had become more aware, for example, that part of the reason why he preferred the poetry of Dante to that of Shakespeare was because it seemed to him 'to illustrate a saner attitude towards the mystery of life'; and, likewise, that part of his distaste for the romantic poets was owing to the lack of correspondence between their beliefs and a mature understanding of experience. Nevertheless, in the course of his study of Dante in the following year, he reiterated his conclusion, which is similar to what Richards has reached from a very different angle,[10] that it is perfectly possible 'to have full literary or poetic appreciation without sharing the beliefs of the poet'; that,

indeed, 'there is a distinct pleasure in enjoying poetry as poetry when one does *not* share the beliefs,' If this were not the case it would mean that the range of a modern reader's full appreciation would be limited to very few poets, that only Catholics could appreciate Chaucer, and that no one at all could appreciate Milton or Aeschylus.

Eliot's conclusion rests on the assumption which, in returning to *The Sacred Wood* to write his later preface, he realized as the central one of the book, as the one which gave his various essays whatever coherence they possessed. This assumption was the integrity of a work of art, and was emphasized by 'the repeated assertion that when we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not another thing,' Eliot knows that it is quite impossible to make an adequate definition of poetry; but he also knows that when we criticize and evaluate we are right to begin with the conception of poetry 'as excellent words in excellent arrangement and excellent metre,' Such a statement may seem unnecessarily obvious; but it is particularly necessary to be plain at a time when works of art are increasingly being confused with the doctrines which they embody. The confusion is especially great in dealing with literature since, in approaching an art whose medium is words, it is very hard to make relevant distinctions between content and form, to distinguish the idea from the expression. In painting it is clear that although the frescoes of Rivera spring directly from his belief in the communist cause and have great force as propaganda, his skill as an artist is something very different from this belief, and that what establishes his work as great art is what also established the frescoes of Giotto—of comparable value as propaganda for Christianity: the complete mastery of the demands of his form. Likewise no one would question the permanent worth to the human spirit of the" work of such painters as Vermeer or Cezanne, neither of whom was using for his material the representa-

tion of any religious or political doctrines whatsoever, but, for the most part, the everyday objects and scenes which surrounded him, and which each transformed into a new realm of space, colour, and design.

It is equally true that although a poem grows organically out of the life of its time, it is not a document but a work of art; that is to say, it possesses in a very real sense a life of its own which is distinct from the biography of its creator and also from any idea or belief that it expresses. Crashaw's poetry has been enjoyed by agnostics as well as by Catholics; it is not read as a statement of doctrine, but because of the burning imagery and ecstatic music with which the poet could invest his feelings. Professor Lowes's demonstration of the extraordinary range of associations from reading and life which fused to form 'The Ancient Mariner' certainly enables us to understand more fully the relation of that poem to the tangled web of newly stirring interests which culminated in the romantic movement, as well as giving us a glimpse into the creative process itself. But the finished poem remains distinct both from those interests and from that process. It is certainly not read for the metaphysical speculation which fascinated Coleridge, or primarily for any other reason than that it is 'an excellent arrangement' of fresh words and haunting rhythm. In the case of Wordsworth, it is true that one cannot read him without at least some sympathy for his transcendental approach to nature. But sympathetic understanding is very different from acceptance; and, the fact that 'Tintern Abbey' is a great poem does not depend on the question of whether or not we agree with Wordsworth's views, but on the realization that these lines beat with the convincing note which only a rarely sincere and original rhythm can communicate, and thus persuade of the genuineness of their vision as they make us share it.

If it is maintained that the preoccupations and beliefs from which Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry issued were

more central to the emotional and intellectual life of their day than Eliot's preoccupations and beliefs are to ours, I find that extremely hard to demonstrate except in the light of further history. It is too often forgotten that the first rather narrow circulation of the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 did not make that date appear to be the beginning of a new epoch that it has since become. In fact the publishers gave away the copyright of the volume because it did not seem valuable enough to keep. But even granting that the current of thought in which Eliot is moving is not the major current of the day, that would not alter my contention, which is also his, that the centre of value in a work of art is in the work produced and not in the emotions or thoughts of the poet, that 'it is not the "greatness," the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts,' Although they do not embrace any important volume of thought and cannot stand as the major expression of an age, the poems of Marvell are quite as alive still as those of Milton. For Marvell's particular essence, his mature 'alliance of levity and seriousness,' the wise urbanity beneath his 'slight lyric grace,' has been fused into a perfection of form, the only means of creating anything that will endure beyond the irrelevances of change. And such mastery is a rare enough human accomplishment to make us want to understand as much of its secret as we can.

Of all Eliot's poems *Ash Wednesday* would have the best chance of appealing to an audience that could neither read nor write. Even though the feelings which he is expressing are extremely complex, and the sequence of his thought is by no means easy to follow, it nevertheless remains true that on its first hearing the poem is capable of making an instantaneous impression purely through the beauty of its sound. For here Eliot has been able to summon up all the resources

of his auditory imagination in such a way that the listener can begin to feel the rare force of what is being communicated and to accept the poem as a kind of ritualistic chant, long before his mind is able to give any statement of its 'meaning,'

As we turn to reading the poem rather than listening to it aloud, we are increasingly struck by the fresh clarity of the words and are led to a reflection similar to Eliot's on Dante, that the style 'has a peculiar lucidity—a *poetic* as distinguished from an *intellectual* lucidity. The thought may be obscure, but the word is lucid, or rather translucent,' This is especially true in the second section—for the structure consists of a series of six progressive developments of a theme rather than a single whole—where an extraordinarily pure impression of whiteness is created by the imagery which presents 'three white leopards,' the 'brightness' of scattered bones, 'the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand,' as well as the Lady who

is withdrawn
In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.

Noticing Eliot's resort to allegory, we are again reminded of what he said in relation to Dante: that 'the allegorical method makes for simplicity and intelligibility,' that 'for a competent poet,' it 'means *clear visual images.'* And we realize that it was no accident that *Ash Wednesday* was published in the year after Eliot's essay on Dante, but that his renewed study of *The Divine Comedy* and the *Vita Nuova* had flowered into stimulus for his own verse. One marked departure, however, from Dante's use of allegory is the inevitable absence in Eliot of the strict medieval interpretation of what the figures stand for. In this respect he shows himself still close to the method of the symbolists (just as his rhythm in some sections seems to reveal the new influence of Hopkins). For example, when he begins:

jLady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull,

it is manifest that the three leopards are less definite in their signification than the three beasts from the opening canto of the *Inferno* which they naturally call to mind, the leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf—though for that matter one also recalls the jungle of commentary that has grown up around the dispute to explain exactly what Dante himself meant to symbolize. Dante possibly intended to have his beasts stand for historical figures and warring political states as well as for the worldly pleasure, ambition, and avarice which were preying on the poet's life. With Eliot we are simply presented the picture of his three beasts 'having fed to satiety'; and for their emotional significance here that picture seems adequate; it is unnecessary to translate them into abstractions such as the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Exactly what Eliot's method is in handling allegory may be seen more plainly in considering the figure of his Lady, for, as a result of the way in which she is described in distinct definite images and yet left at the same time indefinite and suggestive, she can stand at once as Beatrice or a saint or the Virgin herself, as well as being an idealized beautiful woman. Thus, under a very different aspect, we observe an intrinsic likeness here to Eliot's method of expression in *The Waste Land,* and, indeed, in such earlier poems as 'Sweeney among the Nightingales': his desire for a paradoxical precision in vagueness.[11] That is to say, he again wants to make as accurate a description of the object as he can and then let its indefinite associations unfold variously in different readers' minds. For readers of to-day who no longer believe in the elaborate hierarchies and gradations of Dante's system, the figures of Beatrice and the Virgin, though distinct, possess similar connotations. They convey like attri-

butes of merciful intercession. And the way Eliot manages to suggest this quality of both without naming either is another instance of how he indicates the general in the particular, of how he can impart in a single passage a range of different and yet related experiences.

In such fashion are we shown concrete evidence of how a modern poet can profit from Dante, and yet not become archaic. Eliot's suggestion of the purgatorial mount in his prolonged image of the winding stair is equally alive since it does not involve the acceptance of an outmoded cosmography, for no physical existence is implied for the hill, which has been wholly transmuted into a symbol for spiritual struggle and conquest. By his use of the symbol of the Lady, Eliot reveals again what that method of presentation is designed to accomplish in Blake and Yeats as well as in the French poets. The successful symbol possesses its peculiar concentrated vitality through communicating the sense of standing for something larger than itself. Only by its embodiment of the indefinite in the definite, the impalpable in the concrete, can the symbol create the illusion that it is giving expression to the very mystery of life.

Readers of Eliot's earlier poetry, missing the electric shock of his special kind of surprise, may object that the texture of *Ash Wednesday* seems thin. But even in its most limpid passages there is gradually disclosed an unexpected density of implication. Consider the strange aura of feeling which surrounds these three leopards. The act they have done is terrifying, and yet they are so portrayed that our principal reaction is a fascination with their beauty. Just for that reason they seem to set the tone for this second section of the poem, which mounts to its conclusion:

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other
Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing o,' *sand,*

Forgetting themselves and each other, united
In the quiet of the desert. This is the land which ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity
Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

Through *The Waste Land* and 'The Hollow Men' resounded the poet's dread of death and dissolution, a shudder at the thought of bones 'rattled by the rat's foot only year to year. But here that terror has been transcended in a vision of death itself as the promised land. And in such a mystical vision of the serenity that will follow upon release from the body, even the very agents of dissolution themselves no longer seem terrifying, but are merged into the radiance of death itself become life.

If Eliot is no longer employing the method of sharp contrasts that voiced his poignant sense of the similarity of opposites and thus brought a wide scope of life into his condensed passages, he still can endow his words with an equally valuable potential range of meaning. The fourth section of *Ash Wednesday,* following directly after the tortuous ascent of the stair, presents a glimpse of an earthly paradise whereby the poet evokes imagery that will express the emotions he feels in contemplating the doctrines of Grace and Redemption. Its final lines may appear almost too naively simple, with their liquid sounds and transparent colours:

The silent sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews, behind the garden god,
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but spoke no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew

And after this our exile

But the visionary loveliness is punctuated by that short final line: 'after this glimpse, the exile once more of our life on earth.' The line itself is a phrase from the prayer, 'Salve Regina,' which follows the celebration of the Catholic Mass. The immediate context is: 'To thee do we send up our sighs mourning and weeping in this valley of tears; turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.' If the reader is also aware of that context, the line in the poem not only points away from the vision back to life, but also from life once more back to the vision, and thus re-emphasizes the turning movement upon which so much of the entire poem is built.

In fact, that movement—which is set up with the rhythm of the opening lines of the first section,

> *Because I do not hope to turn again*
> *Because I do not hope*
> *Because I do not hope to turn,*

crabbed lines that suggest turning in their very denial of its hope—more than any other element in the poem enforces the final impression that this is not an accomplished literary exercise in the traditional materials of devotional verse, but a work that corresponds to some of the deepest and most enduring feelings in the mind of its creator. So far in my analysis, by focusing on some of the most immediately appealing passages of sensuous beauty, I have probably obscured this integral element in the rhythm: the way it suggests the movement of the mind of the poet back and forth from doubt to acceptance. Perhaps the most evident measure of Eliot's technical expertness is the extraordinary alternation throughout the poem of two contrasting styles: one through its quiet clearness suggesting his moments of vision; the other through its laboured cadences expressing the re-

turning agony of his debate with himself. Shortly after his glimpse of beatitude in the garden follows the tormented series of questions:

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee . . .
Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray:
Pray for those who chose and oppose . . .
Will the veiled sister between the slender
Yew trees pray for those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender
And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks
In the last desert between the last blue rocks
The desert in the garden the garden in the desert
Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed.

This is the same dry torturing desert of rock that haunted the poet in the final section of *The Waste Land;* and the balance that is sustained in *Ash Wednesday* between knowledge of the desert and perception of the garden gives a tone of authority to both, and thus to the range of experience which they encompass. This poem is not an escape from the problem of life into an easy dream world. Its most urgent notes are suggested by the connotations of its title. On Ash Wednesday is performed the ritual of anointing the forehead with ashes, while the priest recites: 'Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return,'

In a few sentences in *After Strange Gods* Eliot put his finger on the usual weakness of religious poetry:

Why, I would ask, is most religious verse so bad; and why does so little religious verse reach the highest levels of poetry? Largely, I think, because of a pious insincerity. The capacity for writing poetry is rare; the capacity for religious emotion of the first intensity is rare; and it is to be expected that the existence of both capacities in the same individual should be rarer still.

People who write devotional verse are usually writing as they want to feel, rather than as they do feel.

It is apparent from all of Eliot's work that he would like to be able to feel a more compelling faith than he does, that one of the severest problems of life to-day as he has found it is the great difficulty for the individual to give himself completely to any belief. Nevertheless, he has not written as he would like to feel, or as he thinks he ought to feel, but as he does feel; and consequently, in *Ash Wednesday* as in *The Waste Land* he has given dramatic expression to a whole complex state of mind. Failure to perceive his dramatic structure has led to the most obvious quarrel with the poem. 'I am made a little tired,' wrote Edmund Wilson, and many others have echoed him, 'at hearing Eliot, only in his early forties, present himself as an "aged eagle" who asks why he should make the effort to stretch his wings.' That question, which is asked in the halting opening lines, depends for its final significance on the way that it is seen in the light of the completed poem. In these opening lines, as in Trufrock,' Eliot is turning his irony upon himself; here is the dramatic portrayal of an individual as he appears to himself at one moment of soliloquy. The emptiness of the attitude disclosed in this question is thrown into sharpest relief by the way in which the final section of the poem recurs to this phrase, but with the significant shift from 'Because I do not hope to turn again' to 'Although I do not hope to turn again,'

For as a result of his acceptance of humility and his partial ascent of the purgatorial mount, the fibre of his life has been strengthened, so that even his moments of temptation and perplexity no longer take the form of the unrelieved blackness of hopelessness, but of an unexpected renewal of desire for life of the senses. And this fresh understanding of the possibilities of life is pointed by the contrast in imagery between these lines in the first section:

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely vans to beat the air
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will

and these in the last:

. . . though I do not wish to wish these things
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices. . .

Once more Eliot has devoted his attention to finding the right 'objective correlative,' His lyrical poetry is still primarily dramatic—it is illuminating that he made one of the characters in his 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,' written two years before *Ash Wednesday,* say that 'the consummation of the drama, the perfect and ideal drama, is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass.' And it seems to me as false to object to his utterance of a mood of world-weariness as, making all distinctions between the volume of experience brought to bear, it would be to consider it a defect that Shakespeare, still under forty, spoke his disillusion in the soliloquies of *Hamlet.* Only by means of the uncompromising sensitiveness with which Eliot has persisted in his effort to find the exact pattern for his expression, has he succeeded in communicating to the reader the shades and nuances which compose for any experience its living character. As a result, by the time we reach the last poem of the the series, we have a full sense of the wavering of an individual spirit, its desire to lose itself in the universal Will, and yet its continual distraction back to the world of desire and loss. In proportion to the human reality of this indecision, we are able to feel how his doubt is 'integrated into the faith that transcends it' in the soaring desire for union voiced in the final prayer:

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

The feelings expressed in *Ash Wednesday* not only furnish grounds for the principal contemporary objection to religious poetry by denying the present goodness and progressive perfectibility of man. In addition, many of them run counter to the demand for an unqualified affirmation of optimistic confidence and a faith in the unfailing efficacy of immediate action. Nevertheless, though I do not share Eliot's belief in Anglo-Catholic dogma, by every test of word and rhythm, sense and sound, I receive a reiterated impression of the honesty with which *Ash Wednesday* has faced the nature of actual human existence, and thus of its being a wholly authentic poem.[12]

NOTES

1. Commentary in *The Criterion,* April 1933.

2. In 'The Cleft Eliot,' *The Saturday Review of Literature,* 12 November 1932.

3. Wilson's chapter on Eliot in *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of* 1870-1930 (New York, 1931), is less satisfactorily rounded than those on Joyce and Proust since he is' seemingly not as sensitive to the nature of poetry as to that of prose, and at all events devotes too great a proportion of his,

effort to outlining the influences and thought which enter into Eliot's poetry, not enough to analysis of the quality which welds these materials into their significance—Eliot's pre-eminent ability as an artist. As a result he states Eliot's importance, but does not enable us adequately to feel it. Nevertheless, as with everything Wilson writes, this essay has the rare quality of persevering honesty, the determination to state exactly what he has perceived, which makes him the most valuable of contemporary critics in this country.

4. Everyman Library Edition, 1931. As Eliot writes about Pascal's conversion we are given a different example of the way in which a writer can find 'an objective correlative,' of how he can tell us everything relevant to an understanding of his own state of mind by focusing his attention completely on the description of a similar state of mind in an historical figure.

5. Some of the qualities that attracted Eliot to the tradition of the Anglican Church are suggested in his essay on Lancelot Andrewes:

> To the ordinary observer the English Church in history means Hooker and Jeremy Taylor—and should mean Andrewes also: it means George Herbert, and it means the churches of Christopher Wren. This is not an error: a Church is to be judged by its intellectual fruits, by its influence on the sensibility of the most sensitive and on the intellect of the most intelligent, and it must be made real to the eye by monuments of artistic merit. The English Church has no literary monument equal to that of Dante, no intellectual monument equal to that of St. Thomas, no devotional monument equal to that of St. John of the Cross, no building so beautiful as the Cathedral of Modena or the basilica of St. Zeno in Verona. But there are those for whom the City churches are as precious as any of the four hundred odd churches in Rome which are in no danger of demolition, and for whom St. Paul's, in comparison with St. Peter's, is not lacking in decency; and the English devotional verse of the seventeenth century—admitting the one difficult case of conversion, that of Crashaw—finer than that of any other country or religion at the time.
>
> The intellectual achievement and the prose style of Hooker and Andrewes came to complete the structure of the English Church as the philosophy of the thirteenth century crowns the Catholic Church. To make this statement is not to compare the 'Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity' with the 'Summa.' The seventeenth century was not an age in which the Churches occupied themselves with metaphysics, and

none of the writings of the fathers of the English Church belongs to the category of speculative philosophy. But the achievement of Hooker and Andrewes was to make the English Church more worthy of intellectual assent. No religion can survive the judgment of history unless the best minds of its time have collaborated in its construction; if the Church of Elizabeth is worthy of the age of Shakespeare and Jonson, that is because of the work of Hooker and Andrewes.

But it should not be assumed that Eliot has accepted the dogma of the Church mainly because of its fruits, or that he has been led thereto for aesthetic reasons. The passage from Hulme which he quotes against the Humanists seems akin to the chain of reasoning which led to his own conversion:

I hold the religious conception of ultimate values to be right, the humanist wrong. From the nature of things, these categories are not inevitable, like the categories of time and space, but are *equally objective.* In speaking of religion, it is to this level of abstraction that I wish to refer. I have none of the feelings of *nostalgia,* the reverence for tradition, the desire to recapture the sentiment of Era Angelico, which seems to animate most modern defenders of religion. All that seems to me to be bosh. What is important, is what nobody seems to realize—the dogmas like that of Original Sm, which are the closest expression of the categories of the religious attitude. That man is in no sense perfect, but a wretched creature, who can yet apprehend perfection. It is not, then, that I put up with the dogma for the sake of the sentiment, but that I may possibly swallow the sentiment for the sake of the dogma.

Eliot adds this comment:

Most people suppose that some people, because they enjoy the luxury of Christian sentiments and the excitement of Christian ritual, swallow or pretend to swallow incredible dogma. For some the process is exactly opposite. Rational assent may arrive late, intellectual conviction may come slowly, but they come inevitably without violence to honesty and nature. To put the sentiments in order is a later and an immensely difficult task: intellectual freedom is earlier and easier than complete spiritual freedom.

6. John Strachey, in his plausible but summary account of contemporary literature in *The Coming Struggle for Power* (New York, 1933), though perceiving that the tragic view of life 'is the one thing which all the great writers of all ages have had in common,' nevertheless objects to what he conceives to be an inferiority in the work of present tragic writers owing to the fact

that they confuse the unavoidable tragedies of human existence in general with the entirely avoidable tragedies of the decaying capitalistic system. His principal charge against them is that 'since they do not extricate themselves from present-day society, since they are unable to stand outside of it, conceiving of a new basis for human life, they are themselves, inevitably, infected by their surroundings of decay,' That Joyce, Eliot, and Lawrence have all written as they have because of the conditions of life in the period in which they have lived, they themselves would be the last to deny. And notwithstanding their marked differences of approach, the fact of contemporary social decay has been an observation common to them all. But the assumption that the tragic writer can stand outside his age abstractly conceiving a new basis for human life, and at the same time create a vision of life as he has known it, seems to me inhuman; indeed, it seems purely verbalistic. Yet it is one of the most widespread contemporary fallacies that confuse the nature of art.

An individual sees tragedy in the life surrounding him; if he is greatly perceptive, like Dante, he may be able to endow that tragedy with universal significance. He may be appalled by the horror of life in his age like Swift or Baudelaire or the creator of Stephen Dedalus. He may fight bitterly against his age like Milton or Tolstoy or Lawrence, and reveal the evil resulting from its assumptions. But in so far as he conceives new possibilities for mankind, he can give those imaginings an illusion of reality only if he remains integrally a part of his age, only, that is to say, if the tragedy which he creates in words corresponds to potential elements in existence as he himself has experienced it. Tolstoy's pamphlets like *What is Art?* and *What is to be done?* undoubtedly owed their immediate effectiveness to their simplified distortion. But the great enduring value of *Anna Karenina* is attributable primarily to the fact that Tolstoy there did not write of life as he would like it to be, but as it was—and is.

If the writer stands outside of his age, he can envisage an ideal state like Rousseau or Marx; indeed, it is only by such *abstraction* that philosophical or political thought becomes possible. But the first requisite for the tragic poet or novelist is to comprehend and portray *concrete* experience. He may heighten and idealize it like Sophocles; but he must not thereby lessen the real existence of both evil and good. But such is at once the

effect if he takes refuge in the abstraction of 'a new basis for life.'

I do not mean by these remarks to deny the value of propaganda; or to make an impossible separation between it and art. I know that it is perfectly possible for a great artist like Milton to write, in addition to his poems, important political and religious tracts as well. My point is simply once more the chief assumption of my essay: that the poet and the political theorist, the artist and the philosopher, though all relating integrally to the age which produces them, express that relation in different ways. That does not impute a necessary superiority in value to the expression of the artist over that of the others. It is clear, for instance, that the works of greatest lasting value to come out of the Russian Revolution so far are the writings of Lenin and Trotzky. But a great poet would express the fact of the Revolution in a different manner. He might convey a new awareness of multitudinous possibilities of life, its glowing promise and yet bitter realities, as Shakespeare expressed the revolution that was transforming the bases of thought and feeling in his day. Or, like Milton, he might embody in concrete form the principal tenets of the thought itself. But in any case it would no longer be the historical accuracy of his statements, nor even the quality of his thought, that gave his poems their value. Milton's pamphlets are read for the importance of their ideas in relation to the development of seventeenth-century political theory; but readers are drawn to *Samson Agonistes* by a quality that still enables it to be a moving experience whether or not one is a special student of the seventeenth century. For, although many of Milton's same ideas are voiced in *Samson Agonistes*, what gives the poem its life is its quality of emotional expression through its expert fusion of content and form.

7. Certain writers, among them Conrad Aiken and Waldo Frank, seem to regard Eliot as a new incarnation of 'the lost leader.' Frank in particular appears to consider it the duty of the modern man to accept the blackness of the waste land, to plunge into it, to refuse to turn back to any old solution, but to cross courageously to a new mysterious dawn of the Whole. Perhaps his own words will give a clearer idea of his meaning:

> Only athletic souls can face a world that has become, perhaps more than any other era, an overwhelmingly open and darkened future.

The temptation to limit this world, either by rationalistically charting its future (a disguised reactionism) or by merely advocating its reform in an image of the past, is great and manifold. . . The one way of life that has no limit and affords no comfort is the way ahead—into the bitter and dark and bloody dawn of a new world, wherein mankind shall integrate without loss the stormy elements that make the chaos of our day, and its promise. ('The "Universe" of T. S. Eliot,' *The New Republic*, 26 October 1932.)

A sympathy with Frank's passionate conviction of the necessity for the reintegration of modern life cannot blind one to the loose rhetoric and wishful thought of such a passage. The basic fallacy in the kind of criticism of which Frank's work is a notable exemplar is suggested in his own statement in *The Rediscovery of America:* T am not discussing art: I am using art, in a purpose of research,' The assumption that you can 'use' art in this way is dangerous. For it is impossible even to understand a work of art unless you are devoted to observation and contemplation of the concrete work itself. And if, instead of keeping your eye trained on the whole object, you manipulate the content of a poem to cast light on historical tendencies, or, worse still, take lines out of their context and generalize upon them as sociological evidence, you usually end by reading into the poem the tendencies you want to reveal by it. In addition, by reducing the poem to a document, you lose all contact with the experience that a work of art exists to communicate.

8. Some further sentences are relevant here:

To accept the poetry seems to amount to accepting an invitation to join the Anglican Church. For the assumption is that the poetry and the religious position are identical. If this were so, why should not the excellence of the poetry induce them to join the Church, in the hope of writing as well, since the irrelevance of the Church to their own needs makes them reject the poetry? The answer is, of course, that both parts of this fallacy are common. There is an aesthetic Catholicism, and there is a Communist-economic rejection of art because it is involved with the tabooed mode of salvation. *(The Hound and Horn*, Winter, 1931.)

The only other useful review of *Ash Wednesday* which I saw was by W. J. Gorman in *The Inlander*, November 1930. I am indebted to Mr. Gorman's valuable enumeration of some of the allusions in the poem to the Bible and to the Catholic Mass.

9. He had also become more fully aware that appreciation of literature cannot be divorced from an understanding of history and philosophy. In commenting on the career of Edmund Gosse (in *The Criterion,* July 1931), he remarked that Gosse, unlike Sainte-Beuve, 'was interested in literature for literature's sake; and I think that people whose interests are so strictly limited, people who are not gifted with any restless curiosity and not tormented by the demon of thought, somehow miss the keener emotions which literature can give,'

10. Richards's most matured discussion of poetry and belief is contained in *Practical Criticism* (London, 1929). His earlier brief treatment of the subject in *Science and Poetry* (London, 1926) is so oversimplified as to be almost without value.

11. Eliot once remarked that all he consciously set out to create in 'Sweeney among the Nightingales' was a sense of foreboding. Yet the very exactitude with which he has built up his impression by means of the close details of his night-town scene, as well as by the way he underlines his effect through a reference both in the epigraph and in the final stanza to another scene of foreboding that ended in the murder of Agamemnon, inevitably causes his delineation to take on wider implications. The contrast that seems at first to be mocking a debased present as it juxtaposes Sweeney with the hero of antiquity, ends in establishing also an undercurrent of moving drama: for a sympathetic feeling for Sweeney is set up by the realization that he is a man as well as Agamemnon, and that his plotted death is therefore likewise a human tragedy, as the end of Agamemnon's career was also sordid.

There is always a danger in reading poetry of making interpretations which are too rigidly detailed, or of exercising a supersubtlety—the word was Irving Babbitt's—which transforms a poem into a kind of puzzle to be solved. The interpretation of 'A Cooking Egg,' which I first heard in a lecture by I. A. Richards, and which was later published in Elizabeth Drew's *Discovering Poetry* (New York, 1933), does not escape from this danger.

Pipit sate upright in her chair
Some distance from where I was sitting;
'Views of the Oxford Colleges'
Lay on the table, with the knitting.

Daguerreotypes and silhouettes,
Her grandfather and great great aunts,
Supported on the mantelpiece
An 'Invitation to the Dance,'

The age of the T in the poem having been established through the epigraph as thirty, the following reasoning is brought to bear on these opening stanzas to determine the identity of Pipit: 'She is sitting "upright," "some distance" away—she obviously can't be the poet's mistress. To whom does one send *Views of the Oxford Colleges* during one's first term up? And who alone would keep the volume on the table after twelve years? Who, indeed, but one's old nurse?'

Such ingenuity, although it springs from the realization that every word in a well-made poem is designed to contribute to the presentation, nevertheless overreaches itself through passing by a more obvious meaning to pursue a more recondite one. Pipit is clearly not the poet's mistress, though you are not told so except by the exact description that starts with the first line. But her name might suggest that she is a little girl, an impression that is reinforced by several other details in the poem, and made most apparent by

But where is the penny world I bought
To eat with Pipit behind the screen?

The *Views of the Oxford Colleges* are only one of the accurately observed details by which the poet depicts the room that surrounds the small existence of Pipit and separates it from that of the thirty-year-old 'cooking egg.' And the total impression of the poem is thus much simpler than if the reader goes through the uncalled-for gymnastics of first jumping the hero back twelve years to account for the *Views;* and then again back to his childhood to account for the penny world which he bought at that time to eat with his old nurse. And in the simpler account, the contrast between the sophisticated world of the hero, with its smart disillusion and social decay, and the innocent world of Pipit, becomes, if anything, more affecting.

There is an important distinction, as Richards himself has demonstrated, between a sensitive awareness to every potential shade of connotation in the words of a poem, and an over-alert

kind of detective sense that is determined to ferret out hidden meanings.

12. In discussing the quality of doubt common to Montaigne, Pascal, and La Rochefoucauld, and to the French tradition generally in contrast with the English, Eliot remarked on 'the honesty with which they face the *donnees* of the actual world,'

VI

THE SENSE OF HIS OWN AGE

My opinion is this: that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling, and all truth is a species of revelation. . . It is *insolent* to *differ* from the public *opinion* in *opinion,* if it be only *opinion.* It is sticking up little *i by itself,* i against the whole alphabet. But one *word* with *meaning* in it is worth the whole alphabet together. Such is a sound argument, an incontrovertible fact.—Coleridge.

EVEN sympathetic readers of *Ash Wednesday* and 'Triumphal March' may feel that they show a decline from *The Waste Land* in that they do not give expression to so fully packed a range *ot* experience. But, unfortunatejy for sociological critics, an artist's career cannot be regarded as a continual 'progress,' nor plotted on a steadily rising curve. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' brought into union Eliot's ironic attitude with all the stimulus that he had received from his initial reading of Laforgue. As a result it possesses a finished mastery both of the material and of the form into which it is cast that puts it far beyond any of the other poems in his first volume of 1917—with the exception of 'Portrait of a Lady'—though they were written during the following five years. In like manner, 'Gerontion,' in 1919, marks a second crystallization and synthesis which lifts it entirely above the rank of the poems composed at about that time, such as 'The Hippopotamus' or 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' which read as though they were the work of a much younger, less mature man. Eliot himself, while commenting on Pound, has described the only way in which a poet's curve can be charted: his

work may proceed along two lines on an imaginary graph; one of the lines being his conscious and continuous effort in technical excellence, that is, in continually developing his medium

for the moment when he really has something to say. The other line is just his normal human course of development, his accumulation and digestion of experience (experience is not sought for, it is merely accepted in consequence of doing what we really want to do), and by experience I mean the results of reading and reflection, varied interests of all sorts, contacts and acquaintances, as well as passion and adventure. Now and then the two lines may converge at a high peak, so that we get a masterpiece. That is to say, an accumulation of experience has crystallized to form material of art, and years of work in technique have prepared an adequate medium; and something results in which medium and material, form and content, are indistinguishable.

The very completeness of this union may cause confusion for the first readers of a new work: it may make them find difficulties that don't exist; mistake perfection for simpleness or slightness; or underestimate the force of what is being communicated. We tend too easily to pride ourselves on our superiority to the initial stupid reviewers of Wordsworth and Keats, and to forget that new art, a fresh way of interpreting life, has always to make its own audience. When Eliot's first poems appeared during the War, they were read, if at all, as an odd kind of *vers de societe;* only gradually was it discovered that this slender volume was to have the effect, as Wyndham Lewis described it, of the little musk that scents a whole room.

In similar fashion, an impression of the comparative tenuousness of Eliot's later poems may prove illusory. It was probably impossible for him to strive towards a focused clarity of expression for his developing religious and political convictions without sacrificing part of his earlier complexity. But if there is loss in quickening surprise through the lessening of his sudden contrasts, there is in compensation a pervading, if less conspicuous quality: a sureness of accent and a quiet depth of tone. The one constant element through all the stages of his work has been his exact fitting of means to end, his rarely failing ability to perfect in each

case the very kind of form he wanted for the particular content. The relative slimness of his production has tended to obscure his remarkable range in style. Indeed, as you read through his poems chronologically, he seems to have become expert in one mode of presentation only to move on to something else. After the 1917 volume the re-echoing manner of Laforgue diminishes, and such loosely flowing experiments as 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' disappear altogether. Then, having carried his study of French versification to the point of writing some poems in that language, he mastered his handling of the quatrain of Gautier and thereafter has used it no more. Likewise his meeting of the late Elizabethan dramatists so completely on their own ground has never been repeated since 'Gerontion.' "Both *The Waste*.. Land and Ash *Wednesday* are notable for the great variety of original verse forms that they employ within a Short space; but the difference betweep these forms in the two poems is almost total.

Such versatility in style should in no degree be mistaken for mere technical virtuosity. Eliot is an example of the type of artist—and Joyce is another—whose motivating desire is to bring his expression to the greatest excellence he can, and then not to repeat it. Certain social implications can assuredly be drawn from the fact that not only Joyce and Eliot, but such other representative artists as Stravinsky and Picasso, have all felt within the past four decades a common urgency not to rest in the development of one manner, but to press on from each discovery to another. In the case of both the novelist and the poet their unwillingness to be confined long to any given method of presentation is obviously owing in part to their extraordinary historical consciousness, to their knowledge of so many possible techniques that they cannot remain satisfied with the limitations of any one. Probing beneath considerations of technique to the reasons for such a period of widespread experimentation in all the

arts, one can undoubtedly link it with our contemporary sense of chaotic change and upheaval, of disequilibrium and insecurity. At the same time it is too easily forgotten in the current generalizations about the collapse of our culture that experiment, the trial of new possibilities, is a sign of life and not of death. And the ominous feeling that the fluctuation of the arts furnishes only one of many evidences that we are witnessing the final breakdown of all tradition often fails to take into consideration similar instability in other ages." Perhaps too much has been made of the fact that Donne's experiments, when seen against the background of his day, are even more radical than Eliot's; yet his restless invention of more than forty stanzaic forms is one unmistakable mark of his unsatisfied quest for certainty. But to take a seemingly far more traditional artist: it should not be obscured by time that Milton's whole career, his unending search for truth that rejected in turn the Anglican and Presbyterian creeds to pass to more and more independent definitions, is paralleled by the remarkably different stages in his development as a poet. Approached without preconceptions 'Arcades' and *Paradise Regained* would scarcely seem to be the work of the same man any more than *Chamber Music* and *Ulysses.* This juxtaposition may seem less incongruous the more one reflects on a remark that I heard Eliot make in conversation, that Joyce is the greatest master of the English language since Milton.

To return from this excursus: the value of any experiment in art lies in the length to which it is carried, whether it is merely the by-product of erratic or undisciplined fancy, or whether it has built up into a completed masterwork. Throughout Eliot's variety persists the enduring sameness that I have already noted, a result of the unusual degree to which he has composed all his work around certain focal centres that possess ,for him a special symbolical value. He has revealed other long preoccupations of a

significance comparable to his persistent return to the twenty-sixth canto of the *Purgatorio.* A pattern could be made of his recurring images: of how often a sudden release of the spirit is expressed through sea-imagery which, with its exact notation of gulls and granite rocks and the details of sailing, seems always to spring from his own boyhood experience off the New England coast, just as his city-imagery belongs to Boston and London; of the equally numerous times when certain spring flowers, lilacs and hyacinths, appear in passages which express the stirring of desire warring against the memory of previous failure; of the widely varied occasions when he presents a moment of beauty and its loss by a glimpse of a girl, 'her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers';[x] of how, in such different poems as Trufrock' and *Ash Wednesday,* a sudden ecstatic loveliness is caught in 'blown hair':

> *. . . brown hair over the mouth blown,*
> *Lilac and brown hair;*
> *Distraction . . .*

The drama of *The Waste Land* is built upon the contrast of repeated and varying symbols of drought and rain; much of its unified effect depends upon the frequent return of the theme of the Unreal City, with its 'trams and dusty trees,' its murky streets 'under the brown fog of a winter noon,' its dull canal made suddenly horrible by the slimy belly of a rat. In such repulsive images, in his insistent use of the sordid and disgusting to picture disintegration and decay, Eliot is again comparable to Webster. But, in considering Eliot's relatively narrow stock of repeated images, it is gradually discovered that what enables them to embrace a wider range of experience than would at first appear is the fact that they release markedly different shades of feeling according to their contexts. The desert rocks and dry bones of *The Waste Land* and the soaring gull at the close of

'Gerontion' carry very different implications from similar objects in *Ash Wednesday*. The subtly differing connotations of the chief symbols within the course of *The Waste Land* itself are one of the strongest means by which the poet conveys the complexity of the existence that confronts him. The life-giving element of water can alone restore the kingdom (water is one of the most ancient symbols of sexual fertility); but in order to break the drought the hero must give himself up to the perilous quest. The necessity of self-sacrifice and the instinctive revulsion from it, the inability to commit himself to belief and the mounting fear that makes him recoil even from the vital forces of life in his dread of defeat and failure—such elements form the situation in which the hero, as unable as Hamlet to come to a resolution, is haunted by the thought of 'death by water,' The doubt that paralyses his desire to give himself is rendered concrete by the way in which water itself so often in the poem is made to appear anything but life-giving, as the squalid Thames instead of the 'damp gust bringing rain' that is longed for. In like manner, the basic symbol of fire is employed in a double sense. In 'The Fire Sermon' it stands tor the destroyer, for the sterile lusts of the city, for the desire that burns without any definite object; it is only in the closing lines of the final section that fire, seen under a different^ aspect, represents the purifier, the purgatorial flame. Thus, purely in terms of Eliot's dominant images, it can be discerned how both their repetition and divergence help to bind together his various observations into a unified vision.[2]

In view of the emerging contours in his most recent work, one of the most significant of Eliot's symbols is what he finds in the figure of Coriolanus. The statement in one of his earlier essays that *'Coriolanus* may not be as "interesting" as *Hamlet,* but it is, with *Antony and Cleopatra,* Shakespeare's most assured artistic success,' [8] might have pre-

pared us for the realization that the meaning of this play is deeply implanted in Eliot's consciousness. In 'A Cooking Egg' Coriojanus is linked with Sir Philip Sidney as a type of the hero; in *The Waste Land* he apeears in the reflections of the poet on the second of the these commands heard in the rumbling of the thunder—'Give, Sympathize, Control':

> *,' have heard the key*
> *Turn in the door once and turn once only*
> *We think of the key, each in his prison*
> *Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison*
> *Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours*
> *Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus*

The individual locked in his solitary identity can escape from this obsession only by self-surrender and by sympathy with others. Calling him 'a broken Coriolanus' at first seems only another instance of Eliot's manner of contrasting the present and the past: the historic splendour of the great individual is gone; in the modern world the aristocrat has been crushed by the mob—again we are not far from the dilemma voiced by Flaubert But as a relevant undertone here, it must not be forgotten that, in spite of all his noble strength and his gifts of leadership, Coriolanus at least in part deserved his tragedy; pride alienated him from his people and brought him to his destruction, pride which is the worst of sins in Dante's theology (as well as in the view of life which lies behind 'Ethan Brand' and *The Scarlet Letter),* since, being at the opposite pole from humility, it cuts the individual off both from man and from God.

Further extension is given to such implications in 'Triumphal March.' Coriolanus is not specifically suggested as the hero there; but Eliot subsequently grouped this poem and its sequel under the title *Coriolan,* thus possibly reminiscent of Beethoven's overture as well. And in the second poem, 'Difficulties of a Statesman,' there is mention of the

Volscians, and words directly borrowed from Shakespeare's play. I suppose 'Triumphal March' would be described by Michael Gold as a Fascist poem; but it was written before Hitler's advent to power and none of the qualities of its hero glimpsed for a moment by the waiting crowd suggest either his or Mussolini's:

Look
There he is now, look:
There is no interrogation in those eyes
Or in the hands, quiet over the horse's neck,
And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.
O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,
Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water
At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

In fact the weave of this poem is so intricate, as a result of Eliot's desire to suggest the dense pattern of reality, that the isolation of any one strand into a prose statement runs the risk of oversimplifying its meaning. There is an observed beauty in the heavy processional movement:

Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves, horses' Jieels
Over the paving.

But there is likewise a full recognition of both the horror and futility of war as it sweeps by in the prolonged inhuman enumeration of its millions of rifles and machine-guns. What is being portrayed is not just one procession; it takes place not only in post-War London or Paris, since there are eagles and trumpets and a sacrifice at the temple. The crowd in the streets is both a Roman crowd waiting with its stools and sausages, and a modern crowd in the final fragments of conversation:

And Easter Day, we didn't get to the country.
So we took young Cyril to church. And they rang a bell
And he said right out loud, crumpets.

Don't throw away that sausage.
It'll come in handy. He's artful. Please, will you
Give us a light?
Light
Light
Et les soldats faisaient la haie? ILS LA FAISAIENT.[4]

What is to be the symbol for spiritual reality to a world that goes to church only when it can't get to the country, which recognizes in the sign commemorating the presence of the Host simply a bell that reminds young Cyril of the crumpet-man in the street? In the shadow of that question, the casual Please, will you give us a light?' suddenly reverberates. What flashes forth from the reiterated word 'light' is not merely the flicker of a match, but searching speculation as to the source from which the light for our age is to come.[5]

In such a context the central figure of the poem is seen to be neither Coriolanus nor a modern statesman alone, no more an Elizabethan than a Roman general; not even a symbol for leadership so much as the embodiment of qualities of spiritual perception and mastery that are integral to any deep apprehension of the meaning of life, and thus also to the existence of any adequate society. The hidden sources of inner life, the reserved balance, which sustain this individual and mark him off from the shallow chaotic flux of mere externalized rootless existence, make him almost a symbol for the harmonious union of emotion and thought that Eliot has so frequently stressed as characteristic of a 'firm grasp of human experience'; these qualities likewise demand a sustained equilibrium in the relations between the individual and the social structure. The ripely developed human being has gained the integrity that comes from self-knowledge, and he therefore understands that no wholeness exists in isolation, that the individual cannot find fulfilment except through also giving of himself to society—a truth none the less implied in 'Difficulties of a Statesman' by the fact

that what is presented there is the breakdown of the relation between the leader and the state in the hopeless confusion of bureaucracy.

These reflections perhaps disclose some of the reasons why Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* has appealed to Eliot with a special urgency. A feeling that this play has an immediate relevance to our own age because of the particular problem of life with which it deals has not been limited to Eliot. A brilliant younger critic, Harry Levin, wrote during the winter of 1934 of his impressions of the recent performances of a new translation of *Coriolanus* at the Comedie Fran^aise, which was done with full 'grandeur and stateliness,' with 'a ghastly Breughelesque mob'; and 'the audience cheered fervently at any slightest political implication. . . Surely, if certain of Shakespeare's great tragedies have a special significance for certain periods *(Antony and Cleopatra* for the Restoration, *Hamlet* for the romantic movement), *Coriolanus* is the play that should have the richest meaning in our time.'

'Triumphal March' is not a Fascist poem any more than Shakespeare's play, but it points to the problem of the relation of the individual to the social organism, the imperfect solution of which has led directly into the ruthless brutality of the Fascist movement. It is worth calling attention to Eliot's growing interest in politics which forms the background for the appearance of this poem in 1931; especially since he articulated, in his introduction to Pound, the gradual way in which a poet gathers his material by a process 'largely unconscious, subterranean, so that we cannot gauge its progress except once in every five or ten years,' when all the amassed experience 'accumulates to form a new whole and finds its appropriate expression.' (It must be noted, if only in passing, that this description of the poetic process emphasizes once more Eliot's fundamental belief that a poem is not to be the overflowing of the mood of a moment, but the blending into a concentrated unity of the dominant

thoughts and feelings of several years.) The part of Eliot's experience which was to crystallize into 'Triumphal March' and 'Difficulties of a Statesman' began to be evident in his preoccupation with political subjects in several of the essays in *For Lancelot Andrewes,* the composition of which stretched from 1925 to 1928. In addition, the Commentary in *The Criterion* for those years was increasingly taken up with contemporary politics, with the problem in the huge modern state caused by the heavy apathy of all elements in society to the responsibilities of intelligent representative government. The right to vote having been won by all men and women in democratic England and America, regard for its individual value seemed to be steadily dwindling. In the confused welter of modern society, the mass of mankind, unable to believe in anything very strongly or to understand any situation very well, was in constant danger of being led astray by any show of power in the streets, unable to distinguish between wise leadership and 'the golf club Captains,' liable to be swept away by any bread and circuses.

In line with such thought, Eliot noted in the spring of 1929: 'If, as we believe, the indifference to politics as actually conducted is growing, then we must prepare a state of mind towards something other than the facile alternative of communist or fascist dictatorship.' In the summer of that same year, in rejoinder to two essays in *The Criterion* defining the philosophic positions of those alternatives, he indicated more exactly what he meant when, in connection with the philosophy behind the Action Française, he spoke of 'the reintroduction of the idea of loyalty to a King, who incarnates the idea of the Nation. And in this idea is, I think, the *alternative* to Nationalism. Fascism seems to me rather (in the form in which it has succeeded up to date) to represent the Napoleonic idea. The latter, in contrast to the idea of Monarchy, is a familiar conventional modern idea: it is the doctrine of success.' The connection of this thought with the Action

Fran^aise will damn it instantly with many readers, to whom no political group could seem more useless for the needs of England or America.[6] I am not here concerned with the direct applicability of Eliot's political ideas; indeed, he frequently confesses himself an amateur in such matters, and yet defends the valid and valuable distinction between political ideas and actual politics, a distinction particularly necessary in a time of social disruption, when practice lags behind theory, when, indeed, the only way of clarifying the chaotic jungle of events is by subjecting them to the scrutiny of an articulated theory. But what is important to understand in the present context is that the strain of thought which characterizes Eliot's conception of the ideal state also runs throughout his conception of the nature of art.

He objects to the modern worship of success, the journalistic 'great man complex,' which sets up alike a Henry Ford or a Hitler and which, in glorifying alike the office-boy-to-millionaire or the corporal-to-dictator ideal, acclaims as necessary an unscrupulous directness of action. What seems to Eliot most false in such an ideal is that by exalting man's petty triumph it loses all view of anything more important than the individual, of the individual's inevitable limitations and his finding his completion only in something greater than himself, of the ruler's responsibility to his people, of the nation's to other parts of the world. The view of man symbolized in the comparative myths which Eliot drew upon for *The Waste Land* and the view of man lying behind *Ash Wednesday* emphasize in common the doctrine of incarnation, of the word made flesh. As Miss Weston summarized it in her chapter on 'The Secret of the Grail' (though Eliot would long since have found a more authoritative statement): 'The end of all the Mystery institutions was the revelation of the Mystery of Man. The central doctrine is that of the Man, the Heavenly Man, the Son of God who . . . though originally endowed with all power, descends into

weakness and bondage, and has to win his own freedom, and regain his original state,'[7] But the heart of the story lies in the fact that he does not win salvation for himself, but only through the giving of himself in sacrifice; and thus it symbolizes the mystery which discloses also the way of Everyman's redemption from Hades. Such a view of man, in contrast to the deification of the Hero, does not exalt man at the expense of society. In recognizing man's potentiality for salvation, it does not confuse the perfection of the idea with his inescapable imperfection. In perceiving the divinity in man, it does not set up an overweening worship of individual power, but stresses the likeness of men, their common aspiration and fallibility, their one basis for brotherhood, not in a sentimental humanitarianism, but in their humility before God.

Throughout his life Eliot has been in reaction against the centrifugal individualism which characterized the America into which he was born. His deep-seated desire to link himself with a living tradition grew directly out of his revulsion against the lawless exploitation by which late nineteenth-century American individuals made any coherent society impossible. He was equally dissatisfied with the undefined spirituality of Emerson or Arnold: neither 'Self-Reliance' nor 'The Buried Life' was adequate. The tenets of the one led logically to an inhuman extreme of individualism, those of the other to a blurring of fundamental distinctions. Neither was restrained by the controlling anchor of dogma. The kind of control Eliot wanted was suggested in Hulme's condensed notes on 'the religious attitude,' a fact which reveals the fertility of that thinker's *Speculations* not only in demanding the qualities of poetry for which Pound and Eliot were to strive, but likewise in foreshadowing many of the bases of Eliot's maturing religious and political thought. What Hulme insisted on was the fundamental confusion that had been brought about 'by the failure to recognize

the *gap* between the regions of vital and human thought and things, and that of the *absolute* values of ethics and religion. We introduce into human things the Perfection that properly belongs only to the divine, and thus confuse both human and divine things by not clearly separating them,' Hulme might have been thinking of either Emerson or Arnold when he wrote those sentences, although any other nineteenth-century 'prophet' would have served him as well. The religious attitude, as Hulme defines it, consists in its view of man 'as essentially limited and imperfect. He is endowed with Original Sin. While he can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself *be* perfect. Certain secondary results in regard to ordinary human action in society follow from this. A man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary.' Eliot quoted this last passage in his essay on Baudelaire. One could not find a more compact expression of the gradually hardening lines of his own thought, as he has moved from and yet retained so many elements of the Puritan strain.

But as Eliot's mind has reached towards the Catholic position, he has been acutely conscious of the new violent extreme which threatens society to-day, the overwhelming of valuable impulses in the individual life by the narrow iron standardization of dictatorship. Not that he holds any brief whatsoever for the value of the expansive expression of an uncontrolled 'personality,' for the impure artist who, like Rousseau or Byron, exploits his idiosyncratic temperament at the expense of society instead of finding its fulfilment in the impersonal structure of a work of art. Nevertheless Eliot knows well that art can come into existence only through the free play of impulses; that it is worthless to try to demonstrate that 'if Milton had held more normal doctrines he

would have written a better poem,' since the source of Milton's inspiration was bound up with his passionate desire to express those very doctrines. What, however, Eliot insists to be disastrous 'is that the writer should deliberately give rein to his "individuality," that he should even cultivate his differences from others; and that his readers should cherish the author of genius, not in spite of his deviations from the inherited wisdom of the race, but because of them,' For Eliot understands that the greatest art 4s impersonal, in the sense that personal emotion, personal experience is extended and completed in something impersonal, not in the sense of something divorced from personal experience and passion,' [8]

The very title 'Tradition *and* the Individual Talent' indicates the stress he has continued to put on the fact that a poem is not a turning loose of personal emotion, that 'no artist produces great art by a deliberate attempt to express his personality. He expresses his personality indirectly through concentrating upon a task which is a task in the same sense as the making of an efficient engine or the turning of a jug or a table-leg,' There is the voice of the craftsman in that remark, of the man who has admired Dryden's skill and Pound's technical expertness, who understands the self-contained quality of a finished masterpiece. But there is more than that: the realization that nothing great has ever been created by a human being without the creator's 'surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done,' without a continual self-sacrifice 'of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable,'

In *The Sacred Wood* such views were restricted to observations on the writing of poetry, in the elaboration of Eliot's belief that the artist 'must be aware that the mind of Europe, the mind of his own country ... is much more important than his own private mind,' But during the intervening years, as we have seen, Eliot has widened his quest, and become deeply concerned with both religion and poll-

tics. In *After Strange Gods*[9] he attempted a description of what he means by orthodoxy to put beside his conception of tradition, itself now extended to a wider context:

> I hold—in summing up—that a *tradition* is rather a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations; and that it must largely be, or that many of the elements in it must be, unconscious; whereas the maintenance of *orthodoxy* is a matter which calls for the exercise of all our conscious intelligence. The two will therefore considerably complement each other.

His conception of the differences between these two elements, and his understanding of the intricate counteraction and interplay between them in a complex civilization, demonstrate his opposition to the falseness of any over-simplified pattern of the social structure. Eliot is careful to make clear that he is not using orthodoxy in the strict theological sense of the term (although, in his own experience, the significance that would now attach itself to his belief in the creative act as consisting in the individual's sacrifice 'of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable' would connect integrally with his growing belief in dogma). What he stresses in his account of the importance of orthodoxy is 'the inherited wisdom of the race,' the carefully sifted central values of human experience that are always at war with extreme individualism in any form. Exactly what he means is disclosed in his remark that in examining contemporary literature he is 'not concerned with the authors' *beliefs*, but with orthodoxy of sensibility and with the sense of tradition'; and that in such light D. H. Lawrence is 'an almost perfect example of the heretic. And the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time is Mr. Joyce.'

Eliot developed further the contrast between these two writers (in the unpublished lecture already referred to): that Lawrence is always concerned merely with the relations be-

tween two individuals and their failure, 'always looking for the perfect relationship and of course never finding it'; that Joyce, on the contrary, is 'concerned with the relation of man to God,' Joyce's scepticism may have carried him beyond the point where he could believe in anything; yet his understanding of the sense of sin is the key to Stephen Dedalus's behavior in both *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses.* And throughout the sordid picture of contemporary Dublin, you still have 'the Catholic idea, the sense that society is more important than the happiness of the individual, hence none of the sentimentality you find in *Sons and Lovers.* In the latter you find only individuals, in the former you find society,' That is to say, in Joyce you have 'a sense of history'; in Lawrence only 'of the moment'—though Eliot's strictures on the inadequacy of Lawrence's interpretation of life did not blind him to the extraordinary sensibility that enabled Lawrence to describe, in a way that Joyce could not, the pain and ecstasy of individual relationships, and to communicate, in visionary flashes, the sensuous fullness of 'the moment,'

In a further reflection on Joyce, Eliot expressed as searching a comment as he has yet made on the relation of the individual to society: 'the Catholic paradox: society is for the salvation of the individual and the individual must be sacrificed to society. Communism is merely a heresy, but a heresy is better than nothing,'[10]

The reason why Eliot is a poet-critic of the first order is that, like Dryden or Arnold, he has not been content to be merely that. Like the author of *Absalom and Achitophel* and *The Hind and the Panther* his mind has wrestled increasingly with some of the main problems of his day. But unlike the author of *Literature and Dogma,* and aided in part by his mistakes, the increased sphere of Eliot's interests has not caused him to confuse their different functions. Eliot

is hardly more qualified for metaphysical speculation than Arnold was—he himself has spoken of his 'incapacity for abstruse reasoning'; in spite of his long training in philosophy, his mind is too heavily concrete, his insight too purely intuitive, to qualify him for sustained flight in the realm of pure logic. Nor, in all probability, will either his political or religious thought build up into a wholly adequate system. But his consistent concern with these spheres of thought and action has yielded him a much deeper understanding of the nature of art and its value for society than was possessed by the author of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' For now, as he says, he conceives of tradition as being of the blood, as 'the means by which the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present.' Orthodoxy is of the brain, and is not unrelated to the quality which he previously discovered in the philosopher Bradley (the author of *Appearance and Reality* and perhaps Eliot's chief master in prose style): the quality of wisdom which 'consists largely of scepticism and uncynical disillusion.' In comparison with Bradley's thought, however, orthodoxy would probably appear as something 'older, more patient, more supple and more wise,'

In the co-operation between tradition and orthodoxy 'is the reconciliation of thought and feeling,' And that brings us once more to the very heart of Eliot's most fundamental belief as an artist: the necessary union of intellect and emotion. He finds it in 'the consummate art' of the finest philosophic prose style in our language, 'in which acute intellect and passionate feeling preserve a classic balance,'[11] Such union, in which words are 'so close to the object' that the two become identified, as surely in Eliot as in Donne or Baudelaire, is the chief attribute of great poetry as well.

NOTES

1. This line is from 'La Figlia che Piange,' Similar images occur in the 'hyacinth girl' passage in 'The Burial of the Dead' section of *The Waste Land* as well as in 'Portrait of a Lady,'

Eliot's penetrating remarks on the 'mixture of biography and allegory' incorporated into the *Vita Nuova* reveal that he recognizes a vision of idealized loveliness attendant upon the first adolescent awakening of sex to be a fundamental human experience. It is the loss of such loveliness in the failure of actual sexual experience to measure up to it that constitutes the emotional undercurrent of his flower-imagery, and creates its peculiar tone of mingled frustration and longing. Similar material is presented, in a very different sardonic form, in 'Dans le Restaurant' in the obscene boastful reminiscences of the old waiter of his first sexual awareness at seven years old, reminiscences which deform the vision of loveliness into something salacious and ugly. Regaining the purified vision in later life is the theme particularly of the second and fourth poems in *Ash Wednesday,* and of 'Marina,'

2. D. S. Mirsky made some thoughtful observations on the way in which Eliot's use of these symbols reveals the decay of contemporary civilization, in 'T. S. Eliot et la fin de la po£sie bourgeoise,' *Echanges,* numero 5, December 1931. Despite his keen appreciation of *The Waste Land* and his belief that Eliot is the most accomplished of living poets, Prince Mirsky, as a result of his conversion to communism, held, like the other, less intelligent sociological critics, that Eliot's career reached its dead-end with 'The Hollow Men,' that all his work since has been mere flight and evasion.

3. It is worth remembering that Eliot had *Coriolanus* in mind as a model when he was making his definition of the 'objective correlative,'

4. It is perhaps just worth noting that this passage and that from the close of 'The Burial of the Dead' (analysed above on pp. 21-2) are the particular two which John Sparrow cites, in *Sense and Poetry* (1934), in order to prove Eliot's obscurity and unintelligibility, and 'how an established reputation and a novel man-

ner can impose upon the public and the critics,' (A third passage from Eliot's early 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' is attributed by Mr. Sparrow to *The Waste Land.)* It is curious that such total misapprehension should come from a sometime editor of Donne's *Devotions,* except that Mr. Sparrow's mind represents English criticism at its most hardened conventional level. He combines considerable knowledge of the past, a certain amount of common sense in pointing out the excesses of some minor figures in modern art, and an almost complete lack of taste or of ability to discriminate between Eliot and Edith Sitwell. His kind has been familiar, and unchanging, since the Quarterly Reviewers.

A position similar to Mr. Sparrow's was developed by Max Eastman, with greater vigour and trenchancy though with no more discrimination or respect for accurate statement, and with an almost wilful obtuseness, in *The Literary Mind* (1931). A sample of Mr. Eastman's plain-man-of-sense-not-to-be-fooled critical approach is furnished by his characterization of Eliot's meditation on the Word, at the opening of the fifth poem in *Ash Wednesday,* as an 'oily puddle of emotional noises.' This is certainly a puzzling approach from a man who had previously written an enthusiastic book called *The Enjoyment of Poetry,* except that one of Mr. Eastman's defects has always been a kind of debater's zeal that will use any means to prove his point.

5. The final chorus in *The Rock* develops this theme of the Light, as its opening stanzas can indicate:

O Light Invisible, we praise Thee!
Too bright for mortal vision.
O Greater Light, we praise Thee for the less;
The eastern light our spires touch at morning,
The light that slants upon our western doors at evening,
The twilight over stagnant pools at batflight,
Moon light and star light, owl and moth light,
Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade.
O Light Invisible, we worship Thee!

We thank Thee for the lights that we have kindled,
The light of altar and of sanctuary;
Small lights of those who meditate at midnight
And lights directed through the coloured panes of windows
And light reflected from the polished stone,
The gilded carven wood, the coloured fresco.

Our *gaze is submarine, our eyes look upward*
And see the light that fractures through unquiet water.
We see the light but see not whence it comes.
O Light Invisible, we glorify Thee!

A relevant commentary on Eliot's aim in writing this chorus is furnished by his remarks on Dante's detailed imagery in the final canto of the *Paradiso:*

An understanding of the Tightness of such imagery is a preparation for apprehending the last and greatest canto, the most tenuous and most intense. Nowhere in poetry has experience so remote from ordinary experience been expressed so concretely, by a masterly use of that imagery of *light* which is the form of certain types of mystical experience.

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,
legato con amore in un volume,
do che per Vuniverso si squaderna;
sustanzia ed accidenti, e lor costume,
quasi conflati insieme per tal modo,
che do ch'io dico e un semplice lume.
La forma universal di questo nodo
credo ch'io vidi, per che piu di largo,
dicendo questo, mi sento ch'io godo.
Un punto solo m'e maggior letargo,
che ventidnque secoli alia impresa,
che fe' Nettuno ammirar I'ombra d'Argo.

Within its depths I saw ingathered, bound by love in one mass, the scattered leaves of the universe: substance and accidents and their relations, as though together fused, so that what I speak of is one simple flame. The universal form of this complex I think I saw, because, as I say this, more largely I feel myself rejoice. One single moment to me is more lethargy than twenty-five centuries upon the enterprise which made Neptune wonder at the shadow of the Argo (passing over him).

One can feel only awe at the power of the master who could thus at every moment realize the inapprehensible in visual images. And I do not know anywhere in poetry more authentic sign of greatness than the power of association which could in the last line, when the poet is speaking of the Divine vision, yet introduce the Argo passing over the head of wondering Neptune. . . It is the real right thing, the power of establishing relations between beauty of the most diverse sorts; it is the utmost power of the poet.

In view of this passage, it may perhaps not seem too fanciful to conjecture that Eliot's attempt in the two lines beginning 'Our gaze is submarine' may have been stimulated by Dante's very different image of Neptune and the shadow of Argo; for Eliot's appreciation of Dante's method of describing light is obviously one of the sources of his own sustained employment here of the 'clear, visual images' of humble and intimate lights that enable him so successfully to give body to the impalpable.

6. At the time Eliot was writing, the pro-Fascist sympathies of Charles Maurras and his group had not yet been demonstrated.

7. Weston, work cited, pp. 145-7. I have somewhat compressed the phrasing.

8. This last statement comes from Eliot's preface to Mark Wardle's translation of Valery's *Le Serpent,* 1924.

9. My reiterated stress on Eliot's growth during the fourteen years between *The Sacred Wood* and *After Strange Gods* requires some qualification. Certainly the Norton lectures, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism,* 1933, were a partial disappointment, owing to the fact that Eliot adopted there the historical method of a survey of principal tendencies in. English poetry and critical theory since the Renaissance, a method for which he possessed little aptitude and which led him into many rather commonplace statements (for example, on Wordsworth and Coleridge), as well as into some one-sided and therefore misleading reflections on 'The Modern Mind' and particularly on I. A. Richards. But it would have been almost worth writing the whole book for the sake of the passage on the auditory imagination; and there were a great many other passages which threw penetrating light on Eliot's conception of the nature of poetry. Nevertheless, it was not until he returned to his own particular approach to art and society in *After Strange Gods* that he deepened the contours of his thought beyond *For Lancelot Andrewes,* 1928, as that volume of 'essays on Style and Order' had marked a different orientation from *Homage to John Dryden,* 1924.

10. In the light of this remark should be read his further reflection in the Commentary of *The Criterion,* April 1933: 'I would even say that, as it is the faith of the day, there are only a small

number of people living who have achieved the right not to be communists. My only objection to it is the same as my objection to the cult of the Golden Calf.'

11. This is Eliot's tribute to Bradley's style in the Commentary of *The Criterion,* October 1924. He concluded a longer essay on him in 1926 with this observation: 'Bradley, like Aristotle, is distinguished by his scrupulous respect for words, that their meaning should be neither vague not exaggerated; and the tendency of his labours is to bring British philosophy closer to the great Greek tradition,' This precision in language is what caused Eliot to rank Bradley higher as a prose writer than Arnold. Arnold, to be sure, as Eliot noted in his essay on 'Arnold and Pater,' 'produced a kind of illusion of precision and clarity; that is, maintained these qualities as ideals of style,' But the distinction is well taken that Bradley's prose actually mastered these qualities, largely owing to his 'intense addiction to an intellectual passion,'

It is interesting that Eliot makes a similar approach to the ordonnance, precision, and 'relevant intensity' of the Sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, to their balance of reason and emotion: 'Intellect and sensibility were in harmony; and hence arise the particular qualities of his style,'

Andrewes's Sermons also furnish one final example of the 'objective correlative':

> When Andrewes begins his sermon, from beginning to end you are sure that he is wholly in his subject, unaware of anything else, that his emotion grows as he penetrates more deeply into his subject, that he is finally 'alone with the Alone,' with the mystery which he is seeking to grasp more and more firmly. One is reminded of the words of Arnold about the preaching of Newman. Andrewes' emotion is purely contemplative; it is not personal, it is wholly evoked by the object of contemplation, to which it is adequate; his emotion is wholly contained in and explained by its object.

VII

THE PLAYS

A verse play is not a play done into verse, but a different kind of play: in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama,' because, instead of clothing nature in poetry, it should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess or be conscious of, it must reveal, underneath the vacillating or infirm character, the indomitable unconscious will, and underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal, the victim of circumstance and the doomed or sanctified being Soothe poet with ambitions of the theatre, mustjdiscoyer the laws, both of another"kind of verse and of another kind of drama —Eliot, Introduction to S. L. Bethell's *Shakespeare and The Popular Dramatic Tradition,* 1944-

THE interplay between Eliot's created work and his criticism, so illuminating to the comprehension of his poems, is inevitably something different in the case of his dramas. His theory of poetry has been borne out by his practice, and both have been greatly influential now throughout a generation. But his conception of drama, his belief in the need for poetic drama, still remain more in the realm of theory even in his own experiments, as well as in their limited effect on the general course of the drama in our time. As he observed in his 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,' which he wrote as a preface to Dryden's great discussion of the subject, 'It is one thing to discuss the rules of an art when that art is alive, and quite another when it is dead,'

At the start of Eliot's career Yeats and the Abbey Theatre were making a limited revival of plays in verse, but the prevailing relation between English poetry and drama was summed up in one of Eliot's early statements: 'Browning wrote dull plays, but invented the dramatic monologue or

character,' For several years it appeared as though Eliot would confine his strong dramatic impulses to the realm of Browning's successes, but by 1926, a year or two before he wrote his 'Dialogue,' he had already experimented with *Sweeney Agonistes.* He had always been absorbed with the great age of the English theatre, as his many essays on Elizabethan playwrights bear witness. But his earliest comprehensive formulation of what he demanded from drama and did not find on the contemporary stage remains buried in an uncollected review, 'The Beating of a Drum,' where in the course of discussing Olive Busby's *Studies in the Development of the Fool in Elizabethan Drama,* he remarked:

> The essentials of the drama were, as we might expect, given by Aristotle: 'poetry, music, and dancing constitute in Aristotle a group by themselves, their common element being imitation by means of rhythm—rhythm which admits of being applied to words, events, and the movements of the body,' It is the rhythm, so utterly absent from modern drama, either verse or prose, and which interpreters of Shakespeare do their best to suppress, which makes Massine and Charlie Chaplin the great actors they are, and which makes the juggling of Rastelli more cathartic than a performance of *A Doll's Housed*

You do not have to agree with his final example—which was a sally in the war he shared with Yeats against the limitations of realism—in order to perceive that he has grasped the conception of p,oetic drama as an organic whole. He realizes, as the nineteenth-century imitators of Shakespeare did not, that verse is not something merely added to a play as an extra ornament or trimming, but that the poetic pattern and the dramatic pattern must subsist together as integral products of one act of imagination. This, incidentally, is what Granville-Barker, who knew both the stage and poetry, has demonstrated again so persuasively in relation to Shakespeare's plays.

To the extent that the nineteenth century, following in

the wake of Coleridge, divorced the poetic philosopher from the workaday playwright, it misunderstood and falsified Shakespeare. To the extent that it confined poetry to the closet, it also, in Eliot's view, impoverished the drama. In a radio broadcast in 1936, the year after the considerable success of *Murder in the Cathedral* on the stage, he made his position as explicit as possible: 'I believe . . . that poetry is the natural and complete medium for drama; that the prose play is a kind of abstraction capable of giving you only a part of what the theatre can give; and that the verse play is capable of something much more intense and exciting,'[2]

By then the drive for realism had become far less dominant in the theatre, which could so easily be beaten on this ground by the film. Consequently Eliot could hold it

> reasonable that the stage should not attempt to compete with the film in illusion of scenery . . . and event. It should turn to the voice, to movement which is meant to be seen from several angles, and to things which can be done by the actor himself and which cannot be done by his pictures. And all this points to the verse play.
>
> To work out a play in verse … is to see the thing as a whole musical pattern. . . The verse dramatist must operate on you on two levels at once. . . It is fatal for a poet trying to write a play, to hope to make up for defects in the movement of the play by bursts of poetry which do not help the action. But underneath the action, which should be perfectly intelligible, there should be a musical pattern which intensifies our excitement by reinforcing it with feeling from a deeper and less articulate level.

This describes what Eliot has striven for in his own plays. As usual his work is of greatest interest in its technical experiments, and in the reasons he gives for them. One of his strongest convictions about the nature of a living tradition is the unlikeliness that any verse form can be renewed for the same purpose for which it was widely current in the

past. He would doubt that either the Popean couplet or the *Don Juan* stanza could serve any longer for satire, except as an occasional *tour de force.* He would be even more certain that the expectedness of blank verse for drama would keep it from being anything more than a poor imitation of Shakespeare, would prevent it from 'contributing anything to the life of our own time.'

'The problem for us, therefore,' he continued in his radio talk,

> is to get away from Shakespeare. . . That is not so easy. I have found, in trying to write dramatic verse, that however different a metre from blank verse I was working with, whenever my attention has relaxed, or I have gone sleepy or stupid, I will wake up to find that I have been writing bad Shakespearean blank verse: and I have had to scrap the lot and start all over again. Hence we have to make use of suggestions from remote drama, too remote for there to be any danger of imitation, such as *Everyman,* and the late medieval morality and mystery plays, and the great Greek dramatists.

When he was writing *Sweeney Agonistes,* Eliot was already convinced that 'the recognized forms of speech-verse are not as efficient as they should be; probably a new form will be devised out of colloquial speech.' He expressed that conviction in his sjelf-revelatory introduction to *Savonarola* (1926), his mother's closet drama, in rhymed couplets, where he also declared that after the discursive conversational pieces of Shaw, the drama needed an intensification, a tightening, that 'the next form of drama will have to be a verse drama but in new verse forms.'

Eliot subtitled his first brief scenes 'fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama,' but the source of the verse spoken by Sweeney and his friends was much nearer at hand. The poet was trying to utilize vaudeville rhythms for reasons that he had recently articulated in his appreciation of Marie Lloyd as 'the greatest music-hall artist of her time,' He felt

that she 'represented and expressed that part of the English nation which has perhaps the greatest vitality and interest'; and that any hope for a popular drama would spring from the robust entertainment of the lower class, and not from the 'morally corrupt' middle class, already given over to the lifeless mechanism of the standardized cinema. The songs in Eliot's play, 'Under the bamboo tree' and 'My little island girl,' found their stimulus in American jazz, as did the syncopation of the dialogue. As a result Eliot's verse here seemed less novel than usual to American ears, but it became one of the starting points for Auden's charades.

In the method of projecting his content Eliot was indebted again to Henry James. The hero is so different a character from the 'apeneck Sweeney' of the poems that Eliot might better have given him a different name. And while the epigraphs from St. John of the Cross and Aeschylus' *Choephori* may seem at first glance another of Eliot's pieces of elaborate irony, the words quoted from Orestes' speech about the Furies—'You don't see them, you don't—but ,' see them: they are hunting me down'—are directly relevant to Eliot's intention. For, like James, Eliot was presenting characters of differing degrees of consciousness. Doris and Dusty and the visitors to their flat were meant to be 'material, literal-minded, and visionless.' Sweeney, in his meditations on 'birth, copulation, and death,' can not communicate his feelings to them, but only to the sentient members of the audience. This complete isolation of Sweeney from the rest of the cast was well conveyed both in Hallie Flanagan's production at Vassar (1933), and in Rupert Doone's for the Group Theatre in London (1935). But such an extreme development of James' device would hardly seem workable for a play of much length, and it is not surprising that Eliot left Sweeney's 'agon' a fragment.

His 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' suggests—half a dozen years before he undertook *The Rock*—where he would turn

next. He cites again the satisfying formality of the ballet, the elimination of all inessentials in its concentrated 'liturgy' of 'traditional, symbolical, and highly trained movements,' As one of the speakers in the 'Dialogue' remarks, 'Here seemed to be everything that we wanted in drama, except the poetry.' But the mention of liturgy leads on to the remark that 'the consummation of the drama ... is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass,' Another speaker takes exception. Granted that the origin of drama is in religious liturgy, granted that 'the Mass is a small drama, having all the unities,' and that 'if you consider the ritual of the Church during the cycle of the year . . . you have represented the full drama of Creation,' nevertheless, 'even if you are a believer, you will have dramatic desires which crave fulfillment otherwise. . . Religion is no more a substitute for drama than drama is a substitute for religion,'

The consensus to which Eliot's speakers come is the same that he had voiced in his introduction to *Savonarola:* 'In genuine drama the form is determined by the point on the line at which a tension between liturgy and realism takes place,' In reaction against the photographic tendencies of realism, Eliot wanted to move again towards heightened convention. William Archer's *The Old Drama and the New* was a central point for attack, and in the position he took up against this apostle of Ibsenism, Eliot revealed a break with current standards of drama even more complete than his poetry had made with Tennyson and Swinburne. In answer to Archer's charge that the weakness of Elizabethan drama lay in its unrealistic conventions, Eliot said that on the contrary it had never been conventional enough. 'The great vice of English drama from Kyd to Galsworthy has been that its aim of realism was unlimited. In one play, *Everyman,* and perhaps in that one play only, we have a drama within the limitations of art,' We may gasp, as often **in** Eliot, at the astringency of his example, which seems to

close more doors rather than to open the possibility of any. But he made clearer the grounds of his admiration, in a lecture on 'Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern' (1937): 'In *Everyman* the religious and dramatic are not merely combined, but wholly fused.'[3] Even if that fusion is the mark of classic wholeness, Eliot can still perceive that something lay beyond the medieval drama's scope. It may be a relief to turn back to 'the austere close language' and to 'the simplicity of the mysteries,' but 'if new influences had not entered, old orders decayed,' we should not have had the less orderly magnificence of *King Lear*.

But in our time of broken standards and beliefs he wanted to see what reinvigoration for drama might lie in a return to its source in liturgy. The structure of *Ash Wednesday*, as we have observed, draws upon the drama of the Mass. In *The Rock*, performed at Sadler's Wells in 1934, Eliot set himself to write a play on behalf of the fund to preserve the old churches of London. Strictly speaking, *The Rock* is a pageant, not a drama. That is to say, its situation does not give rise to any intense struggle or conflict; its structure consists of a series of scenes of a related tone, scenes which decorate the theme of the building of the Church, the hardships it has encountered in various crises of the past as well as the present, and the firmness of its triumph. The scenario was not original with Eliot, but provided for him by Martin Browne; Eliot's task was to produce the dialogue, the bulk of which is in prose. Many of the scenes are hardly of interest beyond their original purpose of furnishing the text for a formal spectacle, which was accompanied by music and ballet. And some of them, in their very conception, do not escape from unctuousness. But the passages of verse, which run to several hundred lines, though spoken mostly by the Chorus, include also the whole of the most energetic scene, that in which the Church is confronted by Redshirts, Blackshirts, and Plutocrats. This scene shows Eliot trying his hand

at the kind of material that Auden, whose first experiments owed so much to Eliot, had already made ambitious efforts to handle in *The Dance of Death'*

Although its choruses give voice to some of the same profound kind of meditative poetry that he was to develop in his *Quartets, The Rock* hardly meets Eliot's test for a religious play, 'that it should be able to hold the interest, to arouse the excitement, of people who are not religious,' Nor, through the very nature of its inception, could it possibly rise to his far more exacting demand of creating an indissoverable double pattern of poetry and drama. Such a setpiece could not possess the wholeness of vision and movement of a *Polyeucte* or an *Athalie.* But the case was very different with the play which Eliot wrote for the Canterbury Festival the following year.

Murder in the Cathedral, like many of the morality plays, is a drama of temptation, but Becket as the great archbishop proves superior to his tempters One of the most conspicuous technical triumps in all Eliot's poetry is in the choruses that were designed to be spoken by the working women of Canterbury. Here he carried further his experiments in finding verse forms suitable for ritualistic drama. He had no living stage tradition upon which to draw, but he believed that a chorus could still perform something of the same fundamental function that it had for the Greeks. It could 'mediate between the action and the audience'; it could 'intensify the action by projecting its emotional consequences, so that we as audience see it doubly, by seeing its effect on other people,'

Eliot's women are there to watch and suffer, and their feelings are nearly all in the most sombre key. Their gamut is from nameless dread of foreboding to horror at the fact of Becket's murder. Their lines are generally iambic, of greatly varying lengths, though, as in *The Rock,* Eliot usually avoided the pentameter. He explored some of the pos-

sibilities of Hopkins' sprung-rhythm, and carried it on occasion into a patterned prose, quickened by alliteration and internal rhyme. He was very dexterous throughout in organizing his speeches according to natural breath lengths.

His actors are also characterized by the verse they speak, so that there is a marked difference between the lilting cadences of the First Tempter, who tries to lure Becket by the memory of old pleasures, and the bluntness and force in the lines of those who tempt by power, either of the Chancellorship or of a new alliance with the barons against the King. The Fourth and last Tempter is at the top ot a rising scale. For while the resumption of the role of Chancellor lay almost as remote from Becket's present desires as did worldly pleasure, and while a coalition with the barons could stir him only momentarily, the Fourth Tempter alone is unexpected by Becket, and tempts him by his own deepest thoughts:

You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
You know and do not know, that acting is suffering
And suffering is action. Neither does the actor suffer
Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
In an eternal action, an eternal patience
To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it,
That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.

This had been Becket's first speech in the play, reflecting on the lot of the Chorus, and the Fourth Tempter flings it back at him almost word for word. The firmness of its doctrine reveals how far Eliot has advanced in his possession of Dante's conception of grace, 'la sua voluntade e nostra pace,'[5] Eliot no longer dwells as he did earlier on 'the eternal burden' alone, but, in this subtle interweaving of suffering, striving, and acceptance, on the possibility of 'the perpe-

tual glory.' But by making the Fourth Tempter penetrate to the same deep level of understanding, Eliot dramatizes Becket's chief peril, the temptation to the proud mind to become so confident in its wisdom that it seeks—and takes for granted—a martyr's crown as its reward.

> *The last temptation is the greatest treason:*
> *To do the right deed for the wrong reason.*

In the meditation that closes the first act Becket wins through to the recognition that no man can will his way to martyrdom. 'I shall no longer act or suffer to the sword's end,' he concludes, and submits his will to God's.

In the sermon that serves for an interlude between the two acts, Becket reveals himself secure in this deeper reliance, and then, holding fast to his belief in the supremacy of God's law above man's law, he encounters the wrath of the Knights, who are the same as the four Tempters of the first act, and goes to his death unflinchingly. The blasphemy of the Knights' deed is underscored by the fact that they advance to their bloodshed with phrases borrowed from spirituals and revival hymns just after the Chorus has voiced a despairing passage, 'Numb the hand and dry the eyelid,' in the cadences of 'Dies Irae.' The Knights then turn to the audience and in a passage of dramatic shock (which seemed too sudden in some performances, though highly effective in others) they drop into the prose of modern debate, and try to justify their act by all the rationalizations of expediency. But the ending belongs to the Priests and the Chorus mounting to a prayer of intercession to 'blessed Thomas,'

Murder in the Cathedral was immensely successful for its immediate purpose in the chapter house at Canterbury. It demonstrated what Eliot meant by saying, in the final lines of his 'Dialogue': 'A continuous hour and a half of *intense* interest is what we need.' Despite the problem created by a chorus on the modern stage, the play demonstrated this again

in a long run at the Mercury Theatre in London under Ashley Dukes and Martin Browne. It was one of the great successes of the WPA theatre in New York, where the Chorus was handled by dividing its lines among several individual speakers, and where Harry Ervine's interpretation brought more vitality to the title role than the somewhat too ritualistic performance of Robert Speaight. In the spring after the liberation of France it scored a renewed triumph at the Vieux Colombier in a translation by Henri Fluchere.

Stimulated by his first reception on the regular stage, Eliot attempted in *The Family Reunion* something far more difficult, a play that would use the setting and characters of drawing-room comedy and that would still include the Eumenides in its cast. He seems to have been thinking of the method evolved by James for his 'ghost' stories, where the design was to have 'the strange and sinister embroidered on the very type of the normal and easy.'[6] 'Nothing is more dramatic than a ghost,' observed one of the speakers in Eliot's 'Dialogue,' but it is one thing to suggest an eerie presence in fiction, quite another to present the Eumenides in evening dress in the embrasure of a window on the modern stage, and here Eliot's inexperience in the theatre betrayed him into a device that failed badly in its effect.

He may have been thinking also of Chekhov's haunted world of social decay, and it is significant that two other Americans of Eliot's generation, O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Jeffers in *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, have dramatized the theme of a curse on a house by a rehandling of the Orestes story. Eliot's device for his chorus here is also comparable to some of O'Neill's previous experiments in having his characters withdraw momentarily from the action to voice their inner thoughts. Eliot's choric group consists of the hero's uncles and aunts, who are on hand for his return, after a long absence, for his mother's birthday.

They are unlike the usual Greek chorus in that their role is not to illuminate the action, but to express their baffled inability to understand what is happening:

We do not know what we are doing. . .
We have lost our way in the dark.

Eliot is absorbed again, in much the same fashion as he was in *Sweeney,* in projecting different levels of consciousness, but one danger here is that his country-house social group is so inert and lifeless that we can hardly become interested in them even as a contrast with the hero, the titular head of the house, Harry, Lord Monchensey. Most of the verse that they speak has a deliberate flatness, and seems, indeed, to have been designed to sound on the stage hardly distinguishable from prose. In this kind of effort to approximate colloquial speech, Eliot seems to have forgotten his earlier and wiser principle that verse should always be used for a heightening, that whatever can now be said just as well in prose is better said in prose.

The hero is in a state of mind which he finds it almost impossible to explain to anyone else. Seven years before, after a brief and disastrous marriage, while travelling on an ocean liner, he either pushed his wife overboard or at least watched her slip and drown. He is not quite clear which, but he had wanted to kill her, and has felt himself pursued ever since, as though by the Furies. The difference from the Furies in Aeschylus is profound, and suggests that in handling his ambiguous material Eliot failed to keep to his realization that the action in a play must be 'perfectly intelligible,' that, in fact, he failed on this occasion to find an adequate 'objective correlative,'

Only in the last play of Aeschylus' trilogy are the Erinys transformed into the Eumenides. The moment is of the widest social significance. The baleful Furies who have tracked down the murderer Orestes are forced by Athena

to yield and to become benevolent guardians of the state. What is dramatized thereby is the immense step that was taken by mankind in giving up primitive blood-vengeance, a life for a life, and submitting to the ordered process of courts of law. Orestes is then released as having done sufficient expiation for his terrible vengeance of his father's death upon his mother, and the curse on the house is at an end.

Eliot wanted to suggest a comparable transformation. Harry has long felt himself followed and watched, but it is only upon his return to Wishwood that he finally sees his pursuers and comes to recognize their true meaning. The two scenes in which they appear on the stage are between Harry and his cousin Mary, whom his strong-willed mother had once designed for his wife, and between Harry and his Aunt Agatha, the one deeply perceptive and sympathetic member of his family. But these scenes, though here Eliot quickened and intensified his verse, are very obscure, owing to Harry's own obsessed state, and do not begin to convey to the audience the intention that Eliot outlined in a letter to Martin Browne:

> The scene with Mary is meant to bring out, as I am aware it fails to, the conflict inside him between . . . repulsion for Mary as a woman, and the attraction which the *normal* part of him that is left, feels toward her personally *for the first time.* This is the first time since his marriage ('there was no ecstasy') that he has been attracted towards any woman. The attraction glimmers for a moment in his mind, half-consciously as a possible 'way of escape,' and the Furies (for the Furies are *divine* instruments, not simple hell-hounds) come in the nick of time to warn him away from this evasion—though at that moment he misunderstands their function. Now, this attraction towards Mary has stirred him up, but, owing to his mental state, is incapable of developing; therefore he finds a refuge in an ambiguous relation—the attraction, half of a son and half of a lover, to Agatha, who reciprocates in somewhat the same way. And this gives the cue for the second appearance of the Furies, more patently in

their role of divine messengers, to let him know clearly that the only way out is purgation and holiness. They become exactly 'hounds of heaven,' And Agatha understands this clearly, though Harry only understands it yet in flashes. So Harry's career needs to be completed by an *Orestes* or an *Oedipus at Colonnos.*

In the scene with Agatha, Harry comes at least to know his situation. She tells him, to relieve his mind, that his father, long since dead, had fallen in love with her and had wanted to kill Harry's mother, but that she, Agatha, had kept him from doing so. Nevertheless, the thought was there, and Harry must now expiate a repetition of the same crime. Or rather,

> *What we have written is not a story of detection,*
> *Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation. . .*
> *It is possible*
> *You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,*
> *Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.*
> *Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,*
> *Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen*
> *To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.*

By finding an equivalent for the transformation of the Furies through the difference between Hell and Purgatory, in the acceptance of the purifying fire, Eliot has tied the Eumenides into his pattern of thought, but he has hardly been explicit enough to take an audience with him. Also, the inferiority for dramatic purposes of Harry's story to that of Orestes is manifest, since the hatred of a wife, though repeated in two generations, does not, as Eliot handles it, assume much more than private significance.

There are also some echoes of *Hamlet* in Harry's situation. As he says,

> *It is not my conscience,*
> *Not my mind, that is diseased, but, the world I have to live in.*

And when his family, still maintaining that he suffers from delusions, sets the old family doctor to spy out the cause of

his neurosis, they suggest the behavior of the King and Polonius. Strangely enough, there is also a reminder of what Eliot found unsatisfactory in *Hamlet* as a play: that Shakespeare gives the sense there of struggling with some 'intractable' material that he could not bring to light, that the

supposed identity of Hamlet with his author is genuine to this point: that Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem. Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her.

Eliot has found the peculiar genius of Cyril Tourneur to consist in his expression of 'the loathing and horror of life itself,' Something of that quality is infused into Harry, Lord Monchensey, but his objective situation simply will not support it. After Agatha's revelation, Harry accepts the fact that his destiny is to suffer more, not to evade, no longer to flee from but to 'follow the Furies'—a phrase which at one time was Eliot's tentative title for the play. Yet Harry can speak of his future in only the most general terms:

Where does one go from a world of insanity?
Somewhere on the other side of despair.
To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
A care over the lives of humble people,
The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases.
Such things are possible. . .
I must follow the bright angels.

But when, in lieu of the traditional chariot of the *dens* ***ex*** *machina,* we have the highpowered car in which his faithful valet, after returning to pick up his Lordship's cigarette case, is to drive him away, the break between the surface of the play and the depth it is meant to symbolize becomes ludi-

crous and irreparable. By no suspension of disbelief can we conceive how Harry, whose life seems to have been passed mainly in resorts and luxury hotels, can undergo the discipline of suffering in any broadly meaningful sense. And when, after his departure, Agatha closes the play by reciting a rune to end the curse while she and Mary make a stylized dance around the birthday cake and blow out the candles, so that the 'last words shall be spoken in the dark,' as in the service of *tenebrae,* the effect seems an unintentional parody of liturgy rather than a reinvigoration from it.[7]

Eliot's belief in the value of poetic drama is based on its richer resources for transcending 'the ephemeral and superficial,' and for concentrating upon 'the permanent struggles and conflicts of human beings,' Only through such struggles is character revealed. One of Eliot's greatest gifts in his earlier dramatic lyrics was the power to suggest the essence "of a character in a few lines. But a play requires more than the flash of suggestion; it requires development through a significant action.[8] The most devastating aspects of *The Family Reunion* are the unexamined implications of Harry's conduct. Whether or not he pushed his wife overboard, she went to her death by drowning; but the loss of her life, other than as a phase of the hero's education, is made a ground of no remorse. It seems only a re-enactment of Sweeney's macabre statement:

Any man has to, needs t'o, wants to
Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.

Harry's heightened awareness, through his talk with Agatha, of the meaning of what has happened to him produces no access of pity for his wife, but only a renewed ruthlessness towards his mother. Unlike Orestes, he does not murder her, butJie becomes none the less the instrument of her death. Warned by the doctor that his mother is at an age where she cannot stand a shock, he produces one by breaking with

her and leaving Wishwood; and we learn that she is dead before the curtain falls. Hers is the character of blind pride and selfish will that brings on *nemesis,* but Harry's utter lack of compunction seems none the less unnatural. We are reminded very forcibly of the sentence from St. John of the Cross that Eliot prefixed to *Sweeney:* 'Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.' Though Agatha may tell Harry that 'Love compels cruelty,'To those who do not understand love,' Eliot has not succeeded in persuading us that Harry has anything of the overmastering love of God that alone could give sanction to the mystic's terrible renunciation.

The contrast with Eliot's Becket is revelatory. His presentation of the archbishop was limited but coherent. He was not writing a drama of disastrous pride like *Lear,* but a drama of pride overcome. His Becket, after resisting the tempters, is a 'sanctified being,' such as Eliot described in the epigraph to this chapter. Such an image, to be sure, greatly simplifies the actual figure concerning whom historians are still divided as to whether he fought at the last 'for an idea' or 'for the humiliation' of his opponent Henry II. In Eliot's Anglo-Catholic belief Becket is a martyr, but the poet makes him a saint even in this life. He gives none of the flare-up of the natural man who was reported to have met Reginald FitzUrse, the leader of the murderers, with the angry denunciation, 'you pander,' But if Eliot lost something of the human being in the ritualistic priest, even if his Becket, in the consciousness of his mission, barely escapes from 'the pride that apes humility,' Eliot managed to dramatize permanent issues.

He could do it since—as was not the case *in The Family Reurnon--he* had grasped and interpreted a social context. He was aware that his conception of history ran contrary to

that of a secular age, and one of his most striking passages is that in which Becket addresses the audience with a prophetic vision:

I know
What yet remains to show you of my history
Will seem to most of you at best futility,
Senseless self-slaughter of a lunatic,
Arrogant passion of a fanatic.

The Fourth Tempter also looks ahead to the Reformation, when Becket's shrine will be pillaged, but adds:

later is worse, when men will not hate you
Enough to defame or to execrate you,
But pondering the qualities that you lacked
Will only try to find the historical fact.
When men shall declare that there was no mystery
About this man who played a certain part in history.

One reason why Eliot could give an urgency to these reflections is that he was not writing about the past alone. As Becket went on to denounce indifference, oppression, and exploitation, as he gave his life 'to the Law of God above the Law of Man,' Eliot was writing also against the then rising menace of Fascism, when violent men comparable to Reginald FitzUrse took power into their own hands. Eliot bore out again thereby what he asserted about Pound's translations, that in possessing the past a poet could suggest the present. When he wrote *The Waste Land,* he had also proved the converse, but he could not do so in *The Family Reunion.* Perhaps his increasing sense of the degradation and decay of the modern world had gradually numbed him against any strong feeling for such immediate issues as Becket had faced. Although he wrote an essay about 'the idea of a Christian society,' when confronted with one of the sharpest-drawn crises of our own time, he replied to a questionnaire on loyalist Spain: 'While I am naturally sympathetic, I still feel convinced that it is best that at least a

few men of letters should remain isolated, and take no part in these collective activities,' One wonders whether such detachment could be possible for any dramatist who would meet the exacting standards held up by Granville-Barker: that the dramatic art in its fully developed form 'is the working-out . . . not of the self-realization of the individual, but of society itself.'

Whatever the reason, Eliot could not contrive to endow his Eumenides with any of the collective significance that they posessed for the Greeks. It may also be argued that a mind as saturated with St. John's 'dark night of the soul' as Eliot has revealed himself to be in his *Quartets* may produce profound contemplative poetry, but is unlikely to have sufficient closeness to human beings to present their conflicts concretely. In a recent essay on 'The Social Function of Poetry,'[9] Eliot wrote: 'We may say that the duty of the poet, as poet, is only indirectly to his people: his direct duty is to his *language,* first to preserve, and second to extend and improve,' Eliot was careful to emphasize, once again, that this is not a duty merely to form, in isolation from content, since the poet 'discovers new variations of sensibility which can be appropriated by others. And in expressing them he is developing and enriching the language which he speaks,'

In spite of the failure of *The Family Reunion,* therefore, one should not underestimate the new possibilities that Eliot has already opened for poetic drama. We have only to turn to Tennyson's *Becket* to perceive how far *Murder in the Cathedral* has gone towards revitalizing the genre. Tennyson used the loose five-act structure of a chronicle play in which the nineteenth century imitated the Elizabethans, and though he presented Becket as a spiritual man, in answer to the sceptics, he did not succeed in creating much tension. He ranged over Becket's whole career from the days of his earliest friendship with the King, he introduced an immense cast of characters, and provided a love interest through

Henry's affair with Rosamund. Only in his final scene did he come to Becket's return, after his long exile in France, to the situation out of which Eliot made his whole play. But even more remarkable than Eliot's dramatic concentration is the resonance of his verse, the variety that he gains through its stylized patterns. For one symptomatic instance of why he felt traditional blank verse to be played out, take the difference in dramatic energy between Becket's two speeches to his priests at the moment when the Knights attempt to break into the Cathedral:

Tennyson

Undo the doors: the church is not a castle:
Knock, and it shall be open'd. Are you deaff
What, have I lost authority among you?
Stand by, make way.

Eliot

Unbar the doors! Throw open the doors!
I will not have the house of prayer, the church of Christ,
The sanctuary, turned into a fortress.
The Church shall protect her own, in her own way, not
As oak and stone; stone and oak decay,
Give no stay, but the Church shall endure.
The church shall be open, even to our enemies. Open the door!

Murder in the Cathedral, including the sombre magnificence of its choruses, is the most sustained poetic drama in English since *Samson Agoriistes,* and playable as that work was not designed to be. In spite of its stiffly restricted content, Eliot's drama is particularly impressive when set off against the dead background of the commercial theatre during the past decade. With the radio, as Auden and MacLeish have also argued, we have returned to a period when an audience can again depend entirely upon the spoken word. That may have something to do with the fact that even

large moving-picture audiences now respond to Shakespeare's verse as delivered by Laurence Olivier, and that stage revivals of Webster and Middleton and of Yeats's translation of *Oedipus* are again being attempted. At least we are faced with a situation that might challenge the fullest resources of a dramatic poet. Despite the long interruption of the war and the isolating rigors of Eliot's thought, it may be hoped that his play-writing is not yet a finished chapter. •

NOTES

1. *The Nation and Athenaeum,* 6 October 1923. The quotation within the passage is from Butcher's commentary on *The Poetics.*

2. This was printed in *The Listener,* 25 November 1936.

3. *The University of Edinburgh Journal,* Autumn 1937.

4. This interchange suggests an interesting sequence. Without Eliot's revolt against the art for art's sake of the 'nineties, his steady insistence that no part of life should be barred from poetry, and his growing example of how a poet can turn for his material both to religion and to politics, Auden's generation would not have found the ground so clear for their own handling of contemporary affairs. But Auden's political plays, as well as Spender's *The Trial of a Judge,* are much more implicated in immediate events, and owe a great deal to the theatre of Berthold Brecht.

5. Eliot's passage is also closely akin to Jonathan Edwards: 'In efficacious grace we are not merely passive, nor does God do some, and we do the rest. But God does all and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. God is the only proper author and fountain; we are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly active and wholly passive.' In moving towards Catholicism Eliot has also preserved the rigor of his Puritan forebears, and his dramas of pride are still in the tradition from Hawthorne.

6. That Eliot had in mind James' story, 'The Jolly Corner,' while composing his play is made apparent by one of the open-

ing speeches describing how Eliot's hero, like James' exile returning to his old home, will be confronted everywhere by the specter of his past:

> *The man who returns will have to meet*
> *The boy who left. Round by the stables,*
> *In the coach-house, in the orchard,*
> *In the plantation, down the corridor*
> *That led to the nursery, round the corner*
> *Of the new wing, he will have to face him—*
> *And it will not be a very* jolly *corner.*

The reference was even more pointed in the manuscript draft, which continued:

> *,' am sorry, Gerald, for making an allusion*
> *To an author whom you never heard of.*

7. This seems to have been the case both in the play's limited run in London (1939), under the direction of Martin Browne, and in the amateur performance by the Harvard Dramatic Club (1940).

8. Matthew Arnold's realization of his failure to find such 'human actions' for his plays gave rise to the formulation quoted as an epigraph to my chapter on 'The Objective Correlative' (p. 56 above).

Maud Bodkin, in *The Quest for Salvation* (1941), pointed out some of Eliot's limitations when contrasted with the archetypal patterns of Aeschylus. C. L. Barber's essay, 'T. S. Eliot after Strange Gods' *(The Southern Review,* Autumn 1940), utilizing a Freudian technique, is the most extensive examination of the inadequacy of the play's symbols.

9. In *The Norseman,* November 1943, and, in a more extended form, in *The Adelphi,* July 1945.

VIII

THE QUARTETS

… a white light still and moving.

IN the course of an artist's development certain phases may detach themselves and challenge comprehension as completed wholes. Eliot rounded out such a cycle with 'Little Gidding' (1943), and we are now able to see the full significance of the experiments with structure which he inaugurated in 'Burnt Norton' eight years previously. He speaks of the four poems which form this cycle as 'quartets,' and has evolved for them all the same kind of sequence of five parts with which he composed 'Burnt Norton,' *The Waste Land* was also composed in this fashion, but the contrast is instructive. In his earlier desire for intense concentration the poet so eliminated connectives that *The Waste Land* might be called an anthology of the high points of a drama. It was as though its author had determined to make his poem of nothing but Arnold's 'touchstones,' or had subscribed to Poe's dictum that no longer poem could exist than one to be read at a sitting. In the intervening years Eliot has given further thought to the problem, and he has recently concluded that 'in a poem of any length there must be transitions between passages of greater and lesser intensity, to give rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole,' He has also enunciated 'a complementary doctrine' to that of Arnold's 'touchstones': the test of a poet's greatness by 'the way he writes his less intense but structurally vital matter,'

None of the four quartets is much more than half as long as *The Waste Land*, but he has included in them all transi-

tional passages that he would previously have dismissed as 'prosaic,' His fundamentally altered intention is at the root of the matter. The dramatic monologues of Prufrock or Gerontion or of the various *personae* of *The Waste Land* have yielded to gravely modulated meditations of the poet's own. The vivid situations of his *Inferno* have been followed by the philosophic debates of his *Purgatorio.* He has made quite explicit the factors conditioning his new structures in the essay from which I have just quoted, 'The Music of Poetry,'[1] As is always the case with Eliot, this essay throws the most relevant light upon his poetic intentions, and is thus a further piece of refutation to those who persist in the fallacy that there is no harmony between his 'revolutionary' creative work and his 'traditionalist' criticism.

Looking back now over the past generation, he finds the poetry of our period to be best characterized by its 'search for a proper modern colloquial idiom,' He develops the same theme near the close of 'Little Gidding' where he envisages the right equilibrium between 'the common word' and 'the formal word,' Only through their union of opposites do we get

The complete consort dancing together.

Eliot, no less than the later Yeats, has helped to restore to poetry the conversational tones which had been muffled by the ornamental forms and diction of the end of the century. But now Eliot is thinking of the other partner to the union, and remarks that 'when we reach a point at which the poetic idiom can be stabilized, then a period of musical elaboration can follow,' Just as Donne, in his later work, returned to the formal pattern of the sonnet which he had mocked in the broken rhythms of his early lyrics, so Eliot now believes that there is such a 'tendency to return to set, and even elaborate patterns' after any period when they have been laid aside.

The present phase of his own return seems to have started

with 'New Hampshire' and 'Virginia,' the short musical evocations which grew out of his renewed impressions of America in the early nineteen-thirties. The impulse to write a series of such place-name poems led on in turn to the more ambitious 'Burnt Norton,' which borrows its title from a Gloucestershire manor near which Eliot has stayed. The titles of the other three quartets indicate more intimate relationships: East Coker, in Somerset, is where the Eliot family lived until its emigration in the mid-seventeenth century to the New England coast; the Dry Salvages, a group of rocks off Cape Ann, mark the part of that coast which the poet knew best as a boy; Little Gidding, the seat of the religious community which Nicholas Ferrar established and with which the names of George Herbert and Crashaw are associated,[2] is a shrine for the devout Anglican, but can remind the poet also that

History is now and England.

The rhythmical pattern of 'Burnt Norton' is elaborated far beyond the delicate melodies of the brief 'Landscapes,' Eliot seems to have found in the interrelation of its five parts a type of structure which satisfied him beyond his previous experiments. For he has adhered to it with such remarkably close parallels in the three succeeding quartets that a description of the structure of one of them involves that of all, and can reveal the deliberateness of his intentions. In each case the first part or movement might be thought of as a series of statements and counterstatements of a theme[8] in lines of an even greater irregularity than those of the late Jacobean dramatists. In each of these first movements a 'landscape' or presented scene gives a concrete core around which the poet's thoughts gather.

The second movement opens with a highly formal lyric: in 'The Dry Salvages' this is a variant of a sestina, rising from the clang of the bell buoy; in 'Little Gidding' each of the three eight-line stanzas ends with a refrain—and thus

does Eliot signalize his own renewal of forms that would have seemed played out to the author of Trufrock.' In the other two poems he has also illustrated a remark which he has been repeating in his recent essays, that 'a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words.' The lyric in 'Burnt Norton'—which is echoed perhaps too closely in 'East Coker'—is as pure musical incantation as any Eliot has written. Not only does its opening image, 'Garlic and sapphires in the mud,' take its inception from Mallarm6's line 'Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux';[4] but the rhythm of the poem in which that line occurs, 'M'introduire dans ton histoire,' seems also to have haunted Eliot's ear until it gave rise to a content which, with the exception of its opening line, is wholly different from Mallarme's.

Following the lyric in the second movement, Eliot has relaxed his rhythms for a sudden contrast; and in 'The Dry Salvages,' and especially in 'East Coker,' has carried his experiment with the prosaic virtually over the border into prose:

That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.
It was not (to start again) what one had expected.

The sharp drop from incantation is designed to have the virtue of surprise; but it would seem here to have gone much too far, and to have risked the temporary collapse of his form into the flatness of a too personal statement. The variant in 'Little Gidding' substitutes for such a sequence a modified terza rima, where the poet uses instead of rhyme a sustained alternation of masculine and feminine endings, in a passage that makes the strongest testimony for the value of formal congruence.

What the third parts have in common is that each is an account of movement. In 'Burnt Norton' it is a descent into the London underground, which becomes also a descent into the dark night of the soul. In 'East Coker' the allusion to St. John of the Cross is even more explicit. The poet's command to his soul to

be still and wait without hope,
For hope would be hope of the wrong thing,

borrows its sequence of paradoxes directly from the text of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic. In 'The Dry Salvages' where the concluding charge is

Not fare well
But fare forward, voyagers,

the doctrine of action beyond thought of self-seeking is, again explicitly, what Krishna urged to Arjuna on the field of battle; and we recall Eliot's remarking, in his essay on Dante, that 'the next greatest philosophical poem' to *The Divine Comedy* within his experience was the *Bhagavad-Gita.* In 'Little Gidding' the passage of movement is the terza rima passage at the close of the second part, and the deliberately prosaic lines open the third section. The movement described is the 'dead patrol' of two air-raid wardens.

The versification in these third parts is the staple for the poems as a whole, a very irregular iambic line with many substitutions, of predominantly four or five beats, but with syllables ranging from six to eighteen. The fourth movement, in every case, is a short lyric, as it was in *The Waste Land.* The fifth movement is a resumption and resolution of themes, and becomes progressively more intricate in the last two poems, since the themes are cumulative and are all brought together at the close of 'Little Gidding,'

It seems doubtful whether at the time of writing 'Burnt Norton,' just after *Murder in the Cathedral,* Eliot had already projected the series. His creative energies for the next

three years were to be largely taken up with *The Family Reunion,* which, to judge from the endless revisions in the manuscript, caused him about as much trouble as anything he has done. With 'East Coker' in the spring of 1940 he made his first experiment in a part for part parallel with an earlier work of his own. Again Donne's practice is suggestive: when he had evolved a particularly intricate and irregular stanza, he invariably set himself the challenge of following it unchanged to the end of his poem. But in assigning himself a similar problem for a poem two hundred lines long, Eliot has tried something far more exacting, where failure could be caused by the parallels becoming merely mechanical, and by the themes and rhythms becoming not subtle variations but flat repetitions. 'East Coker' does inr deed have something of the effect of a set piece. Just as its high proportion of prosaic lines seems to spring from partial exhaustion, so its resumption of themes from 'Burnt Norton' can occasionally sound as though the poet was merely imitating himself. But on the whole he had solved his problem. He had made a renewal of form that was to carry him successively in the next two years through 'The Dry Salvages' and 'Little Gidding.' The discrimination between repetition and variation lies primarily in the rhythm; and these last two poems reverberate with an increasing musical richness.

A double question that keeps insisting itself through any discussion of these structures is the poet's consciousness of analogies with music, and whether such analogies are a confusion of arts. One remembers that Eliot, in accepting Lawrence's definition of 'the essence of poetry' as a 'stark, bare, rocky directness of statement,' drew an analogy with the later quartets of Beethoven.[5] This does not mean that he has ever tried to copy literally the effects of a different medium. But he knows that poetry is like music in being a temporal rather than a spatial art; and he has by now

thought much about the subject, as the concluding paragraph of 'The Music of Poetry' shows:

> I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music: how much technical knowledge of musical form is desirable I do not know, for I have not that technical knowledge myself. But I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. I think that it might be possible for a poet to work too closely to musical analogies: the result might be an effect of artificiality.

But he insists—and this has immediate bearing on his own intentions—that 'the use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music.' He has worked on that assumption throughout his quartets, and whether he has proved that 'there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet,' or that 'there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter,' can be known only through repeated experience of the whole series. All I wish to suggest here is the pattern made by some of the dominant themes in their interrelation and progression.

'Burnt Norton' opens as a meditation on time. Many comparable and contrasting views are introduced. The lines are drenched with reminiscences of Heraclitus' fragments on flux and movement. Some of the passages on duration remind us that Eliot listened to Bergson's lectures at the Sorbonne in the winter of 1911 and wrote an essay then criticizing his *duree reellc* as 'simply not final,' Other lines on the recapture of time through consciousness suggest the aspect of Bergson that most stimulated Proust. But the chief contrast around which Eliot constructs this poem is that between the view of time as a mere continuum, and the difficult paradoxical Christian view of how man lives both 'in and out of time,' how he is immersed in the flux and yet can penetrate to the eternal by apprehending timeless existence within time and above it. But even for the Christian the

moments of release from the pressures of the flux are rare, though they alone redeem the sad wastage of otherwise unillumined existence. Eliot recalls one such moment of peculiar poignance, a childhood moment in the rose garden—a symbol he has previously used, in many variants, for the birth of desire.[6] Its implications are intricate and even ambiguous, since they raise the whole problem of how to discriminate between supernatural vision and mere illusion. Other variations here on the theme of how time is conquered are more directly apprehensible. In dwelling on the extension of time into movement, Eliot takes up an image he had used in 'Triumphal March': 'at the still point of the turning world,' This notion of 'a mathematically pure point' (as Philip Wheelwright has called it) seems to be Eliot's poetic equivalent in our cosmology for Dante's 'unmoved Mover,' another way of symbolising a timeless release from the 'outer compulsions' of the world. Still another variation is the passage on the Chinese jar in the final section. Here Eliot, in a conception comparable to Wallace Stevens' 'Anecdote of the Jar,' has suggested how art conquers time:

Only by the form,, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

'Burnt Norton' is the most philosophically dense of the series, and any adequate account of Eliot's development of his themes would demand detailed analysis. With the opening phrase of 'East Coker,' 'In my beginning is my end,' he has extended his meditation on time into history. In such a phrase, which is close to Heraclitus' 'The beginning and the end are common,' the poet has also indicated the recurrent attraction he feels to the reconciliation of opposites which characterizes that pre-Socratic philosopher. Eliot is using these words in a double sense. He is thinking his-

torically—as the first section goes on to make clear, he is thinking back to the conception of order and harmony as propounded by a sixteenth-century Thomas Elyot in his *Booke named the Governour.* And near the close of the poem, the overtones of history and of family are blended in the phrase, 'Home is where one starts from.' But the continuity with which he is concerned is not simply that of race. He is also thinking in religious terms—in my beginning, in my birth, is implied my end, death; yet, in the Christian reversal of terms, that death can mean rebirth, and the culminating phrase of 'East Coker' is 'In my end is my beginning.'

As his thought becomes involved with the multiple meanings of history, with how the moments of significance and illumination bisect 'the world of time,' he dwells also on the course of the individual history, and his reflections become deeply personal as he confronts the disappointments of old age. He weighs the 'limited value' of what can be learned from experience, since its accustomed pattern may restrict and blind us to what comes with the 'new and shocking' moment. When the soul is sick, it can learn only through humility, only if it accepts the paradox which is developed both by St. John of the Cross and by Marvell in his 'Dialogue Between the Soul and Body,' that 'Our only health is the disease,' Man may come to the end of his night of dark vacancy only if he learns that he 'must go by the way of dispossession,'

The three middle sections of 'East Coker' are as sombre as anything Eliot has written, and culminate in his pronouncing his career which has fallen between two wars as 'twenty years largely wasted,' The danger of such a declaration is that it risks false humility, and the inertness of these lines contrasts unsatisfactorily with the comparable passage in 'Burnt Norton' on what is gained through form. But the contrast is structurally deliberate, and with the phrase,

'Home is where one starts from,' there comes the quickening reflection that old men should be explorers 'into another intensity,' For a further union.' What they must pass through is such 'empty desolation' as the sea's, and in developing that image in the concluding lines of 'East Coker,' the poet prepares the most thrilling transition of the whole series. For 'The Dry Salvages' opens with a contrast between the river and the sea, between the two forces that have most conditioned Eliot's sense of rhythm. For nationalist critics of the Van Wyck Brooks school who declare that Eliot has broken away from his roots since he has not included in his poems realistic details from the Middle West, it could be profitable to note that the river is 'the big river,'—at first the frontier, then the 'useful, untrustworthy' conveyor of shipping, then a problem to be solved by the bridge builder, and at last 'almost forgotten' by city dwellers. This passage gives an insight into the sources of a poet's rhythm; and into how he penetrates for his material beneath all surface details, in order to repossess his essential experience. The significance of the river for Eliot shows in what he wrote to a St. Louis paper in 1930:

> I feel that there is something in having passed one's childhood beside the big river, which is incommunicable to those who have not. Of course my people were Northerners and New Englanders, and of course I have spent many years out of America altogether; but Missouri and the Mississippi have made a deeper impression on me than any other part of the world.

The contrapuntal balance of sea and river reinforces, throughout 'The Dry Salvages,' the themes of time and movement. And yet the underlying changelessness of the sea beneath its tides, with its tolling bells measuring 'time not our time,' underscores also the contrasting theme of the timeless. History is again dwelt on, and is now discerned as not just the blind corridor it seemed to Gerontion, since 'Time the destroyer is time the preserver.' This perception

gives foundation for Krishna's counsel of disinterested action. Then, after the bell buoy's 'perpetual angelus' has resounded through the lyrical fourth movement, as it had in the sestina at the opening of the second, Eliot makes his most complete articulation of what can be involved in 'the intersection of the timeless with time.' By allusions to the rose garden and to the other moments of illumination that he has symbolized in the three poems so far, he suggests the common basis of such moments in their 'hints' of grace. He goes farther, and states that such 'hints' lead also to the central truth in his religious convictions:

But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning,
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered and reconciled. . .

The doctrine of Incarnation is the pivotal point on which Eliot's thought has swung well away from the nineteenth century's romantic heresies of Deification. The distinction between thinking of God become Man through the Saviour, or of Man becoming God through his own divine potentialities, can be at the root of political as well as of religious

belief. Eliot has long affirmed that Deification, the reckless doctrine of every great man as a Messiah, has led ineluctably to Dictatorship. What he has urged in his *Idea of a Christian Society* is a re-established social order in which both governors and governed find their completion in their common humility before God. The above passage, therefore, compresses, at the climax of 'The Dry Salvages' the core of Eliot's thought on time, on history, and on the destiny of man.

The content of 'Little Gidding' is most apparently under the shadow of the war. But it underlines what Eliot declared in an essay on Toetry in Wartime,' that the more permanently valuable poetry of 1914-18 was 'more of sadness and pity than of military glory.'[7] The secluded chapel enforces thoughts of pilgrimage and prayer, but a further reflection on history carries the poet to the realization that

We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.

If 'history may be servitude, history may be freedom,' and

Here the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

In the final movement he resumes successively all his major themes, opening with 'The end is where we start from.' This leads into another passage on words and form, since 'every sentence is an end and a beginning,' 'every poem an epitaph.' Comparably, every action is a step towards death, but may likewise be a step towards redemption. Once again we have a recognition of the potentialities of history far more resolute than what was seen in the tired backward look in 'East Coker.' For now the poet affirms that

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

What we will know is adumbrated through allusions that take us back through the series, back to 'the source of the longest river,' back, indeed, to the moment of release that he evoked in 'New Hampshire,' to 'the children in the apple tree.' But the completion of that glimpsed vision, as was the case with Dante's childhood love for Beatrice, must be sought through full maturity, through

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything).

The value of Eliot's device of incremental repetition hinges most on this final section of 'Little Gidding,' since there is hardly a phrase that does not recall an earlier passage in the series. Some readers may object that this makes too much for a circular movement, with insufficient resolution at the close. In one sense this is true, but only in as much as the questions on which the poet is meditating are endless in their recurrent urgency. And such structural recurrence of themes, as Proust also found, is the chief device by which the writer can convey the recapture of time. The concluding lines mount to finality in their enunciation

that all *shall be well*
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

Out of their context these lines may seem to be merely a decorative allusion to Dante's paradise. But once you have observed the central role that fire plays, intermittently through the series and dominantly in 'Little Gidding,' the potential reconciliation of the flames of destruction with the rose of light is weighted with significance. A glance at Eliot's varied symbolic use of fire can also give us an opportunity to examine more closely than we have so far the texture of the poetry he has developed through the structures of his quartets.

The lyric at the opening of the second part of 'Little Gidding' recounts the successive death of the elements. It versifies, with amplification, a sentence of Heraclitus that dwells both on the ceaseless flux and on the reconciliation of opposites, Tire lives in the death of air, and air in the death of fire; water lives in the death of earth, and earth in the death of water.' We can observe again the lasting impression made on the poet's consciousness by this philosopher, concerning whom he recorded in his student's notebook of thirty years ago: 'By God he meant fire.' But the fire in this lyric, and in the terza rima lines which follow it, is not the fire of creation:

In the uncertain hour before the morning
Near the ending of interminable night
At the recurrent end of the unending
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
Had passed below the horizon of his homing. . .

The 'dark dove' is the bird that haunts now all our skies; its 'flickering tongue' is the airman's fire of destruction. The figures who meet 'between three districts when the smoke arose' and who tread 'the pavement in a dead patrol' need no annotation of their function. But Eliot is occupied here with other meetings as well. It is no usual fellow warden whom he encounters but 'a familiar compound ghost.' This 'ghost' is akin, as some phrases show, to Brunetto Latini, whose meeting with Dante in Hell is one of the passages which has impressed Eliot most. A characteristic of Eliot's poetic thought ever since *Ash Wednesday* has been to make free transitions from the *Inferno* to the *Purgatorio;* and the last words spoken in this 'disfigured street' as the day is breaking, are advice to the poet that he cannot escape from the 'exasperated spirit' of old age,

unless restored by that refining fire
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

And here, in the image of the dance—as Theodore Spencer has remarked to me—one also moves in anticipation beyond the searing flames of purgatory to the radiant spheres of paradise.

The other chief passage on fire in 'Little Gidding' is the fourth movement, as impressive a lyric as any Eliot has produced:

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

The control of the range of meanings here is masterly. On one level, the choice in the first stanza is between destruction and destruction, for as 'the tongues' on both sides declare it is either 'we' or 'they,' the 'incandescent terror' must blot out either London or Berlin. But the descending dove is, more profoundly, that of annunciation, and 'the tongues' of prophecy declare the terms of our possible redemption. The poem reaches the heart of its meaning in the heavily stressed end-word of the opening line of the second stanza. That most familiar word is yet unfamiliar to mankind, which 'cannot bear very much reality.' We can hardly face the fact that love is essentially not release but suffering; and that the intolerable burden of our desires—our Nessus shirt—can be removed by nothing within our power, but solely through

grace. All we have is the terms of our choice, the fire of our destructive lusts or the inscrutable terrible fire of divine Love.

The poetry of purgation, as Eliot has observed, is ordinarily less exciting than that of either damnation or beatitude, but this lyric transcends such limitation through its fervour. The encounter between the air-raid wardens is the other most dramatic passage in the poem. Since it marks Eliot's first experiment with terza rima, it carries further the long series of his debts to Dante. But its method follows more particularly the lesson of another master. The 'forgotten, half-recalled' figure is evoked by the device of multiple reference which Henry James used in his 'ghost' stories. The figure, 'too strange . . . for misunderstanding,' suggests not only Brunetto Latini or Arnaut Daniel. When he reminds Eliot how their common concern with speech impelled them 'to purify the dialect of the tribe,' he virtually translates from Mallarme's 'Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe' ('donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu'),[8] and indicates that he may be thought of as any of Eliot's dead masters. When he proceeds to disclose 'the gifts reserved for age,' it is interesting to recall that Eliot's bitter 'Lines for an Old Man' contain in the manuscript the epigraph, 'to Stephane Mallarme.'

It may be objected that such a range of suggestion detracts from dramatic singleness. It is more certainly true—as we noted in relation to his plays—that Eliot, from the time of his earliest poems, has been more successful in posing a dramatic moment than in developing a sustained action. It may also be charged that he betrays a limitation of content in comparison with some of the other strange meetings that he recalls. Whereas the lines spoken by Brunetto Latini are, as Eliot himself has said, Dante's 'testimony of a loved master of arts'; and Wilfred Owen's hallucinated pitiful encounter was with no less than the enemy he had killed; the main

burden that Eliot's 'ghost' has to convey is the impotent lacerations of growing old.

But to the charge that has been brought against Eliot that ever since his conversion his content has been tenuous, the range of reflection and feeling in the quartets should serve to give a persuasive refutation. The trouble has been that whereas Eliot's earlier poetry was difficult in form, his later work is difficult in thought. The reader of 'Gerontion' had to learn how to supply the missing connectives. The reader of the quartets finds a sufficiently straightforward logic, but is confronted with realms of discourse largely unfamiliar to a secular age. Sustained knowledge of the dark night of the soul is a rare phase of mystical experience in any age; and it is at that point that agnostic and atheist readers have been most severe in demanding whether Eliot's lines express anything more than mere literary allusions. The severity is desirable, but it should not be forgotten that authentic poetry often takes us into experiences equally remote from our ordinary hours, as in Oedipus' vision at Colonnos, in Rilke's *Duino Elegies,* or in almost the whole *Paradiso.* Misconceptions of Eliot's content may be avoided if we remain aware, at least, of what he is aiming to do. As our examination of the structures of his quartets has borne out, the greatest change from his earlier poems is that his intentions now are only intermittently dramatic. Or rather, he has tried to concentrate his desire for drama into his two plays; and what he has produced in his quartets is what in the seventeenth century would have been called meditations. Yet the most striking change in the texture of his verse is his abandonment of the devices that he learned from Donne and the other metaphysicals. The qualities for which he now aspires are those of a less popular seventeenth-century master, Lancelot Andrewes, whose 'spiritual discipline' he has contrasted with Donne's broken intensity. The three attributes of Andrewes' style that Eliot singled out for praise

can belong to poetry as well as to prose: 'ordonnance, or arrangement and structure, precision in the use of words, and relevant intensity,' Those attributes seemed very far from the poetical aims of 'The Hollow Men' which he had written the year before his essay on Andrewes; but something comparable to the 'purely contemplative' emotion he found in Andrewes is what he now wants most to express.

The measure of an author's attraction for Eliot can always be read in what that author has taught him about the development of his medium; and it is notable that the passage which Eliot cited to show how Andrewes' spiritual reflections can force 'a concrete presence upon us,' provided him with the starting point of his own 'Journey of the Magi.'[9] Another sentence ('Let us then make this so accepted a time in itself twice acceptable by our accepting . . .'), which illustrated how Andrewes did 'not hesitate to hammer, to inflect, even to play upon a word for the sake of driving home its meaning,' gave Eliot a similar word-play in 'Burnt Norton' ('There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting'), and stimulated him to such an independent development as the startling

Distracted from distraction by distraction.

Those who demand that a poet's content should be immediately useful will take no satisfaction in Eliot's belief that the poet in wartime should as a man 'be no less devoted to his country than other men,' but that 'his first duty as a poet' is still to the preservation and development of his 'native language.' To the nationalist critics that will seem to beg the question of content altogether. But the cheapness of Van Wyck Brooks's opinion that Eliot is a poet of little hope, less faith, and no charity, should be substantially refuted by the lyric on the kinds of love alone. But such a lyric does not exist alone; it rises organically as the summation of one of Eliot's profoundest themes. And those who are suspicious

of the inertness of the passages which urge the soul to wait in the dark without hope, should remember that the final declaration, even in 'East Coker,' is that

We must be still and still moving.

The reconciliation of opposites is as fundamental to Eliot as it was to Heraclitus. Only thus can he envisage a resolution of man's whole being. The 'heart of light' that he glimpsed in the opening movement of 'Burnt Norton' is at the opposite pole from the 'Heart of Darkness,' from which he took the epigraph for 'The Hollow Men.' Essential evil still constitutes more of Eliot's subject-matter than essential good, but the magnificent orchestration of his themes has prepared for that paradisal glimpse at the close, and thereby makes it no decorative allusion, but an integrated climax to the content no less than to the form. Such spiritual release and reconciliation are the chief reality for which he strives in a world that has seemed to him increasingly threatened with new dark ages.

NOTES

1. 'The Music of Poetry' was the W. P. Ker Memorial Lecture at Glasgow. It also appeared in *Partisan Review* (November 1942).

2. By including in 'Little Gidding' a refrain from Juliana of Norwich—

Sin is Behovely, but
All shall be well, and
All manner of thing shall be well-

Eliot also aimed, as he has said, 'to escape any suggestion of historical sentimentality about the seventeenth century by this reiterated reference to the fourteenth century and therefore to get more bearing on the present than would be possible if the relation was merely between the present and one particular period of the past.'

3. This was also observed by Helen Gardner, in 'The Recent Poetry of T. S. Eliot' *(New Writing,* Summer 1942). The other most useful studies of Eliot's later work that I have seen are Philip Wheelwright's 'The *Burnt Norton* Trilogy' *(The Chimera,* Autumn 1942) and James J. Sweeney's examination of the sources of 'East Coker' *(The Southern Review,* Spring 1941).

4. I am indebted for this point and for other fertile suggestions to Mr. John L. Sweeney.

5. At pp. 89-90 above.

6. A detailed analysis has been made by Leonard Unger, 'T. S. Eliot's Rose Garden: A Persistent Theme' *(The Southern Review,* Spring 1942).

7. 'Poetry in Wartime' appeared in *Common Sense* (October 1942). Eliot also wrote a poem on the same subject, 'A Note on War Poetry,' which appeared in the anthology, *London Calling* 094'):

Not the expression of collective emotion
Imperfectly reflected in the daily papers.
Where is the point at which the merely individual
Explosion breaks

In the path of an action merely typical
To create the universal, originate a symbol
Out of the impact? this is a meeting
On which we attend

Of forces beyond control by experiment:
Of Nature and the Spirit. Mostly, the individual
Experience is too large f or too small. Our emotions
Are only 'incidents'

In the effort to keep day and night together.
It seems just possible that a poem might happen
To a very young man: but a poem is not poetry—
That is a life.

War is not a life: it is a situation,
One which may neither be ignored nor accepted,
A problem to be met with ambush and stratagem,
Enveloped or scattered.

The enduring is no substitute for the transient,
Neither one for the other. But the abstract conception
Of private experience at its greatest intensity
Becoming universal, which we call 'poetry,'
May be affirmed in verse.

8. This point has also been observed by Delmore Schwartz.

9. How prose may be transformed into poetry is illustrated by the comparison between the quotation from Andrewes and what Eliot made of it:

'It was no summer progress. A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey m. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, *in solstitio biumah,* "the very dead oi winter." '

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter,'

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