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T. S. ELIOT

THE DESIGN OF HIS POETRY

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THE DESIGN OF HIS
POETRY

ELIZABETH DREW

London

EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE

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TO
JOHN L. SWEENEY

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Poetry is of course not to be defined by its uses ... It may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed; may help to break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it. It may make us from time to time a little more aware of th'e 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 to say al this is only to say what you know already, if you have felt poetry and thought about your feelings.

T. s. FLIOT *The Use of Poetry
and the Use of Criticism*

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PREFACE

CRITICISM must always profess an end in view, which, roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art.' This is Eliot's own definition of the function of criticism, in his essay with that title; and it is one with which most people would agree. The elucidation centres in and radiates from a search for *design*, in every meaning of that word. All art springs from the impulse to impose pattern upon experience. Poetry, using the medium of language, seeks to give a living verbal substance and outline to the unorganized feelings, perceptions, ideas and sensations afloat in the personal consciousness of the poet. But any attempt at the elucidation of this process of metamorphosis by which shapeless, untidy, vagrant consciousness becomes what Yeats calls 'proud, living, unwasted words,' brings with it the further awareness that 'a style, a rhythm, to be significant, must embody a significant mind.' Any exploration of the techniques of poetry is inextricably intermingled with the exploration of another element in design, 'the figure in the carpet,' and the attempt to elucidate that. What is the poet *designating* in his pattern of words? How is his mind, through his own particular style and rhythm, making us 'See the world afresh, or some new part of it'? What *designs upon us* does he have? How is he modelling his medium of communication so that through his own patterned sensibility and understanding our own shall be awakened and shaped?

The elucidation of works of art, then, becomes an effort at the interpretations of these inter-related patterns. The critic or teacher or reader is fully aware that his search for 'meaning', and his own expression of a poem's 'meaning' exists in a very restricted and very different order of being

from that of the work of art itself, which remains proud, living and un wasteful in its assertion of its own vitality. But just as the creation of poetry is the result of a compulsion towards expression and communication, so a similar compulsion visits its readers. Eliot himself admits the presence of what he calls this 'restless demon' and its drive.

Our impulse to interpret a work of art (by 'work of art' I mean here rather the work of one artist as a whole) is exactly as imperative and fundamental as our impulse to interpret the universe by metaphysics . . . and Bradley's apothegm that 'metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct; but to find these reasons is no less an instinct'; applies as precisely to the interpretation of poetry. . . . To interpret then, or to seek to pounce upon the secret, to elucidate the pattern and pluck out the mystery of a poet's work, is 'no less an instinct'. Nor is the effort altogether vain; for as the study of philosophy, and indeed the surrendering ourselves . . . to some system of our own or of someone else, is as needful part of a man's life as falling in love or making any contract, so is it necessary to surrender ourselves to some interpretation of the poetry we like.

This passage is from Eliot's preface to *The Wheel of Fire* by G. Wilson Knight, a book which explores Shakespeare's poetic symbols and imagery. Any critic of Eliot's poetry inevitably sets out on a similar exploration. I have found what is, to me, an interesting parallel in symbolic content between the progression of dream symbols described by Jung •as arising during what he calls 'the integration of the personality' (and which he relates to the history of myth), and some of those appearing in Eliot's poetry during the course of its development.¹ But this is not a book about rival schools of psychology and anthropology. I have very little knowledge of either, and am in no way qualified to judge them.

Moreover any approach to poetry through psychology seems to me to be blocked very early. Psychology can suggest a good deal about the unconscious forces at work behind the conception of art, but it has limitations which make it a very poor critical instrument. It cannot touch the work of art itself, and it cannot distinguish between good art and bad. The mere presence of certain images in poetry, therefore, though it may be of psychological interest, has nothing to do with its vitality. The life of poetry springs from the inter-relationships of words in a formal pattern. It is from an exploration of those that elucidation must start.

But these inter-relationships are more than usually complex in the poetry of Eliot. An analysis of them requires us to 'break up conventional modes of perception and valuation', and an exploration of them soon leads us to those 'deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate'. So that both new insights and a new way of arriving at insights are included in Eliot's designs. There is, to alter Wordsworth's image, a film of unfamiliarity in the reader's eye which must be dispersed before he can see what the poetry is doing.

A large body of criticism already exists dealing with the sources of his literary allusions, with various aspects of his symbolic method, and with the elucidation of certain individual poems. To this I am deeply indebted. There has, however, been no attempt to write of the body of the poetry as a process of growth, as an 'integration of the personality'. The particular purpose of this book is to do that, and to help the general reader, and the student, to a fuller enjoyment of the individual poems by analysis and discussion. Any such analyses must be open to attack. All interpretation must be personal and partial, and as Marianne Moore said: 'Ex-

panded explanation tends to spoil the lion's leap.' But any newcomer to the critics of Eliot is in good company as he yields to that 'restless demon' with its "imperative and fundamental impulse'. And we may add another simple statement by Eliot himself: 'Our talking about poetry is a part of, an extension of, our experience of it.'

¹ My interest in this was first aroused by an article on 'The Archetypal Imagery of T. S. Eliot' by Genevieve W. Foster in *PMLA*, Vol. 60 (1945), 567-585.

T. S. ELIOT
THE DESIGN OF HIS POETRY

CHAPTER I

The Mythical Vision

In looking at objects of Nature, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking* for, a symbolical language for something within me that already and for ever exists, than observing anything new.

S. T. COLERIDGE

I hold this book to be the most important expression which the present age has found . . . 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 for which the horoscope is auspicious. Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step towards making the modern world possible for art, towards . . . order and form. And only those who have won their own discipline in secret and without aid, in a world which offers very little assistance to that end, can be of any use in furthering this advance.¹

THE whole tone of this passage from Eliot's review of *Ulysses* suggests that in it he is not merely commenting on an interesting and original work by a fellow literary artist, but that there is something in the method

¹ *The Dial*. November, 1923.

of the creation of that work which has excited him profoundly; that it contains some revelation of wide and deep significance for himself and for others. He likens its importance to that of the most revolutionary discoveries in the physical universe, and his mind jumps for an analogy to the ancient belief that linked man's fate with the courses of the stars. As an astrologer of old plotted the encompassing position of the constellations to discover the controlling forces of a particular future, and rejoiced to find them favourable, so Eliot sees the happiest future for art under the influence of a new controlling factor. He calls this 'the mythical method' and he sees it as a way by which the artist can give shape and significance to the chaotic material of contemporary life. He can set the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy' in opposition to the pattern of a different vision; he can 'manipulate a parallel' with the world of myth.)

But the stories of ancient mythology have always been a source of inspiration to the literary artist, as their use in every age has amply shown. (What then does Eliot mean when he says that recent discoveries in anthropology and psychology have made the mythical method possible, and that it is the most important expression the present age has found?

He means that modern explorations of myth have changed completely the conceptions of its origins, its nature and its function. Myth (the etymological root is the same as that of *mystery*) leads us back to ultimate mysteries, not only the mystery of life itself, but of that element in life by which man differentiated himself from the rest of the animal creation: speech. *Mythos* meant 'word', and the development of man's use of the term from *mythos* to *epos* to *Togos* is itself the story of his developing use of language;

from the word meaning a symbolic reflection of his earliest consciousness ;to the word meaning a structure of events in time ; to the word meaning a pattern of rational values.)

Modern scholarship now recognizes that myth no dead form, a relic of antiquity, an empty survival. It is true that the "ancient stories we call 'myths' are primitive legends expressing man's first response to his world, But the *manner* of that response springs from a faculty alive in all ages of man's existence. The mythical method is the presentation of experience in symbolic form, the earliest and still the most direct and immediate form of human expression. Long before man developed the power of logical discourse and intellectual interpretation, the material transmitted to his mind through his senses moulded itself into meaning in myth. The outer worlds of physical nature, of human character, action and endeavour, and the inner world of his own conscious and unconscious response to these things, formed themselves in him, and were in turn formed and developed by him into symbolic configurations, into metaphorical conceptions and expressions. It was the first step of primitive man 'towards order and form'; the giving of imaginative shape and significance to the totality of his experienced

(And since its aim was to encompass his experience in its wholeness, to communicate his sense of the revelation of its meaning, primitive myth always creates a pattern in which man brings himself into significant relationship with mysterious forces outside the actualities of his daily life. He senses himself as part of a symbolic drama extending far beyond himself. Anthropologists now trace all the symbolic formulations of primitive myth and religion, and of the ritual inseparable from them, to the primeval consciousness of a magic or *mana* potency indwelling in the physical

universe and accessible to man, though forever evading his practical understanding:

In the case of any important magic we invariably find the story accounting for its existence. Such a story tells when and where it entered the possession of man. But it is not the story of its origins. Magic has never been made or invented. All magic simply 'was' from the beginning an essential adjunct of all such things and processes as vitally interest man and yet elude his normal rational efforts.¹

Myth, therefore, was the symbolic presentation of primitive man's instinct that his work-a-day world was interpenetrated with a super-rational or extra-rational activity in which he himself could and did share. There was an anonymous source of vitality diffused throughout the universe and in himself, which he objectified in dramatic symbols and so made operative in human experience. His myths were fabulous fictions which revealed psychic facts: they were images which intensified and expanded and gave grandeur of design to his existence. Through them he became part of a unity composed of two activities. On the one hand he appeared merely a social unit in the common round of diurnal enterprise, but he apprehended too a symbolic drama where that apparently planless flux of being and becoming related itself to changeless patterns of creative and destructive forces; patterns of value, existing on a different plane of living, and requiring a language of their own) " "

(He created this symbolic drama in that language, the language of myth and ritual, which thus became the herit-

¹ Magic, Science and Religion⁷, Bronislaw Malinowski, in *Science, Religion and Reality*, edited by Joseph Needham, London. The Sheldon Press, 1926, p. 69.

age of the race handed on from generation to generation. Through it the individual and the tribe were alike united with the indestructible potencies symbolized, and brought into close and purposive relation with them. Thus the function of Myth and ritual in the primitive community was the creation of expressive forms which satisfied man's primeval need of spiritual reassurance and social stability. The myth vouched for the 'magic' that was alive in the universe, while the ritual associated with the sacred tradition defeated the destructive aspects of the 'magic' and transmitted its beneficent powers into the life of the individual and the tribe. The formal rite concentrated and channelled the cosmic energies, disposing their strength and value directly upon the affairs of men.

Modern anthropology sees all religion and all art springing and growing from his primitive root of symbolic transformation. By his symbol-making instinct man's knowledge and experience of the outer and inner world were projected into direct sensuous embodiment, giving them life and outline and meaning, turning force into form. And it was the juxtaposition of the 'shape and significance' of life given expression in these symbolic terms with 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' in which Eliot saw a hope for a new advance towards order and form.)

§

(The contribution of psychology to that possibility has been to explore behind the *results* of man's symbol-making instincts and needs, to their source in his own being.) Though psychology has come to no verifiable conclusions about the

origins or the nature of the source, it has done much to clarify both its workings and its functions. It has also given it a name and called it 'the unconscious', that part of the psyche which Jung describes as 'the eternally creative mother of consciousness ; the never failing source of all art and of all human productivity'. To the psychologist, the 'magic' which to the primitive just 'was', originates in the unconscious, whence man projects it upon the external world, endowing physical objects or his self-made symbolic figures with properties and behaviour from its own reality; giving psychic life from its own energies to the objects of its wonder, fear, love, hate, reverence or contempt.

Freud, at his seventieth birthday celebration, refused credit for the discovery of the unconscious. That, he said, properly belonged to the masters of literature, who had always been aware of its presence, its pressures and its powers. Jung would agree with him. But the two great psychological pioneers of the contemporary world parted company over the question of the derivation of myth. Though both agree it has its root in the unconscious and the strange phenomenon of the dream image, they differ radically in their theories and interpretations of its genesis.]

To Freud, the scientific positivist, the unconscious contents of the human psyche consist solely of material suppressed by the conscious. To him the unconscious is a pathological or infantile activity of the mind and the disguised symbols of mythological situation which arise in it mere symptoms of these all-prevailing but basically unhealthy suppressions. He sees all myth, all religion and all art as originating in such suppressions. Moreover, although the resulting symbolic manifestations are so complex and so varied, their originating cause is simple: 'the beginnings of

religion, ethics, society and art meet in the Oedipus complex'.¹ He interprets all unconscious drives exclusively in sexual and familial terms, and their emergence into myth and ritual as illustrating various aspects of the ambivalent emotions of love and hate, admiration and fear, attraction and repulsion, inherent in the parent-child relationship. 'In, the beginning was the deed.'² the original murder (whether in imagination or in actuality) of the primal father, springing from the incest motive, and all further developments of mythical legend and religious ritual are transpositions and releases into acceptable terms of the repressed emotional forces occasioned by that ever-recurring central situation in the life of the individual.

¶To Jung, however, this theory very early appeared inadequate. He could not square the tremendous dynamic effects of mythic-religious concepts on man's history, art and behaviour with a belief that their symbolic origin was morbid or that they derived solely from experience in the single individual life. He felt that such psychic happenings could not be explained away in other terms, but must be explained as psychic events with an independent nature of their own. He became convinced that the symbols generated in dream from the unconscious sprang not only from man as a disordered object, but also from a level of his psychic activity where his faculty of symbolic transformation made him a self-creating subject.

It is clear that such a conception of the activities of the human psyche would be more congenial to Eliot as a contribution to the 'mythical method' than the theories of Freud. In his remarks on *Ulysses*, however, Eliot injects parentheses after his mention of psychology - '(such as it is

¹ *Totem and Tabu*, p. 260.

² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious)'. In *The Dry Salvages* he appears to class it with fortune-telling, palmistry and astrology as 'pastimes and drugs'. He is, however, kinder elsewhere:

Psychology has very great utility in two ways. It can revive, and has already to some extent revived, truths long since known to Christianity, but mostly forgotten and ignored, and it can put them in a form and a language understandable by modern people to whom the language of Christianity is not only dead but undecipherable . . . But I must add that I think psychology can do more than this, in discovering more about the human soul still; for I do not pretend that there is nothing more to know; the possibilities of knowledge are practically endless. Psychology is an indispensable handmaid to theology; but I think a very poor housekeeper.¹

{ But in spite of this 'serious' reaction to the subject, the core of the criticism is in the last sentence, and it is obvious that it was not through psychology that Eliot reached his own conclusions about the nature of reality. Yet apart from such ultimate problems, the development of his poetry contains an interesting parallel to some of the materials cited by Jung, and a confirmation of his belief that certain archetypal patterns of imagery which recur and interfuse in the myths of the human race are of great significance in the problem of the nature of the symbolizing process, as well as that of the nature of life in general. -'

§

To Jung these archetypal patterns inhabit a psychic territory which he has called the 'collective unconscious', an area beyond the personal unconscious first defined scientific-

¹ *The Listener*. March 30, 1932.

ally by Freud, and much vaster. It is not altogether clear in what terms Jung regards the collective unconscious. He speaks of it sometimes as a working hypothesis; sometimes as a kind of mighty metaphor (similar to Yeats' 'Great Memory') which images the permanent sameness of man's deepest psychic patterns. It would surely seem as if it belongs, in this category, where it could be generally accepted as of very great interest and enlightenment in the exploration of all the great recurring themes of myth and literature. But Jung, while admitting that evidences of it are to be found only in particular individuals, seems often to accept it as having universal scope as fact, j

{ There is no reason for believing that the psyche, with its peculiar structure, is the only thing in the world that has no history behind its individual manifestations. Even the conscious mind cannot be denied a history extending over at least five thousand years. It is only individual ego-consciousness that has forever a new beginning and an early end. But the unconscious psyche is not only immensely old, it is also able to grow unceasingly into an equally remote future. It forms, and is part of, the human species just as much as the body, which is also individually ephemeral, yet collectively of immeasurable duration.¹

{ Just as tradition is the inherited wisdom of the race consciously expressed, so Jung envisages the collective unconscious as the *unconscious* inherited wisdom of the race. As such he sees it as accounting not only for the striking analogies between the themes and patterns of myth in many different cultures, but also for the presence of recurring mythological and archaic symbols in dreams, even in the dreams of those who have no knowledge of the traditional and literary sources which perpetuate them.)

¹ *The Integration of the Personality*", p. 25.

(it is to these symbols that Jung has given the name of *archetypes* or *primordial images*, and he sees them not only as the raw materials from which the myths and religions of the race have been consciously elaborated, but as constantly recurring revelations of creative and destructive potentialities in the individual. They appear as symbols in man's deepest inner conflicts, in which his most vital energies are brought into play and 'they become accessible to consciousness only in the presence of that degree of self-awareness and power of understanding which enables a man to think what he experiences instead of just living it blindly'.¹ In fact, just as tradition is meaningless unless its continuity is also a process of continual recreation in society and in the individual, so with this racial memory. Its images, to be of any value, must be re-created in collaboration with the conscious intelligence into a process of ordered growth. Just as the language of myth and ritual gave significant pattern to tribal tradition and so satisfied the needs of primitive man for inner communal security, so Jung sees the same process accomplished for modern man through the conscious adaptation of these symbolic messages from the unconscious into richer patterns of individual living. '

(Moreover not only do they make him aware of the character of the eternally recurring conflicts to be resolved, but they are actual instruments of the resolution. Jung not only postulates the *presence* of the racial memory, of these deposits of inherited psychic experience which in certain circumstances and in certain temperaments can become stirred and active, but his experience has led him to detect in them not only a peculiarly powerful dynamism, but a *purposive* quality of their own. At the other extreme from

¹ *Psychological Types*, p. 272.

Freud's belief that such dream images are relics of primitive and infantile modes of reaction, blocking the way to the mature development of the ego, Jung regards them as revelations of psychic potentialities, 'the mighty spiritual inheritance of human development, reborn in every individual'. When particular circumstances are encountered in the life of the individual which bring him into touch with some aspect of this universal collective experience, tile images appear, modified by the personal circumstances and sensibilities of the dreamer, but bringing with them always the peculiarly stirring and energizing sense of involvement in larger and more impersonal forces.

Each of these images contains a piece of human psychology and human destiny, a relic of suffering or delight that has happened countless times in our ancestral story, and on the average follows ever in the same course. It is like a deeply graven river-bed in the soul, in which the waters of life, that had spread hitherto with groping and uncertain course over wide but shallow surfaces, suddenly become a mighty river. This happens when that particular chain of circumstances is encountered which from immemorial time has contributed to the laying down of the primordial image. The moment when the mythological situation appears is always characterized by a peculiar emotional intensity; it is as though chords in us were touched that had never resounded before, or as though forces were unloosed, the existence of which we had never dreamed.¹

And to Jung, not only are the forces unloosed, but the symbols through which they reveal themselves have a peculiarly compelling power. It is as if the individual were agent and interpreter of something which is as it were shaping *him* and being shaped *by* him in a reciprocal action. For

¹ 'On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art, *Contributions to Analytical Psychology*, p. 247.

in the incessant flux of lively antagonisms and perpetual oppositions which sustain the energies of psychic vitality, Jung detects an inner ordering principle, a purposive process, as compulsive as that of physical growth itself. Though he does not pretend to know what 'spirit' is, he insists on it as a force in its own right. He will not accept the 'spiritual' as a derivative of sex, even in the widest application of that term. 'The spiritual appears in the psyche likewise as a drive, indeed as a true passion. It is no derivative of another drive, but the indispensable formative power in the world of drives.' To those who become aware of this drive, this true passion, the archetypes and primordial images can act in the nature of energy transformers. They absorb and resolve the opposing charges on which the purposive use of psychic force depend and the fresh energy thus released can be directed towards future development.

In such cases it is as if the individual were himself caught up into the world of myth, made living instead of legendary, and with the content of its conscious and unconscious dramatic material revealed gradually as a creative process. And being in a sense artist too as well as a character in the drama, controlling as well as being controlled by the symbolic forms, being able 'to think what he experiences instead of just living it blindly', the individual has the power to collaborate consciously in the design. He waits for those moments when fabulous fiction explodes into psychic fact; when seemingly unrelated and ambiguous symbols constellate into pattern when many-faceted 'meaning' resolves itself from apparently irreconcilable paradox. Thus the material from the conscious and the unconscious situation 'given' symbolically in the dream image is reduced by the conscious formative process to new contours and compounds

of thought and action. The *mythos* of the symbol itself is united to the *epos* of action and to the *logos* of constructive thought.

§

There are as many archetypes as there are figures and situations in myth, for to Jung the psyche contains all the images that have ever given rise to myths. He has analysed a great number of them in his own terms of interpretation,¹ but there is one particular 'constellation of primordial images' to which he repeatedly returns in his writings, and which he regards as the accompaniment of the central psychic adventure of mature human life. He refers to the whole experience under the general title of 'the archetype of transformation' and in non-symbolic language as the process of Individuation or the Integration of the Personality. It is the experience of detachment from the world of objective reality as the centre of existence and the finding of 'a new dimension' in which it can and must be contemplated and lived. Detachment too from the ego as the centre of interest and the discovery of a different centre. As such it involves the process of the death of an old life and the birth of a new, the process traced back by Frazer and other scholars as the inner meaning of the symbolism of the oldest Fertility rituals, and the basis of their development into tragic drama. It is the paradox expressed in the pattern of *Oedipus Rex*. There, in the scene where Oedipus begins that exploration of the truth which will shatter his whole framework of temporal prosperity, the seer Tiresias says: 'This day shall give you birth and death.' It appears in innumer-

¹ See particularly *The Psychology of the Unconscious*, which contains his own theory of the meaning of the 'Oedipus complex.'

able forms in myth and legend, and is, of course, inseparably intertwined with the whole symbolic content of Christianity. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit': 'Except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God': 'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it.'^J

^v During the process of 'transformation', as observed psychologically by Jung, certain archetypal images regularly occur, forming a continuity and interaction of symbols expressing the disintegration and death of the old pattern and the gradual emergence of a new order. When this has established itself, the centre of the personality has been shifted from the ego to a hypothetical point of equilibrium between the individual consciousness and the collective psyche. Rather confusingly Jung calls this point the 'Self' and he says it is

Sensed as an indefinable state of being to which the ego is neither opposed nor subjected, but is in a relation of dependence and around which it revolves, very much as the earth rotates about the sun. I use the word 'sensed' in order to indicate the apperceptive character of the relation between the ego and the Self. In this relation there is nothing knowable in the intellectual sense, because we can say nothing of the contents of the Self. The ego is the only content of the Self that we know. The individuated ego experiences the fact that it is object of an unknown and superordinated subject . . . Visualizations are never more than awkward attempts of a fumbling mind to give some kind of form to the inexpressible psychological facts.¹

Of the whole progression lie concludes: 'As to what these processes consist in, I have no theory to offer. One would first have to know what the psyche is.' And he thinks that

¹ *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, p. 268.

the natural history of the mind is 110 further advanced to-day than was the natural science of the thirteenth century.

The central experience which informs most of the poetry of Eliot is this same age-old pattern of symbolic death and birth, lived through as an intense personal experience and accepted as the central truth of a religious faith. The Anglican Church to which he belongs has its own historic archetypes and rituals, containing in themselves a complete symbolic ordering of the theme, and, by abstraction in theology, the whole conceptual ordering of the psychic material involved. But Eliot in his poetry does not often use traditional Catholic symbolism. His 'transformations' are all his own in his reliving of the inner reality of the myth. It is of course obvious that without any hypothesis of a collective unconscious, the 'primordial' character of many of his dominating symbols can be accounted for very easily by his saturation in literary tradition. But the *sequence* in which the archetypal images arise in the course of his poetry, their inter-relationships, and their final resolution into the design of *Four Quartets*•, reflects in a strange way the succession in the appearance of the symbols which Jung has described as the archetype of transformation. The final development of the images too is in a 'sensing' of a pattern of vital relationships between the ego and a larger order, which arranges itself into the same kind of symbolic design. In this design 'reality' is felt to inhere, though apprehended only through 'hints and guesses'.

This is interesting psychologically, though, if the parallel be valid, it is only a confirming of Jung's hypothesis and not a 'discovering more about the human soul still'. The symbols will be discussed more fully when they begin to emerge in the poems themselves. Meanwhile, to get back to Eliot's

review of *Ulysses*, it was not any special symbolic *content* that he was discussing there, but the mythical *method* of myth as illustrating the direct presentation of experience in symbolic form. He was emphasizing Joyce's use of this to manipulate a parallel between past and present. Eliot himself does that specifically in *The Waste Land*, but he had been using the method in its general meaning long before. The recognition of sensuous symbolism as the richest form of human perception, and its ordering into pattern as the basis of poetic technique, had been from the beginning his whole theory and practice of poetry.

CHAPTER II

The Mythical Method

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.

T. S. ELIOT. Review of *Tarr* by Wyndham Lewis. *The Egoist*, September, 1918

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. . . .

T. S. ELIOT. *Swinburne as Poet* (1920)

ELIOT wrote at the end of his review of *Ulysses* that it was only those who had won their discipline in secret and without aid, in a world which offered very little assistance to that end, who could be of any use in furthering the development of the 'mythical method'. We cannot doubt that the author of the early poems and of the critical essays in *The Sacred Wood*, who had published *The Waste Land* in the year preceding the appearance of *Ulysses*, knew himself to be one of these. We look, therefore, in his early poetry and criticism for the statement and illustration of the qualities which he regarded as the necessary training for his task.

With the expansion of his own interests and his own

practice, Eliot has modified, or developed rather, some of his earlier critical dogma.

The poet, when he talks or writes about poetry, has peculiar qualifications and peculiar limitations . . . I can never reread any of my own prose writings without acute embarrassment . . . But I believe that the critical writings of poets . . . owe a great deal of their interest to the fact that at the back of the poet's mind, if not as his ostensible purpose, he is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write. Especially when he is young, and actively engaged in battling for the kind of poetry which he practises, he sees the poetry of the past in relation to his own . . . When he theorizes about poetic creation, he is likely to be generalizing one type of experience; when he ventures into aesthetics, he is likely to be less, rather than more competent than the philosophers; and he may do best to report, for the information of the philosophers, the data of his own introspection. What he writes about poetry, in short, must be assessed in relation to the poetry he writes.¹

At the outset of his career, however, Eliot was an active rebel and revolutionary, and his purpose, in both poetry and criticism, was to direct attention towards the particular sources of poetic power whose neglect had led, he felt, to a progressive devitalization of the practice of poetic art. He traced this not only to the general loss of the sense of tradition, but to the specific loss of direct symbolic transformation as a method of perception. The primitive mythmaker, for example, did not analyse or describe in terms of logical discourse, the idea that human life is fertilized by forces from the worlds of nature and of spirit. Instead, he embodied his consciousness of that truth in the myth of Leda ravished by Zeus in the form of a swan. The idea lives

¹ 'The Music of Poetry', *Partisan Review*. November-December, 1942.

through the sensuous embodiment of it and in the sensations aroused by that. From those we abstract the 'thought' that man is body, a part of the natural world, and union with nature is one source of his being; but there is a power beyond that of nature, for which, - however, he can find an image only *in* nature. It comes *like* a great bird in flight from the sky; the inflowing of its vital force is *like* the act by which man fertilizes woman. It is violent and joyous, and its product is Helen of Troy — beauty inspiring passions which hold the seeds of both creation and destruction, love and war.

That method of perceiving inner realities *through* their reflection in concrete image, and all the disciplines which have to accompany its translation into language, was what Eliot was in particular 'battling to recapture' in the practice of poetry. He saw the source of power in this symbolic concentration dissipated, and the language of poetry rendered weak and flaccid by the substitution of the 'narrative method', or by what he describes elsewhere as 'rumination'. He saw poetry given over to description, to discussion, to reflection or to mere decoration, while the readers of poetry too became habituated to receive their experience of poetry in those ways. They had come to expect explanation instead of revelation; to expect a method by which thought and emotion and sensation were elaborated as separate entities, each adding its quota to the whole, and related in a process of extended verbal clarification.¹ Eliot wanted to recapture all the concentration which the symbol brings as a result of the kind of perception in which object and 'meaning' synchronize and are recognized simultaneously. And not a single 'meaning', since no symbol can ever be pinned down to that. As it embodies both thought and sensation, so all the

potential proliferation of physical life itself, and all the *relating* qualities of thinking, live in it together. It is body and mind in one: it both means and is. It has 'shape and significance'⁵ a sensuous body and a 'meaning' which points beyond body. It is complete in itself and yet life, inward and outward life, are not only contained in it, but flow from it in every direction. It was to bring back this unruly life-force into poetry, and to rule it by the discipline of poetic form, for which Eliot fought: to capture and communicate the rich mythic quality of perception in the ritual of words.

⁶ For the poet's medium is language and it is only through words that the quality of his thinking and feeling become operative. Here too, Eliot was intuitively alive to those links with the primitive which bind the poet to the history of the race. Poetry had its origin in ritual incantation and dance. We still speak of the spell of poetry, of its magic and enchantment, as a metaphorical term, but to our primitive ancestors it was a reality; the word had power over the thing. The utterance of the magic formulas, charged with the potency of tradition, released that power into the immediate present. At the same time, the formal ceremonious dance and chant isolated the participants from the fragmentary mundane rhythms of their daily occupations, opening pathways to the inward and secret rhythms of the deeper sources of life. Through the active co-operation of the whole body in the rite, the sense of its inter-inanimating forces was intensified; and at the same time the harmonizing properties of those forces had their counterpart in the ordered response and dramatic decorum of tone and gesture.

Of all this the modern poet is left with the rhythm of his words alone. It is true that the 'phenomena of civilization', the immense accretion of his verbal material, lend him

powers of expression infinitely more complex and subtle, yet the primitive springs of poetry in sound and movement are emphasized by Eliot in 'The Music of Poetry'. 'I know that a poem, or a passage in a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself.' Or again his remarks on the 'auditory imagination' illustrate very well the wealth of significance that he feels to be alive in the whole aural element of the poet's art.

What I call the 'auditory imagination' is 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.¹

The keyword in that passage, is that the auditory imagination *fuses*; and as we have seen, it is the experience of fusion, of division and multiplicity reduced to unity, which is the essence of the symbolic or mythical method of grasping experience. The rational and the extra-rational, the old and the new, the primitive and the civilized, thought and feeling, intuition and sensation, blend and are communicated in poetry through the control and manipulation of language. In his essay on 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Eliot gives some account of the poetic process. The poet's mind, he says, is 'a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless

¹ *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, pp. 118-19.

feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together?. Their convergence is unconscious and cannot be commanded\$ there must be 'a passive attending upon the event'. From the moment of 'event', however, the process turns into active venture, and the poet's whole attention is focussed on the means of his communication, on the farther fusion of the materials into a pattern of words. And here again it is the third stage in the process of concentration which is the heart of the matter: it is 'the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts.' This involves 'frightful toil' and 'a prolonged manipulation of the materials', which is altogether conscious and deliberate: 'probably indeed the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing'.¹

Speaking of the 'exaggerated reputé' of *Kubla Khan*, Eliot points out that this is the process which has there been omitted.

The imagery of that fragment, certainly, whatever its origin in Coleridge's reading, sank to the depths of Coleridge's feeling, was saturated, transformed there - 'those are pearls that were his eyes' - and brought up into daylight again. But it is not *used*: the poem has not been written . . . Organization is necessary as well as 'inspiration'.²

Organization is a forbidding word on the face of it, yet its implications are very wide and rich. It links life with order, bringing the useful reminder that all life *is* order, and that

¹ 'The Function of Criticism', *Selected Essays*, p. 30.

² *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 146.

in every field it is a matter of relationships and reconciliations. A poem is an organism, composed of living parts separate in function yet mutually dependent; where everything is used and fused. Its force springs from the process of interpenetration, which is its organisation. That is its 'technique', but as Eliot says: 'We cannot say where technique begins and ends.' Matter and manner are a new body-mind indivisibility. A process of collision and collusion takes placet, by which the 'particles' cohere to form a new whole. The fragmentary experiences of feeling and thinking which are those of life and reading take on a different kind of vitality and value, that of a poem. It is a process in which obscure, confused and dispersed features and members take on a unique and living form and are held together in a single field of force: a process by which the flesh is made word, impersonalized in the passionate preoccupation of 'turning blood into ink', and materialized again into a new concentration of outline and energy given a new body.

§

The emphasis which Eliot's theory and practice lays on thejpersonality of art, on the disciplines necessary to it, and on the absorption of the 'idea' into the sensuous embodiment of image and rhythm reveals at once how alien he felt his own position to be from any ideal of poetry which would describe it as either a 'spontaneous over-flow of powerful feelings' or as a 'criticism of life'. The Romantic and Victorian models, which were the popular ones in England and America when he began to write, gave him no help whatever: 'I do not think it is too sweeping to say that there was no poet, in either country, who could have been of use

to a beginner in 1908. The only recourse was to poetry of another age and to poetry of another language.' ^x

It was to the Jacobean dramatists and the French nineteenth century Symbolists that Eliot turned for the kinds of perception and the techniques of expressing them akin to his own creative instincts. There he found what he was seeking. The Symbolists held as the central doctrine of their poetic creed that poetry must transmute life into a jaew incarnation of image and rhythm. The Jacobean dramatists did it more instinctively. It was their natural way of writing; they were inheritors of a wealth of fresh consciousness where life and language had been renewed together and mated in spontaneous vigour. But in both the appeal was to mind *through* sense. In both, too, the interest was dramatic, in contrast to the reflective and descriptive modes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to that of the subjective lyric. The Jacobeans were using the full dramatic form, but the Syrnbolistswere dramatic in the sense in which Eliot's owlTearly poetry is dramatic. The material is fully objectified, and does not attempt to reflect the 'personality' of the poet; and it is a poetry of ironic contrasts and oppositions, where connectives are not 'written out' in the narrative method. Instead, the figures, symbols and rhythms are held together by the tension of "their inter-relationships, which again are indivisible. In the Jacobeans and Symbolists too, Eliot rediscovered the use of the full resources of language itself in poetic practice, bringing back that fusion of the simple word and the speech rhythm with all that is most rich and complex and surprising, which again had been lost to poetry for so long.

Eliot's turning to the past for his initial stimulus is an

¹ *Poetry*. September, 1946.

illustration of another element in his poetry which is an inseparable part of his own particular kind of symbolic transformation. There is no other poet who to the same extent, or in the same way, has used the work of other writers as an integral part of his own. He quotes with delight Ben Jonson's remark that one of the requisites of the poet, or maker, is 'Imitation, to be able to convert the substance, or riches of another poet, to his own use.' It is an aspect of the whole subject of tradition, as well as of that of the process of transformation, for Eliot's uses of allusion, adaptation and quotation serve a double purpose. They are an illustration of the possession of the 'historical sense' which 'involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence ; (and) 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 rather tall order reminds us of Eliot's agreement with Matthew Arnold that the Romantic poets 'did not know enough', and his support of Dr. Johnson's criticism of the Metaphysicals that 'to write on their plan it was at least necessary to read and think'.

Even if we did not have the whole body of Eliot's criticism to prove his very wide reading, his absorption of material from it into his poetry would prove it. But it is not of course the presence of the material which is important, but the uses he makes of it. It does not only mark his sense of the continuity between past and present and between the individual writer and all other writers, but is again part of the process of the fusion of disparate materials into a re-creation.

¹ Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Essays*, p. 14.

The writers of earlier ages, who have become at one and the same time both past and timeless, become a fresh component in a new composition and set up new reverberations in a new context. It may be the whole spirit and outlook of other writers, who, at various periods in his development, fuse with his own consciousness and 'thence a new Concoction take'. The influences of Laforgue in his early work, of Baudelaire, Pascal, and of course most of all Dante, in his later, are illustrations of this. Or the effect may be stylistic, as with his love of Bishop Andrewes; or allusions and quotations may play the part of independent symbols, elements of the design of relationships which serve as support, or ironic contrast, or (as in 'those are pearls that were his eyes' in *The Waste Land*) as statements of theme. But they are never 'imitation' in the common sense of the word; they become revelations which are at the same time revaluations. Material from the past is amalgamated into the poem, becomes part of its 'organization' and issues in a metamorphosis.

§

But to see Eliot at work in actual production of the kind of poetry for which he was battling, let us take a poem first published in 1916, at a time when the public taste in England was for the 'Georgian' qualities of clear exposition, easy sentiment, and the skilful, melodious cadences of the Tennysonian tradition.

MR. APOLLINAX

*Ω τῆς καινότητος. 'Ηρόκλεις, τῆς παραδοξολογίας,
εὐμήχανος ἄνθρωπος.*

LUCIAN

When Mr. Appollinax visited the United States
His laughter tinkled among the teacups.

I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch-trees,
 And of Priapus in the shrubbery
 Gaping at the lady in the swing.
 In the palace of Mrs. Phlaccus, at Professor Channing-Cheetah's
 He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.
 His laughter was submarine and profound
 Like the old man of the sea's
 Hidden under coral islands
 Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green
 silence,
 Dropping from fingers of surf.
 I looked for the head of Mr. Appollinax rolling under a chair

 Or grinning over a screen
 With seaweed in its hair.
 I heard the beat of centaur's hoofs over the hard turf
 As his dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon.
 'He is a charming man' — 'But after all what did he mean?'
 'His pointed ears . . . He must be unbalanced,' -
 'There was something he said that I might have challenged.'
 Of dowager Mrs. Phlaccus, and Professor and Mrs. Cheetah
 I remember a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon.

One of the qualities for which Eliot has praised the Metaphysicals is the Alliance of levity and seriousness' in their poetry.¹ It is a quality which disappeared early from his own work, where his wit, his concentrated intellectual brilliance, becomes steadily more serious and sardonic! But in this poem there is an agreeable mixture of grave and gay in his ironic scrutiny. The tone is set in the epigraph: 'What a novelty! o Hercules, What a wonder! Man is a crafty creature of many wiles.' The main impression provoked by Mr. Appollinax is that of the complex and contradictory reactions

¹ There may be more significance than that of tone, but I have not been able to identify the passage in Lucian from which it is taken.

he excites. But the poet is not concerned with explaining this effect directly. He does not deal with Mr. Apollinax as, for instance, Pope deals with Atticus, listing his attributes in an orderly sequence and coming to a savagely neat epigrammatic conclusion. But "this is a satiric character sketch too, though the traits of Mr. Apollinax are not distilled into couplets which are marshalled in a logical argument of condensed satiric observation. They emerge obliquely and by implication, and in dramatic contrast to those of his environment, which is evoked too, and satirized. Moral, emotional and social criticism inhere in the symbols, but never become explicit.

Who Mr. Apollinax is does not matter. Some European man of letters, presumably, who is being lionized by the same social circle in which Mr. Prufrock and the Lady move. His name, with its hint of a synthesis of Apollo and Apollyon, suggests that mixture of the vital and the devilish which pervades his portrait. 'His laughter tinkled among the teacups' is his introduction, and it is the *vibrations* which the poet senses in the scene which are the subject matter of the poem. Those produced in Mr. Apollinax's hosts are given in the fragments of conversation at the end of the poem. They too respond to the challenge of his personality with amazement, but it is only the externals of his talk and his appearance which affect them, and they dismiss him, secure in their own unpunctured superiority and self-esteem. The poet in his turn dismisses his hosts and their environment, with laughter certainly, but the humour is wry. For the purposes of the poem, they represent the United States, but included in the irony is all that is implied in those two words used uncapitalized to represent any wholeness of living. Their degree of inanity and inanition is suggested by the

quality of their remarks, and by the details which the poet smuggles in as illustrations of the civilization they represent. The dowager entertains her academic guests in a 'palace' but the aristocracy is that of wealth only, and the names carry hints of flaccidity, pretentiousness and humbug. The scene is a tea-party, but the quality and quantity of the social, intellectual and emotional refreshment provided by the dowager and the professor and his wife is all in the poet's acid comment: 'I remember a slice of lemon and a bitten macaroon.'

Yet at the same time even the vapid observations these people make -

'He is a charming man' - 'But after all what did he mean?'

'His pointed ears . . . He must be unbalanced,' -

express in their own insipid way something complex and baffling about Mr. Apollinax which the poet feels too and for which *he* must find the *appropriate* verbal medium. That medium must be a sensuous embodiment of the material, so the laughter and talk of Mr. Apollinax - and he is defined purely in terms of his laughter and talk - is communicated to us entirely through their impact on the *senses*; by the pictures we see, the sounds we hear, the associations they arouse, and the rhythms through which they reach us.

What has registered to one of the ladies as his pointed ears, has already affected the poet, listening to his tinkling laughter, as a memory of the delicate but lascivious flavour of a picture in the manner of Fragonard's *The Swing*. The addition of Priapus, the lewd garden god, 'gaping' in the shrubbery, emphasizes the sexual element felt strongly in Mr. Apollinax, but that element has been subdued to a

stylized convention. In the present setting however his laughter takes on a different quality:

In the palace of Mrs. Phlaccus, at Professor Channing-Cheetah's
He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.

The impudent rhyme brings the desiccated, flaccid, ultra-respectable society figures into sharp collision with something utterly different in quality, though as inhuman in its way as its opposite. The ironic laughter is timeless and bodiless and all pervasive, existing before birth and after death. It is a detached and irrepressible vital force, and in one way it is refreshing and surprising to feel it, 'unbalanced' - rolling around and peering over the screen these inhibited and hidebound figures put between themselves and reality.

I looked for the head of Mr. Apollinax rolling under a chair
Or grinning over a screen
With seaweed in its hair.

But the laughter also has an element of irresponsibility and irisensitivity. Mr. Apollinax's hosts are also insensitive in their way. They lack entirely what Henry James describes as 'the tendency of the artist to vibrate'; they are flat, dull, doughy in their self-complacent egotism. But the egotism betrayed by Mr. Apollinax's laughter and talk, while again it is very compelling in its sheer primitive power, has something horrible in its all-devouring assertiveness. His laughter is 'submarine and profound', but it suggests the incarnation of the ocean into that sinister mythical figure, the old man of the sea, and there is no 'levity' in the lines where Eliot pictures him laughing,

Hidden under coral islands
Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green
silence,
Dropping from fingers of surf.

The 'worried' here carries its etymological origin of *strangled* or *torn*. Suddenly the hands holding the teacup and the macaroon turn into the fingers of surf and the clutches of the old man of the sea ; and though we are back again in a moment in the tone of light mockery, the 'Vibration' has been felt.

The same hint of something repellent in its insensitive drive is in the description of his talk. There the common cliché of 'riding roughshod' over others, and suggested in the Professor's belated regret: "There was something he said I might have challenged,' becomes:

I heard the beat of centaur's hoofs over the hard turf
As his dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon.

This evokes a wonderful contrast between academic timidity and conventional torpor and the swift racing vitality of the centaur. It also illustrates the blending and condensing of suggestions in a single image, of which Eliot is such a master. Mr. Apollinax eating his tea and appropriating all the conversation; the sound of his voice ; and the quality of his personality which comes through the talk. It is full of vitality, but again it is an assertive, unrefreshing, greedy vitality which the image creates.

The poem thus translates into images and sensations everything the poet wants to convey about the actual scene and all the vibrations it sets up in the way of emotional and intellectual responses. But it is much more than mere brilliant impressionistic notation. It has a complex structure of interweaving dramatic oppositions running all through its deceptively erratic course. The stuffy Cambridge drawing-room is seen in turn against the atmosphere of a sylvan eighteenth-century painting ; against an emblem of the life-

principle; against a mythological embodiment of the destructive forces of the ocean, and another of the blended vigour of man and beast. But another contrast is that between the sensibility of the poet, as illustrated in his rich field of associations, and the savourless prosaic remarks of his hosts; and yet another is in the conflicting aspects of Mr. Apollinax himself. Finally the darting, diverse nature of the whole experience is emphasized not only by the quality of the images themselves, but by the irregular metre and rhyme scheme, and by the intermingling of the general light conversational tone with the sad lingering music of the lines telling of the drowned men, and the swift energy of those evoking the dominating beat of the centaur's hoofs.

The poem is something in the nature of an exercise in technique, and it is a good illustration of the disciplines which Eliot had been practising in secret and which were to be the bases of all his later development: the union of idea, emotion and sensation in the symbol and image; the mastery of rhythmic variation; the dramatic structure of antithesis; the expansion of the surface of the occasion into a symbolic pattern of wider issues; and the economy and concentration with which that pattern is projected.

In the preface to the 1928 edition of *The Sacred Wood* Eliot says that the problem which is central to the essays is that of 'the integrity of poetry' - poetry considered primarily as poetic art and not as anything else. The cause for which he was battling in 1920 was that assertion; that poetry is not 'self-expression', but the making of a new integration which is independent of the life of the poet. That was where the emphasis of his criticism then fell. In the eight years that had passed since the first publication he found that his emphasis had shifted, and that something had happened to

his mind which was 'not so much a change or reversal of opinion, as an expansion and development of interests'. He had passed on to another critical problem, 'that of the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and of other times'. A great part of any criticism of Eliot's own poetry is necessarily taken up with these later interests, but it is right to emphasize at the start that it is his techniques as an artist which are the means through which the ends in social and spiritual revelation are attained. The conclusion of the poetry is an illumination of life, but it is the principles and practice of the artist which are, as he says, 'logically, as well as chronologically, the beginning'.

CHAPTER III

Early Poems 1909-1920

All creativeness in the realm of the spirit . . . arises from a state of mental suffering, and it is spiritual stagnation, psychic sterility, which causes this state.

C. JUNG. *Psychotfierapists or the Clergy?*

IN his essay on Dante, Eliot confesses that he found it difficult at first to accept the end of the *Purgatorio* and the whole of the *Paradiso* because of a prejudice 'that poetry not only must be found *through* suffering but can find its materials only *in* suffering'. Elsewhere he speaks of 'the struggle - which alone constitutes hfe for the poet — to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal'. He does not mention that the poet's personal and private joys can be treated in the same way, and indeed in the whole of Eliot's poetry suffering plays a very much larger part than joy. Hell and purgatory are familiar territories to him; release from them fleeting and infrequent, won only by unrelenting self-discipline, 'a *training* of the soul as severe and ascetic as the training of the body of a runner'⁵ the comfort in the pain only that 'the souls in purgatory suffer because they *wish to suffer*, for purgation'. The main distinction in most of his poetry is not between suffering and joy but between two kinds of suffering: the passive and the active. He sees the choice for civilized man as between the pain of spiritual stagnation and psychic sterility or the pain

of the willing surrender to purgation, to the heavy toil of spiritual rebirth and growth.

The early poems show us 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history', and the condition of the poet as a part of it. For he differs from others in the same environment only in his awareness of his plight. From these poems it is clear that it was not only the technical disciplines of the Jacobean dramatists and of the French Symbolists which attracted Eliot to those poets. He shares too their spiritual colouring; an attitude of disgust at the quality of the civilization in which they find themselves, and an added self-disgust. There is a sense of imprisonment in an empty, ugly and alien society, and the impossibility of escape from it. The poet can do nothing but escape into his poetry. There he can examine his situation, objectify and dramatize it. He can create in patterned language the moods of ironic and cynical repulsion, of unromantic disillusionment and of nervous intensity which mirror his predicament. He can transmute its welter of triviality and horror into a wealth of related symbolic detail.

There are two backgrounds in the earliest poems - those contained in *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917); the social environment of the poet's own class, and the plebeian. In some we are in the drawing-rooms of a society 'refined beyond the point of civilization', among the teacups and the cakes and the coffee spoons, or *tete-a-tete* with a lady in a setting of flowers or candle-light, with the conversation slipping 'among velleities and carefully caught regrets', and embarrassing overtures towards intimacy. We have glimpses of the solid older generation reading *The Boston Evening Transcript*, and living and dying imperturbed among their servants and dogs and parrots, and of the younger generation

at home or abroad, being 'modern' and sophisticated. At the other extreme there is the impact on the senses of all the ugliness and squalor of the common urban scene; the sight of the 'broken blinds and chimney pots', of vacant lots with their grimy scraps of newspaper, of sunless dry geraniums, of hands raising dingy shades in furnished rooms; the sounds of rattling plates in basement kitchens, of sparrows in the gutters, of insistent feet pressing the sawdust-trampled street. Above all there are the smells; of steak in passageways, of stale beer, of cocktails and cigarettes, of dusty paper flowers, of females in shuttered rooms.

But it is apparent at once that the outward scene never exists for its own sake, that the world which is being created from these sensory impressions and concrete objects is a world of emotional realities. The outward scene exists as a set of symbols, 'a thousand sordid images', through which the imagination senses the quality of a civilization not of an environment. The music, 'dying with a dying fall' in the drawing-rooms, is no longer the food of love, but of death. That evening which is 'spread out against the sky Like a patient etherised upon a table', is no placid, peaceful city sunset. It fills the imagination with thoughts of disease and helplessness; of the ether which is not the breath of the spirit, but the deadener of consciousness and volition; of the contrast between the wide stretches of the sky and the vigour and vitality of man reduced to the living death of anaesthesia. 'The burnt-out ends of smoky days' are not the city dusk but the twilight of an epoch; 'the yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes', the dinginess, the stale smells, are the creeping, choking atmosphere of a spiritual miasma; the 'crowd of twisted things', the 'broken spring in the factory yard, Rust that clings to the form that

the strength has left' are emblems of moral, not material disintegration; the 'one-night cheap hotels' are not a reminder of the transient life of a great city, but of the homelessness of the human soul.

And so with the figures which move about in this world. It is their states of mind and not their social status which matters: attitudes not actualities. Brahmin or plebeian backgrounds make no difference; a common blight afflicts them both, a common impoverishment of vitality, a common lack of meaning. These people either live by the 'formulated phrases' of social and religious faiths which are unreal and devitalized, dry and sapless as a 'twisted branch upon the beach'⁵ or their lives are purely materialistic; or they are conscious to a lesser or greater degree of their isolation and rootlessness, their insecurity and sterility. The 'lonely men in shirtsleeves leaning out of windows', the 'damp souls of housemaids, sprouting despondently at area gates', 'the aimless smiles of the passersby', are all expressions of the negative helplessness enveloping this world. Those more conscious or more sensitive are the victims of a more positive torment. They agonize, like Mr. Prufrock, over their own vacillations, timidities and frustrations; or lie sleepless, with souls 'stretched tight across the sky ... Or trampled by insistent feet'; or feel 'the last twist of the knife' in the realization that the dreary routine of living is as much a nightmare as the distortions and disintegrations of 'a lunar synthesis' in which 'the floors of memory' have been dissolved.

§

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, written in 1910-11, is the richest of these poems, and illustrates very fully the

insights which are particularly characteristic of Eliot's new vision and the disciplines through which he presented it. Mr. Prufrock is at the opposite extreme from Mr. Apollinax as a 'personality pattern'. He would indeed be helplessly envious of Mr. Apollinax's uninhibited self-assertion as he 'devoured the afternoon', and of his unrestrained vitality as he 'laughed like an irresponsible foetus'. For Mr. Prufrock is an unromantic and unprincely Hamlet in a 'tragical-comical-historical' urban drama where 'Denmark's a prison' — the prison of a divided self in the tortures of neurotic conflict. His 'love song', as the epigraph implies, will never be uttered outside the inferno of his own mind, and the 'you and I' of his soliloquy are the impulses within him 'to murder and create' or 'to be or not to be', concluding neither in suicide nor in the release of chosen action, but in the death-in-life of the abdication of the will.

As in *Mr. Apollinax* the method of presentation is that of dramatic opposition, but here it is expanded and subtleized and demands more literary background and imaginative agility on the part of the reader. The social environment in which Mr. Prufrock is 'drowned' is as inane and stifling and self-satisfied as that which Mr. Apollinax dominates so easily, and it is evoked with the same brilliant sensuous embodiment in image, word and rhythm. But it is the 'universe' of Mr. Prufrock himself which is the centre of interest. And in creating that, Eliot is already expanding the possibilities of the 'mythical method' as a way of ordering and controlling his material. Mr. Prufrock's retreat into the world of despairing introspective day-dream, and his mingled self-pity and self-disgust, are not only brought home to us through the images of the tortuous streets and the fog-cat, the pictures of his life as measured out with coffee spoons,

and the symbols of his terror of social and sexual failure. The shrunken universe of his own nature and will is set beside a series of suggestions and allusions which take us to worlds of action and expression which are very different. John the Baptist, Lazarus, Hesidd's *Works and Days*, Michelangelo and Shakespeare all 'disturb' Mr. Prufrock's pitifully enclosed universe. Most of all, the sustained parallel with the concepts of time and space and love in Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* provides a melody in counterpoint to his own 'dying fall'. They haunt his own dickerings with *his* 'world' and 'time', and mock ironically his own impotence to 'force the moment to its crisis'.

Finally his psychological plight reveals itself in the identification of both the positive and negative elements of his conflict with images of the sea, primordial symbol of both creation and destruction. At the end of the poem, he hears the mermaids singing and has a vision of them

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

That glimpse of a life-rhythm where living creatures delight spontaneously in their natural environment, mastering it and being carried along with its vital energies, is what Mr. Prufrock's T yearns for and will never achieve. All that his 'we' has done is to capitulate:

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

He has withdrawn into passive day-dream, where the 'arms that are braceleted and white and bare' caress and crown him as he lies catlike 'smoothed by long fingers' in a peace-

ful sleep. The inevitable future awakening will be only to suffocate in the human scene, again a part of the living death of the patient on the operating table.

His outburst in the middle of the poem where he accepts the hopelessness of struggle suggests the same compulsive infantile and primitive craving:

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

Here on one level, the claws suggest the longing for uncomplicated animal existence. They can clutch their prey and make off with it, without any preface of 'Do I dare?' or 'Shall I say?' They, like the mermaids, are at home and free in the 'silent seas' and can scuttle as they desire. But at the same time, they cannot go *forward*. As Hamlet says to Polonius: 'Yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.' Mr. Prufrock laments 'I grow old ... I grow old . . .', but like Hamlet, his secret wish is only to regress to a safe haven where his inner universe is no longer disturbed by any tormenting human problems.

§

In the next volume of poems, published three years later, while the suffering presented is still that of spiritual stagnation and psychic sterility against the background of a world steeped in the same atmosphere, the poetry itself has taken on an enriched vigour and expansion. The method by which a definite parallel is manipulated between the planless panorama of the present and the ordered world of myth appears for the first time. Whereas in the earlier volume *Prufrock* is the only poem in which a conflict between contemporary isolation, disintegration and sterility and the awareness of

an existing and unused power is even hinted at, all the finest poems in the 1920 volume are concerned with the dramatic opposition of the world of to-day to the sources of vitality and order from which it is now cut off and of which it has the most urgent need. The 'rival forces are not yet engaged in the poet's own consciousness; he is involved in no personal struggle between them. He *perceives*, and re-creates his perceptions by projecting patterns which are now much more than those of the nerves upon a screen. The insights are increasingly moral as well as emotional, they are coloured by a disgust which is much more bitter and searching, and the powerful symbols and rhythms which carry them move in new and complex poetic pantomime and choreography.

Some of the juxtapositions are comparatively simple: the more or less innocent materialism of the secular world, compared with the hypocritical materialism of the 'True Church' in *The Hippopotamus*; the romantic and classical symbols of lustful passions beside the sordid scene in the rooming house of *Sweeney Erect*; the childish day-dreams of dazzling successes compared with the actuality of the stale and unsavoury emotional present in *A Cooking Egg*. The present, indeed, is uniformly stale and unsavoury in all these poems, as it is in the earlier ones, but interwoven with it is the continuous reminder of times when it was not so, and of works of the creative imagination in art and thought which have embodied a different reality and pictured a different vision. And the dramatic interplay and organization of these antagonisms becomes increasingly intricate and concentrated in its suggestions.

Sometimes indeed, too much so, as in *Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service*, where by the time the reader has finished

with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* he has not much heart for the intellectual *tour-de-force* of the use of the material in the poem. Like *The Hippopotamus* it is a satire on the decay of religion, but a very much more complex one. On the one side, or in the centre rather, there is the basic Christian concept, 'In the beginning was the Word,' twice stated; also two verses describing an Italian painting:

A painter of the Urabrian school
Designed upon a gesso ground
The nimbus of the Baptized God.
The wilderness is cracked and browned

But through the water pale arid thin
Still shine the unoffending feet
And there above the painter set
The Father and the Paraclete.

The lines are full of implications; of the creative mystery of the Logos; of the rich symbolic content of the sacrament of baptism and the doctrine of the Trinity; of the simple humanity of the still-shining figure, still reminding man in the modern 'wilderness' of the redemption of his 'offences'; and of the whole 'design' which the painter has 'set' on his ground. In ironic contrast Eliot sets various symbols of degradation and ugliness and a complicated parallel between the sterility of the worker-bees and that of the 'Word' of sectarian theological argument. The 'superfotation of *TO IV*,^J that is, the effort to fertilize 'the one' by a fresh begetting; to make of the Word a Queen bee mated with numerous drones, inevitably produces a swarm of neuter religions, symbolized by the heretical Origen, the self-made eunuch. The sterile 'masters of the subtle schools' who think themselves 'sapient sutlers of the Lord' (servers or food-bringers)

are barren. Not only as barren as the bees, but as barren in meaning to common humanity as the appalling polysyllables and learned terms with which the poem is loaded. The only area in it where this 'neuter' use of the 'word' is not used is in the two verses describing the painting.

The neuter worker-bees, also 'sapient sutlers', at least fertilize the flowers as their 'hairy bellies' gather the pollen, and so may be said to perform a 'blest office' in the scheme of nature; but the same cannot be said of the 'blest office' of the church service, or of 'the sapient sutlers of the Lord' who are the clergy and congregation. The 'sable presbyters' move up the aisle like the 'religious caterpillars' in the epigraph, who were more interested in getting the Jew of Malta's 'piaculative pence' than in saving his soul. The black gowns and red, spotty faces and the 'dim souls' of the devout congregation all contrast with the shining halo and the pale thin water and 'unoffending feet'.

The final degrading 'offence' is the contrast of Sweeney wallowing in his bath with the figure of the Baptized God j with the further irony that there is a parallel between the movement of his body, shifting from ham to ham and stirring the water, and the 'controversial' antics of the learned theologians.

§

There is as much packed symbolism and verbal concentration in *Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar* but the materials are much more lively and the versification more agile and flexible in its phrasing. The epigraph strings together and telescopes quotations from writers (St. Augustine, Henry James, Shakespeare, Browning) whose life or work associates itself with Venice or with thoughts aroused

in the poet by the contemplation of Venice to-day. The poem itself, by selecting, combining and contrasting details in a pattern of interweaving oppositions, makes a design where again it is the sterility, ugliness and decadence of 'contemporaneity' which stand out. The details are a medley of direct sense impressions and of references which evoke specific works of art and their aura of association.

It opens deceptively as if it were going to employ the 'narrative method':

Burbank crossed a little bridge
Descending at a small hotel;
Princess Volupine arrived,
They were together, and he fell.

But the next verse alters the focus from a temporal to a spatial one.

Definitive music under sea
Passed seaward with the passing bell
Slowly: the God Hercules
Had left him, that has loved him well.

This remains obscure unless we remember the scene in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, before the battle of Actium, where the soldiers hear strange unearthly music and one of them declares:

'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd
Now leaves him.

From then on it is clear that Burbank, the Princess, Bleistein and Sir Ferdinand Klein are not actors in a realistic drama, but are symbolic embodiments in a conflict of values. Burbank with his Baedeker, embodiment of creative arts and acts, becomes aware of his impotence in the Venice of to-day. Associated with the 'small' and 'little', he descends

and falls in the first verse; the 'passing bell' of his music is 'defunctive' in the second. His virility has left him; and in the last verse he contemplates the proud winged lion on its pillar by the waterfront, epitomizing the power and glory of the old city, and asks:

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

The actualization into direct physical terms of diminution and decay colours the whole poem. The loss of the long tradition in Venice of aristocracy built on commercial wealth mating with culture through the patronage of artists, is part of 'time's ruins'. The Princess, whose name suggests at once the foxy and the sensual, the decayed aristocrat fallen to adventuress, and in physical terms 'in a decline', 'extends' not patronage to the arts, but 'a meagre, blue-nailed phthisic hand', to the new commercial order, symbolized by Sir Ferdinand Klein. Again, the quality of that new order emerges in contrasted terms of form and energy between Bleistein and his surroundings in the poem. His 'saggy bending of the knees And elbows, with the palms turned out' is first set beside the great bronze horses over the doors of St. Mark's, as their hooves 'beat up the dawn' as if harnessed to the chariot of Apollo. Then the reference to 'Her shuttered barge Burned on the water all the day' injects the memory of Tiepolo's great frescoes of Antony and Cleopatra in the Palazzio Labia. Finally, as we read

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

his 'saggy bending' contrasts with the formal perfection of the picture. At the same time his 'lustreless eye contrasts

with Canaletto's lighting, and backwards, with the light of the dawn over the lagoon, and the memory of Cleopatra's barge as it 'burned on the water all the day'. Istria, Antony and Cleopatra, Canaletto 'decline' into 'the smoky candle end of time', or the 'lights' by which the Princess entertains her new patron. In further cross-fertilizations of the images, the standards and stability of the past are suggested by the association of the 'perspective', 'the seven laws', and the quotation 'On the Rialto once'. This last brings not only the memory of the bridge itself, but the whole world of *The Merchant of Venice*. 'The rats are underneath the piles' - the foundations of that world, built on its attitude towards usury. They have become 'saggy' by the new commercialism, symbolized here, as in *Gerontion*, as 'the jew'.

Thus with the utmost concentration and economy of language, but with the widest possible expansion of it by suggestion and association, Eliot contrives to manipulate this 'continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity'. All the music of the past is 'defunctive'; all its ordered civilization dying into a new barbarism; all its light and glory guttering to extinction.

§

In *Burbank* the opposition is a clear-cut one between the values of the past and of the present, but in *Sweeney among the Nightingales* the emphasis is rather upon the distinction between two atmospheres, two attitudes towards reality. On the one hand there is human life conceived in a religious and moral framework, surrounded by spiritual forces and by natural forces of which it is a living part} on the other, there is the disintegrated, rootless, unstable, isolated position of

the individual in the midst of the futility and anarchy of pure materialism. There is, of course, no overt reference to this. After the setting of the first two verses the drama sweeps in one long sentence of descriptive vision to the climax which links Agamemnon with the contemporary scene. That, and the epigraph from Aeschylus, 'Alas, I have been smitten deep with a mortal blow', lead some readers to seek a parallel in the *action* between the murder of Agamemnon and the scene in the poem. But it seems more characteristic of Eliot that the relationships should be symbolic⁵ that it is everything that Agamemnon and his story (and myth in general) stands for, that has been killed by Sweeney and his like.

The link between the two worlds, that of myth and of the immediate actuality, is the nightingales. They are present in both, but Sweeney and his companions do not hear them. They are as deaf to their song as to the story behind the song. It is a horrible story of cruelty and revenge, just as the Agamemnon myth is, and the story of the 'bloody wood'. Here Eliot is using a favourite device of his, the telescoping of associations to get greater pressure and intensity. Agamemnon, after all, was not killed in a wood. The wood is that from which Frazer named his great work *The Golden Bough*, and from which Eliot took the title for his first essays, *The Sacred Wood*, where he uses it as a symbol for the immortal poetic tradition, always dying and being re-born. The opening chapter of Frazer traces the story of the wood of Nemi, which was the scene of the bloody ritual by which the old priest of the grove was slain by a younger one, who succeeded as both priest and king until he in his turn was slain. Frazer shows how this ritual is the basis for all the oldest symbols of the human race. It was bound up with the

concept of the Fertility God and his resurrection every spring, and extended into the larger theme of the death and resurrection of the human spirit. Eliot's purpose is to emphasize that pattern. Philomela is raped, but magical powers render her voice inviolable and immortal. It lives on in a bird, linking together man and nature, the animal and the spiritual. Agamemnon is murdered and Clytemnestra is murdered and Orestes is pursued by the Furies, but the end of the trilogy is the transcendence of revenge by reconciliation and mercy — just as the Sacred Heart too embodies the same values. All these stories create a pattern of reality which gives *meaning* to human hate and horror and sacrifice and suffering, because they are related to an order and value beyond the temporal and immediate. Agamemnon too represents another tradition, that of the heroic ideal of Greek tragedy. He is king and leader⁵ his fate involves the whole community and its laws, and the irony of fate, and the inexorable working out of the tragic pattern.

The basic ironic contrasts of the poem are those between the suggestions of the significance of life seen in such terms of value and order and the complete significance of the modern scene. These people have not even the vitality to have violent passions of any sort. Their 'murderous paws' tear only grapes; their sexual passion is that of a drunken prostitute trying to sit on Sweeney's knees⁵ the outcome of the assault is only to pull off a tablecloth and overturn a coffee-cup. They move in the clearest pictorial outline, vividly *there* by the selection of a few expressive details, but there is no point at which they have any organic relationship with the worlds of spiritual value, of nature, or of human fellowship; no point at which they touch the patterns suggested by the worlds of classical myth, of heroic tragedy, or

of the Convent. They are indeed barely human. They are largely designated in animal terms, and thus dehumanized, and as men and women they have neither identity nor community. They do not even speak. Sweeney himself is simply a laugh, in a body which otherwise suggests an ape, a zebra or a giraffe; one woman is 'the person in the Spanish cape', the other is Rachel - she was born with another name but she does not use it any more. The second man is 'the silent vertebrate in brown', and his reaction as he 'contracts and concentrates' suggests a lower form of life than a vertebrate, that of an amoeba seen under a microscope. The third man is heavy and lifeless, the only gleam about him is that of the gold fillings in his teeth. And they are not even finely co-ordinated animals. Again, in terms of gesture, Eliot suggests the disintegrated quality of life they symbolize. They *sprawl*, they *gape*, they 'show fatigue'. The woman *slips* in her tipsy efforts to seduce Sweeney: even her 'reorganization' upon the floor is only to yawn and pull up a stocking, and is an ironic comment on the concept of organization.

These people have neither vitality nor order, and Eliot places them against a background which has both. The punctuation is significant here. After the introduction of Sweeney as a medley of animal shapes and markings, there are six lines of complete contrast which put him within a cosmic setting. There is no period at the end of these lines, just a semi-colon, and the sentence runs on to the end of the poem and the final climax of the Convent, the nightingales, the bloody wood and Agamemnon. The contemporary scene, that is, fades in from the background of the great ordered rhythms of the natural world, and fades out into the reminders of the great ordered patterns of myth. The worlds

of the temporal and the eternal are always co-existent. The permanence of the rhythmic patterns of nature, the moon and stars, the seas and the rivers are still there, just as the deathless reality of Agamemnon, and the bloody wood and the nightingales and the Sacred Heart are still there. But their clarity and brightness is lost and their relationship with humanity. The stormy moon is blurred; it 'slides' to its setting towards the shallowest of rivers, with the ominous 'drift' of doom about it. All the myths linking man and the heavens and the gods and so drawing them all into one pattern, are 'veiled'; the sea itself, symbol of life, is 'hushed' and 'shrunk'; the true dreams which come through the gates of horn in the underworld arc blocked by the figure of Sweeney.

Just as these people can establish no contact with the old cosmic visions, the scene without, so the scene within is equally 'shrunk'. That suggestion is built up from many details in the few verses of description. Of course there are sexual overtones in the fruits, just as there are to the actions of the man in brown, but in the general context the point is that the fruits they eat are all foreign fruits. They do not plant them or raise them or share in any way in the natural rhythms of growth and fruition. It is the same with the cultures and nationalities to which they have belonged. The traditions of Ireland or Russia, of Catholicism or Judaism mean nothing in their lives. Nor does the mere bond of a common humanity unite them. Everyone is distrustful and wary; if two are 'in league' it is for some sordid purpose; an advance towards a relationship is only a 'gambit', a move in a game to beat the other fellow; the host converses 'apart'. Everything indeed is 'apart'; there is no community, no cohesion; all is blurred, indistinct, disordered, fragmentary.

There is no framework which circumscribes it and within which it has composition and meaning. The only symbols with meaning are *outside*, where the sky and the woods and the Convent are all framed by the brandies of wistaria. But that view is effectively blocked by the man with the 'heavy eyes', and all the expansion into dignity and tradition brought in by the word *circumscribe* is at once cancelled by its conjunction with his golden grin. Just as Sweeney blocks the hornfed gate, so that the messages from the shades - the human tradition - cannot get through, so the vertebrate in brown blocks the window on to the immediate realities. But the point is that outside in the dim night *are* the Convent and the nightingales and the wood and the memory of the dead Agamemnon, and all the associations they bring, about the relationships of man and nature and the gods, of mortality and immortality, death and resurrection, the temporal and the eternal, nature and spirit. Man is animal, inescapably so⁵ and in a sense every shroud is a stained and dishonoured one; all are maculate'. But the nightingale is not only animal, nor the Agamemnon story one only of dishonour. Their perspective is in a larger context.

CHAPTER IV

Gerontion

He could not escape suffering and he could not transcend it
... But what he could do ... was to study his suffering.
T. S. ELIOT. *Baudelaire*

THERE is only one poem of any length in the 1920 volume, but it is one of Eliot's most powerful, and one of his most obscure. It is impossible to read it without being deeply stirred by its strange drama and music, but to interpret the sequence of its imaginative logic is riot easy, and there has to be a good deal of guesswork. The organization, however, is similar to that of *Sweeney among the Nightingales* in that there is the same antithesis between human life conceived in a framework of myth and the lack of all meaning in contemporary secularism. In *Gerontion*, the general context of myth becomes specifically that of Christianity. The birth of Christ is conceived of as opening a new era, within which the cycle of civilization symbolized by *Gerontion* is very near its end. *Gerontion* sees one aspect of Christ as the tiger, Blake's embodiment of the creative fire and light in animal form, part of the order of nature, but he is as incapable of drawing any vitality from, or entering into any communion with, that elemental source of 'juvescence' as was Mr. Prufrock from the sea and its mermaids. Like Mr. Prufrock, he lays bare his psychological dilemma with merciless ironic insight, but at the same time excuses himself from translating self-knowledge into any

effort towards change. Indeed, like Mr. Prufrock, he feels above all the futility of struggle. All his acute activity of consciousness is in *perception*, and is not directed towards any solution. He supplies admirable reasons, indeed, for the impossibility of any solution. But "his perceptions are far wider and deeper and more intense than those of Mr. Prufrock, and they operate in a different theatre. Instead of a setting within a recognizable environment, which keeps the mind busy with precise social implications, the whole vision is distanced, suspended out of time, projected from 'a dull head among windy spaces' and forming itself into pictures and psychic situations with a dream locus and ambience of their own.

The epigraph takes us to *Measure for Measure*, to the Duke's speech when he visits Claudio, under sentence of death in prison. He urges him to wish for death, to ⁴'be absolute for death', and to reason on the lines that what is called life is little but conflict, cowardice, insecurity, disease and the scramble for riches. The inevitable end is 'palsied eld' which has 'neither heat, affection, limb nor beauty'.

What's yet in this
That bears the name of life?

he asks, and in the poem, Eliot creates life seen in those terms as the civilization in which Gerontion exists. It is a civilization founded on money values and secular rationalism, with no religious communion or human sense of community, a nightmare world of isolation and instability, of restless nervous and intellectual activity, emotional stagnation and spiritual drought. Gerontion (the name means a little old man) is the shadowy symbol and spokesman of the sensitive intellectual in this world. Perhaps we are meant

to compare him with the hero of Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius*, who looks forward with such full and serene joy and faith to the moment of dissolution and the acceptance of purgation. The diminutive of the name would imply the diminution of the life in Eliot's hero. He has become contracted to nothing but 'a dull head': 'I have lost my passion ... I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch,' he says, and 'I have no ghosts.'

But that does not apply to his creator. The truth of Gerontion's situation is 'carried alive into the heart by passion'; it is felt in every line in terms of sensation; and the poet's imagination is filled with 'ghosts', with suggestions and associations and memories which charge his strange imagery and powerful rhythms. The negative deprivation of Gerontion and his dream world, possessing 'neither heat, affection, limb nor beauty', is revealed in most telling detail by its physical characteristics. The whole vision is 'thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season'; Gerontion has been driven by the parching trade winds, steadily blowing in the same direction, into 'a sleepy corner'; his house is peeling and decayed, and he 'stiffens' in it, passive and inert, 'waiting for rain', surrounded both within and without by emblems of degradation. A boy reads to him from a history of the past, and as he listens, his thoughts flow into an imaginative 'inquisition' of his own situation and that of the other 'tenants of the house' who share his arid and humiliating exile and whom he is addressing. Momentarily he is swept out of his inertia into gusts of dramatic challenge, and the need of self-examination, self-explanation and self-justification. His apologia moves back and forth from historical revelation to cynical or impassioned analysis to embittered disgust to declamatory warning. From reverie it passes to direct rhetorical approach:

'Think now . . . think now . . .', and with a tormented desire to convince himself and his hearers of what is plainly untrue, he proclaims:

Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last
I have not made this show purposely . . .

With an effort at calm objectivity he goes on 'I would meet you upon this honestly', but it is immediately apparent that his only purpose is an attempt at self-vindication from his self-brought charge, and that he himself knows that his 'conclusion'⁷ is already irrevocable.

A sequence of visual images and physical details in the opening paragraph reveals his condition and the reasons for it. He points at once to the chief element in his failure: he has not *fought*. In 1920, when the poem was published, the first World War was but barely over, but that had been no Thermopylae, no active struggle of the forces of civilization against barbarism, refreshed, in spite of hardships, by the 'warm rain' of faith in a common cause. Nor has Gerontion throughout his life fought for any values he believes in. His inert helpless old age is the result of a passive comfort-seeking indolence. But it has not brought him any comfort, and the description of his 'house' and his debased and impoverished living conditions follow. The civilization he represents is decayed:

And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.

As a result of not fighting for the values of a living tradition, the modern world is now 'owned' and enslaved by the only proliferating element in it, the international money power.

The inhuman and sub-human quality of that power is suggested in the words *squats* and *spawned*. Then the landlord and the house, the owner and the civilization he owns, become one. They share the degradation and they share the syntax, and are both 'blistered, patched and peeled' in their shabby and rotting decay. The background to the 'house' is a field of 'rocks, moss, storiécrop, iron, merds' - an atmosphere of barrenness, torpor, mechanization and corruption, where even natural lust itself, the goat, is starved and unhealthy. The picture is completed by the figure of the woman. She is equally squalid. Instead of functioning as mother and helpmate, symbol of fertility and affections, she is the petty housekeeper with petty ailments. In another compression of the syntax we see her 'poking the peevish gutter'. Finally Gerontion sums *himself* up as 'a dull head among windy spaces'. He is not a whole man, symbolic of a civilization ministering to body, mind and spirit. He has shrunk to an abstract intelligence, anchored to nothing stable, with no organic relationship between himself and a living culture.

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In an abrupt, startling transition we pass from this symbolic description to obscure condensed intensity of suggestion. Eliot has said that if many images highly charged with emotional significance are fused together, intensity is gained at the expense of clarity, and these next few lines illustrate this. Yet they are the heart of the poem. With the demand of the Pharisees to Christ: 'We would see a sign', we are shown the direction of the thought. The sign was given, but the modern world has taken the revelation with doubt and questioning. Bishop Andrewes, in a Nativity sermon, des-

cribed the mystery of the Word made flesh appearing first as a speechless infant, as 'the word within a word unable to speak a word'. Eliot adds the words 'swaddled with darkness'. That mystery of the union of flesh and *logos* remains dumb and hidden, its spiritual meaning unable to make itself known.

In the juvescence 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;

I interpret this that just as the significance of the symbol of Incarnation has been ignored, so has the symbolism of Blake's *The Tyger*. He saw the tiger as the symbol of the union of the creator and his creation; the symbol of the energy of the creator expressing itself in all forms of physical incarnation. Eliot suggests the link between the human and the natural world in associating the *year*, the seasonal cycle of birth and death, with juvescence, the youthfulness of a human being. The tiger also of course suggests the 'burning bright in the forests of the night' compared with the 'swaddled with darkness'. But it is in quite a different forest that this tiger appears. The next lines are very obscure. At one level they might mean that Christ as tiger superseded the old pagan sexual Fertility rituals and myths of 'dismemberment', giving them new sacramental meaning. But I follow Ruth Bailey¹ in believing that the break in the verse paragraph here indicates a gap in time, and that 'depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas', besides pointing back to the old paganism, points forward to the birth of a

¹ *A Dialogue on Modern Poetry*, London. Oxford University Press, 1939.

new paganism, and opposes the Renaissance to the Nativity. The etymological meaning of *depraved* as crooked, distorted or-perverse, suggests the sense of a wrong *direction* (always associated in Eliot's mind with the birth of Humanism); while its common usage links it with all the other images in the poem of debased or unnatural propagation. The Renaissance seemed a fresh flowering and illumination of human sense and spirit, bringing, as it were, the stars of the dogwood and the candles of the chestnut into the forests of the night. But it was 'flowering Judas'. The new paganism betrayed the tiger, bringing not communion but division. The clear 'word' has lost all its resonance and is only a confusion of 'whispers'. In the place of a society nourished by the sacrament in which man could partake of the creative source of light and life (the Christ-mass), Gerontion sees four figures typical of his own deprivation of both spiritual and physical vitality. They are cosmopolitan, rootless and sapless creatures, cut off entirely from the lifeblood of a living tradition. To Mr. Silvero, Limoges enamels are simply objects of art; it is their surface texture only that interests him; his 'caressing hands' have nothing to do with a loving heart. Hakagawa's ritual among the Titians again ignores the tradition which has inspired the art. To Madame de Tornquist faith has degenerated to spiritualistic stances: Fraulein von Kulp has repudiated it, turning away from the door. This is probably to be too specific in interpretation, but more important is the emotional atmosphere suggested by the very precise gestures, which are all we are allowed to see of these people. They suggest restless loneliness, empty formality, dimness, evasion, doubt, uncertainty, frustration. They are summed up by the image of complete futility: 'Vacant shuttles Weave the wind.'

§

Now the rhythm changes again. In opposition to 'the word within a word, unable to speak a word' is Gerontion's impassioned rhetoric of 'inquisition' on the subject of 'history'. It is strongly flavoured by the use of language and the verse movement of the later Jacobean dramatists. But the parallel is not just stylistic. Style is the embodiment of a way of thinking and feeling, and with the manner, Eliot injects into the poem the quality of perception which linked him (or Gerontion) with the dramatists of the early seventeenth century. They too were alive in a period when the established beliefs in a religion of 'revelation' had been challenged by the autonomy of the individual intellect, resulting in a deep cleavage between the religious and the secular. They too felt a profound disgust at the society they pictured, living its 'depraved' life. They too in their poetry, married intellect and sense in a magnificent riot of creative zest, but it too was 'flowering Judas' and brought no *human* fulfilment. Their tragedies also 'multiply variety in a wilderness of mirrors', but end in much the same indiscriminate destruction as Eliot's poem.

But here, instead of the creation of the situation in dramatic flesh and blood figures working out their own destruction and that of their victims in terms of action, Eliot analyses the interaction of element in 'history' as a structure of symbols. 'History' is human experience lived without the framework of a Logos; lived by the 'knowledge' supplied by empirical science. It is man relying on his own desires and 'whispers', believing that he can control his own fate; directed only by arbitrary expediency, inspired only by

instinctive action and reaction in the world of temporal fate and change.

• After such knowledge what forgiveness? *Forgiveness* must have an extended etymology here. What has man been given over to, or given up to, or resigned himself to, as the result of experience lived in these terms? The 'giving'⁵ and 'forgiving'⁷ are then played out in a series of images suggesting the 'depraved', crooked ways of knowledge (cunning), the ways of self-deception and self-interest, their methods of propagation and what they propagate. Man craves knowledge (of himself, of truth), but history presents it 'when our attention is distracted', when we are looking in a different direction, or are in a state of conflict, torn in opposing directions.

And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving.

A wonderful creation in terms of sense of the intellectual struggle between faith and doubt. Then Gerorition seems to describe his own position towards religion's revelation. It becomes an experience at second hand:

if still believed
In memory only, reconsidered passion.

The alternative to that is the sentimental interpretation, which ignores hard realities 'till the refusal propagates a fear'. The earlier images of depraved and Judas propagation now shape and colour the ideas. Historical cause and effect are seen in terms of this 'spawning'. The statement is quite general, but in the actual historical context of the poem, linked with the opening paragraph, the 'unnatural vices' fathered by the heroisms of war become the financial operations of the 'owner' of the house, and the virtues 'forced

upon us by our impudent crimes', such things as submission and poverty or dependence - of no moral value if imposed by necessity. This is the 'forgiveness' resulting from the 'givings' of history: not a forgiveness based on love, but a world given over to conflict and confusion. 'These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree': the fruit of the propagation is that of the Poison Tree of Blake's poem, watered with fears and tears, sunned with smiles and 'soft deceitful wiles', and bearing only the death-dealing apple of destruction.

Into this vision of depraved human appetites and impotencies bursts the reminder that the tiger is eternally present. 'The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.' Christ as symbol of creative love, willing to share his body and blood with mankind and so making all men members one of another, is 'unable to speak a word'. But the *logos* remains as inexorable natural law, a 'fearful symmetry', and the alternative to acceptance of it is destruction by it. Gerontion recognizes this, but he refuses to accept the direct, unequivocal truth of it. He shifts and palters as his 'dry brain' pursues its analysis of his own attitude in a kind of hopeless and half-hearted self-justification. He pleads that he is a passive victim: he is in the power of the 'owner'⁵ the purpose of his 'show' is not to urge a return to old superstitions; it is a real effort to face the facts: 'I would meet you upon this honestly.' Speaking for, and of, the whole development of civilization since the Renaissance in terms of relationship to the central Christian symbol, he says:

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.

The word *inquisition* implies the overtone of torture in his

condition and it is set against the full meaning of *passion* in the Christian context. Intellectual scrutiny is compared with the 'beauty' of the concept which unites all men in their whole emotional being with 'the word' commemorated in the Crucifixion and the Communion. But faith cannot be commanded. Even the 'terror' of the sense of isolation is now lost. Again Gerontion excuses himself for his incapacity to experience passion :

Why should I need to keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?

The simplicity of the old faith must in any case be modified by new scientific investigation. But again in *adulterated* Eliot fuses the two ideas of the debasing and dishonouring as well as the diluting of the mythical vision by rational materialism.

§

In the next lines the abstract condition of 'inquisition' is again translated into active sensuous embodiment and movement. Gerontion is ironically aware that his analyses are profitless. They are 'chilled delirium'. There is no warmth and substance to them, arid in the precise sense of delirium they are a wandering from the track. Compared with the spontaneous intuition of human communion and community, they are like a palate whipped up with pungent sauces beside natural appetite. Or they 'multiply variety in a wilderness of mirrors', reflecting the bewildering disintegration and empty desolation of a vision cut off from any central source of light.

What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil
Delay?

Will 'deliberations' stop 'conclusions'? Will the spider, spinning its money web, 'suspend its operations' in the financial markets? Will the inevitable cycle of moral cause and effect be halted, any more than the course of destructive nature?

The poem sweeps without pause to the answer in terms of visionary ruin. In contrast to the movement through cunning passages and contrived corridors and issues, to that of the thousand small deliberations arid the refractions from a wilderness of mirrors, there are two clear, unequivocal images of cataclysmic violence. First the vision of the single blast in which the cosmopolitan, rootless society is

Whirled

Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms.

Then the pathetic weakness of the innocent individual who will perish with the guilty, appears as the single gull, helplessly buffeting the wind and finally hurled by it downwards to the desolation of 'white feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims'. The Trades turn into the devouring tempest, and the Gulf claims the old man himself. The 'show' ends; Gerontion proposes no *action* which can prevent the inexorable end. He reveals his 'thoughts' to his fellow 'tenants' and leaves his warning with them. The final images of drought and sterility lead directly to the atmosphere of *The Waste Land*.

CHAPTER V

The Waste Land

We work in the dark — we do what we can — we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art.

HENRY JAMES. *The Middle Years*

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

Eliot's irritation at such criticism is natural. The poem, like *Sweeney among the Nightingales* or *Gerontion*¹ is visionary and timeless, and the 'figure in the carpet' which is woven through it has been woven through centuries of general and personal experience in a changeless pattern. The very number of cultures and languages and of associations with the experiences of other poets which are absorbed into the structure is enough to suggest its universality. Nor is 'disillusionment' a possible word to apply to Eliot, since it implies some 'illusion' held before, of which there is never any trace in his poetry. Perhaps, however, there was some excuse for the early readers of the poem. It is of the essence of Eliot's method that the experiences created and enacted in his poems are both timeless and timely, but the most

¹ 'Thoughts after Lambeth', *Selected Essays*.

falling down falling down falling down', and by the sense of attempting to shore up the ruins by repeating words of comfort and strengthening of the spirit which may 'help him. But they are in foreign tongues, not translated into his own inner experience and so become a part of himself. *Give, Sympathize, Control, Peace*, remain abstract ideas; none of them has been transfigured into a redeeming symbol. The surrender has been made, but it still seems a surrender to death, and the possibility of rebirth is still without substance or outline.

CHAPTER VI

The Hollow Men

Those of us who find ourselves supporting what Mr. Murry calls Classicism believe that men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves. I am aware that 'outside' and 'inside' are terms which provide unlimited opportunity for quibbling, and that no psychologist would tolerate a discussion which shuffled such base coinage; but I will presume that Mr. Murry and myself can agree that for our purpose these counters are adequate, and concur in disregarding the admonitions of our psychological friends. If you find that you have to imagine it as outside, then it is outside.

T. s. ELIOT. *The Function of Criticism*

FROM a letter Pound wrote to Eliot early in 1922,¹ we know that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was very much in his mind at the time he wrote *The Waste Land*. He contemplated using the quotation 'Mistah Kurtz - he dead' as the epigraph, and was persuaded by Pound that it was not substantial enough to sustain that position. The only direct influence of the Conrad story is in the first of the songs of the Thames-daughters in Part III. *Heart of Darkness* opens with a very fine description of the Pool of London, and in the course of it Conrad writes: 'Nothing is easier . . . than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames.' The detail of 'the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas', is echoed in

¹ Eliot House Collection. Harvard.

The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward . . .

But the story itself, with its haunting creation of the lost soul who had obviously passed through the initiation into some savage mystery cult and had been broken by the experience, is not in any way evoked. Nor indeed is it in *The Hollow Men*, but the epigraph turns our attention to the story, and a study of it brings out some interesting parallels between some of the comments of Marlow, who tells it, and attitudes which appear in the poem, and which we may perhaps attribute to Eliot at this time.

Psychologically, the experience in *The Hollow Men* is even more despairing than that of the conclusion of *The Waste Land*. The full horror of the situation of spiritual stagnation is experienced, without the actively dramatized revulsion from the contemporary scene, or the actively dramatized inner struggle between compulsion and revulsion towards personal change. The poet sees himself inescapably identified with his environment, and any power of choice or movement towards action of any sort seems utterly paralysed. It is a condition which Jung, as well as Eliot, characterizes symbolically as the meeting with the Shadow. To Jung it is the confronting of our own inner 'darkness', which means 'bitter shock, though it is the indispensable prerequisite of every renewal of the spirit'. The 'death by water' will appear first as a real spiritual death⁵ the surrender seems to lead to 'a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty, with apparently no inside and no outside, no above and no below, no here and no

there, no mine and no thine, no good and no bad'.¹ And this is the dangerous moment, 'in which the decision takes place between annihilation and new life'.

The essential prelude to any new life is the appearance of a new redeeming symbol from the unconscious which shall be a new centre of energy, the focus of fresh effort. No such symbol appeared in *The Waste Land*: the cock-crow brought no glad dawn, the damp gust no saving shower. The final picture is of the lonely fisher with the arid plain behind him. All he can do is to recall 'the awful daring' of the moment of surrender, to remind himself of others who have succeeded in the quest, and pronounce the words at least of the saving formula. In *The Hollow Men* what the poet feels to be the redeeming symbol has appeared, but only to be lost again: hence the despair created in the poem. The faint heartbeat of the rhythm throughout, the recurrent images of deadness of sensibility, and the abstract vocabulary into which the poem finally passes embody a sense of psychic depletion far more spectral than the violent emotional conflict in *The Waste Land*. Any hope that the 'eyes' may reappear is negated by the despairing acceptance of defeat, by the compulsion to *avoid* any further struggle; by the final failure even to continue to formulate positive and negative positions, and the resulting collapse into the whimpering announcement of annihilation.

§

The dramatic oppositions too are no longer between symbols of a vital past and a dying present, or between creative and destructive attitudes towards experience. They

¹ *Integration of the Personality*, p. 70.

are between different qualities of self-destruction - between Mr. Kurtz and Guy Fawkes on the one hand, and the hollow men, among which the poet himself is numbered. He can no longer project his own 'darkness' upon all the elements in his environment to which he feels alien, but superior. He can no longer find any release in the exposure of the hollowness and horror of a Sweeney, of a decadent 'land-lord', of a Madame Sosostriis, of empty, aimless women and young men carbuncular. He himself is a dweller in darkness as deep as that of those he had so surely and cynically displayed, and far deeper than that of those 'lost violent souls' in history or imaginative creation, who, if damned, were at least damned for overt action, and not for the condition of

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion.

The self-destruction by *deeds*, even if evil, is preferable to passive non-entity. 'So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist.'¹ The real Guy Fawkes, whose memory is now reduced to the light-hearted burning of him in effigy, to dances around a bonfire, and the begging of pennies for fireworks, at least had the courage of his convictions. Waiting in his gunpowder-filled 'dry cellar', he was willing to face death in the 'bang' of an explosion of the House of Commons. Even Mr. Kurtz, who had succumbed to African 'black magic', goes to death 'with direct eyes', with a 'wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe', whispering his final summing up of human experience: 'The horror! The

¹ Baudelaire, *Selected Essays*, p. 577.

horror!' Marlow, confronted with the 'choice of nightmares', the choice between taking the side of Kurtz or that of the 'mean and greedy phantoms' of the purely commercial interests, unhesitatingly chooses loyalty to Kurtz. His terrible last words seem to him 'the expression of some form of belief ... it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!'¹

Marlow himself, the imaginative rationalist, owns that when he himself faced death, it was in a 'sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism', a 'vision of greyness without form', and that he found with humiliation that he 'had nothing to say'. He returns to Paris and to a mood when he moves through 'the sepulchral city' as through 'some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire'. Finally he takes the packet of letters entrusted to him, to Kurtz's 'Intended', and in her he finds an 'inextinguishable light of belief and love', based on the illusion that Kurtz had remained true to the end to her and to his early ideals. 'Her dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident and trustful'. Naturally, Marlow refuses to quench that faith and to let in 'the triumphant darkness'. He tells her nothing of the truth. 'By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears - of tears that would not fall.'

§

But the symbol of the eyes in *The Hollow Men*, which are the only hope of overcoming the Shadow, cannot belong to

¹ *Youth and Two Other Stories*. Joseph Conrad. Doubleday, Page & Co., N.Y., 1916, p. 172.

any vision of romantic illusion, any more than they can be Kurtz's 'wide and immense stare'. In Part I they are the 'direct eyes' of those of assured faith, who have died, but later the symbol absorbs much richer implications. The opening of Part II is somewhat ambiguous, as it is difficult to know whether the 'there' in the fourth line refers to 'in dreams' or to 'in death's dream kingdom' (which is the death-in-life of the world of the hollow men). I read it that the poet dare not meet the direct eyes in dreams, for they light his ruins, reveal the lovely freedom of wind and tree and arouse poetic and spiritual memories 'distant and solemn', in place of the 'quiet and meaningless' voices of the opening lines. His world is a dying planet, doomed to extinction, and he prays to be left in it, a stuffed effigy, a scarecrow, 'behaving as the wind behaves', that is, acted *upon*, not acting, having no responsibility for his own fate. With terror he recoils from coming face to face with the eyes, from

that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

when, in the purgatory of active spiritual regeneration he, like Dante, would see the severe eyes of Beatrice directed upon him, and hear her stern words of reproach.¹

Parts III and IV develop the horror of 'death's dream kingdom'. The images of the dryness, the nullity, the emptiness are joined by further symbols of agonizing frustration. Both the worshipper and the thing worshipped are equally lifeless:

Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand

¹ *Purgatorio. Canto XXX.*

Faith can give nothing to satisfy the passionate desire for warm human comfort and communion, and he asks if death itself, 'death's other kingdom' would mean the same thing.

The water symbol here has no regenerative value. It is the 'tumid river' as described in *Heart of Darkness*: 'this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace . . . An empty stream, a great silence.' Life is nothing but 'this broken jaw of our lost kingdoms' — a packed image which suggests the deadness and dryness of existence, its incapacity for articulation and communication and its isolation from a body within which it could function as a living member. It also suggests the whole concept that such entity as this life has bears only as much relation to the whole 'kingdom' of man's estate, as the single bone from which a zoologist guesses at the whole living organism that once existed.

After this torturing picture of hollowness, loneliness, darkness and deadness, we are reminded again of Dante and Beatrice; of how, after his repentance, she bathed him in the river of Lethe, and her stern gaze turned to smiling encouragement, to 'eyes of light'. Of how she conducted him upwards and he saw the Divine Essence as an intensely shining Point, 'and like a star in heaven the truth was seen'⁵ and of how finally he saw Paradise as a 'multifoliate rose' of saints, the crown and consummation of that willing condemnation to the spiritual purgatory of 'death's twilight kingdom'. But the conclusion again is ambiguous.

The hope only
Of empty men

may mean that even the hollow men hope for such a revelation, or, more probably, that it is only empty men who

put their hopes so high, omitting any action towards climbing the mount of purgatory which must precede it.

There is certainly no hope in the conclusion. Instead of any vision, any release, any forward movement, any light or any 'wind's singing', there is the eternal going *round* in the cactus land, enclosed in time and place, in a childish nursery-rhyme world of make-believe. Then, passing out of the concrete evocation of physical parallels, the poet conceives of the Shadow as 'paralysed force', as that abstract principle of the negation of the will, which either uses the forms of prayer without the substance of action, or evades the issue by a postponement: 'Life is very long'. Finally, the Shadow triumphs, not in any vision of cataclysmic violence, as at the conclusion of *Gerontion*, but from sheer inanition of the spirit to make any affirmative response. The only possible step from the 'essence' of the poet's present despair, enclosed in his 'dry cellar', would be the active 'descent', the repudiation of his faint dream visions of empty hope, the entrance into the 'twilight kingdom'. But he is lost in the Shadow, and his 'world ends' not in any self-chosen dark night of the soul, but in a sense of tormented, whimpering vacuity.

CHAPTER VII

Ash Wednesday

Love has her priests in the poets, and sometimes you will hear a voice which knows how to hold her in honour: but not a word will you hear about faith. Who is there who can speak in honour of this passion?

s. KIERKEGAARD. *Fear and Trembling*

ELIOT has said that there are essentially two ways in which poetry can add to human experience. One is by perceiving and recording the world of sense and feeling at any given moment; the other by extending the frontiers of that world into a wider and loftier one. It is Dante above all who thus extends the frontiers of actuality, and Eliot in his own way has done the same thing. Although no poetry could be more concrete in detail, image and scenery, all are part of an inner world, a visionary and symbolic landscape. In *Ash Wednesday* this landscape changes its character. Some of the old symbols remain, but their emotional quality is subtly changed and shifted by the appearance of new ones which combine with them. The new dominating figure is that of a Lady, but inseparable from her is a garden, a rose, a fountain and two yew trees. These all form a new symbolic *centre*, in which the poet finds a renewal of life. They alternate with a desert of sand and of blue rocks, and there are further contrasting images of sounds and silence; of movement and stillness; of disintegration and reintegration; of light and darkness; of

loneliness and companionship. The fragments of liturgy appearing in most of the separate poems also take on the character of a symbol, and the whole is controlled by images of *transition*, of 'turning' from one condition to another, arid in the third part, of climbing a circular stair. It is obvious that the whole poem is coloured by religious and literary tradition, but its particular quality is entirely its own.

In *Ash Wednesday*, what Jung calls the 'dangerous moment', the hovering between the possibility of permanent distortion or of the total arrest of growth on the one hand, and the possibility of fertility springing from spiritual renewal on the other, is over. That was present throughout *The Waste Land*, but was at its greatest intensity in *The Hollow Men*. There, 'unless the eyes reappear', the spirit seems doomed to permanent imprisonment in the 'dry cellar' of the ego. But in *Ash Wednesday* that danger is past. This does not mean any assured position of safety and security, but it means that the new redeeming symbols are established as the new centre from which the new life will radiate and in which it has its being. It is to pass from dwelling wholly in 'death's dream kingdom' to the 'dream-crossed twilight' of a new world ; to feel, at least intermittently, the capacity to experience *reality*, *act*, *creation*, *response*, *spasm*, *existence*. Instead of the sense of complete exhaustion and defeat, there is one of a gradual spiritual clarification, of process and progress, though within that, there is still both progression and regression, 'a rhythm of destruction and construction, of error and truth, of loss and gain, of depth and height'.¹

The emotional condition may seem little different from that in *The Hollow Men*, but the *attitude* towards the

¹ Jung. *Integration of the Personality*, p. 89.

condition is changed completely. The complete passivity of the opening poem has nothing in it of negative frustration. In-place of hopeless abandonment to the blighting power of the Shadow, the compulsion to evade and escape, there is the *willed* renunciation and patience of a *chosen* attitude. Jung describes this as a condition of 'not doing', which is quite different from that of 'doing nothing'⁵ a condition through which the new forces alive in the new symbols gain strength by allowing them possession; by becoming object not subject. The symbols themselves dramatize the inner conflict, while the conscious will collaborates by its own disciplines. In Eliot's poem this is represented forcibly by the reminders of traditional worship to which the poet turns perpetually in his distress. The individual vision of his personal redeeming symbols comes and goes, but prayer is a technique of concentration to which he reverts throughout. The poem returns again and again to it; to the submission of the penitent, to the *ordering* power of a discipline, to the placing of the individual within the traditional corporate experience of the race. At the same time it is a poem of intensely personal emotion, though it is removed from anything like romantic subjectivism by the interposing of the symbolic emblems, and by the distancing of the whole experience into its own aesthetic world.

§

Of the particular qualities of this world Eliot himself has given a description in his essay on Dante. Commenting there on the similarities between the *Vita Nuova* and *The Shepherd of Hernias* of the second century, he says: 'The similarities might prove that a certain *habit* of dream

imagery can persist throughout many changes of civilization ... I suggest that possibly Dante, in his place and time, was following something more essential than merely a "literary" tradition⁵. Eliot defines the general medieval practice of allegorizing experience as the ordering of it into 'clear visual imagery', which sprang from the quality of thinking in an age when men still saw visions. 'We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions . . . was once a more significant, interesting and disciplined kind of dreaming.' The work of Dante, he says, 'belongs to the world of what I call the *high dream*, and the modern world seems capable only of the low dream'.

Ash Wednesday certainly belongs to the world of high dream, and its reminiscences of the world of Dante have been pointed out frequently. More particularly the figure of the Lady inevitably recalls that of Beatrice. Eliot's own remarks on the *Vita Nuova* suggest strongly that he sees in the story of the relationship of Dante to Beatrice a mixture of the personal and the imaginative which parallels something in his own life, something which also had its root in a childhood memory. He sees it as a fundamental human experience which can be understood only 'by accustoming ourselves to find meaning in *final causes* rather than in origins'. The origins may appear physical and sexual, but 'the final cause is attraction towards God'. Again, when distinguishing between 'romantic' and 'classical' mysticism, Eliot declares that it is characteristic of romantic mysticism to *substitute* divine love for human love, whereas in Dante the effort was to enlarge the boundary of human love so as to make it a stage in the progress towards the divine. It was a method of utilizing, transforming instead of discarding, the emotions of adolescence, whereby the area of the

emotion was extended, through the expression of love as contemplation of the beauty and goodness of the beloved object. He regards the experience which forms the material of the *Vita Nuova* as the material of adolescence, but handled by a mature man with the philosophy which assigns a place to such experience.

He concludes that the *Vita Nuova*, besides being an example of 'vision literature' is 'a very sound psychological treatise on something related to what is now called "sublimation" '. In this Jung would certainly concur, and would interpret both Beatrice and the Lady as examples of the *anima* archetype, the woman image which, according to his theory, regularly appears at this stage in the process of 'transformation'. The *anima* in spite of its name, is in no sense a 'soul' image in the religious sense. It is the 'contra-sexual component' alive in every man, and its images, like the other archetypes, have both creative and destructive aspects. In itself it is a primitive and compulsive force, which, when it has no 'ordering' function, may be created in man's myth-making imagination as Venus, or Helen of Troy, as Morgan le Fay or La Belle Dame sans Merci. 'An element of the supernatural always adheres to the anima. This must be so, since she is an entity living almost entirely in the "other world" of the unconscious'. But as a symbol in the process of spiritual regeneration, the figure always appears to hold 'something like a secret intention, which seems to spring from a superior knowledge of the laws of life . . . and the more this meaning is recognized, the more does the anima lose its impetuous, impulsive and compulsive character'.¹ It becomes instead the symbol of hidden wisdom, the 'enlightener', the *mediating* function

¹ *Integration of the Personality*, p. 80.

between the conscious ego and the inner world of the unconscious. It is the 'enabling' power, though at the same time it remains mysterious and ambiguous, 'a complexly opalescent phenomenon'.

§

The poem as a whole has much that is mysterious and ambiguous in it, in spite of several elucidations,¹ and we cannot hope to find any easy allegorical content of the various symbols. They remain 'complexly opalescent', as do the constantly shifting moods and tones. And just as it takes us into a new world of psychic experience, so is its rhythmical organization, imagery and language unlike any earlier poem of Eliot. It swings with the 'turning world' of the poet's inner consciousness, while it is framed and controlled by the unchanging ritual of common prayer.

It has been pointed out² that the condition in the opening poem is that of the initiate who enters the 'dark night' of St. John of the Cross. He must achieve 'a spiritual detachment from all things, whether sensual or spiritual, and a leaning on pure faith alone'. There is a quiet acceptance of temporary exile from hope and a refusal to admit despair in its place. Instead, the act of renunciation itself can be made a cause for rejoicing, since it is a willed act, an annunciation in positive terms of submission to the 'negative way'. When we know that the first line is a translation from a farewell ballad of Guido Cavalcanti to his 'lady', describing his afflictions dying in exile from her, it adds much to its force. The inner interplay of 'turn' and 'return' comes in from

¹ Leonard Unger in *T. S. Eliot. A Selected Critique*. E. E. Duncan Jones in *T. S. Eliot. A Study of His Writings by Several Hands*.

² By Leonard Unger.

the start, and the sense of exile from a loved figure as well as from 'the usual reign'. The poet has put aside all 'striving'; all the mood of Shakespeare's sonnet¹ where, weeping his outcast state, he curses his fate,

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope . . .
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope.

Shakespeare finds release in thinking of his love:

and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

But this kind of happy change from frustration to fulfilment has no place in Eliot's mood. In a parenthesis he suggests '(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)' where the sensation matches the *striving* of the line before, and there is an implied contrast to Shakespeare's lark. The image has been related² to a medieval legend that the eagle in old age flies up to the sun, where his feathers are burnt off and he falls into a fountain of water whence he issues with his youth renewed. In this way it is a symbol of spiritual regeneration. In the context Eliot seems to be suggesting simply 'Why identify oneself with any regal image of dramatic renewal?' The renunciation of 'striving' involves the renunciation of all that order of 'state'; the kingdom, the power and the glory of the 'usual reign'.

But the second verse implies the further renunciation of spiritual as well as material power and glory. In the love-code of the Provencal lyric poets, their 'lady' represented an object outside possessive sexual love. While she was wor-

¹ No. XXIX.

By E. E. Duncan Jones.

shipped as a human being, she was contemplated also as the source of aspiration and inspiration on the highest spiritual level. Cavalcanti is bidding farewell to that too, and here it is the hope of the return of such spiritual strength, as well as the hope of temporal and 'actual' joys that the poet puts behind him. He renounces 'the infirm glory of the positive hour', but also 'the one veritable transitory power', the one thing 'in this brief transit where the dreams cross' (Part VI), which gives him a sense of *relationship* between this world and some firm glory beyond it. This is the Lady herself, 'the blessed face and voice', and the garden and the fountain, 'there, where trees flower and springs flow'. Instead of the vision of the Lady and the power to drink from her symbolic fount of life, 'there is nothing again', and he turns to make something of that nothing, turns from the contemplation of ends to that of means. Cause and consequence seem paradoxical when the renunciation of hope can bring rejoicing, but it is in faith and penitence alone that such an attitude can be sustained, and the broken rhythms of the opening become firm and affirmative as they assert that attitude. Instead of the endless torturing turnings of self-debate,

These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain

he submits himself in prayer to the mercy and judgment of God.

The wings of his spirit are neither those of the aged eagle nor those of the lark singing at heaven's gate, but nevertheless they do not drop or droop. They 'beat the air'; they have a winnowing function, and their action suggests too his own chosen condition of *active* patience in the small dry air of

complete deprivation. His will at least need not capitulate and accept the resignation of despair. It is the distinction between 'not doing' and 'doing nothing'; it is both caring and not caring.

The conclusion in the words from the *Ave Maria* merge the individual consciousness into the collective response represented by ritual. The words of the familiar invocation both blend and contrast with the emotive power of his own lines. They also replace his own lost vision of 'the blessed face and voice' with thoughts of the supreme mediating 'Lady' of the Church.

§

In his essay on Pascal Eliot says:

It is a commonplace that some forms of illness are extremely favourable, not only to religious illumination, but to artistic and literary composition. A piece of writing meditated, apparently without progress, for months or years, may suddenly take shape and word; and in this state long passages may be produced which require little or no retouch ... he to whom this happens assuredly has the sensation of being a vehicle rather than a maker.

I have no means of knowing if the second poem of *Ash Wednesday* was composed in this way, but it is certainly one of the passages in Eliot which *reads* as if it had come without conscious effort. There is a feeling of exhausted vitality in the first poem, where the conscious will is labouring to 'construct' an advance on the principle of causation and consequence, and the wings of the spirit are 'merely vans to beat the air'. Prayer, the concentration on the traditional ritual of mediation, is the only activity, and it is carried on in an atmosphere of shrinkage and constriction which, however gladly accepted, is by definition the deprivation of both

sense and spirit. In the second poem, however, the rejoicing in the situation is no longer a matter of a discipline of renunciation. It has translated itself into the spontaneity of vision, into joyous, grotesque and beautiful symbols. The desert of *The Waste Land* is seen in a new light. There the disintegration of the personality was

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.

But here the whole emotional colouring is changed. The bones are not 'stony rubbish' or those later 'rattled by the rat's feet'; the dead tree is a live juniper; the beating sun has given place to 'the cool of the day'; the negative 'no sound of water' to the positive 'quiet'. The cricket which brings no relief has become the chirping grasshopper; the red rock of the subsequent lines has dissolved into the radiant whiteness and brightness which lights the whole poem (the liturgical colour of faith and joy); and 'fear in a handful of dust' is thereby transformed into 'the blessing of sand' and the happy bones 'glad to be scattered'. For the scattering of the bones is the symbol of the dissolution of the old ego as the centre of being, while the Rose and the Garden become the new centre. 'Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks The lady of situations' has been transformed into this gracious reconciling figure through whom the poet reaches his revelation, and to whom, therefore, the bones address their song. The song itself has none of the formality of a traditional litany, but is a fresh and personal creation of the central symbolism.

The specific reference is to the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel, the vision of 'the valley which was full of bones',

and to this is added an association from 1 Kings xix. When Elijah fled from Jezebel, 'He went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die'. And when Ezekiel went to the valley of the bones: 'There were very many in the open valley, and lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? . . . Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones and say unto them . . . I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live . . . Prophesy unto the wind . . . So I prophesied as he commanded and the breath came into them, and they lived'.

The three white leopards have puzzled commentators, but perhaps Eliot did have a dream in which he saw them! They are in the tradition of all the *devouring* myths in which the hero is swallowed and emerges regenerated, just as the scattering of the bones tells of the same psychic reality as the dismemberment of Dionysus or of Osiris. The leopards are devouring beasts, but obviously at the same time beneficent ones. Their whiteness and their quiet pose show them to be harmless: they lose terror in beauty. Moreover, as the bones know very well, the loss of the parts devoured by the leopards has made it possible for the brightness of the Lady to shine upon them. The ego which has been dispersed gladly relinquishes itself:

And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.

In these enchanting and chant-like lines, the body, whose old likeness has been changed and scattered (dissembled), renounces its past and the sensual aspects of its love. And

having made the renunciation, it finds that the loss is not complete dismemberment. It is a losing and forgetting of the old, followed by a 'recovery' through which something new can come into being. The earlier emotions are not discarded, but utilized and transformed, and the area of emotion extended by centring love in contemplation of the beauty and goodness of the beloved object: 'Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose', the wind of the spirit may come.

The reference to Ecclesiastes in the last line 'and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home', is another detail in which the scene differs from its parallel in *The Waste Land*. It is the poem which the bones 'chirp' which is the 'burden' (the refrain of a song), and the 'desire' which has failed is not a prelude to death, but to a new aspect of love.

The 'burden', with the mingled biblical and medieval flavour of the word, takes us into a new atmosphere in a litany to the Lady, who is herself withdrawn 'in a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown'. The Garden is a many-faceted symbol, suggesting the Garden of Eden where God walked 'in the cool of the day'; the earthly Paradise of Dante; the rose-garden of the *Romance of the Rose*-, and medieval hymns to the Virgin which allegorize the rose and the 'garden enclosed' of the *Song of Songs* as the womb of Mary. At the opening of the lyric, however, the Lady is the mediating figure between the two sequences of love, carnal and spiritual, and therefore subsumes both:

Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole . . .
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful

She is the rose of memory and forgetfulness; of the forgotten past when his love was that of sense, and of memory of the 'one veritable transitory power' which has nevertheless always been *there*. But from this she becomes identified with the ultimate meaning of love. The torments of the temporal, the meaningless, and all the ambivalence of love in its aspect of desire, are transcended in a vision of the Mother of the Word :

the Garden
Where all love ends.

From the measured cadences of this hymn we return to the rhythm of the opening passage and the bones sing gladly of their scattering and of their union 'in the quiet of the desert'. The poem ends with further allusions to Ezekiel. God tells the prophet to take two sticks to represent the nations of Joseph and Judah and join them together, 'and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. . . . This is the land which ye shall divide by lot . . . for inheritance'. But to the bones in their mood of happy assurance the divisions of love into carnal and spiritual no longer seems to matter. It is all one 'area'; now desert, but holding within it the promise of the Garden.

§

The 'clear visual images' of the third poem give perfect 'sensuous embodiment' to the allegorical content. There is none of the intellectual reasoning of the situation as in the first, though there is the same necessity to 'construct' instead of the spontaneous release of the second poem. In place of the glimpse of grace, and the ecstasy of contemplation, the poet is again enclosed in spiritual darkness. The

sense of the slowness of transition from stair to stair and its heavy labour hangs over it all. The Vapour in the fetid air' is somehow harder to breathe than the air which-is 'thoroughly small and dry', and the turning and twisting, the 'stops and steps of the mind', and the darkness and silence all create an atmosphere of nightmare. So do the figures seen and suggested. His own vague 'shape', twisted in struggle with the devil, which brings to mind his picture of Pascal 'facing unflinchingly the demon of doubt which is inseparable from the spirit of belief. More horrible still the images the narrow darkness turns into. Even the cave in the Waste Land, 'the dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit', is not as physically repulsive as

an old man's mouth drivelling, beyond repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.

And the horror within the stairway is intensified by the sensual temptation of the view through the 'slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit', into the world which in the last poem has been so light-heartedly renounced. Each detail of it emphasizes its opposite in his own plight. Over against the dark imprisonment in the silence and fetid air, the lonely struggle with the devil of the deceitful face, and the pathway into the loathsome mouths, is set the expanse, the colour, the peace, the perfume, the music, the fresh breezes, the 'brown hair over the mouth blown'. But its very enchantment gives added force to the strength of will which continues the climb, and again the poem concludes with the reminder that it is strength beyond that of the individual alone. It is a fragment of the liturgy of the Mass, at the moment before the taking of the Sacrament, which defeats the 'distraction' and focuses the effort on further ascent.

§

Nowhere is the figure of the Lady so 'complexly opalescent' as in the beautiful fourth poem; not only because of her association with actual colours, but because of the subtle metamorphosis she undergoes in the poet's memory and consciousness, and the dream-like way in which the scenes melt into one another and finally fade away among the 'thousand whispers from the yew'. The echo of the 'between' that haunts the poem adds to this shifting, elusive mobility; 'between the violet and violet', 'the years that walk between', 'the time between sleeping and waking', 'between the yews'. Time and place, dreams and actuality, the desert and the garden, the past and the present, are separate, but interpermeate and interfuse into a sense of vital continuity which can and must be preserved and enriched.

This sense of progression is suggested in the syntax of the opening lines, which continue from some unheard memory of one who, like Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*, was seen, never to be forgotten. She walks 'between' an actual scene and the world of imaginative vision; between the world of Dante and the poet's own world, among the flowers of a garden and the liturgical colours of the church. She is 'talking of trivial things' in her aspect as a real woman, but holding within her the divine understanding of human suffering, and the source of all vital refreshment and stability, so that the 'eternal dolour' melts into 'colour'.

Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs
Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand
In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour

From his own 'dolour', the poet prays to her in the words of Arnaut Daniel. 'Be mindful'.

Again the sense of the flowing continuity of the whole feeling of relationship is evoked in the direct presentation:

Here are the years that walk between, bearing
Away the fiddles and the flutes .

They pass, bearing away the music-haunted memories of the things of sense, and they are both the years between his own present and his first meeting with the Lady, and the years between his own poem and the poetry of the Middle Ages. They 'restore' his own early experience in the form of a dream figure, wearing 'white light folded, sheathed about her, folded' (like the petals of a rose), and also the memories of all the medieval poets whose allegories are always in the form of dreams. The years walk 'through a bright cloud of tears', which reminds us of that 'weeping love that implants a new faculty in the heart', drawing it upwards, of which Dante speaks in the last sonnet of the *Vita Nuova*. They refute the statement of the first poem that

time is always time
And place is always and only place,

they assert that all human experience and all poetry are a continuity and a recreation. They are, that is, if time can be 'redeemed', which may mean brought back, or recovered, or fulfilled.

Redeem

The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.

The poet beseeches the Lady to make it possible to recover the spiritual meaning which is 'unread' to-day in the older poetry. It has become only a 'gilded hearse', containing the

dead body of 'the higher dream'. We see only its external trappings; regard it only as a procession of decorative archaic emblems.

Then the feeling of the procession of the years melts into that of the formal garden, which again is partly that of medieval allegory, partly that of a new symbolic centre of vitality in his own being.¹ The slender yews, general symbols of both mortality and immortality, the garden god, Priapus, fluting of natural and animal fertility, and whose flute is now 'breathless', blend with the traditional fountain and bird. And between the yews and behind and beyond the pagan god, showing the 'higher dream' of which he is the earthy emblem, the veiled, bright figure 'bent her head and signed but spoke no word'. This is in the tradition of the *amour courtois* of the medieval convention. The first sign of the Lady's grace to her lover was this mere wordless inclination of the head, which nevertheless pledges her to him. Here too the sign of grace renews the fountain of life, and the bird's song takes up the poet's prayer to the Lady to recover and restore the vision which is the 'token' of the reality still 'unheard, unspoken'; the 'word of no speech' in the hymn in the second poem. The lovely line 'Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew' perhaps refers to the life-giving wind in Ezekiel, or perhaps it means, till we know the secrets of both mortality and immortality.²

¹ The appearance of trees as images, says Jung, are often 'intermediate symbols' in the general archetype of transformation. They represent 'rootedness, repose and growth ... as also the union of sky and earth'. *Integration of the Personality*, p. 94.

² Compare also John iii. 8. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'

The liturgical fragment which ends the poem carries on the ambiguity of that. Read as it stands it suggests a return to actuality from the vision contained in the poem; but the full context from the prayer to the Virgin is: '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'.

§

The next poem is written out of spiritual exile, though it is a different quality of exile from that in *The Hollow Men*. The Lady has been veiled and silent, but her grace has been shown and she has been revealed as the

Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom

Hence, although here the picture is one of whirling doubt and confusion, and of the impossibility of feeling any living relationship between the noise and darkness and terror and division, and 'the centre of the silent Word', faith in its *existence* is never in doubt. It is 'within the world and for the world'. The whole sensuous expression, however, is that of the shattering of the calm progression and grouping of all the symbols in the poem before, into a chaotic disorder. There, the past and the present, the lower and the higher love, the desert and the garden, the ancient rhyme and the new verse come together into a rhythmic design where the light, the colours, the silence, the fountain, the bird, the yew trees and the Lady are all absorbed into a central significance f are all composed into a moment which is 'breathless' with the sense of a dawning revelation.

But here that sense of rhythmical pattern and creative

synthesis and assimilation is destroyed; is 'lost'. Both the outer secular world and the inner world of spirit are alike 'distraction'. But whereas the distraction of the third poem was accompanied by the achievement of advancing up the spiral stair, of 'climbing', however slowly and heavily, here it is mere 'whirling' and chaotic commotion. The light has become the reiterated, uncomprehending 'darkness'; the silence and the birdsong, the visionary music of the ancient rhyme, and even the gay fiddles and the flutes of sensuous music have become cheapened into a mere mockery of chiming syllables falling on the outward ear, related to no inner harmony and reverberation. The 'between' which spelled reconciliation before, now betokens disruption:

Those who are torn on the horn between season and season,
time and time, between
Hour and hour, word and word, power and power.

And the 'torn' recalls those other aspects of the human plight which before, in the presence of the Lady, were reconciled with their opposites. Here the 'distressed', 'exhausted', 'worried', have vanquished the vision of her wholeness; her repose, her calm, her life-giving silence are lost:

The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny
the voice

The 'voice' is the pleading voice of the Lord in his 'controversy with his people'.¹ 'O my people, what have I done unto thee?' By its incorporation into a penitential ritual for Good Friday it becomes the voice of Christ speaking out of his Passion. It is to the Lady that the poet turns

¹ Micah vi. 3.

for intercession for himself and for all others in the same conflict, fear and weakness 5 those who

cannot surrender

And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks

And it seems as if his effort to evoke the picture of her between the yew trees does calm him. Just as her whiteness communicated itself to the leopards and the bones, so the rocks here carry the aura of the 'blue of larkspur', and hence associate themselves with her. The 'last desert' was that in which thoughts of her 'made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand', and which melted into the garden. Here it may do the same, for 'spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed' is perhaps the denial of knowledge as the world knows knowledge, and the surrender to 'the voice'.

§

The whole poem has been in a rhythm of rotation and transition between states of feeling centred in the presence or absence of the Lady. In the first poem her blessed face and voice are renounced in an act of faith which accepts deprivation itself as creative. In the second the truth of the bare statement of the first is given startling symbolic expression in the rejoicing of the bones and their song. Their joyful feeling of passive accomplishment, however, is contradicted in the third poem, where advance is shown to require more than submission and singing. There 'the deceitful face of hope and of despair', and the music of the flute, both of which are 'distractions' from the blessed face and voice, are conquered, but by creative effort not by creative patience. There is a sense here that a station on the

way has been passed, and it is immediately followed by the poem in which the Lady's grace is manifested, and accompanied by the glad sensation of release and wholeness; where the 'dreams' blend and end in the brief vision of the Garden. This is the only poem in which the poet actually meets the Lady, and then she remains veiled and silent. It too is followed by fresh disintegration, by conflict between all the opposing forces held in 'tension' in the struggle, and the loss of contact with the only power which can reconcile the whirling antagonisms.

The final poem brings another temporary resolution, but at the same time a reminder that there is no end to conflict in the way the poet has chosen. The mere will to submission is not enough, and to have a vision of the Garden where all love ends is not to be free of the distracting loves which continue to haunt 'the dream-crossed twilight between birth and dying'. The lower dreams remain and can only cease to distract if they can be absorbed into the higher dream which transcends them. 'The time of tension between dying and birth' is still the time in which the poem ends. And to point the truth of this, the 'blind eye' of memory sends up another false dream through the ivory gates of the underworld, and 'the infirm glory of the positive hour' reasserts itself. The description of it is prefaced by the 'Bless me father' of the confessional, but it bursts forth in quickening, rebellious rhythms of rejoicing, in some of the loveliest lines Eliot has ever written:

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 smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth.

Yet it is the 'lost heart' and the 'weak spirit' which are responsible, and who long to restore the old glory of earth and sea, of colour and movement and sound and smell as enough in themselves for rejoicing.

But it is 'to mock ourselves with falsehood' to allow that dream. The poet turns from it to his own dwelling place:

The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks

The lady is not present and the rocks are not those of 'the granite shore' of happy vision; but they are coloured by her memory, and the living yew trees are a hint of the Garden. The three dreams are perhaps light and dark and twilight, or birth and dying and 'the time of tension'. 'The voices shaken from the yew tree' are the 'sea voices' of the rebellious memory. When they 'drift away', it is the voice of prayer which is heard again.

The final intercession subtly blends all that has gone before. The full meaning of 'Teach us to care and not to care' comes home to us. There is no struggle between soul and body, only the one struggle towards perfection. The meaning of the yearning towards the sea, just as the meaning of the physical love of woman must be sought in final causes. And again, quite simply 'the final cause is the attraction towards God'. 'Our peace in His will' sends us to the words of Piccarda in the lowest sphere of Paradise, and to the continuation of that speech: 'his will is our peace. It is that

sea towards which all moves that it creates and that nature makes'. The poet 'among these rocks' is far from Paradise, and his prayer is still for patience and humility. It is not the glad litany of praise of this second poem, nor the excited appeal for revelation of the fourth; not the impassioned plea of the fifth, nor the acceptance of deprivation of the first. It is the simple prayer that he may express his love in contemplation of the beloved object; a supplication that he may not be *separated* from the knowledge of the 'one veritable transitory power' which has been vouchsafed to him, that beloved and guiding figure who is the *spirit* of life and love, the *spirit* of the fountain, of the garden, of the river, of the sea. And again he identifies himself with all other dwellers among the rocks by making his personal petition to the Lady, and to the 'Thee' of the last line in the traditional words of the prayers of the church.

CHAPTER VIII

Ariel Poems

For 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.

T. s. ELIOT. *The 'Pensdes of Pascal*

DURING the years 1927-9 Eliot not only published two of the parts of *Ash Wednesday* as separate poems, but also *Journey of the Magi*, *A Song for Simeon* and *Animula*. These, with *Marina* published in 1931, are known as the Ariel poems. This name, however, is not a title given them by Eliot. It was the name of a series of Christmas poems published over a period of years, to which Eliot contributed, so is without significance in any criticism. All four of the poems embody different aspects of the experience of rebirth, of the discovery of a new focus of existence. They are all visionary impersonal dramatizations of states of feeling within 'the dream-crossed twilight between birth and dying', this 'time of tension between dying and birth'. And all of them except *Marina* hold this sense of ambiguity between which is which. The passage between the death of the old and the birth of the new is marked by no milestone. It is 'this birth season of decease', a condition of suspension between the two: it is a 'transit', a 'journey'. Emotionally, it is equivocal and indefinite, 'waver-ing between the profit and the loss'. The meaning of the

new birth is obscure, full of doubt, accompanied by pain, not joy, and perplexing in the extreme.¹

This is particularly true of the first poem, *Journey of the Magi*. The opening is a direct quotation from one of the "Nativity sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, and the method of the poem follows a pattern which Eliot discerns in Andrewes' prose. 'Before extracting all the spiritual meaning of a text, Andrewes forces a concrete presence upon us'. The experience is projected first in direct realistic terms; terms of bad weather and the practical details of hardships and antagonisms. There is no mention of the dream or the star of the Gospel story. In memory, one of the Magi recounts the incident, in all the extraordinary precision and clarity of its external detail, and in all the uncertainty and obscurity of its ultimate significance. The tone is direct, conversational, factual: the dominating feeling that of faith without revelation. The determined faith, never openly stated, comes through the description of the character of the journey and its results. In the background are the 'Kingdoms' the wise men left:

There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.

But this 'regret' is the only personal emotion expressed in the opening section of the poem. Everything else is communicated by the simple enumeration, without comment, of the things that had to be endured. One after another

¹ 'The birth of the deliverer is equivalent to a great catastrophe since a new and powerful life issues forth just when no life or force or new development was anticipated . . . This reversal of values is tantamount to a destruction of previously accepted values; hence it resembles a devastation. . . .' Jung, *Psychological Types*, p. 328.

(there are twelve uses of 'and' in the first fifteen lines), follow all the obstacles provided by both nature and man to oppose and frustrate the journey, 'and such a long journey'. Each is a vivid picture of delay or embarrassment or obstruction. First there are the hindrances of nature ; the cold, the bad roads, the sore-footed camels 'lying down in the melting snow'. But in addition to these are all the exasperations arising from the active and passive frailties of man:

Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:

The narrator expresses no rebellion at all this. All he remembers is the faith that impelled them forward, the sense of urgency which made them quicken their pace, and which conquered not only the practical impediments and their own fatigue, but also their own doubts:

the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

In the second stanza the images become symbolic as well as realistic, though the extension is subtle and unobtrusive. The narrator continues to report faithfully the external details of the scene, as if they had face value only, but some of these hold a significance for the reader beyond that perceived by the travellers. The new way is different both from the old summer ease and luxury and from the struggle through the darkness, 'sleeping in snatches', of the cold winter journey. The rhythm softens and flows more easily. There is dawn and dampness and the smell of growing things, and a sudden intensification of assurance: 'with a

running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness'. The water and the mill are both vital forces, full of throbbing, driving life, with all the practical and symbolic activity carried by '*beating* the darkness'; denying the voices saying that this was all folly. They and the fertile valley and the trees and the 'old white horse galloping away in a meadow', and the vine-leaves over the door of the tavern, all speak of hope and freedom and fruitfulness; but again they are qualified by the implied vision of the three 'trees' on Golgotha, and the reminder of greed and treachery in the glimpse of the 'six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver'.¹ The transposing of memories of the crucifixion, of the dicing for Christ's garments and the thirty pieces of silver, to the approach to the scene of the birth foreshadows the basic ambiguity of the conclusion. The hope of the 'dawn' in this new land is not crowned by any scene of adoration or of rejoicing 'with great joy'. On the contrary the narrator's comment, though it may be read to imply fulfilment if we take 'satisfactory' in its literal sense, carries none of that sense. It is a bald recitation of the ending of a quest, not in failure, but in anticlimax and inadequacy:

But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

There was no illumination; only a bewildering sense of paradox, expressed with fierce intensity:

¹ 'Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? ... six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill.' *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 148.

I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death?

The birth brought 'hard and bitter' agony', far beyond the hardships of the journey. It brought the death of 'the old dispensation', with its unthinking ease; the sense of alienation from their own people, who had 'roots that clutch' in their old ways⁵ so that it is in their own country now that they find 'the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly'. The faith remains: 'we had evidence and no doubt', but their journey seems to have had no *creative* significance and to have brought no creative change. There is no water-mill beating the darkness in their land. There is only great weariness and disillusionment in the last line, 'I should be glad of another death'.

§

In *A Song for Simeon* there is the same emotional pattern. The birth of the new Word destroys the pattern of 'the old dispensation', but though Simeon *sees* where salvation lies, he is too old and tired to create anything himself. He wants only peace, and knows that it is only death that will bring it. Any life left to him means only the knowledge that it is not peace but a sword which is to be the lot of the true followers of 'the still unspeaking and unspoken word'. Others will reach the 'consolation' which is the reward of the inevitable suffering of creative living and dying, but that is not for him.

The voice which speaks in the poem is very different from that of the narrator of *Journey of the Magi*. The vigorous, graphic descriptions, the moments of excited intensity, and the lapses into weary bafflement, all alike carried in the

tones of direct speech, are gone. In their place is a more musical rhythm, direct biblical echoes, chant-like cadences and irregular rhyme and assonance. Simeon's state of suspension between dying and birth, between birth and dying, is beautifully created in the rhythm of the first stanza. Again the distinction between the two states is blurred: 'the stubborn season has made stand' may mean either the winter or the spring. What is sure is that Simeon himself cannot partake of the 'stubbornness' of either. He is passive, detached, waiting:

My life is light, waiting for the death wind,
Like a feather on the back of my hand.
Dust in sunlight and memory in corners
Wait for the wind that chills towards the dead land.

And the time of waiting is now haunted by the pain and disquiet of the revelation. There is none of the suggestion in the Gospel story that the vision 'revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ', brings any sense of triumph. It merely brings the knowledge that all his 'just and devout' past life, on which he had complacently prided himself, is a pattern in which he is 'no longer at ease'. In place of contented old age there is the consciousness of the coming 'time of sorrow' and of its continuance, and of the fact that the creative sacrifice of the saints cannot be his, though he can contemplate it. In this Simeon does differ from the Magi. To both, the new birth remains pure loss as far as their own lives are concerned. Both recognize it, but not with the joyful prophecy of 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given'. With the Magi it is accompanied by no social change whatever: with Simeon it brings the vision of the pain, death

and destruction which is to be the *immediate* conclusion of the birth of the new value. He does, however, also see its dynamic power as a potential new intensity of living. The rhythm quickens as he begins to describe the glimpse of the *mounting*, the glory and the ecstasy⁵ but it is checked and slowed again at once by the intrusion of his own impotence.

They shall praise Thee and suffer in every generation
With glory and derision,
Light upon light, mounting the saints' stair.
Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,
Not for me the ultimate vision.

He repeats his plea for peace, for release from the new disturbing consciousness, knowing that death alone can bring it. What remains of his old life is now meaningless because it can have 'no to-morrow'. It is not peace, it is merely the heavy burden of realization that both in himself and in the majority of mankind, what he had called life, is death⁵ and moreover that even for those who have a 'to-morrow' life and death seem indistinguishable from one another.

I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.

Animula carries on the same theme of the difficulty of distinguishing the true pattern, indeed of its impossibility without a spiritual death prefaced by the viaticum, the sacramental symbol of the passage from death to the rebirth of the soul, and of the provision for that journey. Here it is no longer a dramatic impersonator who speaks the lines. The uneven rhythms of the two old men change to sustained

¹ The title recalls Hadrian's lines to his poor little wandering soul, 'animula, vagula, blandula . . .'

poetic statement in flowing, supple lines, cunningly rhymed and varied by innumerable changes of stress and of the number of syllables to a line.

The quotation at the opening is from the sixteenth canto of the *Purgatorio* where Marco Lombardo discourses to Dante on the need for spiritual law vested in the Church to guide the innocent childish soul into true development. From this suggestion of the soul as child, Eliot passes to a description of the world of childhood, creating living sense impressions of its unthinking joys and fears, its instability of movement and emotion, its incapacity to distinguish between 'actual and fanciful'. The child lives by instinct only, but its life flows free and uninhibited; it is full of movement in its own being or delight in the movement around it, 'the wind, the sunlight or the sea' or 'running stags around a silver tray'. From this simple, dynamic world, ruled only by the instincts, time forces upon the growing soul a world full of the unpleasant necessities of distinguishing between reality and illusion, of trying to understand the accepted prohibitions and freedoms, and of moral choice. The 'heavy burden' of these problems 'perplexes and offends more, day by day'. The soul gives up the struggle to grow; it is simpler to remain childish, to compensate 'the pain of living' with 'the drug of dreams', to shelter behind the world's definition of knowledge:

The pain of living and the drug of dreams
Curl up the small soul in the window seat
Behind the *Encyclopaedia Eritannica*.

The inevitable result of this is the adult body with the spiritual and moral equipment of a child. In childhood, the limitations of movement and the sense of emotional in-

security are natural, and are recompensed by ever-present reassurance of love from outside itself⁵ the soul can live fully in the unsullied delights of the senses and the innocent contemplation of the patterns of nature or art or dreams. But 'the hand of time'⁵ is very different from 'the hand of God'. Instead of time moulding the soul in loving understanding of

the imperatives of 'is and seems'
And may and may not, desire and control

it teaches it nothing. The soul issues from it with all its spontaneous joys warped, all its potentialities frustrated; its fears comforted by no love, its being denied any 'warm reality', its delight in light and life annihilated to complete nonentity, without substance or pattern,

Shadow of its own shadows, spectre in its own gloom,
Leaving disordered papers in a dusty room;

The conclusion would be that of *The Hollow Men* were it not for the completion of the sentence.

Living first in the silence after the viaticum.

There are many whose first death is 'Death, our death', and whose life throughout is a mere process of dying. But since even such souls issued originally from the hand of God, they must return with the possibility of purgation. The possibility breaks the calm statement of the hopelessness of the souls who are mere shadows and spectres, and the poet adds an urgent prayer for those who have passed into physical death without the viaticum, perishing in the 'mis-shapen' temporal patterns they created for themselves. All are clear except 'Floret, by the boarhound slain between the yew trees'. The picture seems to be of one who, unlike the

others, was aware of the ambiguity of life and death: he stood 'between the yew trees'. Perhaps he was slain by the animal in him. These yew trees stand neither among the rocks or in a garden.^r The last line ironically emphasizes again that the hour of birth and of dying may be the same.

§

'Andrewes takes a word and derives the world from it; squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning which we should never have supposed any word to possess'. Eliot has been doing the same thing with the words *birth* and *death* in these poems, forcing the consciousness of the reader to feel with him their equivocal connotations. But it is the full meaning of *death* which heavily preponderates. The sense of new life is faint and fitful, and the faith in it, though fixed and steady, supports itself with no *emotional* assurance. Eliot says again of Andrewes' style that 'it may seem pedantic and verbal. It is only when we have saturated ourselves in his prose . . . that we find his examination of words terminating in the ecstasy of assent'. It would be possible to say that in the early Ariel poems the faith in the reality of rebirth may seem 'pedantic and verbal'⁵ but it is certainly true that it terminates in *Marina* in 'the ecstasy of assent'.

It is interesting too that it is no vision of the Christian Nativity which brings the overwhelming sense of emotional certainty to Eliot, but that of a very different child. According to Jung the revelation of the beginning of new spiritual experience is usually heralded by the appearance in dreams of some sort of miraculous child, symbolizing the new potentiality for growth and development which has awakened

in the unconscious. 'Psychologically, the divine birth heralds the fact that a new symbol, a new expression of supreme vital intensity is being created . . . from this moment the supreme intensity of life is to be found only upon the new line. Every other direction falls gradually away, dissolving into oblivion'.¹ It is this feeling of supreme vital intensity which radiates from the poem. It is the only purely joyous poem Eliot has ever written. The joy is not that of a triumphant moment of passionate fulfilment, but the profound and exquisite joy of a moment when, out of confusion, heaviness and despair, the world is suddenly transformed into beauty and significance. The possibilities are too complex and elusive to become explicit to the poet; the pattern cannot be fully comprehended. Its various elements, the images that return, seem unrelated, dream-like, and the speaker can only enumerate their harmonious presences and communicate the sense of free-flowing streamlike association which enfolds them all and unites them in the figure of Marina.

In an unpublished address on 'Shakespeare as Poet and Dramatist'² Eliot wrote: 'To my mind the finest of all the "recognition scenes" is Act V. i of that very great play *Pericles*. It is a perfect example of the "ultra-dramatic", a dramatic action of beings who are more than human ... It is the speech of creatures who are more than human, or rather, seen in a light more than that of day'. Eliot's poem has the same lighting, and his Marina is more than human. She is the dream-symbol of something newly born, and the scene is a recognition, a discovery of this magical creative regeneration, begotten in some mysterious way by the

¹ *Psychological Types*, p. 235.

² Given at Edinburgh University in 1937.

speaker himself. With a strange ironic twist, Eliot has chosen an epigraph from the *Hercules Furens* of Seneca, telling of the moment when Hercules, having unknowingly killed his children in a fit of madness, returns to sanity, questions where he is, and is forced to recognize the deaths he has himself caused. It is no more ironic, however, than *Journey of the Magi*. There, though birth is the theme we associate with the subject matter, it is death which pervades the consciousness of the speaker. Here too, as always in Eliot, death and birth are very close. Not only the epigraph, but the setting of the Pericles story reminds us of it. Marina was born at sea, then believed to have been murdered by those in whose charge she was left, and miraculously restored to her father when she was a grown woman. Pericles therefore has already experienced the belief that she was dead, and it is not only the sudden, unexpected presence of life when death had been accepted, but the return of life transfigured and transformed, matured out of all knowing, which is the miracle.

The poem illustrates very strikingly how in the poetic imagination, as in dreams, images already deeply felt, and active as symbols of great psychic importance, can rearrange themselves into a new constellation as it were, having a completely new intensity of value and significance. Here the sea and the memory of the sights and sounds and scents of the seacoast, and the figure of a woman, all of which came together in the last poem of *Ash Wednesday*, regroup themselves in an atmosphere entirely different. There, the controlling element was that of a religious discipline, gladly accepted, but nevertheless subduing the rebellious senses to the contemplation of a divine source, and framed in a ritual observance aimed to concentrate consciousness on that

source. Here the one word 'grace' though not confined to a religious context, carries a hint of it. But it is the release from the *confinement* of the religious context which creates the new world of the poem and liberates the new life in it. It is a spontaneous uprush of the sense of a new reality, intangible, and in a way inexpressible, but apprehended as

This form, this face, this life
Living to live in a world of time beyond me.

And there is a vast difference in the quality of the *anima* figure as she appears as the Lady in *Ash Wednesday* and in Marina. In both she is 'opalescent', a semi-visionary companion, yet holding within her being the *meaning* of the total experience. But again, here she has lost the *formal* element of a poetic and religious tradition. She is not semi-divine 'sister', 'mother', veiled, remote, worshipful; she is 'daughter', both child and woman, created of the speaker, springing from himself, a part of himself, though strange, unfamiliar, and recreated of his spirit.

She is of the sea, and the recognition of her presence associates itself with a scene of peace and loveliness, where rocks have none of the connotation they carry in *Ash Wednesday*:

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
What water lapping the bow
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog
What images return
O my daughter.

Then in a strange, chant-like progression, all ideas associated with the sensual or lustful aspects of love, dissolve: the 'insubstantial pageant' fades. They are 'reduced', which carries with it so many meanings: they are diminished,

subdued, re-ordered and appear in a new combination of values. They have been

reduced by a wind,
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog

And 'by this grace dissolved in place', which holds the double meaning that their substance has been dissolved by this miraculous presence, and that the miraculous presence pervades everything. The place and the presence melt into one another and are inseparable. But the poet (or the fictitious Pericles) tries to define the character of the miracle.

What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger -
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye

It is new life, unlike the old life of the physical senses and yet at the same time a heightening and enhancement of it: something intensely personal yet diffused throughout the universe.¹ Whether a permanent possession or a mere fugitive visitant, it brings with it a joyous spontaneity and excitement and a sense of movement and delight which is associated with some childhood memory. The 'whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet' is part of a memory which is created in the short lyric *New Hampshire*, and recurs in *Four Quartets*, and is charged with a half-comprehended sense of ecstasy. It returns in that dream world where all the streams of images from the conscious and the unconscious, the past and the present, meet and flow and reform into new patterns.

Then with all the unaccountable pattern of dream, we hear of the strange ship whose bow the water is lapping. The sea-world and the dream-world meet. Pericles and

¹ Compare Jung on the sense of possessing a new psychic reality: 'It is strange to us and yet so near, quite our own and yet unknowable,'

Marina are together on this very insecure and dilapidated vessel, which seems quite out of keeping with the perfection of the experience. But the significance of it is in the 'I made this'.¹ The presence of Marina is income strange way connected with a constructive effort of his own. The ship has come through bad times, it is defective and damaged, and its building was carried through over a long period of unawareness of its purpose⁵ it was no planned, rational creation of the will. But though he made it 'unknowing, half-conscious, unknown', it is 'my own'. It has been the *means* which has brought Marina to him, and having served its purpose, it too can now dissolve, for his whole being is centred on the vision she evokes:

let me

Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

The sea voices and the sea smell, the birdsong calling and the granite shores are no longer reminders of the lost heart and the weak rebellious spirit. The worlds of sense and spirit are one⁵ 'the time of tension' is transformed into a moment of complete release; the solitude among the rocks into the rapture of the presence of Marina. She, like the Lady, does not speak, but she is 'the warm reality, the offered good', and the poem ends in 'the ecstasy of assent' to the new life and love, to a glad surrender to wherever the voyage may lead:

What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers
And woodthrush calling through the fog
My daughter.

¹ As a human construction, the ship has the meaning (in the dream sequence of transformation') of a system, method or way. Jung, *Integration of the personality* p. 189.

CHAPTER IX

Coriolan

It is my contention that we have today a culture which is mainly negative, but which, so far as it is positive, is still Christian. I do not think that it can remain negative, because a negative culture has ceased to be efficient in a world where economic as well as spiritual forces are proving the efficiency of cultures which, even when pagan, are positive; and I believe that the choice before us is between the formation of a new Christian culture, and the acceptance of a pagan one.

T. S. ELIOT. *The Idea of a Christian Society*

MARINA creates the revelation of a new centre of consciousness, a new supreme significance. This brings an extraordinary intensity of feeling, which is at once that of recognition and of renewal. The old world is not lost, but it is transfigured. The same experience, in part, was created in the fourth poem of *Ash Wednesday*, but there the whole experience is centred in the figure of the Lady. It is, as Eliot said of the figure of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*, 'something related to what we now call sublimation'. It wove into living poetry the sense of the absorption of a part of the self formerly projected upon living woman, into a total response to a religious belief. The whole consciousness of the poet is focused on the shining clarity and loveliness of the Lady, which again becomes centralized in religious feeling by the liturgical fragment of the conclusion.

But in *Marina* the movement is quite different. The intensity of feeling is no less, but it is diffused over a much wider area. The force is centrifugal instead of centripetal. It moves outwards from the central figure, and though controlled from that centre, radiates from it in all directions. The 'grace' is no longer in the Lady's gesture, it is 'dissolved in place'; Marina does not wear 'white light folded, sheathed about her, folded', so that all the light is absorbed into her. Instead, while remaining herself, she becomes a part of a new lighting of the old world; something 'more distant than the stars and nearer than the eye'. And she is as much a part of the poet himself as she is of the seas, the shores, the rocks, the islands and 'the scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog'. The unity she symbolizes enfolds the individual and the universe.

This form, this face, this life
Living to live in a world of time beyond me. Let me
Resign my life for this life.

But it is in a poem published in the following year, a poem of a completely different character, that Eliot first creates the symbol of this new vision as a new *dimension* in living, a 'still point in a turning world'. *Triumphal March* is the first in a series of poems which were to have had the general title *Coriolan*, but only two of the series were published. In them he set out to dramatize a vision of the world of actuality in the light of his new apprehension of a 'reality' which transcended it, but in which, could it but recognize it, the world has its truest life. In *Marina* the whole emphasis is on this reality as a new living *presence* in personal living; in the Coriolan poems the emphasis is on its *absence* in any view of the world as a pattern of temporal,

objective relationships. Very subtly, and entirely in poetic image and association, Eliot contrasts a world structure focused finally on the visible Hero as the centre of a vast organization of force, with that hidden point which is the central light of another world.

The poem throughout is a masterpiece of inter-related contrasts. The stillness of the still point holds in itself properties of time and space in direct opposition to those of the turning world at any point in history. For the purposes of the poem the time and space of 'history' is collapsed to a 'day' which is equally Roman and contemporary.¹ The succeeding events of this day, and the procession itself, that is, the external world as a *sequence* of moments, is juxtaposed to the eternal 'noon' hidden at the heart of a different concept of time and movement. In the same way the 'perceiving' which is 'the natural wakeful life of our Ego' is contrasted with the intuitive apprehension of the different pattern of reality.

The 'day' of the poem is no ordinary day. 'We hardly knew ourselves that day or knew the City'. It is a day into which the whole essence of a civilization is distilled. And the qualities of that civilization are communicated to us by an intricate interweaving of facts and suggestions in the apparently simple but cunningly ironic monologue of one of the crowd watching the parade. Indeed 'he's artful' would be a good description of Eliot's method. He has been so careful to try and prevent the interpretation of the poem as political satire at the expense of totalitarianism. The unexpected entrance of the line, 'The natural wakeful life of

¹ Eliot has spoken of the contemporary scene as 'more analogous to that of the later Roman Empire than to any other period that we know.

our Ego is a perceiving', in the middle of the account of the waiting crowd at once directs the lens. 'Our Ego' is nothing very distant.

The magnificent opening, repeated later, concentrates the quintessence of it all.

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

With this ringing echo of unyielding hardness in our ears, and with the sight and sound of the other symbols of military glory, the numberless flags and trumpets and eagles, we become aware of the crowd itself, 'such a press of people', all 'waiting' on 'the way to the temple', until 'he' comes. 'So many waiting, how many waiting? What did it matter on such a day?' It does not matter, for the individual as an organic unit in the whole no longer matters. 'What comes first?' is the next question, and the answer is the enumeration of the weapons of war and the ammunition and the whole equipment of the army. This is followed by the organized bands of the sporting elements and then by the municipal officers. We see the picture of a whole society where the mechanical destructive force man has created 'comes first', with man himself organized into pieces of social machinery, and the unthinking 'people', provided they have their 'stools and sausages', question nothing beyond what they 'see'.

Then the great moment:

Look

There he is now, look:
There is no interrogation in his eyes
Or in the hands, quiet over the horse's neck,
And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.

The Hero differs only in one respect from the crowd. He too is 'watchful, waiting, perceiving', but he is 'indifferent', and 'there is no interrogation in his eyes' or in his hands. He cares nothing for the people who hail him as saviour, and his vision sees nothing and questions nothing beyond the pattern of values of which he is the central symbol, and which his 'hands' translate into government or command. The other central symbol is hidden:

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.

The procession goes on to the temple. 'Then the sacrifice', and the deadness of everything in the religious observance is symbolized in the urns and the four times reiterated 'Dust', and related immediately to the repetition of the opening lines of the poem.

'That is all we could see', says the speaker. It is left to the reader to compare the suggestions created in the lines on what is 'hidden' with what has been 'seen'. In the place of the inflexible hardness of the stone, bronze, steel, we feel the softness of the dove and turtle feathers, the pliant grace of the palmtree ; instead of the rigidly regimented procession, the running water; instead of the deadness and dust, organic life. But beyond these contrasts in sense-perception, there are all the elusive implications scattered in the conclusion of the poem, enforcing its inner significance. Already the hint of the palm tree has brought to mind the ironic parallel of a very different triumphant procession with the multitudes waiting on the way to the temple to see 'him' pass, riding on an ass. The ironic pressure increases with the fragment of talk which places the temple and the sacrifice in its modern

context, and illustrates the 'dust' into which the Christian tradition has disintegrated. Its symbolic language is so 'undecipherable' that to the literal-minded Cyril the ringing of the bell at the elevation of the Host can be translated only into memories of the muffin and crumpet man ringing his bell in the London streets. The ignoring of the food of the spirit in favour of that of the body is hinted again in the 'Don't throw away that sausage, It'll come in handy'. The arrangement of the words in the next phrase,

Please, will you
Give us a light?
Light
Light

turns the commonplace request into a prayer that what is 'hidden' may be revealed. But the last quotation, with its picture of the lines of soldiers drawn up in formation with their bayonets facing each other, emphasizes the 'hedge' that blocks the vision, ever growing greater just as the letters enlarge themselves at the conclusion.

§

We can guess that one reason for abandoning the *Coriolan* sequence was the difficulty of the dramatic monologue form for the purpose Eliot had in hand. Their only weakness is that the speakers in the poems would riot dramatically have Eliot's own apprehension of the still point in the turning world, being entirely preoccupied with its turning. Their 'perceiving' is all on the level of the natural wakeful life of our Ego, and though a great part of the 'meaning' can be introduced by the satiric irony with which the speakers, all unaware, reveal much more than they say, still the crucial

lines creating the new vision in *Triumphal March* are dramatically inappropriate in the mouth of the supposed speaker. *The Difficulties of a Statesman* is more successful in that way, since the poor harassed politician is nearer Eliot's own degree of sensibility. But by making it more straightforwardly dramatic the real purpose of creating an apprehension of, and directing attention to, the 'still point', is largely lost in the flow of the tragi-comedy of dramatic self-revelation.

The satire in this, with the refrain 'What shall I cry?' blending the official power and private despair of the speaker, is excellent sardonic fun. The robust ridicule of bureaucratic administration, and of the clash between public and private ambitions reaches its culmination in the complete impasse:

A commission is appointed
To confer with a Volscian commission
About perpetual peace: the fletchers and javelin-makers and
smiths
Have appointed a joint committee to protest against the
reduction of orders.

The rest of the poem expands the contrasts already 'given' in *Triumphal March*. The new refrain 'O mother' suggests the baffled desire for some directing and loving authority to appeal to, and at the same time the essential immaturity of the direction it takes. Whereas *Triumphal March* indicated a *wrong* centre on which public attention is focused, *Difficulties of a Statesman* creates the opposite error of a complete *lack of centre*. The wrong centre appears again in 'the row of family portraits, dingy busts, all looking remarkably Roman', but the only alternative to *that* pattern is the dissolving confusion of committee on committee and the

vain hope that correct observance of sacrifice and submission to the gods - 'the mactations, immolations, oblations, im-petrations' — may have some magic force.

Meanwhile the guards shake dice on the inarches
And the frogs (O Mantuan) croak in the marshes.

The '(O Mantuan)' reminds us that while Virgil chronicled the glories of Rome, it too had within it the seeds of its own decay; its enervating inattention to its corporate life, its malarial swamps. Then too, the frogs croaked their reminders of doom.

All through the rest of the poem Eliot plants in the reader's mind the *smallness* (to the statesman and his world) of the reminders of a different order of consciousness, but hints to us at the same time that this order, however miniature its manifestations and fitful its appearance, has the continuity and permanence which marks natural vitality as opposed to the melancholy muddle of human affairs. The central light is shaded, 'set under the upper branches of noon's widest tree', and fitful as 'the small flare of the firefly or lightning bug', but it is essentially different in *character* from that on the dingy busts 'lit up successfully by the flare Of a sweaty torchbearer, yawning'. The stir of 'the small wind after noon', 'the sweep of the little bat's wing', the thin chirp of the small creatures through the dust, is more significant than the 'cry'. The source of the life 'where the dove's foot rested and locked for a moment', where 'the cyclamen spreads its wings [and] the clematis droops over the lintel', is 'hidden', but it is very different in kind from the confused, restless perplexities driving the worried statesman. In the final 'cry' of the repeated 'RESIGN', with its condensation of political implication with the echo from

Marina we hear Eliot's ironic comment on the futilities of statesmanship without a centre in some reality more permanent and more satisfying to the nature of man than that of government machinery.

CHAPTER X

Four Quartets

If we learn to read poetry properly, the poet never persuades us to believe anything . . . What we learn from Dante, or the Bhagavad-gita, or any other religious poetry is what *it feels* like to believe that religion.

T. S. ELIOT. *Address at Concord Academy 1947*

IN a quotation from Jung in the first chapter of this book ¹ he attempts to give some idea of the new centre of being attained by the process of 'transformation' which results in the integration of the personality. He describes the intuitive nature of perception through which this centre is apprehended, and its character as an experience of pattern and control. He adds: 'Visualizations are never more than awkward attempts of a fumbling mind to give some form to the inexpressible psychological facts'. The visualizations which he is here referring to are dream images which characterize the final phase of the whole archetype of transformation'. This archetype, since in his description of it, it is being lived, not fashioned into art, is in no sense a procession of clear 'primordial images', the myth of a Quest or a Pilgrim's Progress. Throughout, there is synthesis as well as sequence. The single images within the whole experience 'are not isolated from each other in the unconscious but are in a state of the most complete mutual interpenetration and interfusion'. But in spite of this, if the

¹ See page 32.

conscious will is collaborating with the revelations contained in the dream symbols, Jung traces an apparently purposive sequence of images creating the gradual shift from the ego as the centre of being, to a different centre. It begins with the going down into the darkness, to the water, the mythical theme of the hero's journey under the sea or a lake, or in the belly of a beast, or as a Fisher King. It means a meeting with the Shadow, actually the inner realities of a man's own unconscious, however it may be transposed into monsters and dragons and ordeals. It means a repudiation of the old practical guides of the ego, and the allowing of the ego to be object not subject; the experience of 'not doing'. The new centre of value will then reveal itself under the image of some form of enclosure, which to Jung has the meaning of the Greek *temenos* an isolated sacred place; visualized in dream as garden, courtyard or such. At the same time, the anima figure makes its appearance, symbol of the woman element in man, with which he must come to terms if he is to develop further. Images of a miraculous child and the sensations of renewal through it come from the unconscious. The anima figure becomes increasingly depersonalized, as the feminine function she represents becomes integrated into the total response of the personality, and diffuses itself throughout consciousness. More and more, dramatic figures as actors cease to appear as symbols of the new centre, and it reveals itself as abstract pattern, in dream symbols of plastic design which bring extraordinary sensations of release, assurance and Brightness'.

What they bring is, according to Jung, the sense of *wholeness* of personality, the Self in place of the Ego. The deepest feelings of the Ego become its assurance of relationship with the Self, a relationship which can only be 'sensed' since

wholeness of personality is an ideal which is humanly unattainable ; which can be experienced only through its parts. Moreover it is a feeling which develops very gradually and becomes a part of experience at the cost of great effort, and is at once 'task and goal'. Efforts to visualize the fleeting images in drawings take most varied forms, but according to Jung, have always certain elements in the design which are constant. They are in the form of what he calls a *man-dala*. He says that mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning magic circle, and that the basic design includes always a circle, having a centre, and divided into four equal parts.

This design has turned up in every cultural region, more or less, and we find it today not only in Christian churches, but in Tibetan monasteries as well. It is the so-called sun-wheel, and as it dates from a time when no one had thought of wheels as a mechanical device, it cannot have its source in any experience of the external world. It is rather a symbol that stands for a psychic happening; it covers an experience of the inner world.¹

Jung asserts that the mandala dream image always combines the elements of a circular rotation (frequently of rotating light), some element of 'Sourness', and the all-important centre. Whereas in its consciously religious art-forms in West and East, the centre will have the figure of Christ or Buddha (generally within the design of rose or lotus), the secular unconscious seems generally to produce some natural symbolic emblem such as flower, sun, star, or pool of water.⁸ But he regards all such manifestations as 'expressions of a

¹ 'Psychology and Literature.' *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 188.

² Iconographers tell me that the mandala is a Chinese pattern only, and that reproductions of Indian and Christian pictorial designs which Jung in his books calls mandalas are not recognized as such by them.

certain attitude which we cannot avoid calling religious' . . . 'Religion is a relationship to the highest and strongest value . . . The relationship is voluntary as well as involuntary, that is, you can accept consciously the value by which you are possessed unconsciously.'¹

In the mandala pattern, the circle suggests the imagined wholeness of being, and the centre the point at which the resolution of opposites occurs which makes such a sense of wholeness possible. For Jung sees the pattern of 'reality' in the Heraclitean terms of a dynamic system in which a central energy perpetuates itself by opposing forces which, though apparently antitheses, are found to be phases of one cyclical process. As Heraclitus says: 'The unlike is joined together and from differences result most beautiful harmony, and all things take place by strife.' Heraclitus too, though he had no concept of a round world in which to place his imagery of pattern, saw the four elements as alternatively predominating constituents of one universe. Jung traces the insistence upon 'fourness' which the mandala dreams and drawings always possess, to some inexplicable constituent in the unconscious mind which is constantly asserting itself in symbol. He calls it 'the archetypal image of God as manifested in his creation', citing the visions of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse as literary illustrations. He comments: 'The central Christian symbolism is a Trinity, but the formula of the unconscious mind is a quaternity.'² To the unconscious there seems to be something wholer about fourness than threeness.

Jung's speculations about the mandala imagery have led, as he says, to the accusation that he is 'mystical'. His reply is that if so, it is because the 'mystical' idea is enforced by

¹ *Psychology and Religion*, p. 98.

² *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, p. 265.

the natural and spontaneous occurrences of the unconscious mind, which, he has found, always produce the same kind of symbolism to give vision and sensation to a certain attitude of consciousness which produce? harmonious living. He is careful to make it clear that he is not attempting to prove the existence of God through the presence of mandalas. 'They prove only the existence of an archetypal image of the Deity, which to my mind is the most we can assert psychologically about God. But as it is a very important and influential archetype, its relatively frequent occurrence seems to be a noteworthy fact for any theologia naturalis.'

It will be clear to those familiar with *Four Quartets* that Eliot's imagined circle and 'still point' have what Jung calls the mandala form, though any materials supplied by the unconscious would only confirm what Eliot had already accepted intellectually: psychology is the handmaid and not the housekeeper of theology. Eliot too is frequently accused of 'mysticism', a word loosely used nowadays, and associated almost always with emotional experiences unrelated to any intellectual and moral discipline. Eliot's 'mysticism' is never of this nature, as he has tried to make clear in his prose writings. He is in the tradition of those Christian and Oriental mystics who have believed that moments of intuitive insight into the nature of 'reality' come as the crown to 'prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.' His poetry from *Gerontion* onwards is a record of the gradual development from the position where his *intellect* accepted Christian dogma, through the stages by which intellectual acceptance grew painfully and arduously into a conviction embracing the totality of personal and social experience. As he says

¹ *Psychology and Religion*, p. 73.

himself: 'a religious "experience" without dogma is very different from the experience of believing a dogma:'¹

Four Quartets are his ripest, most complex and most complete expression of 'the experience of believing a dogma'; of the moments of intuitive apprehension of its truth, and of the relation of these to a view of history and to the general living of life. Of the 'mystical' experiences of the moments of vision, Eliot says in his essay on Pascal,² 'you may call it communion with the Divine, or you may call it a temporary crystallization of the mind', and he comments that such illuminations occur to many people who are not mystics, and that 'they can be judged only by their fruits'. *Four Quartets* are religious poems, but as Eliot said of other great religious poetry, the poet is not persuading us to believe anything, he is revealing what it feels like to believe his religion. And to believe it not only intellectually, but with the whole personality. He is creating in language the steps in thought and feeling, and the moments of sudden apprehension, in and through which he has felt the conflicting oppositions of the worlds of nature and of 'spirit'; of time and the timeless; of the personal and the social; of inner and outer actualities; of life and death, to be 'conquered and reconciled' in the central symbol of Incarnation, although that remains only 'half-guessed, half understood'. Of how, moreover, the principle of incarnation seems to work on all sorts of levels, appearing in 'hints and guesses' in all those creative aspects of living by which humanity transcends, and always has transcended, its slavery to time and place.

Steps in the historical growth of this process of revelation

¹ 'Planning and Religion', *Theology*, May, 1943.

² The whole of this essay throws much light on the attitude of mind behind *Four Quartets*.

are hinted at in the quotations from Heraclitus and the Bhagavad-gita, but what to Eliot is the ultimate revelation is never presented directly. It appears in allusion and quotation from Dante, from medieval English mystics, from St. John of the Cross, and in connecting the poems with events in the Church calendar, but never by direct quotation of the familiar, smooth-worn words of the Gospels. It is only by implication that we continually hear the old words in a new voice, and particularly those telling of the way, the truth, and the life. Nor is anything ever presented as the dogma of a Church. The full illumination of the Christian concept is not the starting point but what is *arrived* at. The poems are a process of exploration, both *along* the movements of time, and *inward* into the stillness of 'consciousness'. This idea emerges in the imagery of *travelling*, which is sustained throughout. What is arrived at, the moments of intensified living, are also subtly transformed, as the quality of revelation grows and spreads. And the two processes by which the truth is revealed - through the way and through the life - the travelling and the sense of arrival, the means and the ends, the becoming and the being, are inseparable, always in a condition of interpenetration and intertwining. The two modes of experiencing - by exploration and by apprehension - are again reflected in the ways in which the poet approaches his themes. The whole sequence opens with a passage of musing philosophical speculation and ends with a passage of the utmost symbolic intensity and concentration. The approach by way of analytical exploration, and the direct intuitive revelation through symbol alternate throughout, merge into one another by subtle transitions and become one in the total rhythmical structure.

§

A parallel between the living of life with its centre in the symbol of Incarnation, and the creation of art as another symbol of which incarnation is the centre, is sustained throughout. Poetry and music are united in the title of the poems.¹ The parallel between the creation of life and art will be discussed later, but the title is one illustration of the 'Sourness' which Jung emphasizes so much as an element in the mandala pattern. This goes far beyond the musical suggestion and is of the greatest intricacy and elaboration. The whole design is of a four-in-one. The division of the physical universe into the four elements of air, earth, water and fire is used symbolically to express the elements in the nature of man which make him the microcosm of the macrocosm. His powers of abstraction are air; the chemical composition of his body is earth; the lifestream in his blood is water; his spirit is fire. Each poem emphasizes one element in particular. Each poem too creates one of four different ways of looking at time: time as memory; time as a cyclical pattern; time as flux; time as the revelation of the meaning of 'history'. Time itself is the fourth dimension. The title of each poem is the name of a place, and that place is related to the poet's experience in the present, and to events in the past. The four seasons play their part and are related to four periods in the life of man.

All these quarters which make the various 'quaternities' are enclosed within an image of human experience as 'the turning world'. But the image of the turning world is two-

¹ A parallel with musical structure is discussed by Helen L. Gardner in 'Four Quartets': A Commentary' (*T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands*, pp. 58-60). The whole essay is full of valuable suggestions.

fold: there are two co-existent turning worlds, two 'spheres of existence'. One is the physical, external world of spatio-temporal manifestations; the world of perpetual change. The other is the unseen world of inner unchanging pattern, whose centre is 'the still point'. Man is 'involved' with both and is part of the pattern of both. The themes of the poems are the revelation of this double relationship — to the world of nature and to the world of spirit - and of the results of the *lack* of relationship.

§

These themes have their first statements in the two epigraphs from Heraclitus. The first says: 'Although the Word (logos) is common to all, most men live as if they had each a private wisdom of his own.' The second says: 'The way up and the way down are one and the same.' Philip Wheelwright¹ explains the idea behind the second epigraph thus:

'The way up' meant to Heraclitus, outwardly, the qualitative movement from rock and earth through the intermediate stages of mud, water, cloud, air, and aether, to the rarest and uttermost of all states, which is fire; 'the way down' meant the contrary movement. Both the movements are in process all the time in all things that exist, hence they are said to be 'the same.' Existence thus involves unceasing tension between upward and downward pulls - toward the realm of rarity, warmth, light and toward the realm of density, cold, dark. The pull is not only observed in physical phenomena, it operates too in our souls.

All things exist in tension, but to Heraclitus the 'reconciliation of the opposites' means their creative interdependence in accordance with a universal law but not their transcendence. He has no concept of a 'still point' where all the

¹ 'Eliot's Philosophical Themes.' *T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands*, p. 100.

emotional oppositions are 'gathered and reconciled'⁷ and 'conquered' by having *meaning* in terms of resolution. So that Eliot's interpretation of 'the way up and the way down' is not that of Heraclitus. To him the words mean that an exploration of all the human emotional equivalents of birth-death, war-peace, day-night, height-depth, heat-cold, movement-stillness, leads to the discovery that all the 'ways' lead to the 'life' in the centre, and to the revelation of the 'truth' of that symbol. It is the revelation *in* 'the turning world' of 'the word which is common to all'.

Outside the turning worlds of human experience, both outer and inner, is the Logos itself, the 'unmoved mover':

Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement.

But that Absolute is unattainable since humanity is inextricably involved within the physical turning world where all time and movement are relative. The 'still point' therefore is *the point of intersection* between time and the timeless, between stillness and movement, and partakes of the qualities of both the eternal unmoving Logos and the inescapable world of time and movement: 'only through time time is conquered.' If we try to place it in definition, in time it is the 'eternal present', the dimension of time existing outside its divisions into the cycle of past, present and future, but which has to be defined in temporal terms. If we try to define it in space, we have to envisage (to quote Mr. Wheelwright again) 'a mathematically pure point' existing at the centre of a revolving wheel: again not a part of its movement, but to be expressed only by reference to movement. For an inescapable condition of our physical turning world is that we exist in space-time.

§

But our punctual rotary prison, with physical dissolution as the inevitable and inexorable end of our sojourn in it, can be transformed if we become a part of the inner pattern, the other 'sphere of existence', which, though unseen, inheres in it. We are made fully aware of it only in those moments of 'communion with the Divine' or of 'temporary crystallization of the mind,' when the sense of 'wholeness' becomes an actuality. In those moments we reach 'the still point'; we are conscious of release from the tension of the opposites and their sudden resolution into harmony. 'Sudden in a shaft of sunlight' these moments of insight and intensification of living, come and in those moments we touch 'reality'. They may occur in memory or day-dream; in religious contemplation; in any moment of 'sudden illumination', and in the full experience of works of art. The rest is, from one point of view 'the waste, sad time stretching before and after'. But nevertheless that can be lived in the light of the revelation, in the knowledge that the pattern subsists. Though the individual is in the midst of the oppositions and conflicts, doomed to ego-consciousness, a part of the eternal flux, a unit in society, a fragment in history, a mere 'word' or 'note', still the hidden design is there, 'in the world and for the world'. If the individual consciousness recognizes this, it has a centre towards which all action may point, round which it can revolve, and from which it is controlled. It will then 'move in measure like a dancer'; and at moments it will experience 'the still point' where the stillness and dancing become one.

The still point may be reached by the 'way' through any of the apparent opposites; through light or darkness, a be-

ginning or an ending, harmony or silence, plenitude or vacancy, movement or abstention from movement. Any way will prove to be 'the same' and each to include the other, as part of the whole, in the 'sphere' whose centre is the point. But in absolute contrast to this patterned existence are all those unco-ordinated oppositions arid conflicts which are without a central control. In the individual life, there are the 'ways' which are, as it were, spokes in the wheel and all part of the design centring in the 'mathematically pure point' at its axis. To follow these is to be a part of the larger pattern⁵ to be within the 'dance'. But in absolute contrast to that is the confusion and *lack* of pattern if the only centre of existence is the ego; if life is lived 'as if each had a private wisdom of his own.' Then there is no co-ordinating pattern and the movements and stillnesses which result are of a completely different character.

In image after image Eliot suggests the quality of the passively inert or actively errant existence which is governed neither by the great ordered rhythms of the external world, nor by the inner order of the imaginary wheel. Such existence is to be neither in 'the way up' nor 'the way down'; it is to be

in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold . . .

It is to be neither in the controlled rhythm of movement, nor the controlled 'stillness', but to be 'that which is only moved And has in it no source of movement'. It is a condition of

Tumid apathy with no concentration
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind . . .

It is to be 'in a drifting boat with a slow leakage'. It is to be neither in active life nor in that creative 'death' which pre-

come the passages of uncompromising denunciation of that society, and of ruthless self-examination and self-dissection. From that too comes the sense of stifling oppression and failure and fatigue which colours most of the poem and is dispersed only at its conclusion.

The element in the natural world which has its reflection in the nature of man is here *earth*. Man is a part of the processes of nature. He is not only involved in time as an abstract progression of past, present, future, but in the cyclical pattern of its practical aspect as birth, maturity, decay, death. This is the pattern woven in his changing body, and it is the pattern of the works of his hands and of his mind; of his houses, his political ideas, his social structures. This is the link with the place-name. (Coker is a small village in Somersetshire, which was the reputed birthplace of Sir Thomas Elyot, who in 1551 published *The Boke named the Gouvenour*. The book is one of those treatises on new moral, political educational and literary ideals, which were the result of the 'revival of learning' and the fresh interest in the study of the classics. It was inspired by all the hopes of the dawn of a new era; of a Renaissance from the Dark Ages. Eliot himself, from the birthplace of his ancestors, from the darkness of a new dark age, from a personal darkening of the spirit, surveys past, present and personal.

§

The poem opens with the assertion of what had been speculation at the opening of *Burnt Norton*. 'Perhaps,' said the poet there, perhaps present and past are both present in the future. But now we are presented with the concrete, indubitable facts of life in the sequence of time! They are

determined by the unalterable laws by which an end succeeds a beginning, by which the only unending thing is change, and by which dust returns to dust and man's body becomes finally part of the chemical composition of the soil itself.

In the last section of *Burnt Norton*, where the first reference was made to beginnings and endings, they were shown to be necessary but 'unreal' aspects of a work of art, which truly exists in the form and pattern. That is a whole, just as the eternal metaphysical 'reality' is a whole, to which any point in the temporal or spatial order is equally relevant. But [the opening of *East Coker* insists upon life as 'succession'. In the same way, 'the way up and the way down' in nature are seen here not as creative tensions but as successive 'rising and falling' in a ceaseless process of change.

Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.

There is the life-rhythm which is that of 'generation':¹

there is a time for building
And a time for living and for generation
And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent riot.

This is the rhythm of succession (and . . . and . . . and).
The movement is that of the 'trot' of the mouse, and of the

¹ Cf. Ecclesiastes iii. There are verbal echoes from this chapter throughout the poem and Eliot obviously intends us to have it in mind.

wind of time that shakes and breaks. The only stillness is that of the dead house and the silent motto.¹

With the repetition of the opening words in the next paragraph the focus shifts from the general statement, created in all its particularity of image, to the scene in the immediate present, the 'now'. Here, although the whole flavour of the poetry is so different, we are back in the same quality of civilization created in the London scene in *Burnt Norton*. (Again there is the same half-light and half-life: nothing is clear. There is light in the open field, but the deep lane 'where you lean against a bank while a van passes' is 'shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon':

in a warm haze the sultry light
Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.

It is not the 'lucid stillness, turning shadow into transient beauty'. It has no radiance; it reflects back nothing from its source. There is an absolute contrast with the scene in the rose-garden. } There it was autumn too, but the air was 'vibrant' in the heat, and the birds and the roses and the human figures partook of a shared vitality in the sunlight. Here 'in the electric heat Hypnotised', there is no vitality:

The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.
Wait for the early owl. }

¹ The silent motto has been identified with that of Mary, Queen of Scots, *En ma fin est mon commencement*. While this is helpful in some ways, I feel myself that it distracts attention from the imaginary decayed manor house of Coker, where that would not be the motto. In some notes sent by Eliot to his late brother Henry, which Mrs. Theresa Eliot has kindly allowed me to see, the comment on the words is: 'Eliot motto *tace et fac*.' 'Be silent and act' could be interpreted as the same as 'We must be still and still moving.'

The flowers share the same quality as the light and the empty silence: everything is in a state of suspended animation, waiting for the ominous hoot of the owl and the coming of night. But 'the deep lane insists on the direction | Into the village' j it points there as the beginning, for this is the afternoon of the dawn dreamed of by Sir Thomas Elyot as the opening of a new era.

What has now become a deep lane was then an open field, and 'if you do not come too close', if you will distance it all into a vision, you will see the essentials of Sir Thomas's dream in a picture of country dancers round a bonfire on a summer night. The music of 'the weak pipe and the little drum' is very far away, but the dream had a real beauty. It was of man as an inseparable part of the rhythm of the natural world, and of his dancing as a symbol of 'sondry vertues', particularly the ideas of pattern, harmony and 'concorde'. 'And for as moche as by the association of a man and a woman in daunsing may be signified matrimonie, I could in declarynge the dignitie and commoditie of that sacrament make intiere volumes.' (J) Eliot has condensed the last seveji words into the happy phrase 'commodious sacrament', Jand he has made Elyot's commentary into a most delightful Breughelesque scene. But in spite of the 'sondry vertues' in the rhythm of this dancing, and its contrast to the men and bits of paper whirled by the cold wind, it is not the dancing at the still point. It is the rhythm of inexorable succession,

Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

In the little finale to the movement this is again emphasized. The sea image weaves several suggestions in its simple lines. Dawn, the *point du jour*, silently points the facts of

the cyclic recurrence of day and night, and points to the present atmosphere of heat and silence. The dawn wind 'wrinkles arid slides', bringing hints of old age, and the memory of the words that 'slip, slide, perish'. The poet is equally a part of the time cycle: he cannot escape from his historical setting and from the past which begat it.

§

{The scene of the next lyric contrasts not only with the rustic life which kept the rhythm of 'the time of the seasons and the constellations', but with that in *Burnt Norton* where all the patterns of the universe were 'reconciled among the stars'. Here is no reconciliation but only conflict and 'disturbance' and inextricable confusion: perpetual strife which produces no harmony. Instead of a temporal pattern of orderly creative sequence, or a spatial one of dynamic tensions, the 'creatures' of the universe are in a chaos of derangement and commotion, whose end can be only the final annihilation of life. Instead of being part of a 'slow rotation suggesting permanence', they are

Whirled in a vortex that shall bring
The world to that destructive fire
Which burns before the ice-cap reigns,}

The poet then considers his poem, with its neo-classical decoration and its translation of human situation into analogies from nature, and decides that it is 'not very satisfactory'. Instead he ponders on the problem in the language of argument. But just as it is the particularity of each image which creates the inner, ordered life of the lyric, so it is the particularity in the use of *word* which creates the inner, ordered life of the argument. What did the dawn of the Renaissance

expect its serene autumn to be? What was to be the ripe harvest of value in humanistic wisdom?

Had they deceived us
Or deceived them'selves, the quiet-voiced elders,
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?

As always when Eliot is reiterating and playing upon a word, we may be sure that he is 'squeezing' it to extract its full juice of meaning. In the lyric it is the loss of pattern which all the images have illustrated, and when he returns to metaphor at the end of this passage it is to that of losing the way on a journey. This is the clue to the five-times use of *deceive* within a few lines. To deceive is to lead into error: it is 'any disposition or practice which misleads another or causes him to believe what is false'. Hence the 'deceit' which we *received from* the quiet-voiced elders in the way of a *recipe* for living, reveals its falseness. That calm, clear, bright 'serenity' reveals itself as a 'deliberate' (hesitating) dullness or bluntness of sensitivity. With rising intensity, the lines restate what Eliot had said before in *Gerontion*, that history *in itself* is meaningless, its 'progress' illusory. 'The knowledge derived from experience' imposes a pattern from the past which inevitably falsifies. It falsifies because the Heraclitean saying is true that no man ever steps twice into the same stream, since both stream and man are part of the endless flux. But also falsifies because, seen in terms of the eternal pattern, every moment of human experience falls short.

And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

The errors which have already been detected by the advancement of empirical knowledge would in any case 110

longer lead us astray. Detection is not wisdom. And with superb irony the next passage points to that fact by bringing together Dante and Sherlock Holmes.

In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
Risking enchantment.]

The opening of *The Divine Comedy*: 'In the middle of the journey of our life, I found myself in a dark wood, having lost the straight path', is blended with the dark Grimpen Mire and the phosphorous-daubed face of the Hound of the Baskervilles. There is a memory too of the chimera of *Burnt Norton*, as well as of the fireflies which confused the detectives and the superstitious fears which falsified the problem. A hint too, I think, in the word *enchantment*, of the atmosphere of hypnosis suggested in the way and the day which is 'dark in the afternoon'.

(The movement ends with the summing up of the lack of value in the mere acquisition of knowledge or in supposing that wisdom is cumulative either in the life of the individual or in that of society. To the poet, the central doctrine of Humanism, the autonomy of the individual spirit, is not wisdom but folly.) The individual is not the ultimate Gouvernour, and he sees humanistic ideals as leading to spiritual pride and finally to the isolation of the individual in the prison of self. Wisdom and humility are two of the fruitful oppositions which prove to be 'the same' and are therefore endless. In the time-cycle the only endless thing is change, and the poet points to that in the last two lines. In that cycle man and the works of his hands, however worthy, are absorbed into the natural elements, earth and sea."

§

Into the atmosphere of the dark wood and the deep lane and the empty silence Waiting for the early owl breaks a voice of prophetic denunciation. It denounces the deadness, darkness, blindness, vacancy, forlornness, in which, with chilled sense-perceptions and rational faculties, and the loss of any directed 'motive', modern civilization is going to its death - a blind Samson without the inner vision which came to Milton's hero. The reiterated *vacant* brings first, in 'the vacant interstellar spaces', the sense of the loss of relationship with the ordered living which 'kept time' with the seasons and the constellations; and further the remembrance of the 'vacant of meaning' in the Dantesque London scene in *Burnt Norton*. The pattern is obliterated. The only idea of an almanac, reminding us of the movements of the heavenly bodies, is a social register of rank: the only kind of Gouverneur or Director is that of a financial company. Hence there is no 'sense' or meaning or message in the oppositions of life and death. The funeral will be 'silent', and the darkness is not that of 'destitution or property', the renunciation of the personal as a 'motive of action'; it is simply vacant lack of identity, 'there is no one to bury'.

From this outer directionless darkness, as from the similar scene in *Burnt Norton* the poet turns inward to the chosen empty darkness of religious contemplation. In a transition passage of three elaborate similes, he compares it to the transference from one kind of darkness and emptiness to another within this dark modern existence. The movement of the verse is very heavy and perhaps the irony is on the heavy side too. Then the creative darkness and waiting and

'vacancy' are described, and the renunciation of the 'echoed ecstasy' which they demand.

Whisper of running streams, ayid winter lightning.
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden. . . 7}

Each image here suggests all the fresh sensuous delight which is utterly lacking to the cold senses of the modern social figures, or in the hypnosis and haze of the 'electric heat' of the dark afternoon.[The whole rose-garden scene and its pattern is evoked, with the recognition that its 'reality' involves its opposite. The ecstasy is 'Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony Of death and birth'⁵. The ecstasy *requires* the agony, that is, it exacts it, and also, paradoxically, it *requests* it. The paradox is pointed to and resolved in the next lyric. 3

Hammering in the pointed requirement in the following passage, Eliot puts it largely in the actual words of St. John of the Cross⁵ but with overtones of his own which take us back to *Burnt Norton* as well as to the first part of this movement. 'To arrive where you *are*, to get from where you *are not*' is to achieve *consciousness*, or as much of it as can be achieved in time, in contrast to the anaesthesia and nonentity of 'the vacant'. And 'where you *are* is where *you* are not' points to the truth that the fullest consciousness is reached by the fullest renunciation of the personal. "

§

The lyric fourth movement in *Burnt Norton* spoke of bodily death as part of a larger pattern: this Good Friday poem speaks of the spiritual death which is part of the pat-

tern of redemption. It is in the tone and colouring of most of *East Coker*, as uncompromising and severe in its ethical content as it is strict in its stanzaic form and the working out of its metaphysical imagery and paradox. The central metaphor of the hospital may have been suggested by Sir Thomas Browne: 'For this world I count it not an Inn but an Hospital⁵ a place not to live, but to dye in.' There is also a reference to St. John of the Cross, who speaks of the soul as 'under medical treatment for the recovery of its health, which is God himself. The soul will be pierced 'with a dart of most enkindled love', yet 'amidst these gloomy and loving pains, is conscious of a certain companionship and inward strength which attends upon it'. But Eliot's poem supports itself without need of outside sources to elucidate it, and he purposely avoids religious terminology. The lyric is an organic part of the rest of the poem, not a detached interpolation of a different nature from the rest. It is merely 'a new and shocking valuation' of what has gone before.

'The 'earth' now becomes the nature of man, envisaged as a hospital, endowed by Adam, 'the ruined millionaire', with original sin. Man in his folly likes to think he is 'substantial flesh and blood', an autonomous entity in himself. Instead, his earthy body with its 'mental wires' is a suffering patient and his only health (wholeness) is in recognizing his 'disease', his individual share in Adam's curse of being dust that will return to dust. That is the entire human condition ; even the Church, the directing, mediating power is 'the dying nurse'. [But within this inescapable mortal time-cycle, there is another cycle of death and rebirth; that of the human spirit. The 'absolute paternal care', ever-present, 'prevents' us, that is both checks and guides, showing the way to do and be 'well', the way towards 'health' through

our dis-ease, our earthly suffering and voluntary death. We are each a 'distempered part', a disordered fragment of the absolute wholeness. Our spiritual distemper reveals itself as a 'fever chart', a confused series of 'rising and falling', showing unresolved oppositions of temperature. This is the condition created already in terms of nature in the lyric at the opening of the second movement.

Always keeping within these controlling metaphors of the part and the whole; sickness and health; heat and cold; and 'up and down', Eliot points to the resolution and reconciliation of these opposites. [The wounded surgeon is a fellow man in the hospital, involved in its pain and suffering, while uniting that with 'absolute care' of the patients. There are no anaesthetics in this hospital, but the quality of the treatment which 'resolves the enigma of the fever chart' is created in the language used to describe it.) The pointed steel is in itself piercing and merciless, but 'plies' introduces the idea of the pliant hands which enfold it, 'questions' bring the idea of tenderness and patience as well as stern examination, and 'sharp compassion' is the central emotional paradox of the healing and resolving. [The bleeding hands direct the disordered rising and falling of the fever chart into the pattern of 'the way up and the way down'. Here it is the way down through the 'frigid purgatorial fires'. Yet this fire is not 'that destructive fire Which burns before the ice-cap reigns'. It is creative, and it unites nature and spirit, 'the flame is roses and the smoke is briars'] Its light is the emblem of love its dark not 'bramble' but a crown of thorns. Light and dark do not follow one another in a time-sequence, they are together, like the roses and the thorns. And the destructive fire is not a prelude to an age of ice, the frigid fires will become fused into warmth.

This movement of the opposites towards union and reconciliation is present throughout. Everything in the experience reflects back to the paradox of the 'sharp compassion', and to the precise meaning of compassion. That suffering *with* is the means of redemption, and is commemorated in that union and communion in which the 'eating and drinking' of the natural man become a sacramental symbol of a consubstantiation.

) The Good Friday symbol is the still point reached by the way down through the darkness, with the revelation that there descent and ascent, light and dark, death and rebirth, agony and triumph, flesh and spirit, become one. And the 'beginning'⁹ in Adam's fall has an end which is at the same time a beginning. The conclusion of the poem finds a hope for men in the fact that, in spite of their lack of humility, they have christened this day 'good'.)

§

It is in keeping with the whole atmosphere of *East Coker* that Eliot follows this miraculously intricate piece of poetic art and craft with a passage of the harshest self-criticism. In relaxed, colloquial speech-verse he examines his own accomplishment as poet, his own 'way', in itself, and as a part of the tradition. For him too, as poet, there is 'only a limited value In the knowledge derived from experience'.) Any imposed pattern falsifies, and the vision of a perfect pattern in which words and music 'reach the stillness' is forgotten here. It is the sense of struggle which colours everything; 'the intolerable wrestle' between the poet and his medium. Every poem is 'a raid on the inarticulate', that is an attack and invasion of an 'empty silence' where is

neither speech nor movement. In tones of despair he sees himself,

With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion.J)

It is again characteristic that the enemy is not only the negative 'inarticulate' but the positive 'mess', the emotional disorder. Conquest comes only through discipline. But there is also the temptation to think of poetry as a competition among poets and to despair on that ground. Again the answer is humility; an active humility requiring both strength and submission: a fight which is also a dedication. As he says in his essay on F. H. Bradley: 'We fight to keep something alive rather than in expectation that anything will triumph'. By the end of the passage the ground of the fight is shifting itself from that of 'trying to learn to use words' to the whole field of human endeavour.

The finale grows from this transition. The poet starts from the tradition as he finds it, and the achievements of other poets are not isolated 'intense moments' in a sequence of history. They become part of the poet's own struggle, ever alive in his medium, reminding him that the past is not just left behind, neither does it live only in the memory of its mistakes and failures. This thought gives a meaning to the intense moment which it did not have in *Burnt Norton*. It does not have meaning only as a release from individual tensions and a momentary sense of enhanced living, nor is it isolated in the waste sad time stretching before and after. It has the power to irradiate all life and time, as in the moment commemorated in Good Friday. And in the historical terms of time, the living tradition, always being lost and found again, and the story of man's struggle,

stretching back to 'old stones that cannot be deciphered', unite all humanity in a sense of unity and continuity. The past is living as well as dead; its light is not absorbed but refracted. The inner life must be lived in the light of this. There is a sense of a half-emerging revelation here, which is held in suspension, because there is a great sense or *urgency forward* in his line of thought. There is a time for thinking of those who have added to one's own 'burning', and to turn the pages of man's family album. But he reminds himself that his present task is a detachment from 'here and now' not in memories of the past, by a journey backwards in time, but by a journey inward into 'another intensity'. 'Old men ought to be explorers'. Tennyson's Ulysses thought so too: 'A perfect poem at that', Eliot said of it). There too 'the deep moans round with many voices'. But this poet's exploration now is neither forward nor backward in time or place, 'here and there does not matter'. It is into the intensity of 'a further union, a deeper communion' with the spiritual subject of the Good Friday lyric; expressed in the depth and grandeur, the sadness and hope of the concluding rhythms.

Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
 The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
 Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

'During the time span of the poem the poet has experienced a series of feelings of humiliation. First the humiliation of the law of the natural world that the human body will return to the earth 'which is already flesh, fur and faeces'. Then the humiliation of belonging to a decaying culture which is going into the dark. The bright dawn of the Renaissance has ended in the dark afternoon of the present.

garden scene is a vision of an ecstasy of love, but it is man and nature which make the pattern. In *East Coker* it is the presence of the wounded surgeon that gives meaning to the moments of agony; and in *The Dry Salvages* the promise of rebirth is the moment of the Annunciation. In *Little Gidding* the fulfilment of that promise is symbolized in that 'baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire' which is the feast of Pentecost, v

Fire is the master element in the poem, and it has a four-fold aspect; as the emblem of destruction, of purification, of illumination, and of the divine love itself. Little Gidding was the site of an Anglican religious community founded in 1625. The community was broken up in 1647, but the ruined chapel rebuilt in the nineteenth century. It is a visit to this chapel which is the starting point of the poem. Little Gidding was associated with the English civil war, and the poet is writing in the midst of a greater war. As in *East Coker*, there is a sense of the passionate identification of the poet with his country's experience as well as the detached, but also impassioned, exploration of the total meaning of that experience.

Unlike the other poems it opens with a moment of kindling illumination. It is a day of 'midwinter spring', and though its details suggest such a day 'in time's covenant', it is 'not in the scheme of generation'. It is the precise antithesis to the scene in *East Coker*. Everything refracts and radiates light. Instead of 'dark in the afternoon', 'a glare that is blindness'; instead of the haze of sultry heat, 'the brief sun flames the ice'; instead of the sense of hypnotic paralysis, 'the soul's sap quivers'. Again, in the place of the destructive fire and ice, the sun and frost blend in perfect harmony 'in windless cold that is the heart's heat'. The

snow itself is 'blossom'. The poet ends the description of the glowing intensity with the question :

Where is the summer, the unimaginable
Zero summer?" ' ' 3

If the union of spring and winter has this glory, what can the full consciousness and complete union of opposites be?

[Although 'suspended in time', we are on the actual road to Little Gidding, and the details of the scene are there ; the hedges, which in May will be white 'with voluptuary sweetness', the pig-sty, the dull facade and the tombstone. But this lane insists on the direction to the chapel, not the village. This is 'the end of the journey', whether the traveller is Charles I after his defeat at Naseby, or a modern tourist. Little Gidding itself is now only a shell or husk, and the purpose or end of the journey there breaks forth only if what you 'figured' becomes transfigured and 'is altered in fulfilment' *Altered* must be heard in the ear as well as read by the eye. It is 'the world's end', the end of the purely temporal, just as death is the end for so many during the war:

some at the sea jaws,
Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city -J

Bjit this experience is here in this actual chapel.

V'l'f you came this way' now gathers in all that 'the way' has meant during the course of the poems. The experience is the same always.] 'You would have to put off] Sense and notion⁵ — all the joy of 'voluptuary sweetness', the merely opinionated, the ingenious counters of common exchange. It is useless too to come to Little Gidding in the spirit of the historical researcher verifying his scholarship or the journalist writing up a story. 'You are here to kneel Where

prayer has been **valid**'. And prayer means the sense of living relationship with the timeless reality which drew together the original community at Little Gidding. And it means too the sense of living relationship with those men, for 'the communication Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living'. The reaching of 'the point of intersection' is 'now and in England', but it is also nowhere, never and always.

§

In the second movement, 'England and nowhere', the particular and the general, the themes and symbols of the other Quartets as well as new material, are woven into a fresh and haunting fabric of words. The lyric seems to confound Heraclitus: 'Fire lives in the death of air; air lives in the death of fire; water lives in the death of earth and earth lives in the death of water.' Here there is no creative strife among the elements. They are destructive only and they cancel out to nothingness. The scene of wartime desolation represents the death of everything creative that the elements have represented in the nature of man. Time takes away life and gives no new birth. The roses of *Burnt Norton* are 'ash on an old man's sleeve'; the dust is lit by no shaft of sunlight. Houses die but they do not live, 'old stone to new buildings'. Water and sand are both dead, and instead of 'significant' soil,

The parched eviscerate soil
Gapes at the vanity of toil

There is succession without **renewal** ;end without **beginning**; suspension without transfiguration. All the living patterns in the world of nature and those created as the work of man's hands have disintegrated with no hope of

resurrection. The laughter of the hidden children becomes the derision of the elements at man's forgetfulness and denial of the foundations of his being, and of the central truth which any chapel commemorates.

Water and fire deride
The sacrifice that we denied.
Water and fire shall rot
The marred foundations we forgot,
Of sanctuary and choir.

What is left after this holocaust of destruction? The answer is given in the wonderful dream sequence that follows. The conversation between the spirit from purgatory and the poet himself in the London dawn after an air-raid - 'two worlds become much like each other' - inevitably recalls Dante. The verse too is a rhythmical variation of a *terza rima*, and one feels that this must be one of those occasions when the poetry realized itself first as a particular rhythm before it reached expression in words, so deeply does the movement flow in and under the verbal surface.

The scene is the antithesis of the Pentecostal symbols. The dove becomes the airplane; the tongues of flame those of the guns; the 'rushing mighty wind' that of the 'urban dawn' blowing the 'metal leaves' of the fragments of shrapnel over the asphalt!) The poet as air-raid warden patrols the streets, and his soul meets 'a familiar compound ghost', a familiar spirit 'both intimate and unidentifiable', composed of all the dead poets who have become a part of himself. The ghost is the poetic parallel to the Holy Ghost; for the 'tongue' of poetry is like wise communication, interpretation, illumination. The poet's soul and the ghost, 'too strange to each other for misunderstanding', for the squabbles and mis-readings of criticism have no place here,

are 'in concord' in another moment of 'intersection': 'we trod the pavement in a dead patrol'. (The ghost will not speak to him of 'thought and theory' in poetry, for that is a matter of continual ends and beginnings:

Last season's fruit is eaten
And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail. }

But since it is the concern of the poet to 'learn to use words' to interpret and illumine life to others, he will reveal in poetry the reality of old age to the poet, just as to all other men. The lines need no interpretation.

Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
 To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
 First, the cold friction of expiring sense
 Without enchantment, offering no promise
 But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
 As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
 Second, the conscious impotence of rage
 At human folly, and the laceration
 Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
 And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
 Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
 Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
 Of things ill done and done to others' harm
 Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
 Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.
 From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
 Proceeds,

Again, with the pause of a comma only, comes the possibility of moving into the other dimension. Not less torment, but a torment within the creative pattern. 'Old age in time can be only bodily decay, bitterness, and the torture of memory,

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

The fire of illumination of the opening of the poem is not enough. That is the 'stillness'. But there must also be the 'faring forward' into the intensity of the purifying fire, detached from self, and part of the dance controlled from the still point. The 'measure' of the dance is placed not only against the raging, unquiet spirit of old age, but also against the actual scene of the 'dead patrol' and the windblown, rattling leaves. The 'disfigured street' is opposed to the way of transfiguration in the figure of the dance. We can guess that the 'kind of valediction' the ghost gave was that of *The Dry Salvages* 'not fare well, But fare forward'.

§

The tone now changes completely and the voice is that which speaks throughout the poems in discursive exploratory analysis; but it has more assurance and certainty here. It tells of the two creative kinds of love, attachment and detachment and of the unflowering indifference. Both attachment and detachment are 'nettles', but they are within the rhythm of birth and death? Detachment is the disinterested love, hence the 'right action' which gives freedom from time. Memory brings it, for in it we can see the past without personal involvement in it, and use it to enrich the spiritual significance of the present. History may be servitude, because it may 'impose a pattern' of mere traditionalism, just as patriotism may be only a kind of family loyalty. Detachment does not lose personal love in indifference, it absorbs it into something larger.

See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved
them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.)

This is developed in a change of rhythm^f Little Gidding reminds the poet of the religious and political civil war and of the men who fought it.) He dwells on these 'ghosts', not to support the Royalist cause, or that of Milton, or to pretend that there is any value in arguing the rights and wrongs of the struggle. Both sides now

Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded in a single party.

The party is that which fights to keep alive the values of the spirit, and the symbol they leave is the reminder that detachment is a 'field of action' where this struggle is ended only in death. The whole passage is framed in two allusions from the writings of the fourteenth-century mystic, Dame Julian of Norwich. In 'shewings' she received, a voice said to her 'Sin is behovable (necessary) but all shall be well . . . and all manner of thing shall be well'. And again the voice said: 'I am Ground of thy Beseeching', which was interpreted to her to mean Love. The 'field of action' therefore, and the motive force in this spiritual strife is love.

If these passages seem a little soft and over-simplified, the next lyric at once dispels the idea of any easy solution. As the gentle tenderness of the fourth movement of *The Dry Salvages* has something of the same quality as that in *Burnt Norton*, so this matches the tone of the Good Friday lyric in *East Coker* in its stern acceptance of the attitude 'requiring, pointing to the agony of death and birth'. There is the same compression of language and intricate correspondences, but it has greater intensity and explosive force, and for the first time there is the overt use of the terms of sin and redemption.,J

^f The central symbol is the implicit reference to the descent

of the Holy Ghost at the baptism of Christ, and of the tongues of flame which inspired the disciples so that they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. We should also remember that the Jewish Pentecost is the celebration of the giving of the law to the Israelites, and that the English name for it is Whit (white) Sunday. Against all these implicit oppositions, 'the dark dove with the flickering tongue' descends in destructive wrath and 'breaks the air With flame of incandescent terror'. The utterance from its tongues of flame is the declaration of 'the one discharge from sin and error'. *Discharge* explodes into many meanings. The message of the tongues of flame is that *one* way of relieving the burden of our own sin is by projecting it in hatred of others; or again one way to discharge a debt is on the principle of revenge. Again the release of the bomb or the gun is one form of resolving a tension. 'Tongues' too, in wartime are always busy saying that hate is justified. But there is another message from the tongues saying:

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre -
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Unless we are to despair and choose the fires of destruction and damnation - and it is a matter of man's *choice* - there is no other way than to accept our debt of sin and error and discharge it through the fire of purgatory. We shall then be discharged of it, and the dove, though coming no less as 'flame of incandescent terror' is the redeeming fire of God.

Who then devised the torment? Love.

I think *devised*, in addition to its common use, carries a meaning from the derivation linking it with *divide*. 

whole positive weight behind the love in relation to the torment is brought out by the accentuation, and its singleness. That creative and destructive fires can be all part of one process, and that their opposition is 'conquered and reconciled' in the symbolic pattern of redemption personified in the Name, is unrecognized:

Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove..

Hercules could not tear off the poisoned Nessus shirt which was supposed to preserve human love forever, so in his agony he built a pyre on which his mortal body burned and his divine element ascended to Olympus. Again though it is man's hands that have woven the unendurable shirt of flame of his own desires, and the 'incandescent terror' of war, the divine love is also an 'intolerable shirt of flame'. But behind man's hands are those of the wounded surgeon showing how pain can heal.

We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

Each one of us has the choice between the fires of destruction (*suspire* brings the memory of the sighs of the inhabitants of the Inferno) or the burning away of self-love on the sacrificial pyre, whose consuming fires bring a promised consummation.

In these last lines, where everything becomes 'the condition of fire', the 'tongues' descend from Heraclitus to Dante and from both to the poet of to-day so much fired by each.

§

The opening of the final movement restates the central theme of the continuity and co-existence of death and rebirth in the metaphor of beginning and ending. Then the ever-existing pattern of vital relationships alive in every moment is suggested by the analogy of a sentence that is 'right'. That too contains all the essentials of a vital society. 'Every word is at home, Taking its place; to support the others', which suggests the human family. The words unite past and present, 'an easy commerce of the old and the new'. They are of all kinds, and exist in a coherent, harmonious pattern, 'the complete consort dancing together'. Writing and living then converge in the reminder that every phrase and every moment is an end and a beginning. Any action is a step towards physical death, but physical death is unreal in the changeless pattern. The dead are alive in the present, their actions can be reborn in us. Hence the true pattern of history is not a sequence in time, but is a 'familiar compound ghost' of the spiritual values which have made a people, 'a pattern of timeless moments'. These exist apart from the cycle in which night follows day and winter summer:

So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

A disembodied voice in the quiet chapel seems to speak the next line, poised by itself before the finale begins.

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling¹

¹ It is a quotation from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous, mystical work of the fourteenth century.

It gathers into itself the opening scene of love in the rose-garden and the calling of the bird; all the moments of insight and all that the living tongues of the past have declared and the vocation of the poet.

The conclusion weaves together the main symbols and metaphors of the four poems and the truths they embody, into a new whole.

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.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always -
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

First, all the metaphors relating man's nature and the natural world are recapitulated and blended. Exploration is endless, but all exploring into further spiritual intensity and communion will bring us back to the worlds of nature and man, the rose-garden, to find it 'renewed, transfigured in another pattern'. The remembered gate into 'our first

world' leads, unknown, to 'that which was the beginning', It leads to the myth of the Garden of Eden and its river of life flowing from the hidden waterfall, 'and the children in the 'apple-tree'. 'The bitter apple and the bite in the apple' was not known before under that image, but 'the ragged rock in the restless waters' is now transformed. It becomes an image holding a promise of growth and fruition, for 'heard, half-heard, in the stillness, Between two waves of the sea', is the bell of the angelus and 'the hint half guessed, the gift half understood'.

Here the symbolic 'exploration' by means of natural imagery ends, and the next lines are purely abstract. They blend into a unity the particular spiritual reality given by the voice and the calling in each poem. {The bird's call told of the eternal presence of the point of intersection: 'Quick, now, here, now, always -' *East Coker* revealed that the only timeless wisdom is humility: 'a condition of complete simplicity'. *The Dry Salvages* told of the vocation of the saint 'a lifetime's death in love': '(Costing not less than everything.)' In *Little Gidding* strife and sin and death are conquered by the voice which says 'All shall be well'.} This leads into the final intricate symbol of the ultimate vision, drawing in images and associations from the rest of the poem and irradiating them with new illumination. The 'ghost' from purgatory in the dark dawn had disclosed ironically the 'gifts' which the time-world brings 'to set a crown upon your lifetime's efforts'. The final revelation is of 'the gift half understood' of the timeless pattern now disclosed and glittering out of heart of light. All conflicts are conquered by the crowned kingship of love. All the 'tongues' which have spoken for the spirit of man are 'folded into a single party'. All the strands of the opposites are reconciled

in the lover's knot^x woven from the fires. Flame becomes flower. Nature and spirit, the rose-garden and the chapel, are one,^J

And this finale with its crowning symbol, in which everything has 'come together', in which all that has passed is fused and intertwined into this easy flow and this glowing intensity, is poetic art.^J The poems are the creation of that union of sense and spirit which issues in living language interpreting the experience of living. They are the crown of a lifetime's effort to get the better of words, to make them stay still and yet dance together in complete consort. For the poet, maybe, mostly a matter of 'the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings', but ending in that sole work of man's hands which is changelessly enduring and harmonious, the form and pattern of a work of art.

¹ The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says that renunciation and humility 'will at the last help thee to knit a ghostly knot of burning love betwixt thee and thy God in ghostly one head.'

CHAPTER XI

⁶The Voice of This Calling⁹

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.

T. s. ELIOT. *A Note on War Poetry*

ELIOT'S mature poetic faith is as closely woven into the anatomy of *Four Quartets* as his religious faith. Throughout the poems an analogy between the writing of poetry and the living of life is sustained and developed. The poems are about the nature of the universe, of its two inter-relating spheres of existence as turning world and eternal pattern, as the transient and the enduring, and of the way the creative man's life is inextricably involved in both. But they include too the matter of the nature of poetic art, of its existence as sequence and as unity of the poet as transient but the work as enduring of the relation of the poet to his medium and of his function in the community.

In his lecture on Yeats, Eliot said: 'It is my experience that towards middle age a man has three choices: to stop writing altogether, to repeat himself with perhaps an increasing skill of virtuosity, or by taking thought to adapt himself to middle age and find a different way of working. This last is the difficult task, because 'maturing as a poet means maturing as the whole man, experiencing new

emotions appropriate to one's age, and with the same intensity as the emotion of youth'. And these feelings are not merely a new set of conditions: 'the interesting feelings of age are not just different feelings; they are feelings into which the feelings of youth are integrated'.

Integration is central to all Eliot's ideas of life and of poetry. The concept in which both are grounded is that of a pattern of creative order. His review of *Ulysses* hailed the method of myth as a way of ordering, of giving shape and significance to vision, and when *mythos* and *logos* have become inseparable it is the same. It is the theme behind everything he has written in both poetry and prose. Perhaps it is natural that in view of the appalling *disorder* of the modern world, its greatest writers should have taken the search for order as their quest. Among writers in English, Yeats, Joyce and Eliot, each in his own way, has created the progress of that exploration. Each has sought for the secret of totality of being, for some pattern of relationships which shall, as it were, hold man and men together in a universe where, more and more, the image of fractured atoms whirled in senseless circuit conquers all. Yeats failed to create any ordered world vision in his poetry. In *A Vision*, his complicated 'system' tried to give some kind of schematization to experience, and it is perhaps of psychological interest that his great wheel, and phases of the moon, and cones and gyres and four faculties and four principles are obviously 'mandala' forms of psychic experience. But he could not produce in poetic or dramatic form anything in the way of an ordered cosmogony, and he remains a poet of magnificent achievement in individual examples of lyric and meditation. Like Eliot, however, Yeats (though he found no controlling image for it) felt passionately that the only orders dis-

covered and pursued in the civilization of to-day are the ever-extended 'metalled roads' of *imposed* orders — scientific classification and measurement in the world of knowledge; mechanization in the World of industry⁵ international bondage in the world of finance; bureaucracy or totalitarianism in the world of government. And Yeats too felt that outside of these orders imposed upon the individual from without, yet woven by his own hands into a shirt of chain-mail about him, the life of the average man becomes ever more purposeless, more confined, more 'distracted' and more 'empty of meaning'.

Against all this Eliot sees on the one hand, the world of natural order, with its great organic cycles of birth-death, winter-summer, day-night, and its great harmonious tensions of energy holding all together in pattern. This is the cycle and pattern which Joyce took as his controlling symbol in *Finnegans Wake*. The title suggests that human life is one vast funeral, and yet a matter of rejoicing, since life and death, joy and sorrow, are inextricably one. Moreover the cycle of historical experience, and the river of life, and man himself as the microcosm of both, are all inexhaustible, and their contemplation is sufficient for the human imagination.

But to Eliot such experience and such contemplation are inadequate. Natural law is meaningless, unless complemented and completed by spiritual law, and these two creative 'spheres' become united in the symbol of Incarnation. Capitalized, it is the ultimate symbol of revelation, illumination, transfiguration. But it is also the process at work in all man's true experiences of self-fulfilment. On earth, in religious experience, it has its highest reflection in the symbol of the saint, which Eliot has used in one of his

plays. In the secular world its revelation is the presence of art, and that is the symbol which he chose as the title of *Four Quartets*. On the musical side perhaps Vve can expand and extend its overtones to include 'the music of the spheres!' But Eliot is poet and his own creative sphere is that of poetry. The relation of poetry to the central symbol is of a very precise kind. The ultimate revelation is the image of communication by *speech*: the Word. Hence in the world of human communication by speech, poetry is its most perfect counterpart; the revelation and illumination and transfiguration of life through the word.

This cannot be accomplished by the poet without a discipline parallel to that practised in the dedication to the life of religious devotion. It is only by the loss of self in his art that the poet's consciousness is directed, ordered, focused, intensified, and thus made ever more powerful in the diffusion of its energy beyond itself. 'One is prepared for art when one has ceased to be interested in one's own emotions except as material . . . Personal emotion, personal experience is extended arid completed in something impersonal - not in the sense of something divorced from personal experience and passion. No good poetry is the latter . . . Not our feelings, but the pattern we make of our feelings is the centre of value.' This was written in 1924, but Eliot's theory and practice of poetry have been consistent throughout his life. The things he was actively engaged in battling for when he started writing are the things he continues to battle for, but the feelings and the patterns made of the feelings have steadily changed and deepened.

He has always been master of what, in a rare lapse into the hideous language of modern abstraction, he has called

¹ T. S. Eliot. Introduction to *Le Serpent* by Paul Vatery. •

the 'objective correlative'. In *Prufrock* that creation of thinking into feeling, of projecting the inner life in terms of weather and scenery and rooms and gestures and disease and sounds and textures, seemed already complete. With age he has lost none of that richness of sensibility, but it has been expanded to cover wider areas of experience. And in addition to this he has developed a new method of direct philosophical analysis in poetic form, and has infolded the two into a poetry of contemplation which is as sensuous as it is intellectual. The subject contemplated is pattern⁵ a pattern which, the further it is explored in any direction, up or down, inwards or outwards, forward or back, is found to be one vast system of dynamic ordered relationships. And so it is with the poetry itself. It has all the qualities alive in the earlier poetry⁵ acuteness of sensibility, structural strength and elasticity, rhythmical variation, absorption of the past and its re-creation into new poetic life. But whereas in the early poems these qualities had often to be asserted through a *dislocation* of language, in *Four Quartets* they are knit into a perfect articulation of sound and movement and meaning. Instead of dramatic clashes and startling associations and references which require constant elucidation from outside the poems, the language itself penetrates more and more deeply into the structure, the *word* becomes more and more loaded with meaning. It is squeezed and squeezed of every drop of its juice. It is ex-pression at its fullest.

§

The 'familiar compound ghost' said of poets :

our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
To purify the dialect of the tribe

. And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight . . .

The purification and the replenishment of the English language is a continuous process in Eliot's poetry, and we might extend his description of the phrase or sentence that is 'right' very widely.

(where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)

But the ghost added that speech compels the poet 'to urge the mind to aftersight and foresight'. The dialect of the tribe is inextricably interwoven with the life of its members and with life in general. The life of the word extends beyond itself, not only backwards into the family history of the language, not only around itself in its context, and from there in linked relationships to other parts of the poetic pattern, but to a human context. 'The complete consort dancing together' is not only the organic affinity of the words in the poetic structure, it is also the inter-relationship and inseparability of poetry and life. When the poet is at work, says Eliot, 'he is no more concerned with the social consequences than the scientist in his laboratory - though without the context of use to society, neither the writer nor the scientist could have the conviction which sustains him'.¹

The poet's own immediate task is to bring all the depth and intensity of his own full consciousness to a verbal surface: the reader, starting from the surface, penetrates gradually to the full consciousness beneath. Poetry is thus both act and instrument. It is the poet's tongue speaking

¹ *The Music of Poetry.*

'a language of enticement' to his fellow men, and urging them, through a sharing of his speech to share his own aftersight, foresight and insight.

In expressing what other people feel he is also changing the feeling by making it more conscious; he is making people more aware of what they feel already, and therefore teaching them something about themselves. But he is not merely a more conscious person than the others; he is also individually different from other people and from other poets too, and can make his readers share consciously in new feelings which they had not experienced before.¹

In *Four Quartets* the poet is trying to awaken the consciousness of his age to its situation. He does not urge the tribe to a religious and political viewpoint by preaching or argument, he urges them to sight through vision.

Nothing could be clearer than the vision of western civilization he creates. We see man, having solved all the problems 'confronting the builder of bridges', living among his metalled roads, his ocean liners, his aerals, his Directory of Directors. He 'tends to forget' the strong brown god, the demonic chthonic powers by which he may be driven, and who use 'the worshippers of the machine' for their own purposes; always 'watching and waiting', and finally declaring themselves in the tongues of incandescent terror.² On the

¹ 'The Social Function of Poetry', *The Adelphi*. July-September, 1945.

² 'The old religions with their ridiculous - and horrible symbols, are not born out of the blue, but out of this very human soul that lives in us at this moment . . . At any time they may break in upon us with destructive force, in the form of mass-suggestion, for example, against which the individual is defenceless. Our frightful Gods have only changed their names.' Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, p. 223.

other side, neither in city nor in village is there a society 'keeping the rhythm in their dancing, as in their living⁵ in an ordered Concorde'. Instead, the individual is detached, a whirling bit of paper, or wandering in a bramble or a grimpen with no secure foothold, or lying awake trying to unweave, unwind, unravel, the tangle of its fate. And along with the busy travelling along material ways, the inorganic metallised roads, or the helpless unrelatedness of anxious insecurity, is the refusal to face any experience of the inner life - the torpor, the apathy, the 'silent funeral; or what in prose Eliot has called 'the invincible sluggishness of imagination', which paralyses all movement, and repudiates all responsibility.

And over against these ways, all leading one way or another to death, the poet sets the creative pattern whose centre is life and peace ; but whose way is never that of peace but always a sword. 'There is only the fight to recover what has been lost And found and lost again and again.' The parallel with the poet and his medium is exact: the achievement, the stillness, those moments when the sense of 'the complete consort dancing together' is felt as a reality ; but the way, the actual moving, always the struggle:

With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion.

The revelation of all this to the tribe, to make society and the individual share his own consciousness of it, is the poet's aim. And that again is another fight. Eliot has said¹; that it is inevitable that the man of letters should always be 'in a certain sense in opposition. He should be jealous to preserve the

¹ In an unpublished radio address given in October, 1944 (Eliot House Collection. Harvard).

tradition of the culture of his people and of Europe: but in so doing he must constantly find himself opposed to current tendencies and popular values. All great literature is, in one aspect, a criticism ... of the society in which the author lives. If he is not to criticize, he must remain silent.' Eliot's criticism probes very deep. Certainly no poet of any age has ever revealed the dilemma and disease of his own times more surely. No one except those committed to some aspect of the new paganism as a positive creed is likely to disagree with his diagnosis of the failure of western civilization in terms of misdirection, indirection and inertia. It is Eliot's insistence in his prose works on the acceptance of the letter of Christian dogma as the only way of salvation which large numbers of the tribe find a difficult medicine to swallow. It does not have to be swallowed in his poetry, since the poetry is never polemical and propagandist (except in the choruses to *The Rock*.) The poetry is the affirmation in verse of 'private experience at its greatest intensity Becoming universal'. It is the progress of an individual personality relating itself to its total environment. It contains almost as much doubt as belief, and emotional acceptance of it is certainly not confined to churchmen. Since it is concerned with symbols, it can be interpreted in any terms of human experience acceptable to the reader. Indeed the poetry is in some ways a flat contradiction of the prose position. In prose Eliot has declared stubbornly that the spirit killeth but the letter giveth life: also that the acceptance of dogma precedes emotional acceptance of Christian truths and that though intellectual conviction may come late it comes inevitably 'without violence to honesty and nature'. The only possible answer to that is that to a very great number of thinking people it does not. To these it appears that dogmatic Christianity demands the

acceptance *as facts*, of 'revelation' which, while it may contain symbolically the deepest human truth, has been confined to no special period and to no special part of the map. Moreover that if a new positive 'religious' attitude is to be able to combat the new positive paganism, it cannot remain frozen and stereotyped in its traditional moulds, but must be refreshed and replenished from some new spring of symbolic interpretation.

While Eliot the prose writer asserts that heresy is diabolic and Catholic theology immutable, Eliot the poet provides us with just that refreshment and replenishment of symbolic approach which gives new meaning to old truths and reawakens the imagination to new growth. Its centre is Christianity, the traditional form of western culture, but a Christianity accepting its roots in cultures much older than itself, and recognizing itself not only in Dante and St. John of the Cross, but in age-old 'pagan' symbols of the vitality of water, of fire, of earth, and age-old concepts of the communion and relatedness of the worlds of sense and of spirit; of the supersession of guilt by an understanding of the process of symbolic death and rebirth; and of the way of 'detachment' and contemplation as a path to the kingdom of God within. All this, and the truth that 'history is a pattern of timeless moments', and all the explorations into self-surrender and 'right action' which have led to that conclusion, provide 'revelation' indeed of profound realities, but realities whose acceptance does no violence to 'honesty and nature' and requires no supernatural sanctions. Eliot's prose sayings and his Anglo-Catholicism have perhaps blinded critics to the completely catholic, that is, universal character of his vision; to how 'at home' his conclusions are in *any* pattern of harmonious living; and how they strike home to the pom-

mon roots of social and personal disorder at all times and among all peoples.

But from the point of view of use to society', poetry itself can do no more towards translating revelation and insight into action than the dream image in the life of the dreamer. Action is a matter of the will. But just as the dream image *reveals* the psychic situation in sensuous form and presents it to the conscious mind, so does the work of the poet. Jung's theory is that just as the personal dream is a message from the unconscious of the personal need of the individual, so the great artist experiences and then creates in his particular art-form those archetypes of which his whole age is most in need.

Being essentially the instrument for his work, he is subordinate to it, and we have no reason for expecting him to interpret it for us. He has done the best that in him lies by giving it form, and he must leave interpretation to others and to the future. A great work of art is like a dream ... it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal. A dream never says: 'you ought', or: 'This is the truth,' It presents an image ... To grasp its meaning, we must allow it to shape us as it once shaped the artist. Then we understand the nature of his experience. We see . . . that he has penetrated to that matrix of life in which all men are imbedded, which imparts a common rhythm to all human existence, and allows the human individual to communicate his feeling and his striving to mankind as a whole.¹

Eliot says in *East Coker* that the poet's fight to-day, for both his language and his values, is under conditions 'that seem unpropitious'. There is perhaps another layer of meaning to the title of *Four Quartets* in the sense that the poet's area of resonance nowadays can be only that of chamber-

¹ 'Psychology and Literature', *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 198.

music, and his audience correspondingly small. Matthew Arnold declared that 'for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment'. "But this is inexact." The moment may be propitious or unpropitious for the artist, but the work of art stands secure in its own life not in that of the society in which it is produced. Great works of art have been produced as often when the artist was in active revolt from his age as when he was in harmony with its accepted faith. It is not the creation of the work but its acceptance by society which demands the concurrence of the man and the moment. For it is true that the communication of the power of the master-work to others rests on conditions in society over which the artist has no control and which, in his own age or in any other age, may muffle his voice and make the complex harmony of his music sound like that of 'the weak pipe and the little drum'.

When Eliot began to write, it was inevitable that his poetry should be 'undecipherable' to the reading public. The speech of the tribe had become impoverished, atrophied, inarticulate. Hence the return to some of the sources of its lost life, to the language of symbol, the logic of the imagination, made it appear a stranger, whose unfamiliarity must be repudiated. A generation of readers and critics and teachers, and of other poets writing in the same language, has done much to reawaken consciousness, and to widen the area over which the music can be heard. As to the fight for his values, all the poet can do in his art is to present them as poetry. 'The rest is not our business.' Eliot summed up that matter in his comment on Yeats:

Born into a world in which the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' was generally accepted, and living on into one in which art has

been asked to be instrumental to social purposes, he held firmly to the right view which is between these, though not in any way a compromise between them, and showed that an artist, by serving his art with entire integrity, is at the same time rendering the greatest service he can to his own nation and to the whole world.

That service the king of Eliot's adopted nation has recognized by the highest honour he could bestow, the Order of Merit. This is surely as it should be, for Eliot has united himself with his nation and its struggles and has given it his love. But in the greater realm of art, as he has said, 'there is no competition'. There is only the struggle for integrity, the honest service of the whole man towards the mastery of integration; the integration of life and words, of past and present, of words themselves into the new wholeness of a poem. In the only passage in which Eliot 'speaks out' about the dignity and glory of his calling, he transmutes this abstract 'integration' into the sense world where poetry exists. From the disorder of practical living and dying, the flux of being, the many voices, the general mess, 'spring' the words which renew and transfigure into pattern, and which embody the rhythm and order of creation.

Out of the meaningless practical shapes of all that is living
or lifeless

¹ Joined with the artist's eye, new life, new form, new colour.

Out of the sea of sound the life of music,

Out of the slimy mud of words, out of the sleet and hail of
verbal imprecisions,

Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that have taken
the place of thoughts and feelings,

There spring the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of
incantation.

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