M.A. English

William David MacCallan

THE POETIC PRINCIPLES OF T.S. ELIOT

A Thesis

by

W.D. MacCallan

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment for the degree of M.A.

McGill University

April 1949

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his thanks to Mr. A.M. Klein, who very kindly continued to direct this thesis after he had left the Staff of McGill University.

CONTENTS

"I believe that the critical writings of poets..... owe a good 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 that he writes, or to formulate the kind of poetry that he wants to write."

T.S. Eliot - "The Music of Poetry"

"Mr. Eliot, I am sure, would disavow any ambition to pose as a leader of men; but he is a leader, and a very influential leader. Our difficulty is that he seems to be leading us in two directions at once."

P.E. More - "The Cleft Eliot"

"The assumption always is that his verse and prose are quite unrelated to each other. Actually they are very closely related. If one reads through the whole of the prose and the whole of the verse, one finds that the same process, the same search for a Tradition and for orthodox principles, combined with the same sensitivity to contemporary life, is developed through both of them."

Stephen Spender - "The Destructive Element"

"The poet turned critic is faced with the novel danger of contradicting himself."

C. Day Lewis - "The Poetic Image"

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Stearns Eliot has unquestionably influenced English poetry. Just how profound this influence is cannot at present be estimated, but up to now he has been without doubt the most influential writer of his time.

One of the reasons for this is that Eliot is not only a poet but a critic also - and thereby he has, so as to speak, an extra innings which renders him the more influential. It is only natural, therefore, to look to the criticism of such a writer to amplify and, especially in the case of a poet whose work so often seems obscure, to elucidate his poetry. Equally, it is possible to go the other way, to examine his poetry for concrete examples of ideas set forth generally in his criticism.

In either case it is the writer's poetic principles that are concerned, for it is in these that both his verse and his critical prose must have their roots. It is conceivable that from these roots the criticism and the poetry might branch out in slightly different directions and thus result in opinions that appear mutually exclusive. It is more logical to expect, however, that the critical prose of such a writer would state in general terms the facts which appear in more specific forms in his poetry.

Both of these points of view have been taken up regarding Eliot's work. But somebody must be wrong since these two view-points are truly mutually exclusive. Thus it seems valuable to enquire into this matter of the relation between Eliot's prose and his verse against the probability that the future will show Eliot to have been perhaps the most important literary influence of our time.

In the following paper I have therefore tried to examine impartially,

in the light that is shed on them by his own poetry, the critical remarks Eliot has made concerning poetry. What emerges from this examination leads to the conclusion that there is a unity, albeit qualified, in Eliot's writings as a whole. To do this it has been necessary to collate the prose and the verse, and, whenever there seems to be a difference, to attempt to get underneath the precise instances to the principle involved in each case. As a result something has to be said about nearly all the features of Eliot's writing, but it has been impossible to deal with allied features contiguously because of the differences between the various contexts in which these features have been examined. This has ruled out the possibility of organizing this paper along chronological lines or in accordance with strict groupings of ideas. The latter would be possible only if the structure were to be totally artificial and static. I have chosen rather to divide Eliot's critical remarks into broad categories: those bearing on technique, those bearing on content, and those bearing on the nature of poetry, and to attempt a more fluid and developmental manner of discussion.

It seemed wiser to proceed from the specific to the general than vice versa in consideration of Eliot, since Eliot is an elusive writer when it comes to generalities. With a number of more superficial aspects of his poetic principles under control it is, however, easier to attack the general element. It is for this reason that I have treated my divisions of the subject matter in that order.

I have approached the subject largely from the critical side of Eliot's writings not only because deduction is a more reliable method than induction but also because - etiam disiecti membra poetae notwithstanding - dissection is less damaging to criticism than to poetry.

. . . . . .

I TECHNIQUE

Eliot maintains that the poet has a distinct duty towards his language - that is to say, the tongue in which he writes. In his preface to "Selected Poems by Marianne Moore" he says, "Living, the poet is carrying on that struggle for the maintenance of a living language, for the maintenance of its strength, its subtlety, for the preservation of quality of feeling, which must be kept up in every generation; dead, he provides standards for those who take up the struggle after him." This seems rather a secondary occupation for a poet, in fact a derivative one. For this struggle takes place the moment a poet tries to write a poem. For a poem to achieve effectiveness, the language must be battled with. As Eliot says "the poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." [1.] In writing poetry, one is constantly struggling to achieve life, strength, and subtlety - and consequently the posited obligation towards language is automatically fulfilled. Perhaps what Eliot really meant was that this struggle is necessary in order to create poetry. It has nothing to do with "duties", it is merely one factor that prevents more people from writing poetry.

What is more relevant is that, although he rarely mentions "le mot juste", [2.] Eliot is always extremely careful in choosing his words. He feels very intensely the extreme difficulty of entrapping what one wishes to say in a net of words. The fifth section of Burnt Norton includes this idea, especially in the lines:-

> "..... Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still."

This constant feeling of battling against one's medium, although one of the inevitable riders attached to the practice of any of the arts (and possibly the

1. "The Metaphysical Poets".

2. "I wish that we might dispose more attention to the correctness of expression, to the clarity or obscurity, to the grammatical precision or inaccuracy, to the the choice of words, whether just or improper, exalted or vulgar, of our verse; in short to the good or bad breeding of our poets. This (p.25 "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism") is the most obvious example of Eliot's use of the phrase in his prose. In his poetry

(Cont'd)

victory in this fight is the greatest pleasure derivable from artistic creation - vide Théophile Gautier's "Ars Victrix" - becomes almost an obsession for Eliot at times. For example in "Sweeney Agonistes" he makes Sweeney say "I've gotta use words when I talk to you". Though Sweeney is himself a rather inarticulate character, this also shows Eliot's own concern over the difficulty of communicating a thought without allowing the inadequacy of the medium or of the writer's mastery of the medium to modify this thought.

Again in East Coker, in section two, Eliot writes:-

> "That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory:
> A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
> Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
> With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter."

and in section five:-

> "Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion."

These quotations are paralleled in his prose. For instance in his Essay on Blake [1] he speaks of "the eternal struggle...of the literary artist against the continuous deterioration of language."

It was essentially this feeling of the wrestling with words that led Eliot to his "revolution" in writing Prufrock. For Eliot felt that both the forms of poetry and the vocabulary of poetry had been so abused that they were no longer capable of communicating precise thoughts and emotions precisely - you cannot draw a fine line with a blunted pencil. Thus he came to write a music more subtle than that of the Georgians, who held the field in 1915 when Prufrock first appeared. To a very coarse ear, such as that of Dr. Johnson, doubtless Eliot's poetry would hold very

> "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." (Chorus IX from "The Rock")

1. "The Sacred Wood" p. 154.

little musical attraction, and perhaps this might also apply to a reader who was accustomed to the insistent and rather unvarying lilting of Georgian poetry - a listener saturated with Mozart finds little melody in his first exposure to Schonberg. However this is by now a dead issue, for compared with Kenneth Patchen, Eliot is sheer music.

Also Eliot concentrated his images, concretized them. In this matter, his debt to Ezra Pound has not yet been adequately assessed. But on reading the three opening lines of Prufrock there is a certain shock caused by visual clarity:-

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

This image is, of course, not one of scenic description. It is a description of the state of mind of the character who speaks. But the sense that the evening awaits his pleasure, for good or evil, is very clearly and immediately conveyed. F.O. Matthiessen ("The Achievement of T.S. Eliot") says that this image may seem to be too intellectually manipulated and not enough felt, but this is a matter of merely personal opinion. And it is usual, in Eliot's poems, to find that an image conveys an emotion rather than a picture - that is the function of his theory of the "objective-correlative". So in the Waste Land the lines:-

> "Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
> Spread out in fiery points
> Glowed into words, then would be savagely still"

although they do give the reader a mental picture of the action, give as their more important communication a sense of the woman's sudden nervous anger, the sparks that quickly die.

Another defect of (then) contemporary poetry (and this one Eliot turned to his advantage) was the fact that all the time one tended to be reminded of some other poem. There was a rhythm that was familiar, or a phrase distorted, that, as one read, set up an echo in the reader's mind. This was a defect because the echo was

usually irrelevant. Out of this, to some measure, developed Eliot's allusiveness. Of course allusiveness in poetry was not Eliot's invention - in all probability Eliot was at this time familiar with the macaronic poetry of the thirteenth century - but he set out to use these echoes to enhance his poetry, to amplify and reenforce the effect of his own poems. This reenforcement occurs usually by a contrast which suddenly raises the two versions up and out of time and space, poising them antithetically in a giant balance. There is an enormous sense of immediacy available by this method. For instance in the Waste Land there are the lines:-

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

whose first line (aside from the added last word) are a direct quotation from Goldsmith's "Stanzas on Woman". One reads the line, recalls the Goldsmith in its entirety, finishes Eliot's sentence, and is shocked by the contrast.

1. In regard to Eliot's allusiveness, it is illuminating to examine some of his remarks about imitation.

   "The only way to learn to manipulate any kind of English verse seemed (to me) to be by assimilation and imitation, by becoming so engrossed in the work of a particular poet that one could produce a recognizable derivative." ("The Music of Poetry".)

   "...more can be learned about how to write poetry from Dante than from any English poet...Most English poets are inimitable in a way in which Dante was not." ("Dante" - 1929 essay from Selected Essays).

   "His (Jonson's) third requisite (for a poet) pleases me especially: 'The third requirement in our poet, or maker, is Imitation, to be able to convert the substances, or riches of another poet, to his own use'". ("The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" p.54

   It is Eliot's study of imitation that has led him to be able to make his allusions so effectively in some cases - he can write lines with precisely the right distance between them and his model. Perhaps the best example of this occurs in The Waste Land:

   > "....the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
   > Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
   > The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
   > Her stove, and lays out food in tins." (11.220-223)

   Here Eliot not only distorts Sappho's "Hesperus you bring home all things that the morning scatters..." but manages to intrude thoughts of Stevenson's "Home is the sailor, home from the sea, and the hunter home from the hill", and this is an achievement which must be considered as incredible virtuosity at the least.

"When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy?
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom, is - to die."

So Goldsmith. And the effect of the contrast is to make Goldsmith's poem incomprehensible. In spite of the irony of Eliot's tone, it is apparent that he has said something that is true. How then can Goldsmith's poem be true? It cannot - in the world we live in now. And at once the immense change in social mores that has occurred since Goldsmith's time, the great gulf that has been secretly and imperceptibly fixed, yawns dizzily at the reader's feet. Here is a subtle but powerful attack on today's society; powerful because of its subtlety; subtle because of the delayed reaction, the lapse of time between the pulling of the trigger and the sickening detonation that it sets off.

Admittedly there comes a point where this use of allusion becomes indefensible, although it is impossible to state in general when this point is reached. It depends entirely on the individual reader, and his acquaintance with the originals of the allusions. It is conceivable that there is someone who would, on his first reading of "The Waste Land", recognize every allusion. Such a person would be, from Eliot's point of view, the ideal reader. [1.] Most of us have to work to follow everything "The Waste Land" contains. One approach is to read the commentaries that have been written on "The Waste Land" (such as those of F.O. Matthiessen, F.R. Leavis, and Cleanth Brooks) before reading the poem. Unfortunately this over-scholarly approach kills the poem. One is waiting to catch the next allusion,

1. It is true that Eliot says, in "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" (p. 152), "I myself should like an audience which could neither read nor write", but he has made another, less publicised statement that should also be considered: "It is wrong, of course, of Mr. Kipling to address a large audience; but it is a better thing than to address a small one. The only better thing is to address the one hypothetical Intelligent Man who does not exist and is the audience of the Artist." ("Kipling Redivivus" - Athenaeum, May 9, 1919)

and its effect is lost. The surprise is gone. Eliot maintains that surprise is of great importance in poetry, as is evidenced by the following quotations:- "....the poem turns with that surprise which has been one of the most important means of poetic effect since Homer." (Andrew Marvell, 1921) "....the element of surprise....which Poe considered of the highest importance, and also the restraint and quietness of tone which makes the surprise possible" (op. cit.) [1]. It is evidenced much more forcefully by the constant use of surprising twists in his poems, such as the Goldsmith passage just mentioned. Therefore the best thing to do is read the poem as one would read any other poem, recognizing some of the allusions, and missing others. After that by all means read commentaries and catch up on what one has missed.

From this it is easy to argue that Eliot is writing for a very small and select audience - practically for the professorial class (since even writers tend to have an unevenly balanced knowledge of English literature - Eliot himself confesses to a lack of acquaintance with nineteenth century prose). However Eliot has developed an ingenious theory to answer this charge. It involves different levels of apprehension, and is possibly based on the four levels of interpretation of the Divine Comedy. It starts off with his assertion that "some of the poetry to which I am most devoted is poetry which I did not understand at first reading; some is poetry which I am not sure I understand yet." [2]. This is amplified by a statement made four years earlier, in an essay on Dante; "It is a test (a positive test, I do not assert that it is always valid negatively) that genuine poetry can be communicated before it can be understood." And later in the same essay "I do not recommend, in first reading the first canto of the Inferno, worrying about the identity of the Leopard, the Lion, or the She-Wolf. It is really better, at the start, not to know or care what they mean. But the development of this idea (leaving

1. Yvor Winters, in "The Anatomy of Nonsense", says that it was "originality", not "surprise", that Poe considered to be of such importance.

2. "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". p. 151.

aside, for the moment, the question of the 'obscurity' of Eliot's poetry) leads to "Sweeney Agonistes", where Eliot is attempting to write something which will be appreciable on several different levels simultaneously.[1] Of this poem, or rather fragment of a drama, Matthiessen ("The Achievement of T.S. Eliot") merely says that these scenes "were an experiment in trying to use music hall rhythms" and points out the root of this idea which lies in Eliot's essay on Marie Lloyd, where he says that she "represented and expressed that part of the English Nation which has perhaps the greatest vitality and interest", meaning perhaps that in the music hall could be found live material which might resuscitate a dying literature. However, though this experiment in the use of certain rhythms is doubtless the main significance of "Sweeney Agonistes", it is possible to consider it on different levels of appreciation. For instance, the first impression of the scenes is that of the rhythm, which lend a colloquiality to the conversation. The dialogue itself is written in what is very much the vernacular, but more than this it is the use of these rhythms that belong to popular songs that put the scenes on an informal footing and prevent self-consciousness on the reader's part. Beyond that there is the sense of foreboding triviality in the prologue, which, in the agon, becomes a trifle less trivial in that the triviality is recognized, and cynicism sets in. The agon ends up on a very threatening note.

But again, when one stops to consider "Sweeney Agonistes" a little more carefully, one becomes aware of other things - especially the title and the epigraphs. "Sweeney Agonistes" demands a comparison with "Samson Agonistes".

The subtitle of "Sweeney Agonistes" is "Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama". The development of "Samson Agonistes" is primarily Euripidean. Hence there is immediately the contrast (by allusion) between satire and tragedy. Eliot does not intend the seriousness of Milton's work. But this conclusion is immediately questioned by the epigraphs of "Sweeney Agonistes", both of which are drawn from

1. Eliot admits this intention in "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". P. 153.

eminently serious works - the Choephoroi, and St. John of the Cross. In fact the quotation from the Choephoroi is Orestes' last line in Aeschylus' drama - It represents the point where the weight of the sin is transferred to Orestes. Eliot has called up a moment out of the past which is filled both with the sense of overhanging fate, and with the idea of atonement and retribution. All of this is echoed within "Sweeney Agonistes". Fate is evoked in the scene where Doris and Dusty are reading the cards, and Doris draws the two of spades - the Coffin. Atonement and retribution are contained in Sweeney's story of "I knew a man once did a girl in", with the murderer's ultimate confusion as to who was dead. Here of course Eliot combines the ideas of Fate and retribution, dispensing with the Eumenides of Aeschylus (but these he finds necessary in "Family Reunion"). The consciousness of the crime expands in the criminal's mind until all proportion is lost - it is applied to his entire environment. He had been isolated by his guilt (like Orestes) so that he lost his contact with the world of human beings, and life became indistinguishable from death. The pressure of this story (especially considering Doris' efforts to prevent Sweeney's telling it) contrives to fuse it with the idea of drawing "the Coffin". Also there is some suspicion that the man Sweeney is talking about is really Sweeney himself. The uncertainty of this, and the indefiniteness of the connection between the various ideas add a mystery that heightens the feeling of impending doom which the reader has received by the end of the poem. But the point of Sweeney's last speech is that there is no atonement. Unlike Orestes, who realizes that it is he who must pay for the sins of his family over the last three generations, Sweeney (or the unknown criminal) is merely condemned to go on living.

> "We all gotta do what we gotta do
> We're gona sit here and drink this booze
> We're gona sit here and have a tune
> We're gona stay and we're gona go
> And somebody's gotta pay the rent"

It is the chorus that reveals the fact that this lack of punishment is a greater hell than that of Orestes. And it is at this point that "Sweeney Agonistes" takes

on a higher interpretation. Eliot is once more writing upon a moral theme. In effect he is drawing one's attention to the fact that the orthodox get off more lightly - they are subject to externally applied penalties, which are easier to bear than the pangs of one's own moral nature. Samson was condemned to die but he had the satisfaction of destroying the temple; Orestes knew that he was at last expiating the family curse; Sweeney still waits, rotting within, impotent,

A propos of the vernacular that Eliot uses in "Sweeney Agonistes" it is relevant to quote his views on the subject that was at one time in this century a very contentious one, namely the question of whether or not the poet should write in the "language of the people". As this matter is (one trusts) by now forgotten, it should be pointed out that this phrase meant using the language as spoken by the average man, including his penurious vocabulary and uninspired constructions. Eliot gave his views in "The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism", [1] where he says "The language of...(a certain class)...is of course perfectly proper when you are representing dramatically the speech of (this) class, and then no other language is proper; but on other occasions, it is not the business of the poet to talk like any class of society, but like himself - rather better, we hope, than any actual class; though when any class of society happens to have the best word, phrase, or expletive for anything, then the poet is entitled to it." He does qualify this elsewhere by saying "Poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear". [2]

This principle Eliot carries out to its farthest reaches in his own poetry. The vocabulary of, for instance, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" is largely untouched by connotations since the poem contains a multitude of words which are rarely used: polyphiloprogenitive, sutlers, superfetation, piaculative, polymath. [3]

1. P. 71-72

2. "The Music of Poetry."

3. In his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" he speaks of the way in which the contemporary poet is forced to write (it is a continuation of the excerpt I have quoted on page 1) and says, "Hence we get, in fact, a method curiously similar to that of the 'metaphysical poets', similar also in its use of obscure words and simple phrasing ".

It could be argued that these words are pedantic were it not for the satirical intention of the poem. Large ideas are taken off with large words.

But in general, Eliot's usage, both of vocabulary and syntax is marked by the most meticulous selection and balance. The most obvious example of Eliot's exactitude is contained in the first section of "A Game of Chess" in "The Waste Land", where the opening phrases refer one to Antony and Cleopatra -

> "The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Glowed on the marble...."

This suggestion is carried on through the remainder of the sentence. This sentence lasts for seventeen lines, and the rich profusion of its clauses matches "the glitter of her jewels". A key word here is "synthetic" in line 87. The word is itself marked by its alliteration with the preceding word and its importance is that it reminds one that this scene is a modern one - it is a forerunner of the contrast that is to come in the Philomel passage in line 99. Throughout this section Eliot wishes the reader to confuse times and places. One recalls the richness of Rome and Egypt, the richness of Shakespeare's play, one is given a modern richness to compare these with. The Philomel legend is introduced by a painting - and suddenly the tense shifts to the present. A more thoughtless writer would probably have changed the tense at the beginning of line 102, writing "And still she cries and still the world pursues" but Eliot rings the change more subtly by doing this in mid-line. A continuity is achieved between the ancient legend and the present day. To have changed the tense at the beginning of the line would not have achieved this - there would have been a gap of some twenty-five centuries, suddenly leaped over. In Eliot's line there is a sensation of this time-journey, a progression of scenes rapidly passed over, but glimpsed, between then and now.

Another instance of Eliot's care in construction is afforded by "Animula". There are six sentences in this poem of which the first and third are very long and constructed in parallel, mostly by means of participial phrases. It is this sort of care in assembling his poems that gives Eliot's work its unity.

One feels the unity in reading the poem, but it takes a close examination of the text to see where the joints are.

On the relative importance of language and content in a poem, Eliot affirms their interdependence. "I find that, in reading the work of a good poet, I am apt to be struck by a certain ambiguity. At moments I feel that his language is merely the perfect instrument for what he has to say; at other moments I feel that he is simply making use of, even exploiting, his beliefs for the sake of the verbal beauty in which he can express them.....Where this doubt about the attitude of the poet cannot arise one is tempted to suspect the poetry. If we can enjoy the form while indifferent to the content, that poetry is for us mere virtuosity; if we can attend to the ideas and be indifferent to the words in which they are expressed, what we are reading is for us merely bad prose." [1.] This is perhaps the closest Eliot comes to enunciating a distinction between verse and prose.

Whether Eliot practises what he preaches here is a question difficult of answering. His poetry demands attention, many re-readings. If one were to argue from one's first contact with his work, the answer would be no. For one's first impressions are apt to be words and little shreds of ideas. After consultation with the scholiasts one becomes, on the other hand, so wrapped up in the possibilities and probabilities of the meaning of his poems that the words become a hindrance - they slip, slide, perish, will not stay in place, will not stay still. One is, in a sense, re-creating the poem. But now the ambiguity that Eliot speaks of has been achieved. However, for the present writer, Eliot's language always has a slight edge over his ideas. This is perhaps a result of his use of the objective-correlative, for in reading such a sentence as "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" [2.] one inevitably receives a sharp visual impression a fraction of a second before the symbolical significance of the phrase blots this out.

In an essay on Byron [3.], Eliot condemns Byron for writing a dead language, for

1. "The Social Fumction of Poetry". Adelphi. July-Sept., 1945. p. 152
2. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock l. 51
3. "From Anne to Victoria" edited by B. Dobrée 1937.

having no feeling for words. "This imperceptiveness of Byron to the English word - so that he has to use a great many words before we become aware of him - indicates for practical purposes a defective sensibility. I say 'for practical purposes' because I am concerned with the sensibility in his poetry, not with his private life; for if a writer has not the language in which to express feelings they might as well not exist." One should consider this statement side by side with "The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him."[1.] The former quotation is, therefore, modified, and the apparent discrepancy between it and Eliot's general standpoint is removed. For the seeming romanticism of the statement vanishes when one notices that Eliot has deliberately <u>not</u> said "to express <u>his</u> feelings".

Whether Eliot is justified in saying that one can just as well make poetry out of emotions one has never experienced, it is almost impossible to say. One is reduced to a personal opinion (and surely the opinion of the poet is more valuable than that of a mere reader in such matters) for even the most exhaustive biography can hardly enumerate all the different feelings its subject underwent. In Eliot's case verification from his work is rendered even more difficult by the fact that he seldom makes use of an emotion that can be readily catalogued. His poems have a mood, an attitude, but of the "basic" emotions the only one that emerges clearly is fear - in the Sweeney

1. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p. 58 "Sacred Wood" 1934 ed.

poems. And even here it is an evocation of fear and not the statement of it.[1.]

But on the subject of strong passions Eliot has the following to say:

"....an author who is interested not at all in men's minds, but only in their emotions; and perhaps only in men as vehicles for emotions... This extreme emotionalism seems to me a symptom of decadence; it is a cardinal point of faith in a romantic age, to believe that there is something admirable in violent emotion for its own sake, whatever the emotion and whatever its object.

"Strong passion is only interesting or significant in strong men; those who abandon themselves without resistance to excitements which tend to deprive them of reason, become merely instruments of feeling and lose their humanity; and unless there is moral resistance and conflict there is no meaning."[2.]

Here Eliot is taking up the position of the classical humanist. His poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" may not at first appear to fit in with this. For Prufrock is a weak man and in the poem there is no real <u>moral</u> conflict involved. It is just that he can never make up his mind about anything. The Love Song is never sung not because of moral considerations but because "Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,/ Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?" and because "in short, I was afraid". There follows a rationalization ("No! I am not Prince Hamlet.....Almost, at times, the Fool") but it is palpably that. Possibly, since Prufrock's passions cannot aptly be described as "strong", this poem does not come under the ruling. But one feels that the essential strength of his emotion has been diluted by his over-analytical and over-articulate mind, that Prufrock himself cannot choose whether to be a romanticist or a classicist.

1. In this connection one wonders whether since Eliot deliberately tried in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" only to create a sense
2. "After Strange Gods"

(cont'd..

In fact though the position of Prufrock is exactly parallel to that of the indecisive intellectual which Sartre attacks so vigorously. Prufrock will not make up his mind about anything.- he wants faith before he acts. The moral conflict arises from the lack of a basic ethic. Prufrock cannot see that either of two alternatives has any moral superiority over the other, and therefore he refrains from making any decision, although he is aware that this course of inaction will indubitably be fatal.

Finally there is Eliot's most sweeping statement as far as poets and the language they write in are concerned. "Not only every great poet, but every genuine, though lesser poet, fulfills once and for all some possibility of the language, and so leaves one possibility less for his successors. The vein that he has exhausted may be a very small one; or may represent some major form of poetry, the epic or dramatic. But what the great poet has exhausted is merely one form, and not the whole language. The classic poet, on the other hand, exhausts, not a form only, but the language of his time."[1].

If this statement is true, Eliot has at least proved that he is not a classic poet himself. For the language of many poets, even of those who have been strongly influenced by Eliot, such as Hart Crane, is not only effective but effervescing with new life. But Eliot has managed to exhaust something in English poetry. He invented (perhaps resuscitated would be more accurate) a form and he appears to have filled it completely. Certainly too ardent followers of Eliot are invariably defeated by their model. But the form that Eliot uses

of foreboding (vide Matthiessen) he has not here partly justified Valéry's dictum "que le poète moderne essaie de produire en nous un état" and which Eliot attacks violently in his essay on Dante that is included in "The Sacred Wood" (p. 159 1934 ed.)

1. "What Is a Classic".

is not to be thought of as a stanzaic pattern. These are mostly borrowed (vide the tight Gautier quatrains of "The Hippopotamus", "Sweeney Erect" etc.) In fact, though Eliot does often use strict forms, one suspects that this is chiefly either as a self-disciplinary measure or in order to vindicate his "classicism". For he says "No prosodic system ever invented can teach anyone to write good English verse. It is, as Mr. Pound has so often remarked, the musical phrase that matters."[1.] And again "I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image." [2.]

What Eliot introduced into the poetry of his time was, in effect, a new relationship between thought and feeling. He has been accused of writing over-intellectually, but although one is conscious of the control of the mind in reading his poems, the method used is essentially an emotional one. For instance the connections in "The Waste Land" are emotional. Until one realizes that, the poem appears to be a series of disjointed fragments that bear no relation to one another. The method used is one of association. The connection lies in the basic mood of the protagonist. If Eliot himself (in one shape or another) is the protagonist, then the rhythm he speaks of represents the basic emotion. Then the images and ideas appear out of the emotion, but as products of Eliot's own mind. These ideas may be his own personal associations (usually, one imagines, these are reworked later as being too obscure) but they are concrete examples of the mood. They are objective-correlatives. Justification for this exposition of some of Eliot's writing [3.]

1. "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". p. 39
2. "The Music of Poetry".
3. One wishes that Eliot had contributed work sheets to the University of Buffalo's collection. One suspects, from Abbott's introduction to "Poets at Work" that Eliot was one of the poets who refused outright.

lies in his saying that some of his poetry - which he refrains from identifying - was written in a state "approaching the condition of automatic writing".[1] Certainly "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" would seem to be one of these pieces, at least in places such as the fifth stanza:-

"Half-past three,
The lamp sputtered,
The lamp muttered in the dark.
The lamp hummed:
'Regard the moon,
La lune ne garde aucune rancune,
She winks a feeble eye,
She smiles into corners.
She smoothes the hair of the grass.
The moon has lost her memory.
A washed-out smallpox cracks her face,
Her hand twists a paper rose,
That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,
She is alone
With all the old nocturnal smells
That cross and cross across her brain'"

which is largely distorted Laforgue ("Complainte de Cette Bonne Lune" and "L'Imitation de Notre Dame La Lune" generally).

In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" it is interesting to notice the parallel between the lines:-

"I have seen eyes in the street
Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
An old crab with barnacles on his back,
Gripped the end of a stick which I held him"

and the following passage from "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" (page 78):-

"There might be the experience of.....a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time: the simple experience (not so simple, for an exceptional child, as it looks) might be dormant in his mind for twenty years, and reappear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure"[2].

1. "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". p. 146
2. Stephen Spender also remarks this in the section on Eliot's criticism of his book "The Destructive Element".

The similarity here is of the experience and its wording in the two cases, though in the lines from the poem there is no great imaginative pressure. The latter appears in combination with the same image in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the lines:-

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

Here is the summing up of Prufrock's self-disgust. He is not a man, not even a vertebrate. The word "scuttling" here provides a connection between the furtiveness of both Prufrock and the crab.

That Eliot considers rhythm to be one of the primary qualities of poetry is evidenced by his definition of the auditory imagination as "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." [1.] From this quotation it would almost seem that Eliot considers that a poem should appeal primarily - or at any rate first - to the ear.

This feeling of Eliot's for rhythm appears very strongly in his poetry. Perhaps the choruses from "The Rock" provide the most varied examples of rhythm of all of Eliot's poems, since it is only here that he uses the long line for any length of time (with the exception of his translation of Perse's "Anabase" where the form of the original is made up of long lines, and from which Eliot probably obtained his mastery of the technique). The last section of Chorus X of "The Rock" shows especially the use of double caesuras in the long lines to give an impression of weariness after much labour.

> "In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light. We are glad
> when the day ends, when the play ends; and ecstasy is
> too much pain.
> We are children quickly tired: children who are up in the night
> and fall asleep as the rocket is fired; and the day is
> long for work or play.
> We tire of distraction or concentration, we sleep and are glad
> to sleep,
> Controlled by the rhythm of the blood and the day and the night
> and the seasons."

1. "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". p. 119

After the first two lines, each containing two well-marked caesuras, the presence of only one caesura in the third line suggests the falling asleep mentioned in line two; and the emergence of a powerful anapaestic movement in the fourth line completes the illusion of the subjugation of the "we" to the great natural rhythms of the blood and the tides.

It has been pointed out that the occurrence of internal rhymes in these lines makes it inaccurate to speak of caesuras at the rhyme points. This would be true if the internal rhyme were regular, indicating concealed line-ends. It would also make Eliot fall under his own stricture "If a poem reads just as well when cut up so that all the rhymes fall at the end of lines, then the internal rhyme is false and only a typographical caprice". [1] But the rhyme is not regular enough to emerge as a rhyme scheme when cut up, and there would be little or no visible form arising from the process, viz:-

"In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light.
1. We are glad when the day ends,
When the play ends;
And ecstasy is too much pain.
We are children quickly tired:
2. Children who are up in the night
And fall asleep as the rocket is fired;
And the day is long for work or play.
We tire of distraction or concentration,
3. We sleep and are glad to sleep,
Controlled by the rhythm of the blood and the day
4. And the night and the seasons."

In fact the lines lose by this process since it is less easy to compare the relative importance of the lines than it is in the way Eliot actually wrote them. One tends to lend almost equal importance to each line-end, instead of dividing the statements into groups. It is therefore probable that the internal rhyme here is used only to buttress the long lines which might otherwise tend to sag in the middle.

The other extreme of Eliot's rhythms is also used in "The Rock".

"The river flows, the seasons turn,
The sparrow and starling have no time to waste.
If men do not build
How shall they live?
When the field is tilled
And the wheat is bread

1. Preface to "Selected Poems of Marianne Moore".

They shall not die in a shortened bed
And a narrow sheet. In this street
There is no beginning, no movement, no peace and no end
But noise without speech, food without taste.
Without delay and without haste
We would build the beginning and the end of this street.
We build the meaning:
A Church for all
And a job for each
Each man to his work." (Chant of Workmen, section I)

The middle section of this extract is very close to "the Gauguin maids in the banyan shades" of Sweeney Agonistes although it is of a much more serious nature - superficially more serious at any rate. In passing it should be noted that this quotation contains an example of "The Rock"'s failure. It is a passage that closes the section and is evidently meant to be stirring at its end. Unfortunately the transition from the defiant strain of the central lines to the assertions of the final lines (which, incidentally, form an example of the slogan that doesn't come off), although well-marked at the start, finishes by trailing into a rhythm that fails to emerge. The beat of the central lines is still in one's ears and it is impossible to make any sort of rhythmical sense out of the last lines - but one imagines that in a production of "The Rock" this might not be noticed if the last lines were sufficiently bellowed by the Workmen.

Of Eliot's lines perhaps the most brilliant from a rhythmical point of view are the opening lines of "Triumphal March":

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

And their brilliance lies in the fact that the extraordinarily vivid evocation of the noise of horses' hooves is not essentially conveyed by means of rhythm at all. The movement is iambic, although the second syllable of each foot carries a heavy secondary accent which obscures this. But the real effect is achieved through the arrangement of vowels and consonants. Eliot's original for these lines probably lies in the opening line of the "Sirens" chapter of Joyce's "Ulysses" (p. 252 Random House Modern Library Edition):

"Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing."

It is worth noting that in these lines from "Triumphal March" there are only two words whose meaning really matters, "stone" and "horses" - if all the others were nonsense syllables (provided they had the same sound!) the effect would still be there. Of course if they were nonsense syllables the reader's attention would be caught by them; as it is the meanings are there but they are patently of little significance. This is apparent despite Eliot's saying "The music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning. Otherwise, we could have poetry of great musical beauty which made no sense, and I have never come across such poetry."[1.] Of course this is not an example of meaningless poetry, but it approaches it; it illustrates the principle upon which such a theory could be based. In practice Eliot is right. Here the meaning is subordinate. Eliot himself continues the above quotation from "The Music of Poetry" by saying "there are poems in which we are moved by the music and take the sense for granted, just as there are poems in which we attend to the sense and are moved by the music without noticing it." I shall take up the relation of sense to sound later, but here it is interesting to note that P. E. More found that Ash Wednesday came in the former category - he found it excellent and moving poetry, but its meaning eluded him.[2.]

It is unfortunate that Eliot did not extend or justify his statement that "It may be possible that the beauty of some English poetry is due to the presence of more than one metrical structure in it."[3.] As it is, one cannot tell what poems Eliot has in mind when he says this. The only elaboration of the idea is contained in his essay "Prose and Verse"[4.] and even this is not much. "A single work must have some metrical unity. This may vary widely in practice; I see no reason why a considerable variety of verse forms may not be employed within the limits of a

1. "The Music of Poetry".
2. "The Cleft Eliot". Saturday Review of Literature, Nov. 12, 1932.
3. "The Music of Poetry".
4. Chapbook, April, 1921.

single poem." It is not necessary that these statements be contradictory, although when juxtaposed the difference between his two lines of thought is accentuated. Eliot's own poems often, as I have said, are composed in various metrical forms, but nevertheless there is always an overriding 'unity'.

Ash Wednesday forms a good example of this. The notable thing about the rhythmical structure of this poem is the use of broken rhythms. This technique emerges at the beginning of the first poem where the repetitions give the effect of effort that is expended without result, as the wheels of a car revolve on ice without moving the car ("I no longer strive to strive towards such things"). This movement that is not movement is solidly established in the first poem, after which there is a sort of a flash-back. The protagonist's inability to get any further on his spiritual journey has been set forth, and is followed by the first appearance of symbolism in the series of poems - Eliot has switched to a different level of consciousness, one on which it is still possible to amplify the feeling of stultification that is expressed in the first poem. The second poem is therefore much more fluid rhythmically than the first, and in a frame of these long, relatively fluid lines is contained a passage of two-beat lines, whose effect is as that of a solo passage in an orchestral work - something is said singly, above the general level of action.

Thus the first two poems of Ash Wednesday have entirely separate metrical bases, and yet there is a psychological connection between them. It is the third poem that begins to lend, in addition, a formal unity to the series of poems. For, in the third poem, there is a reiteration of the broken rhythms of the first poem, with a difference. Now there is merely difficulty in movement, not a complete stoppage. There are only a few lines like "Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind over the third stair" that seem really disjointed. The fourth poem recalls the second one, although the rhythms are far less regular. It is essentially the first eight lines that set up this comparison in the reader's mind, for after this the lines tend to disintegrate ("White light folded, sheathed about her, folded") from the free-flowing unity of the first ones. It is this loss

of impetus that prepares one for the return to the present tense in the fifth poem.

In the fifth poem there is a definite harking back to the rhythms of the first poem. (Compare

"Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place"

with

"If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard")

The final development of this type of rhythm in Ash Wednesday occurs in the third section of the fifth poem, where it gives a sense of terrific struggling which peters out in the rather hurried and ritualistic movement of the last lines.

So far we have an alternation of rhythmic patterns that knit the two together. In the sixth poem the original rhythms (and indeed the words) of the first poem are repeated initially which gives a bold return to the starting-point of the poem. It is as if the intervening poems had been in the nature of a digression. But towards the end of the second section of this sixth poem, the "wide window towards the granite shore" begins to evoke the rhythms of the second and fourth poems. This is continued in the third section which appears rhythmically as an interpolation in the matter of the second and fourth sections (compare

"In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying"

with

"This is the time of tension between dying and birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross")

Now the two sets of rhythms are completely intertwined and there remains only the closing. In the last lines there is still a jerky rhythm that is heavily accented upon the first syllable of the foot. This is well established before the sudden appearance of the last line, whose appearance of a release from constriction is based chiefly on the unheralded shift to a rhythm that flows evenly and swiftly. Thus this line "And let my cry come unto Thee" is especially marked and becomes

the emotional as well as physical culmination of the poems. But one should also notice that its rhythm is that of the second and fourth poems. The second subject, so as to speak. Eliot has quietly tied up another loose end in the poem's rhythmical structure, one that does not appear on first reading the poems. It is out of this sort of involved arrangement of metres that Eliot developed his idea of adapting musical techniques to the practice of poetry, and which eventually led him to the Four Quartets. He writes: "I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure.... The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter." [1.]

The essential form of the Four Quartets has been neatly exposed by Helen L. Gardner [2.]. "The first movement in each of the Quartets consists of statement and counter-statement in a free blank verse. This must not be pressed too hard, for in "East Coker" the first movement falls into four parts, the statement and its contradiction being repeated, in "The Dry Salvages" the metaphors of river and sea are more absolutely opposed than are the two paragraphs of "Burnt Norton", while in "Little Gidding" the opposing statements of the first two paragraphs are blended in the third, the vivid particularity of the scene in 'midwinter spring' and the assertion of unparticularity, the sameness of the experience, being summed up in the final phrase "England and nowhere. Never and always". But on the whole the opening movement is built on contradictions which the poem is to reconcile. The second movement shows the most striking similarities from poem to poem. It opens with a highly 'poetical' lyric passage - octosyllabics rhyming irregularly in

1. "The Music of Poetry"

2. "Four Quartets: A Commentary"

"Burnt Norton" and "East Coker", a simplified sestina in "The Dry Salvages" and three lyric stanzas in "Little Gidding". This is immediately followed by an extremely colloquial passage, in which the idea which had been treated in metaphor and symbol in the first half of the movement is expanded, and given personal application, in a conventional manner. In the first three poems this is done in a free blank verse, but in "Little Gidding" the metre employed is a modification of terza rima. Though the metre is regular and the style has a greater dignity, it still has colloquial force and the dialogue has the same personal and topical reference as is found in the same section of the other poems. The third movement is the core of each poem, out of which reconciliation grows: it is an exploration, with a twist, of the ideas of the first two movements. In "Burnt Norton" the twilight world of the London Tube (here Miss Gardner justifies in a footnote her assumption that the "place of disaffection" is the London Tube) "Neither plenitude nor vacancy" fades into the world of perpetual solitude. In "East Coker" there is a sudden shift in the emotions aroused by the word darkness, which gives point to the whole poem. In "The Dry Salvages" the change is a change of temper, from the reflective to the hortatory, and in "Little Gidding" the turn is from the personal and individual to the historic. The fourth movement is a lyric in all four poems. The fifth is again in two parts, but the change in manner and metre is slighter than in the second movement and it is reversed. Here the colloquial passage comes first, and then, without a feeling of sharp break, the rhythm tightens and the manner becomes graver for a kind of falling close. The whole movement recapitulates the themes of the poem, with personal and topical applications, and makes a resolution of the discords of the first."

It must not be thought that Eliot's progressive preoccupation with musical form has in any way overbalanced the construction of his poems. One of the most interesting things about Eliot's poetry is that, though he has been developing, the course of his development has been perfectly plain - in fact it is close to a straight line. Eliot is not a Picasso who has well-defined 'periods'; one cannot speak of a 'Prufrock period', or a 'Waste Land period' or a 'Four Quartets period'. Certainly there

are landmarks in Eliot's work as there are in the work of any artist, but with Eliot these form a pattern - the straight line of pylons, of street-lamps leading into the distance.

The excellence of form in Eliot's work has always been particularly noticable. Early, it is the skeleton under the shifting surface of "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Poems 1920 are nearly all written in neat quatrains - the chief exception being the Websterian blank verse of "Gerontion". Equally, Eliot has always been conscious of the music of poetry:

> "I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
> Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
> When the wind blows the water white and black.
>
> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed in seaweed red and brown
> Till human voices wake us and we drown." 1.

What could be more logical than turning for inspiration to the forms of music?

But use of the forms of music by no means obviates the use of melody. Section 2 of "East Coker" - "What is the late November doing..." is a good lyric, but, as Eliot continues, "That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory: / A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion....." Like a melody line from something of Prokofiev's, it emerges swiftly, flashes, and disappears into a boiling of a different dialect - perhaps an alien one. But Eliot is right in one sense (a sense that is probably secondary to his meaning) when he finds this passage "not very satisfactory" - one only has to reread it after reading section 4 of the same poem: "The wounded surgeon plies the steel..."

There are those who maintain that in "Four quartets" Eliot has lost the intensity of his earlier poetry, and try to base this upon the assertion that in this work he has become too preoccupied with pure form. They find "The Waste Land" appeals to them more, means more to them, and therefore is necessarily superior. Possibly this conclusion is correct, but it should be remembered that although "The Waste Land" is a poem into which much can be read, much is meant to be read, it is far too easy for the "Petrochka-figures", as Cyril Connolly calls them, to read into the poem only an

1. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

expression of their personal anxiety and ennui. It is always pleasant (unless the reader happens to be a poet also) to find one's own thoughts and feelings admirably expressed in a poem, but when one does, one tends to overlook any other shade of meaning the poet may intend - especially if the poet is Eliot. And the matter of "The Waste Land", the attempt to reassert spiritual values in a spiritually bankrupt world, leads naturally to the metaphysical speculation of "Four Quartets". To the, one trusts, hypothetical querying of such stuff as a basis of poetry, Eliot refers to the authority of "Lucretius" and Virgil's "Georgics".[1.]

.....

There is another aspect of language - written language - that must be considered in relation to Eliot's work, and that is the quality of style. Style is that quality or combination of qualities that enable one to distinguish the work of one man from that of another. But this definition provides no means of distinguishing between a good style and a bad style.

A work of art must have some sort of style - for if it did not it would be conceived without unity. True, there can be unobtrusive styles, insipid styles - but styles they are nevertheless. One can even dispense, to some extent, with unity of style (Joyce's "Ulysses") but this polystylistic style is not always successful

> ("The association of man and woman
> In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie
> A dignified and commodious sacrament.
> Two and two, necessary coniunction,
> Holding eche other by the hand or the arm
> Which betokeneth concorde").[2.]

Swift says, "Proper words in proper places, make the true definition of a style"[3.] - he obviously meant the definition of a true style - but it is not a definition that can be accepted today. We accept Sir Thomas Browne and are still a little leery of Pope. But perhaps one should not attempt to apply this definition to poetry. It is simpler to say that a good style is a style which enhances a work of art and a bad one that which detracts from it, though this is too ad hoc a definition to be of much value.

1. "The Social Function of Poetry" and elsewhere.
2. "East Coker" section 1.
3. Letter to a Young Clergyman - Jan. 9, 1720.

One of the more outstanding characteristics of Eliot's style (in his poetry) is the liberty he takes with syntax. One of the most notable examples of this occurs in "The Hollow Men", in the fifth section. This opens with a distorted nursery rhyme [1.] from which all joy has been extracted by the substitution of the arid, painful, useless "prickly pear" for the mulberry bush. Then the reason behind the joylessness is explained in the following section. What is set forward is the inability of the hollow men to distinguish between the two realities, the things of Caesar and the things of God. The shadow of death falls across every action and every thought. A feeble effort is made at prayer ("For Thine is the Kingdom") but Death still intervenes and "Life is very long". The prayer and the despair become fragmentary, apathetic - the hollow men are incapable, not only of action but also of genuine feeling. "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper".

1. I have not noticed any commentator pointing out that this was a favorite device of Laforgue's. For instance "Complainte de Lord Pierrot" opens:-

"Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot,
Filons en costume,
Présider là-haut!
Ma cervelle est morte,
Que le Christ l'emporte!
Béons à la Lune,
La bouche en zéro."

The device also occurs in "Complainte du Pauvre Jeunne Homme" and in "Complainte de Cette Bonne Lune" which begins;

"On entend les Etoiles:
Dans l'giron
Du Patron,
On y danse, on y danse,
Dans l'giron
Du Patron,
On y danse tout en rond."

Réné Taupin's invaluable work "L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur la Poésie Americaine" misses it perhaps since it is a minor point when considered from the point of view of general influences of a certain genre of poetry on another genre.

But the point in question is the validity of the lines

"For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the".

These lines are the culmination of what has gone before. The canticle and response technique has displayed the split behind the futility, but it is these three lines that fuse the foregoing ideas. These lines reiterate the prickly pear lines but on a different level. They describe the situation on the level of causes instead of superficial phenomena. They say exactly the same thing, but it is the broken ungrammatical phrases that clarify the vision, prepare things for the descent of irony in the last four lines.

I have tried to justify (as without doubt it can be justified) this usage on the basis of its effect in this particular place. Eliot himself has various things to say on this subject. The first has already been quoted on page 1, "The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." Of this dislocation (or perhaps decaudation) the above is a fairly simple example, though it should be noted that the absence of any punctuation enables the lines to be divided in various ways, giving varicus meanings. Thus one could read "For Thine is Life" or "Life is for.....", as well as regarding each line as only the beginning of sentences used earlier in the poem. The circular effect of these lines should not be neglected either.

A further example occurs in "The Fire Sermon" from "The Waste Land". Perhaps the punctuation in the song of the "Third Thames Daughter" is the introduction to it.

"'On Margate sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.'"

First the flat statement "On Margate sands". It means nothing - there is no action, no thought, and therefore no verb. This lack of signification, lack of association

even, is stated baldly in the next two lines "I can connect /Nothing with nothing".[1] Everything is as sordid and meaningless as "The broken fingernails of dirty hands" isolated in the vacuum between two full stops. It is the examples of the "broken fingernails" that form the end of "The Fire Sermon". There is a feeble echo of the "Weialala leia" and one reads fragments from St. Augustine and Buddha - from the great works of one of the greatest religious thinkers from each of the Occidental and the Oriental worlds. Admittedly all this would be incomprehensible if one were not familiar with these writers and Eliot had not appended notes to "The Waste Land". It is, of course, precisely against any such eventuality that Eliot has appended notes. He does not wish his poem to become meaningless. Therefore he gives notes on points that are absolutely essential to the poem. The others that have been dug out by the scholiasts are not really essential - the fact that certain lines in the first section of "The Burial of the Dead" resemble rather closely a passage from a letter of Rupert Brooke's is, although interesting to the scholar, absolutely unnecessary to the poem. Potatoes fulfill their function without parsley.

But since the references in these lines are given there is no reason for not accepting them. Thus we have two statements that at first appear meaningless but turn out to be part of some of the greatest philosophy appearing for no apparent reason and without any visible connection between them. They begin as two 'nothings' - and "I can connect / Nothing with nothing". Then appears their real meaning and one realizes that to the protagonist the meaning is meaningless, so as to speak - the explanations of and justifications for human life no longer seem to hold water. And yet in spite of this, in the reiteration of parts of the excerpts at the very end of the section (as in the manner of "The Hollow Men" referred to above) one sees an unhoping clutch made at these forms that no longer seem to hold anything. "burning". The lack of capitalization here has more significance than it does in

1. It is interesting to note that the motto, designed to produce a real life, which runs through E.M. Forster's "Howard's End", is "Only connect".

the work of E. E. Cummings, although it is of the same type. But the point to notice from this is that, again, it is because of this twisting of language that Eliot achieves his effect. It can be argued that it is a trick of technique - but is not art (I refer to the work of art, not to the life of the artist, or indeed to the artist at all except insofar as he created the work originally) the only field where the ends can be said to justify the means? Does anyone who appreciates El Greco worry that his figures are invariably too long and thin? or any lover of music that some of Beethoven's modulations are musicologically unorthodox?

Writing of George Herbert, Eliot says, "The structure of the sentences, on the other hand, is sometimes far from simple, but this is not a vice; it is a fidelity to thought and feeling."[1] Eliot goes on to explain that something happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne and the time of Tennyson and Browning. "It is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought was to Donne an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for his work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are constantly forming new wholes."

It is here that one sees Eliot's justification for the use of psychological, associative connections in his work. These days the

1. "The Metaphysical Poets".

reader is more likely to accept this technique when he considers that clinical psychology shows this to be the way that most minds work most of the time.

As an example of the long sentence in Eliot's poetry the following from the first section of "The Dry Salvages" is good; but it is not entirely a fair example. Its structure is not particularly tortuous - it is designed to give the swell of the sea a form in words and is thus a fidelity to feeling.

"The sea howl
And the sea yelp, are different voices
Often together heard: the whine in the rigging,
The menace and caress of the wave that breaks on water,
The distant rote in the granite teeth,
And the wailing warning from the approaching headland
Are all sea voices, and the heaving groaner
Rounded homewards, and the seagull:
And under the oppression of the silent fog
The tolling bell
Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried
Ground swell, a time
Older than the time of chronometers, older
Than time counted by anxious worried women
Lying awake, calculating the future,
Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel
And piece together the past and future,
Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,
The future futureless, before the morning watch
When time stops and time is never ending;
And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,
Clangs
The bell."

As far as fidelity to thought is concerned, the "Four Quartets" have a mass of examples. The whole series of poems is a tissue of thought, highly abstract thought. One reads passages such as:

"If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid, And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living,

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always."
("Little Gidding", I)

Here it is not the sentences that have an involved construction; it is the passage as a whole that is tortuous. The meaning is entirely clear, but there is something curiously constricted about the passage - especially in the first few lines.

In writing of Massinger, Eliot says "To say that an involved style is necessarily a bad style would be preposterous. But such a style should follow the involutions of a mode of perceiving, registering, and digesting impressions which is also involved." [1] In effect then the style must proceed from the content, or, to carry the generalization perhaps a little too far, any style is a good style provided that it can be justified by the content, either in that it follows the intricacies of the thought or in that it parallels the emotion complementary to the thought. Thus the style of Henry James is eminently faithful to his characters and is therefore a good style; the style of Swinburne, on the other hand, is a bad style since the language flourishes independently of the meaning with a "singular life of its own". [2] [3]

1. "Philip Massinger". "The Sacred Wood" p. 131.
2. See "Swinburne as Poet", "The Sacred Wood" p. 149-150.
3. In "A Note of the Verse of John Milton", Eliot writes, "A tortuous style, when its peculiarity is aimed at precision (as with Henry James), is not necessarily a dead one; only when the complication is dictated by a demand of verbal music, instead of by any demand of sense." He goes on to claim that Milton's thought was originally simple and abstract, but was subsequently involved for musical effect, whereas James' complexity arises out of a determination not to simplify the twistings of a mind of work.

Usually Eliot's poetic style is very closely bound up with what he is saying. A particularly felicitous example is in lines 111 - 138 of "The Waste Land" where the style with its choppy spitting rhythms echoes admirably the taut nerves of the speakers, and the last three and a half lines express once and for all this particular ennui - with the concealed reference to Middleton's "Women Beware Women" which conveys the idea that in this context neither of the chess-players is aware of the seduction that is going on, although perhaps each is aware of something in that they are "waiting for a knock upon the door".

Another, rather peculiar, remark of Eliot's sheds some light on Eliot's own work. He writes, "The great poet's craft may sometimes fail him: but at his greatest moments he is doing what Kipling is doing on a lower plane - writing transparently, so that our attention is directed to the object and not to the medium. Such a result is not simply attained by absence of decoration - for even the absence of decoration may err in calling attention to itself - but never by using decoration for its own sake, though, again, the apparently superfluous may be what is really important." [1]
Eliot himself does not write decorated verse - he is so continually condensing that there is no space for "decoration" for its own sake. Thus he never errs on that side of the ledger. On the other hand it is difficult to find - at all events in the earlier poems - any examples of Eliot's drawing attention to the decorative element in verse through its momentary absence. For although Eliot writes poetry that is stripped of unnecessary material, of lines that do not bear forcefully (however indirectly or allusively) on the material in hand, and therefore has neither the space nor the time for decoration qua decoration, his words and phrases are so carefully chosen that the decoration is inseparable from the meaning. It

1. Introduction to "A Choice of Kipling's Verse".

could only be removed by means of a prose paraphrase - which is manifestly inadmissible. An example taken at random: the opening two lines of "Mr. Apollinax".

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

Here place and mood are indicated at once. Laughter should not tinkle among teacups - there is an air of irresponsibility ("He laughed like an irresponsible foetus"). Mr. Apollinax is a shade outré. But as well as this practical purpose of the second line, there is nevertheless decoration in it. It is a decorative line - secondarily so, but inescapably so. In "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" there appear to be no decorative lines whatsoever. Every sentence is a bare statement of factual event - except Burbank's question in the last stanza, and even this is something reported. The poem consists of pure observations. [1]

Indubitably without the form in which it is cast, this poem would have advertised its lack of decoration, but the tight tetrametrical quatrains and the abab rhyme scheme bind the whole poem so much together that to say it's undecorated is like complaining that there is no design on a pearl. Besides this, the poem is full of masterly touches - the stanza division between "Sir Ferdinand" and "Klein"; Burbank's "descending at a small hotel; / Princess Volupine arrived, / They were together and he fell"; and above all the epigram "Money in furs" implying that modern society nourishes itself on the surface of things, discarding the meat.

It might be possible, on the other hand, to claim that there is a noticeable lack of decoration in the "Four Quartets", but this is partly due to the way in which Eliot tends to move from a conventionally poetic diction to something which, by comparison, appears to approach a prose style. The first two passages in the second section of "East Coker"

1. It is interesting to remember that Eliot's first volume of poetry was entitled "Prufrock and other Observations".

show this contrast ("What is the late November doing..... That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory"). But it is largely the juxtaposition of such passages that gives this impression - a juxtaposition designed to convey the fact that though a lyric is satisfying in one sense, in another it is not, since lyrics treat only parallelly of the substance - the problem remains unresolved ("Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings").

Again, the opening passage of the fifth section of "Little Gidding" seems completely prosaic after the "intolerable shirt of flame" of the fourth section. But in point of fact the rhythms of this passage are too contrived (however subtly) for prose. For me this passage has been cheapened by the subsequent appearance of Karl Shapiro's "Essay on Rime", and perhaps I overdiscount this feeling in trying to arrive at a correct evaluation of it.

Eliot mentions another point that is essentially one of style when, writing of Pound [1], he says, "The two poems mentioned ("Mr. Styrax" and "Nodier Raconte...") irritate in a way in which poems should not irritate; they make you conscious of having been written by somebody; they have not written themselves." Since this idea is very well illustrated by either of these poems, I quote "Mr. Styrax" in full. [2]

I

Mr. Hecatomb Styrax, the owner of
a large estate
and of large muscles,
A "blue" and a climber of mountains, has married
at the age of 28
He being at that age a virgin,
The term "virgo" being made male in mediaeval

1. "The Method of Mr. Pound". Athenaeum, Oct. 24, 1919.

2. I quote from p. 178 of the New Directions edition of "Personae; the Collected Poems of Ezra Pound". The lineation of this edition is followed exactly, since I suspect the poem to have been mutilated by the typesetter. Some of the lines ("a large estate", "latinity") are obviously merely carry-overs occasioned by lack of space. One sees this and notices that most lines begin with a capital letter - in which case "another" would also be a carry-over, but why at that position along the line? Similarly with "and of large muscles" and "at the age of 28" the same difficulty arises, but I suspect that these two lines were deliberately dropped. Unfortunately I have so far been unable to check on this with another edition, and hence felt it better to reproduce exactly from my source.

latinity;
His ineptitudes
Have driven his wife from one religious excess to
another.
She has abandoned the vicar
For he was lacking in vehemence;
She is now the high-priestess
Of a modern and ethical cult,
And even now Mr. Styrax
Does not believe in asthetics. [1]

2
His brother has taken to gypsies,
But the son-in-law of Mr. H. Styrax
Objects to perfumed cigarettes.
In the parlance of Niccolo Machiavelli:
"Thus things proceed in their circle";
And thus the empire is maintained.

Aside from the typographical caprices of this poem (see second footnote to page 34) there are other things that stick out like so many sore thumbs. Eliot has seen that they all boil down to the one flaw - the intrusion of the poet's own personality. For instance, although the aside on the neutrification of the word "virgo" is interesting and has a certain effect here, the effect is entirely a side-track as far as the poem is concerned. It makes itself felt too pointedly and one feels that Mr. Pound is really more interested in the disintegration of language than in the fate of the Styrax-type. If this is true he should have written about that and not about Styrax - the reference is intrusive.

One should notice that Kenneth Fearing, a vastly inferior poet, does this sort of thing far better (e.g. "Portrait"), and on the other hand, that Pound himself can do it better provided he sticks to a more epigrammatic length (e.g. "Soirée" and "Sketch 48 b. 11").

This lack of balance in the poet's purpose, which leads to the reader's consciousness of the poet, is an artistic error because it results in a distorted product, one that wrangles with itself. Eliot would, I think, deduce this to be a flaw from his theory of the impersonality of art. He writes, "the greatest art is impersonal, in the sense that personal emotion, personal experience, is extended

1. Sic.

and completed in something impersonal, not in the sense of something divorced from personal experience and passion." [1] This statement is amplified by two others. The first is from his essay on Lancelot Andrewes. "Andrewes' emotion is purely contemplative; it is not personal, it is wholly evoked by the object of contemplation, to which it is adequate; his emotions wholly contained in and explained by its object. But with Donne there is always the something else, the "baffling" of which Mr. Pearsall Smith speaks in his introduction. Donne is a "personality" in a sense in which Andrewes is not: his sermons, one feels, are a "means of self-expression." The second is from "The Poetry of W.B. Yeats" [2]: "There are two forms of impersonality: that which is natural to the mere skilful craftsman, and that which is more and more achieved by the maturing artist. The first is that of... a lyric by Lovelace, or Suckling, or Campion..... The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience to make of it a general symbol."

In regard to the first of the above quotations, one sees that Pound's personal experience is not really completed in anything impersonal - the effect of personal pique is too forward. Comparing "Mr. Styrax" with the second quotation it is equally clear that the emotion of the poem is not wholly evoked by the object of contemplation - there is that line whose stimulus is wholly verbal ("The term 'virgo' being made male in mediaeval latinity"). And of course this poem is invisible when considered in relation to the third quotation. But Pound's poetry only rarely shows any signs of maturity. [3]

.....

1. Preface to Valéry's "Le Serpent" trans. Wardle 1924.
2. First annual Yeats lecture. Printed in Southern Review 1942. Vol. 7, p. 445.
3. In passing I should like to draw attention to the fact that one of Pound's greatest successes was his translation of "The Seafarer" - from a very immature language, and an immature period.

II CONTENT

I have spent a good deal of space considering what is, in effect, the surface of poetry, its finish. I have done this because with Eliot as the focus this offers the firmest ground. It is easy to see what Eliot has done in a poem; what is less obvious is to what he was doing it. Perhaps one might compare the situation to that of a man faced for the first time with a telephone. He has a vague idea of what it is for - it is some sort of method of communication. The first problem is that of how it works. Having discovered that one can legitimately consider what to do with it.

The consideration now is therefore what Eliot conveys, what Eliot wishes to convey, and what Eliot thinks ought to be conveyed. This is rendered difficult by Eliot's adherence to the belief that if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then what a poem really conveys is what it conveys to each individual reader, to some extent at least. Thus, in "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism", he writes, "If poetry is a form of 'communication', yet that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it. The poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express', or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader or of the writer as reader. Consequently the problem of what a poem 'means' is a good deal more difficult than it at first appears. If a poem of mine entitled "Ash Wednesday" ever goes into a second edition, I have thought of prefixing to it the lines of Byron from "Don Juan" -

> Some have accused me of a strange design
> Against the creed and morals of this land,
> And trace it in this poem, every line.
> I don't pretend that I quite understand
> My own meaning and when I would be very fine;
> But the fact is that I have nothing planned [1]
> Except perhaps to be a moment merry..... "

1. Op. Cit. p. 30-31

That this is flippant is obvious, but still there is something in it when one adds certain other of Eliot's remarks. Nevill Coghill relates an anecdote that illustrates it rather well.[1] Mr. Coghill had finally worked out what he considered to be the meaning of "Sweeney Agonistes". "I now entered the vision; it appeared to be about a normal man of violence, the natural Orestes, the man who cuts his way out of a problem. His natural motives of horror and disgust have their natural expression in murder. But in an obliquity no less natural, instead of plucking out his own eye to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, he tries to pluck out what his eye has seen; and this is murder, the wrong kind of surgery, wrong and useless for (as in the case of Orestes) it brings retribution. KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

"The true solution of Sweeney's predicament, which he neither knew nor took, was not natural but supernatural, namely to divest himself of the love of created beings. (St. John of the Cross.)"

Then Mr. Coghill saw Rupert Doone's production of "Sweeney Agonistes". "He offered an almost entirely different interpretation of the play to that which I had worked out. As he presented it, it was a study in the psychology of a Crippen; he made it seem that we were all Crippens at heart and that nothing was so true as that:

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

And this necessity led to nightmare and to the police. KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK. But it remained a necessity.

I went away overwhelmed and bewildered, yet reassured of the greatness of the play in this admirable production."

Finally Mr. Coghill was able to buttonhole Eliot hemself on the subject. He records the conversation thus:

"Myself: I think I saw you at Rupert Doone's production of "Sweeney Agonistes"?

1. "Sweeney Agonistes" by Nevill Coghill. From "T.S. Eliot - a symposium", compiled by Richard March and Tambimuttu.

Mr. Eliot: Very likely indeed. I was there.

Myself: I had no idea the play meant what he made of it.....that everyone is a Crippen. I was astonished.

Mr. Eliot: So was I.

Myself: Then you had meant something very different when you wrote it?

Mr. Eliot: Very different indeed.

Myself: Yet you accept Mr. Doone's production?

Mr. Eliot: Certainly.

Myself: But.....but.....can the play mean something you didn't intend it to mean, you didn't know it meant?

Mr. Eliot: Obviously it does.

Myself: But can it then also mean what you did intend?

Mr. Eliot: I hope so.....yes, I think so.

Myself: But if two meanings are contradictory, is not one right and the other wrong? Must not the author be right?

Mr. Eliot: Not necessarily, do you think? Why is either wrong?

This was to me so staggering a point of view that I could only put it down to modesty. I therefore abandoned this attack for one more frontal.

Myself: Tell me, Mr. Eliot, who is Sweeney? How do you see him? What sort of man is he?

Mr. Eliot: I think of him as a man who in younger days was perhaps a professional pugilist, mildly successful; who then grew older and retired to keep a pub.

I do not remember any more of this conversation, but what I have written is true so far as it goes, subject to correction from Mr. Eliot, should he remember it at all. I was disturbed and excited by what he said and have often since then reflected on these occasions, and on the critical implications of his remarks. They repay thought. At least they have the merit of being authentic anecdotes."

I quote this passage because here is an occasion where someone definitely tried to pin Eliot down - however half-heartedly. True he escapes almost as neatly as he does in the essays, but there is a suggestion of 'touché'. One could wish that Mr. Coghill had not "abandoned this attack for one more frontal", since the question Eliot had just asked was a crucial one.

Eliot's aversion to labelling something as "right" or "wrong" in the field of art is noticeable all through his writings. In the famous essay on Hamlet [1]

1. "The Sacred Wood" p. 96

for instance, we find the following: "Qua work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it according to standards, in comparison to other works of art; and for 'interpretation' the chief task is the presentation of relevant historical facts which the reader is assumed not to know." This example is especially applicable to the foregoing material in view of the many different opinions that have been held about Hamlet. Later in the essay, Eliot does, in fact, give his own opinion as to why Hamlet fails, but he does not really expound Hamlet's character more than is necessary to show that the intense emotion exceeds its object.

The point of view is more generally in "The Perfect Critic" [1], where he writes, "The dogmatic critic, who lays down a rule, who affirms a value, has left his labour incomplete. Such statements may often be justifiable as a saving of time; but in matters of great importance the critic must not coerce, and he must not make judgments of worse and better. He must simply elucidate: The reader will form the correct judgment for himself." One must not assume from this that Eliot believes in a "correct judgment" as far as meaning is concerned. Here he is speaking of a correct evaluation of the literary merit of the work under consideration.

These two quotations from early essays show the germs of this idea. But shortly afterwards one finds the following: "I would have a work of art such that it needs only to be completed and cannot be altered by each interpretation." [2] Here Eliot is writing of drama, which attaches a special meaning to the word "interpretation", but it is conceivable that one could postulate a work that would not be complete until one had taken into account every possible interpretation. In fact the interpretations are to be added arithmetically and not algebraically. This suggestion is not borne out by "I am used to having cosmic significances which I never suspected, extracted from my work by enthusiastic persons at a distance; and to being informed that something I meant seriously is vers de société;

1. "The Sacred Wood" p. 11.
2. "Four Elizabethan Dramatists". 1924. (Selected Essays)

and to having my personal biography reconstructed from passages which I got out of books, or which I invented because they sounded well." [1] This thrust must be directed at people who have made suggestions bordering on the absurd - and where Eliot is concerned there have been many of these - for in "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" he says, "A poet.....in one sense, but a very limited one..... knows better what his poems 'mean' than can anyone else; he may know the history of their composition, the material which has gone in and come out in an unrecognizable form, and he knows what he was trying to do and what he was meaning to mean. But what a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author; and indeed, in the course of time a poet may become merely a reader in respect to his own works, forgetting their original meaning - or without forgetting, merely changing." [2]

And again, in "The Music of Poetry", "It is a commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase. It is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins." Further on in the same essay: "A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant..... The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid - it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of. The different interpretations may all be a partial formulation of one thing; the ambiguities may be due to the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate."

These quotations from later essays [3] are so definitely opposed to that from "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" that one is forced to look for an explanation.

1. "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca". 1927. (Selected Essays)
2. op. cit. p. 130.
3. There are also other similar remarks, for instance in his introduction to "A Choice of Kipling's Verse" in 1942, Eliot writes "Most of us are interested in the form for its own sake - not apart from the content, but because we aim at making something which shall first of all be, something which in consequence will have the capability of exciting, within a limited range, a considerable variety of responses from different readers."

Two immediately spring to mind; of these I have suggested one - that the earlier statement was made with certain critiques in Eliot's mind. The second is simply that Eliot changed his mind - but this is such a complete volte-face that it does not ring true. A complete volte-face is a rarity in Eliot's work.[1] One would have to find a very cogent reason behind such a change of mind to justify it - and the only obvious one is that Eliot heard so many different interpretations of his own poems that he became confused himself. I do not think Eliot is as dishonest as to accept multiple meanings merely because they enhance the value of his work, in spite of their being far from his mind at the time of writing.

At all events, this doctrine is a logical outgrowth of classicism. The poem stands on its own legs - once written it no longer has any connection with the author (except insofar as it is inevitably related to the corpus of the poet's work, part of which may not at that time have been written). But the poem, although on its own, cannot act without the cooperation of a reader (concerning works of art one may say, almost dogmatically, that they are not there unless someone is looking at them - indeed they are still not there if the observer happens to be deficient in the sense or senses to which the work of art appeals). Thus something occurs when the poem and the reader are brought together, for which both the reader and the poem are essential. As far as Eliot is concerned, it is this phenomenon that is the poem - and of course the phenomenon is a function of the nature of the reader. The poem itself (in the normal sense, not the one which I have imputed to Eliot's usage) is a constant and does not change. This is perhaps obscure. "I shall, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when" a piece of iron is brought near a magnet. Let the magnet equal the written poem. It is the factor that contains the capacity for action. The

1. The most notable example is the change in his attitude towards Milton that is shown by his essay "Milton" that appeared in the Sewanee Review for Spring 1948 (Vol. LVI No. 2) where he reverses his original dictum that Milton is a fatal influence for contemporary poets.

reader is represented by the piece of iron. What occurs is that the piece of iron undergoes an experience, and it is this experience that is analogous to the 'real' poem. The magnet exerts an intangible force that acts on the iron: the poem exerts a force that affects the reader. If the two are at too great a distance there is no action.

Now the shape, number, and direction of the magnetic lines of force will be modified by the mass and shape of the piece of iron, and in addition by the composition of the iron and its crystalline structure. This will change the exact action of the force. Similarly the experience undergone by the reader depends on his nature, which partially determines the way the poem appears to him - and thus of his experience of the poem.

If it is indeed this action that is really the 'poem', it follows at once that multiple interpretations can be valid - since the 'poem' itself changes with the reader, and even the reader's state of mind. Whether or not this is a rewarding hypothesis is difficult to say. It is of course unsettling to find that one is dealing, not with a constant, but with a variable. Einstein's approach to gravitation must at first have appeared to be a wilful complication - it is the application of such ideas that determine their value. This is unfortunately not the place to track this one down any further.

This idea can, however, have a certain application to Eliot's poetry. Eliot usually is writing on a 'large' theme; now when Wordsworth (inter alios) is writing on a 'large' theme it is all expressed down to the last comma - the subject is hemmed in by Wordsworth's viewpoint. Universality is excluded because to a reader whose views are diametrically opposed to those of Wordsworth it seems that one is getting a very one-sided estimation of the situation. This is inevitable with short poems written in the didactic manner. Shakespeare and Dante do not suffer from this failing, Shakespeare because in a play it is impossible not to present differing (if complementary) points of view and still have a balanced structure; Dante because his framework is so vast that it transcends Dante's own point of view, which was often petty. More recently another way of avoiding this problem has been

evolved by the Imagists. They present a picture and leave it at that. A third method is found in Chinese poetry, and it is perhaps to this that Eliot's writing is most akin in this respect.

"Taking Leave of a Friend

"Blue mountains to the north of the walls,
White river winding about them;
Here we must make separation
And go out through a thousand miles of dead grass.

"Mind like a floating wide cloud,
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances
Who bow over their clasped hands at a distance.
Our horses neigh to each other
as we are departing."

I have quoted Pound's rendition of this poem of Rihaku's deliberately, for although it has come into English via the Italian of Fenollosa, and it has indubitably been influenced on the way by remnants of Pound's own Imagism, it bears (at all events to one who knows no Chinese and has made no proper study of Chinese poetry in translation) a marked resemblance in flavour to the allegedly fine translations which Arthur Waley has made.

The technique here is essentially symbolistic and associative. On this there need be no elaboration. What I wish to point out is the effect of an implied generalization of a particular experience. Here the sentence "Our horses neigh to each other as we are departing" contains the entire effect of the poem (or seems to - in reality it is a fusion and vivification of the preceding material) and this effect takes place through the symbolic and associative meaning which one attaches to it. Eliot often does precisely the same thing. A notable example is the first stanza of the second section of "The Hollow Men" -

"Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star."

Eliot has placed his key phrase in the middle of the stanza. "Sunlight on a broken column" is an image that explodes in the reader's consciousness to give a vivid picture of this death-in-life. Life (the sunlight) is present but the spirit (the column is broken, the civilization is dead) has decayed. This light illuminates the rest of the stanza, giving meaning to lines that are too diffuse to have significance when taken alone.[1] It is the same principle nevertheless. What I wish to suggest is that since Pound did most of his work on the Fenollosa manuscripts in about 1915 it is probable that Eliot was well aware of it before he produced much of the poetry which he has allowed to survive. It is well-known that Eliot learned much from Pound,[2] and it is quite conceivable that this type of sudden but oblique summing-up was one of the things he learned.

Eliot has also somewhat extended this idea in a manner that is well enunciated by Matthiessen, who says[3] that by his use of images Eliot designs "to give the exact perceived detail, without comment, and let that picture carry its own connotations. As he said once in conversation, the images here are 'consciously concrete'; they correspond as closely as possible to something he has actually seen and remembered. But he also believes that if they are clearly rendered, they will stand for something larger than themselves; they will not depend for their apprehension upon any private reference, but will become unconsciously general."[4] Later Matthiessen continues, "Indeed, by his own account of the 'consciously concrete' and 'unconsciously general', it is apparent that he believes that poetry should suggest much more than it can state directly to the mind."

1. "A single verse is not poetry unless it is a one verse poem; and even the finest line draws life from its context." "The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism". p. 146.
2. "I have, in recent years, cursed Mr. Pound often enough; for I am never sure that I can call my verse my own; just when I am most pleased with myself, I find that I have only caught up some echo from a verse of Pound's." Eliot in "Isolated Superiority" - Dial, Jan. 1928.
3. "The Achievement of T.S. Eliot".
4. This idea was, of course, carried past its logical extremity by the Auden-Isherwood group.

This can probably be regarded as a corollary to Eliot's theory of multiple interpretations since in each case the one is merged into the many - and all of it serves to reveal the One. An interesting comparison can be made between it and something Eliot has written of Swinburne.[1] "And this is connected with an interesting fact about his vocabulary: he uses the most general word, because his emotion is never particular, never in direct line of vision, never focused; it is emotion reinforced, not by intensification, but by expansion.

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

You see that Provence is the merest point of diffusion here. Swinburne defines the place by the most general word, which has for him its own value. 'Gold', 'ruin', 'dolorous': it is not merely the sound that he wants, but the vague associations of idea that the words give him." Eliot has obviously learned also from Swinburne, if only à rebours. With Eliot the associations of certain words have usually a significance that is relevant to the poem (except hyacinths, which seem to mean happiness to Eliot; and hair, which seems to be more than usually freighted with erotic overtones in his work). Nevertheless Eliot's emotion is often reinforced by expansion, though it is always an expansion from the particular to the general.

Matthiessen's statement quoted above concerning Eliot's views on the suggestiveness of poetry needs some qualification. For instance, in his essay on Andrew Marvell, in comparing Marvell's "The Nymph and the Faun" with William Morris' "The Nymph's Song to Hylas", he writes, "the former have the suggestiveness of true poetry; and the verses of Morris, which are nothing if not an attempt to suggest, really suggest nothing; and we are inclined to infer that the suggestiveness is the aura around a bright clear centre, that you cannot have the aura alone. The day-dreaming feeling of Morris is essentially a slight thing: Marvell takes a slight affair, the feeling of a girl for her pet, and gives it a connexion with that inexhaustible and terrible nebula of emotion which surrounds all our exact and practical passions and mingles with them."[2]

1. "Swinburne as Poet" - "The Sacred Wood" p. 147.
2. Selected Essays

From this, I do not think that it is possible to say that Eliot maintained that poetry should "suggest much more than it can state directly to the mind". The idea is right but the phrasing is all wrong. One could say that the suggestive aura that surrounds a poem should contrive to spread the meaning from its bright clear centre to include a host of other vaguer things. I hesitate to add the phrase 'that are perhaps incommunicable by words directly' since I believe that Eliot writes somewhere that the incommunicable in poetry is often only the vague or the unformed, though I have been unable to find it.

But certainly Eliot himself makes full use of this suggestiveness, this aura of dream, although as Taupin writes, "Si les poèmes de Mallarmé flottent dans le rêve, ceux d'Eliot s'arrachent au rêve continuellement par l'intensité d'un mot, l'incision d'une image." [1]

The dream-like quality of some of Eliot's verse often comes from liturgical connotations. There is a trance-invoking quality in litanies that is akin to dream, and something in ritual that transcends the apparent meaning. ("All art emulates the condition of ritual. That is what it comes from and to that it must always return for nourishment." [2]) It is perhaps partly from this quality that Eliot derives his predilection for the writings of St. John of the Cross - a mystic suspended between dream and logic. This is, of course, not Eliot's definition of mystical writing; he writes "Poetry is mystical when it intends to convey, and succeeds in conveying, to the reader (at the same time that it is real poetry) the statement of a perfectly definite experience which we call the mystical experience. And if it is real poetry it will convey this experience in some degree to every reader who genuinely feels it as poetry. Instead of being obscure it will be pellucid." [3] This definition would, however, have more meaning if the 'mystical experience' were defined.

The place of mysticism and its meaning in Eliot's writing have been discussed by Leonard Unger (Southern Review pp 745-770), Philip Wheelwright ("Eliot's Philosophical Themes", Focus #3) and others. All that should be pointed out here is

1. Réné Taupin. "L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur la Poèsie Americaine."
2. Eliot in 'Marianne Moore': Dial, Dec. 1923.
3. "The Silurist". Dial, Sept. 1927.

that the essential stillness of the second 'paragraph' of the second section of "Ash Wednesday", whose origins stem (as does much of "Ash Wednesday") from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, has a distinct kinship with the hysteria of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night". In a dream one could almost connect them - they have the same flavour. In this section of "Ash Wednesday" the hysteria has passed.

Perhaps the dream is most noticeable in "Landscapes" - and indeed in 'Minor Poems' generally, where the thought itself is almost tentative, so obliquely is it put. The thought is conveyed almost entirely by the atmosphere and is only brought out "par l'intensité d'un mot, l'incision d'une image". "Rannoch, by Glencoe" depends on the sentence "Memory is strong / Beyond the bone."; "Virginia" on "Iron thoughts came with me / And go with me".

Dreams too, have many meanings. In some ways Eliot seems to be of the opinion that the meaning of a poem doesn't matter as long as the reader is aware of the existence of a meaning. He writes, for instance, "I do not recommend in first reading the first canto of the Inferno, worrying about the identity of the Leopard, the Lion or the She-Wolf. It is really better, at the start, not to know or care what they do mean. What we should consider is not so much the meaning of the images, but the reverse process, that which led to a man having an idea to express it in images. We have to consider the type of mind which by nature and practice tended to express itself in allegory: and for a competent poet allegory means clear visual images. And clear visual images are given much more intensity by having a meaning - we do not need to know what the meaning is, but in our awareness of the image we must be aware that the image is there too."[1] It should, however, be considered that here Eliot is speaking of individual images and not of the poem as a whole. Nevertheless, in writing of Pound's "Cantos", he says, "As for the meaning of the Cantos, that never worries me, and I do not believe that I care. I know that Pound has a scheme and a kind of philosophy behind it; it is quite enough for me that he thinks he knows what he is doing; I am glad the philosophy is there, but I am not interested it it."[2]

1. "Dante" 1929. From Selected Essays.
2. "Isolated Superiority".

In this case it might be possible to say that Eliot is merely uninterested in Pound's philosophy because he doubts its validity.

The explanations suggested above for these remarks are by no means watertight, but one must remember that in 1928 Eliot can hardly have expected to have each of his printed words minutely examined for inconsistencies. Also "I can never re-read any of my own prose writings without acute embarassment: I shirk the task, and consequently may not take account of all the assertions to which I have at one time or another committed myself; I may often repeat what I have said before, and I may equally well contradict myself". [1]

These two statements of Eliot's seem to be isolated, and on balance I think it remains clear that Eliot does require a poem to have a meaning, although it may be quite obscure, and although the meaning cannot be precisely conveyed by a prose paraphrase - as he writes, "If only a part of the meaning can be conveyed by paraphrase, that is because the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist." [2]; and further, "anything that can be said as well in prose can be said better in prose. And a great deal, in the way of meaning, belongs to prose rather than poetry." [3]

The meaning, however, may not appear in the poet's mind to begin with. This idea naturally makes it difficult to grasp the problem at all firmly. For instance he writes, "For other poets.....the poem may begin to shape itself in fragments of musical rhythm, and its structure will first appear in terms analogous to musical form; and such poets find it expedient to occupy their conscious mind with the craftsman's problems, leaving the deeper meaning to emerge, if there, from a lower level. It is a question then of what one chooses to be conscious of, and of how

1. "The Music of Poetry". See also "The Poetry of W.B. Yeats". These remarks may be aimed at those who have said with Yvor Winters that "Eliot is a theorist who has repeatedly contradicted himself on every important issue that he has touched" ("The Anatomy of Nonsense").
2. "The Music of Poetry."
3. "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". p. 152.

much is conveyed indirectly by the musical impression upon the sensibility - always remembering that the use of the word 'musical' and of musical analogies, in discussing poetry, has its dangers if we do not constantly check its limitations: for the music of verse is inseparable from the meanings and associations of words." [1]

This idea is anticipated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", where Eliot, after exploring his analogy of the poet as catalyst and using it to prove the inexactitude of the Wordsworthian formula for poetry, claims 'concentration' as one of the main qualities of a poem: "it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not 'recollected,' and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is 'tranquil' only in that it is a passive attending upon the event. Of course this is not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious." This idea emerges once more in the suggestion that one of the advantages of drama as a form for the poet to use is that drama, "by its problems which have constantly to be solved, has enough to keep the poet's <u>conscious</u> mind fully occupied, as the painter's by the manipulation of his tools." [2]

Thus meaning, like everything that Eliot touches, has become elusive. It is this quality in Eliot's criticism (as well as in his verse) that muddles some readers. Eliot looks at all the possibilities and draws tentative conclusions that are always modified - and the modification depends on the context. There are surprisingly few generalizations in Eliot's essays. He uses the scientific approach, examining <u>all</u> the evidence, not merely that which supports a preconceived theory, and the synthesis of the type of data gathered by this method always results in a more complex expression than does the latter method; more complex, but more accurate.

1. Introduction to "A Choice of Kipling's Verse."

2. "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". p. 154.

Looking at it from a purely psychological view-point it seems likely that Eliot writes his poetry without starting from a precise plan of the poem's meaning since he discusses this type of writing much more fully and more interestedly than he does the reverse method. This is, I think, borne out by a study of his poetry. Such a poem as "The Waste Land" bears the marks of much reworking, and it is known that this was originally a considerably longer poem. One imagines that Eliot had a pretty fair idea of what he intended to do when he started (although it is conceivable that he originally meant to write something quite, quite different), but one can easily see the way a line would occur to him that had a very faint echo of something else (or perhaps only seemed to Eliot to have this resemblance), and how he deliberately contrived to strengthen the resemblance. The beginning of the Tiresias passage (l. 220 et seq.) makes a good ground for this particular bit of speculation with its echoes of Sappho, Stevenson, Keats, and Tennyson; or lines 182-3 with the connection between "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept" and the Prothalamion, on which is superimposed the pun in the word 'Leman'.

Eliot maintains on the whole that the particular beliefs of the poet are immaterial to the poetry. "I doubt whether belief proper enters into the activity of a great poet, qua poet. That is, Dante, qua poet, did not believe or disbelieve the Thomist cosmology or theory of the soul: he merely made use of it, or a fusion took place between his initial emotional impulses and a theory, for the purpose of making poetry. The poet makes poetry, the metaphysician makes metaphysics, the bee makes honey, the spider secretes a filament; you can hardly say that any of these agents believes: he merely does." [1] His idea is essentially that great poetry is not written with the poet's beliefs in the forefront of the poetry. For instance in protesting Valéry's theory that philosophical poetry is finished and that "le poète moderne essaie de produire en nous un <u>état</u> et de porter cet état exceptionnel au point d'une jouissance parfaite", Eliot writes "A state, in itself, is nothing whatever..... The poet does not aim to excite - that is not even a test of his success - but to set something down; the state of the reader is merely

1. "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" 1927.

that reader's particular mode of perceiving what the poet has caught in words. Dante, more than any other poet, has succeeded in dealing with his philosophy, not as a theory (in the modern and not the Greek sense of the word) or as his own comment or reflection, but in terms of something perceived. When most of our modern poets confine themselves to what they had (sic) perceived, they produce for us, usually, only odds and ends of still life and stage properties; but that does not imply so much that the method of Dante is obsolete, as that our vision is perhaps comparatively restricted". [1]

Here there is an implication that modern poetry, if it merely presents what is perceived, fails - but Eliot puts this down not to a flaw in modern poetic ability but to a flaw in modern methods of perception. Nowadays one does not perceive things according to a pattern; there is no framework on which the observations may be hung, and consequently any pure perception must appear fragmentary. The perceptions of Dante were made in accordance with a prescribed scheme that automatically turned them into a unified whole. Perhaps Eliot would consider this change as another consequence of "the transference of attention from theology to science (which was) the beginning of that slow disease which was to separate and then confuse thought and feeling." [2]

In the essay on Dante quoted above, Eliot defines his views on the relation between poetry and philosophy. "Without doubt, the effort of the philosopher proper, the man who is trying to deal with ideas in themselves, and the effort of the poet, who may be trying to realize ideas, cannot be carried on at the same time. But this is not to deny that poetry can be in some sense philosophic. The poet can deal with philosophic ideas, not as matter for argument, but as matter for introspection. The original form of a philosophy cannot be poetic. But poetry can be penetrated by a philosophic idea, it can deal with this idea when it has reached the point of immediate acceptance, when it has become almost a physical modification. If we divorced poetry and philosophy altogether, we should bring

1. "Dante" - the essay included in "The Sacred Wood".
2. "A Note on Two Odes of Cowley".

a serious impeachment, not only against Dante, but against most of Dante's contemporaries."

Many years later (in 1945) Eliot summed up the question of whether the 'message' is all or nothing in a poem by writing, "To arrive at what seems to me the more correct view, we may consider first, that when a poem has expressed successfully a philosophy we find that it is a philosophy which is already in existence, not one of his own invention; when he has made a successful poem which conveys information, the facts are not of his own discovery". (Here Eliot adduces the evidence of Dante, Lucretius and the Georgics of Virgil). "And this leads me to conclude, that these poems were not designed to persuade the readers to an intellectual assent, but to convey an emotional equivalent for the ideas. What Lucretius and Dante teach you, in fact, is what it feels like to hold certain beliefs; what Virgil teaches you, is to feel yourself inside the agrarian life." [1] It is seen that at this point Eliot has tied in his theory of the objective-correlative - through the phrase "emotional equivalent for the ideas".

But the general conclusion one may draw is that Eliot views philosophy as a possible framework for poetry; and there may be more or less framework used, ranging from enough to stick the other material together to enough to give the whole work a definite direction. In the essay on Blake from "The Sacred Wood" Eliot writes that if Blake had had an organized framework and a respect for common sense he would have been a Dante. [2] On the other hand "It is not a permanent necessity that poets should be interested in philosophy, or in any other subject." [3]

This last statement follows closely after Eliot has said that it does not matter what a poet's interests are; "our only condition is that he turn them into poetry, and not merely meditate on them poetically. A philosophical theory which has entered into poetry is established, for its truth or falsity in one sense ceases to matter, and its truth in another sense is proved."

1. "The Social Function of Poetry". Adelphi, July-Sept. 1945. p. 152.
2. op. cit. p. 157-8.
3. "The Metaphysical Poets".

Where Eliot says that the truth or falsity does not matter he is not implying that art is above philosophy - "the doctrine of art of art's sake.....was a hopeless admission of irresponsibility".[1] He is on the contrary enunciating something that approaches a pragmatic viewpoint - if the poem 'works', the philosophy 'works' (or, rather, is possible) and is therefore, to some extent, true. This is not entirely in harmony with Eliot's general views but fits in with the following statement: "Poetry cannot prove that anything is true: it can only create a variety of wholes composed of intellectual and emotional constituents, justifying the emotion by the thought and the thought by the emotion; it proves successively, or fails to prove, that certain worlds of thought and feeling are possible. It provides intellectual sanction for feeling and esthetic sanction for thought."[2]

Eliot's own work certainly bears out his assertion that good 'philosophical' poetry never has anything original to contribute to the sphere of philosophy. Philosophically he has no new ideas. Luciano Anceschi, who, in his essay "T. S. Eliot and Philosophical Poetry",[3] sets forward this view briefly and concisely, maintains that Eliot's only possible escape from the "wan sense of a sham and dissolving society, of the grim silence of a world whose inner authenticity and self-integrity is already lost" is along the path "indicated by St. John of the Cross, a 'divestment of the love of the creature', a transference elsewhere of the ideal value, a Christian renascence and finally an orientation, as a student of English letters has put it, 'toward the haven referred to by the Mariner of Marina', to the 'logical conclusion' of this truth:

> "This form this face, this life
> Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
> Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,
> The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships."

And the early Averroism is transformed into the 'eternal present' of Christianity."[4]

1. "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". p. 151
2. "Poetry and Propaganda" - The Bookman, Feb. 1930.
3. Included in "T. S. Eliot - a Symposium" compiled by Richard March and Tambimuttu.
4. Luciano Anceschi op. cit.

Eliot proceeds, then, from an accepted heresy to orthodox Anglicanism. In other, and more important respects Eliot continues to practise what he preaches. When one considers it, one realizes that Eliot himself, in his poetry, does show you what it feels like to hold certain ideas. He is rarely didactic, he rarely lays down a party line (I am not considering "The Rock" here). It is always:

> "If you came this way,
> Taking the route you would be likely to take
> From the place you would be likely to come from" [1]

and even passages such as:

> "As we grow older
> The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
> Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
> Isolated, with no before and no after,
> But a lifetime burning in every moment
> And not the lifetime of one man only
> But of old stones that cannot be deciphered" [2]

do not lay down a law but instead present a point of view - a way of perceiving.

At first it seems that there is an exception in:

> "You say I am repeating
> Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
> Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
> To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
> You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy....." [3]

but even here it is the voice within the writer, within the reader, which chants the answer in the form of a riddle - a Delphic riddle.

It is significant that many of Eliot's poems are put in the mouth of some person or persons - the reader sees what it feels like to hold their ideas: "Marina" from the mouth of Pericles, "A Song for Simeon", "Journey of the Magi", even "The Hollow Men" is the description of himself and his kind by the epitome of a type.

The extent, however, to which Eliot does write his poems on a framework that is at least metaphysical is abundantly indicated by his epigraphs to the "Four Quartets":

1. "Little Gidding" section 1, para. 2.
2. "East Coker" section 5, para. 2.
3 ibid. section 3, para. 2.

"The Logos is common to all but most men live as if
they had a wisdom of their own" - Heraclitus.

"The way up and the way down are the same" - Heraclitus.

Other epigraphs, drawn from less metaphysical contexts, provide equally metaphysical ideas:

"Quis hic locus, quae
regio, quae mundi plaga?".

The significance of this of Seneca's is not clear until one discovers that it is what Hercules says when, recovering from his madness, he sees that he has slain his children. And the Sybil's "apothanein thelo" needs no further comment.

These give the departure point of the poems, but often the poem itself is constructed around a rather different aspect of the same idea. For instance "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" is preceded by line 1342 of Aeschylus' Agamemnon - "Oh, I am struck deep within my flesh". This is the signal for known tragedy and horror to descend again upon the house of Atreus. In Eliot's poem, on the other hand, one does not know what is going to happen or even whether the mills of God have been set in motion. There are little ominous signs but they may not mean anything singly. It is significant that, except for the first two stanzas (the setting of the stage), the whole poem is one sentence. There is no one event that is important enough to warrant a separate sentence; it is the total generalized impression that matters. The only way to fit Sweeney exactly to Agamemnon is to assume that the poem is written from the point of view of the victim - Agamemnon's parallel. True Agamemnon was not aware of what was happening and what the results would be; there were merely little signs, Cassandra's cursed truth. But the idea that "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" is written from the point of view of the hypothetical victim is not one that comes naturally.

The framework of "The Waste Land" is, essentially, neither philosophical nor theological but anthropological. The theology can be considered as a branch of anthropology and can thereby be included in the overriding framework. Eliot himself says that his departure point for "The Waste Land" was Jessie Weston's "From Ritual to Romance". "Indeed," he writes in the notes to this poem, "so deeply am I

indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do". When Eliot wrote this sentence he was obviously writing from his own point of view; to a folk-lorist or anthropologist reading "The Waste Land" the literary references would be the difficulty - indeed this seems to be so generally from the amount of space in commentaries which is devoted to them. Relatively little has been written on, for instance, the phrase "Murmur of maternal lamentation".[1] Although the reference here is clearly to Rachel weeping for her children, one also recalls "Niobe all tears" and (in view of Eliot's reference to "The Golden Bough" in the notes) the lament of the women for the slain Adonis and the lament of Isis or Nephthys for Osiris. The woman who "drew her long black hair out tight / And fiddled whisper music on those strings" is perhaps a reference to the Maenads - but there has been little controversy about it.

The idea which is the theme of both "From Ritual to Romance" and "The Waste Land", is, expressed as abstractly as possible, the degeneration of form into formalism. Miss Weston writes of the Grail legends as being the containers of the essential ritual and symbolism of a wide-spread fertility cult, which had been forgotten. Eliot writes of a world whose significance has been forgotten, a world that preserves the spiritual forms without any idea of their meaning. He equates this with aridity and the failure of the sexual stimulus - in the Grail legends the Fisher King was rendered impotent until the Hero of the Grail delivered him and his country. Much has been made of the Tiresias passage, in which the futility and sordidness of the sexual act (to the inhabitants of the Waste Land) is set forth, as the central portion of the poem. It is true that this is central in that it is the key-note to the fertility theme of the poem. It illuminates the barrenness of the first part of "A Game of Chess" and the frustrated fertility of the second part, and it leads to the references to eastern fertility deities throughout the poem. But there is another passage that is almost equally important and that is the Madame Sosostris passage.[2] It is here that one can find the answer to the

1. "The Waste Land" l. 376.
2. ll. 43-59

difficulty of explaining why, when aridity is the affliction, water also brings death (vide. Phlebas in "Death by Water". Madame Sosostris, the clairvoyante, sets forth in terms of the Tarot pack the essential symbols of the poem - the man with three staves (the Fisher King), and the Hanged Man (the Dying God). She does not find the Hanged Man; that is to say that the body of the slain god is not recovered and therefore cannot be resurrected - and there will be no Spring, no fertility. She also says "Fear death by water". I take this to be a further extension of the curse that is laid upon the person who is having his fortune told. When she says "I do not find the Hanged Man" she means that in his fortune the Hanged God does not appear, that the client will not find the Hanged Man in his life as she does not find it in his fortune. Similarly "Fear death by water" can be taken as "You will fear death by water" - that is, that the client will fear the only thing that will save him (water) in that he fears it will kill him. Similarly one can fear that the way of rejection will bring death, that by divesting oneself of the love for created beings one will bring about not one's salvation but merely an earthly spiritual death. On this basis, it is perhaps possible to consider that the fourth section of "The Waste Land" is concerned not with the death of Phlebas but his apparent death in following the way of rejection. He has emancipated himself from the world, from the profit and loss and from age and youth. One could associate the whirlpool under these circumstances with the heart of light. This is perhaps backed up by the phrase "c'était un sort pénible" which occurs in the earlier version, in "Dans le Restaurant", but which has been eliminated from the English version.

The Madame Sosostris passage appears to me as the 'argument' of the poem. The resemblance of "The Burial of the Dead" to a preface or prologue is rendered very strong by its last line " 'You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!'" which is the last line of the introduction to Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal". Seen in terms of a play, the first section of "The Burial of the Dead" is the setting of the stage, the adjustment of the lighting. In the second section the leitmotiv is introduced through the words of Ezekiel and Ecclesiastes and emerges

crisply in "I will show you fear in a handful of dust". The significance of this line is accentuated by its reference back to the epigraph. Next the sexual aspect of the poem is introduced in a restrained manner, the only emphasis at this point being given by "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead" where the underlined phrase harks back to "and desire shall fail"[1] which comes from the same passage of Ecclesiastes as "the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief". There follows the argement with the essentials at first set out in symbolic terms - it should be noted that the Tarot deck of cards grew out of the Grail cult, some of the cards retaining symbols more or less identical with those of the Grail legends.[2] But it is in line 60 with "Unreal City" that one reaches the attack on the central material of the poem. "I had not thought death had undone so many" - all the Stetsons have been undone. The Stetson passage is an invocation of the reader, addressed to all those who have known defeat (Mylae), to all those who have 'corpses' buried in their lives which still disturb them.

When this is completed, the second section of "The Waste Land", "A Game of Chess", focusses down on individual types, and the immediate action of the drama is at hand.

It has been said that the rain in "What the Thunder said" came too late, but I cannot see that this is necessarily so. At the beginning of this section is shown the agony of the protagonist. He suffers, but he is not aware of why he suffers. It is not until line 359 ("Who is the third who walks always beside you?") that he sees anything but his own discomfort. In the following paragraph he realizes that the world is disorganized."Who are those hooded hordes swarming over endless plains.....What is the city.....cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air Falling towers.....Unreal". At first this world has little connection with the world he knew. The connection arrives in "And upside down in air were towers / Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours / And voices singing out of empty

1. Most of Eliot's erotic stimuli are visual in origin.
2. See "From Ritual to Romance".

cisterns and exhausted wells", where the bells take one back to Saint Mary Woolnoth in line 67 - largely through the use of the adjective "reminiscent".

One sees that this is a stage in the advance of the protagonist by the evocation of the Chapel Perilous in the following paragraph, since this was one of the trials that the Grail hero had to undergo - and because the protagonist realizes that "Dry bones can harm no one" he survives the trial. And it is then that there are the signs of rain.

The significance of the "Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata" passage is that here the protagonist thinks, and realizes his failings: "what have we given...I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only..." The Damyata lines reveal the fact that once "The boat responded / Gaily..." This looking backward is a search for the losing of the way between childhood and maturity, which occurs often in Eliot's poetry but often it has been mistaken for a Proustian récherche du temps perdu. Childhood is equated with innocence throughout Eliot's verse: the "children's voices in the orchard" of "New Hampshire", "Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children, / Hidden excitedly, containing laughter" of "Burnt Norton" I, "the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage" of section V of the same poem, and finally "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."

Finally the protagonist "sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me". The drought is behind, past, the Fisher King is no longer lying wounded on his couch, but is fishing upon the shore. The final eight lines recapitulate, by means of quotations, the two states of mind of the protagonist - whether to resign himself to despair and acedia or to the way of rejections: to "London bridge is falling down" and "I am the gloomy one, the widower, the unconsoled" [1] or to feel that the loveless and lovelorn will find love tomorrow and to "dive back into the fire that refined him" like Arnault. In the end, however the rules datta, dayadhvam, damyata are recalled and there is a suggestion that this will bring the peace that passeth all understanding.

1. El Desdichado.

III THE NATURE OF POETRY

Any discussion of the closing of "The Waste Land" is liable to lead to something like: "The meter of The Waste Land.....is a broken blank verse interspersed with bad free verse and rimed doggerel. And what is one to say of the last eight lines of The Waste Land, which are composed.....of unaltered passages from seven sources? A sequence of such quotations cannot by any stretch of the imagination achieve unity, and its disunity can be justified on no grounds except the Adams-Eliot doctrine of modern art."[1] In point of fact one would only rarely meet the first sentence of this quotation. But nevertheless, to anyone brought up on an almost exclusive diet of the Romantics, this does raise the question of the nature of poetry, of what constitutes a poem.

There have been innumerable attempts made at a definition of poetry but none of them are satisfactory - mostly they turn out to be definitions of the type of poetry that the definer himself writes. "Poets, when they meditate about poetry at all, are liable to generalize either from their own accomplishment or from their own designs; and their purposes and interests, if more exact, may also be narrower than those of their readers, so that their pronouncements should usually be considered in relation to their own poems."[2] Eliot himself, in reviewing Housman's "Name and Nature of Poetry"[3] writes, "Repeated meditations led me first to suspect, that there are surprisingly few things that can be said about Poetry; and of these few, the most turn out either to be false or to say nothing of significance". However this is a singularly coy essay throughout (of Housman's statement that meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not, Eliot says "I should not like to deny this, still less to assert it.") and should not be taken too seriously, since there are plenty of places where Eliot himself makes relevant remarks about poetry in general.

1. Yvor Winters; "The Anatomy of Nonsense".
2. Eliot, reviewing Middleton Murry's "Shakespeare", Criterion, July, 1936.
3. Criterion, Oct., 1933.

It probably is impossible to define poetry in any truly satisfactory, that is to say universal, manner, because poetry is so much a subjective thing. Other than the human mind there are no tools or machines that can be brought to bear on poetry - even the most mechanical quality of poetry, metre, takes on the aspect of an imponderable since it depends so often on a spoken emphasis (except in the case of the quantitative scansion of classical verse). The word 'poetry' has only a vague, diffuse meaning that cannot be pinned down - it includes too much. As a result, many people have pointed out that there must be a common factor to this heterogenous collection that is labelled poetry; and that this common factor is an 'essence' which perhaps can be defined. At this point the argument becomes too metaphysical to be of very much use. As Eliot says, "The poet himself.....is not allowed to reply that poetry is poetry and not science or religion - unless he or some of his mistaken friends produce a theory that Poetry is Pure Poetry, Pure Poetry turning out to be something else than poetry and thereby securing respect."[1] In point of fact Eliot was speaking of another extraction (in the chemical sense) of poetry, whereby one tries to weed out the 'non-poetic' elements of didacticism, philosophy, politics, and higher mathematics.

But Eliot himself recognizes the existence of some such essence, if only as the quality that distinguishes poetry from prose. For instance in the essay on Dante included in "Selected Essays" he writes: "It is a test (a positive test, I do not assert that it is valid negatively) that genuine poetry can be communicated before it can be understood. The impression so obtained (from reading Dante with very little command of Italian) was new, and of, I believe, the objective 'poetic emotion'". Of Dryden he writes, "It is impossible to dismiss his verses as 'prosaic'; turn them into prose and they are transmuted, the fragrance is gone. The reproach of the prosaic, levelled at Dryden, rests upon a confusion between the emotions considered to be poetic - which is a matter allowing considerable latitude of fashion - and the <u>result</u> of personal emotion in poetry; and also there is the emotion <u>depicted</u> by the poet in some kinds of poetry, of which the 'Testaments' of

1. "Religion without Humanism" from "Humanism and America".

Villon is an example. Again, there is the intellect, the originality and independence and clarity of what we vaguely call the poet's 'point of view'. Our valuation of poetry, in short, depends upon several considerations, upon the permanent and upon the mutable and transitory. When we try to isolate the essentially poetic, we bring our pursuit in the end to something insignificant; our standards vary with every poet whom we consider. All we can hope to do, in the attempt to introduce some order into our preferences, is to clarify our reasons for finding pleasure in the poetry that we like."[1] Here Eliot is pointing out that the adjective 'poetic' is applied only to what the individual opinion happens to consider poetic - and of course what is not poetic is prosaic. One could therefore hypothesize someone who, brought up on (say) William Carlos Williams and George Barker, would consider Shelley prosaic. Indeed, if the devotees of Tennyson at the end of the last century had never heard of Donne, surely it was because those who had run across any of his work did not find it poetic?

At this point he does not consider the difference between poetry and prose since he is concerned more with the difference between the poetry of Dryden and that of other poets. He points to the necessity of having reasons with which to back up one's opinions, and then, anticipating the objection that Dryden didn't write 'poetry' because he used un-poetic material,[2] he writes, "Dryden is distinguished principally by his poetic ability. We prize him, as we do Mallarmé, for what he made of his material. Our estimate is only in part the appreciation of ingenuity; in the end the result is poetry." Later he admits that Dryden lacks something and says, "The question...may be justly asked: whether, without this...verse can be poetry? What is man to decide what poetry is?"

The last sentence is unworthy of Eliot. Such overstatement of a grain of truth is unlike him - it is altogether too slick. One might as well ask what is God that He may decide what man is?

1. "Homage to John Dryden".
2. "Thus Matthew Arnold observes, in mentioning Dryden and Pope together, 'that their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits, genuine poetry is conceived in the soul'. Arnold was, perhaps not altogether the detached critic when he wrote this line; he may have been stirred to a defence of his own poetry, conceived and composed in the soul of a mid-centure Oxford graduate." One feels that perhaps Eliot has fallen into the trap on top of Arnold.

Eliot does not attempt to define poetry. He does, on the other hand, make a number of particular statements about poetry from which one can gain some insight into his ideas of what poetry is. The most notable (and noted) of these is Eliot's obsession with a poet's sense of his own time, and the place of tradition in poetry. This was first set out in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" but has continued to appear in his prose writings from time to time (for instance in "What is a Classic") until he extends and refashions his theory at some length in "After Strange Gods".

Before getting down to Eliot on this subject I should like to quote part of the introduction to Oswald Spengler's "Decline of the West". "....for whom is there History? The question is seemingly paradoxical for history is obviously for everyone to this extent, that every man, with his whole existence and consciousness, is a part of history. But it makes a great difference whether anyone lives under the constant impression that his life is an element in a far wider life-course that goes on for hundreds and thousands of years, or conceives of himself as something rounded off and self-contained. For the latter type of consciousness there is certainly no world-history, no world-as-history. But how if the self-consciousness of a whole nation, how if a whole Culture rests on this ahistoric spirit? How must actuality appear to it? The world? Life? Consider the Classical Culture. In the world-consciousness of the Hellenes all experience, not merely the personal but the common past, was immediately transmuted into a timeless, immobile, mythically-fashioned background for the particular momentary present.....For Herodotus and Sophocles, as for Themistocles or a Roman consul, the past is subtilized instantly into an impression that is timeless and changeless, polar and not periodic in structure - in the last analysis, of such stuff as dreams are made of - whereas for our world-sense and our inner eye the past is a definitely periodic and purposeful organism of centuries or millenia."[1]

Spengler later adduces the classical custom of cremation as a proof of the culture's affirmation of mortality. It is the assertion that life is the "narrow

1. p. 8 et seq. Knopf English edition of Oct. 1939.

common frontier of two immeasurable stretches" of something that appears to cause the historic sense. He produces the Egyptians as evidence. Similarly, according to this theory of the nature of life, Christianity is a historic culture whereas Buddhism is an ahistoric one. Today our Western culture (says Spengler) is definitely mixed in its attitude to life and is therefore only a patchily historic culture.

I should like to point out now, that if one takes Spengler seriously, Eliot's Christianity and his acutely historical viewpoint must be intimately bound up together. One finds this substantiated in the "Four Quartets" throughout which is implicit the idea of life as "this brief transit where the dreams cross / The dream-crossed twilight between birth and dying.....the time of tension between dying and birth / The place of solitude where three dreams cross".[1] But to this is added the idea "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / All time is unredeemable."[2] This latter idea must not be considered as one which Eliot upholds, since for him the time must be redeemed.

> ".....restoring
> With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
> The time. Redeem
> The unread vision in the higher dream
> While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse...
>
> But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
> Redeem the time, redeem the dream
> The token of the work unspoken"[3]
>
> "This form, this face, this life
> Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
> Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken."[4]

It is not part of the scope of this paper to delve into Eliot's ideas of time, but there are one or two things which it might be rewarding to note. They are best set out in "Burnt Norton" - probably one of the finest English poems of any length to concern itself so much with the concept of time.

1. "Ash Wednesday".
2. "Burnt Norton".
3. "Ash Wednesday".
4. "Marina".

Time has always been an absorbing idea and a very elusive one. Even when very young, one notices that the duration of time seems to change, and this observation is apt to lead one into a mass of confusions - up to and including the denial of the objective reality of time. This last is manifestly absurd but it is made reasonable by hypothesizing at least two different kinds of time - mathematical time[1] and 'duration'. This is what Bergson does and what Eliot follows to a certain extent.

There are many ideas in Bergson's writings on time that have a reminiscent ring to the reader already familiar with Eliot. "Pure duration is what is most removed from externality, a duration in which the past is big with a present absolutely new. But then our will is strained to the utmost; we have to gather up the past which is slipping away, and thrust it whole and undivided into the present. At such moments we truly possess ourselves, but such moments are rare. Duration is the very stuff of reality, which is perpetual becoming, never something made."[2] Here one sees "the still point of the turning world" "And do not call it fixity, / Where past and future are gathered.....Except for the point, the still point, / There would be no dance".[3]

"Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;
Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being.
Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage
Quick now, here, now, always -
Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after."[4]

1. Einstein's revelation of varieties of mathematical time does not simplify matters.
2. This is drawn from Russell's chapter on Bergson in "A History of Western Philosophy".
3. "Burnt Norton".
4. "Burnt Norton".

"Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint -
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts."[1]

Bergson's "doctrine of time is necessary for his vindication of freedom, for his escape from what William James called a 'block universe'"[2] And for his doctrine of duration it is necessary that the past interpenetrate the present (ignoring the distinction between the past and the philosopher's memory of the past). This crops up in Eliot in his connection between memory and freedom, as in "Little Gidding" - "This is the use of memory: / For liberation."

But it must not be thought for a moment that Eliot is a Bergsonian. Russell says that "There is no room in this philosophy for the moment of contemplative insight when, rising above the animal life, we become conscious of the greater ends that redeem man from the life of the brutes." In contra-distinction Eliot:

"To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered."[3]

Eliot is drawn to Bergson because of Bergson's debt to Heraclitus and because of his literary style.

1. "The Dry Salvages".
2. Russell op. cit.
3. "Burnt Norton".

To Eliot, time is the symbol of the material life ("I journeyed to London, to the timekept City" [1]) which must be transcended. Yet there is the paradox that the escape can only be made through time itself - the Buddhistic withdrawal to contemplation is invalid. Thus the transcending depends upon time and therefore also upon history. "A people without history / Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern / Of timeless moments". [2]

In fact one does find a very intimate connection in Eliot's thinking between history and personal salvation, between personal and world salvation. To a certain extent it is a matter of learning from the errors of others, the necessity of profiting from history, that is important. In the field of literature this is revealed when Eliot writes about what makes a writer 'traditional'.

Tradition seems to mean to Eliot the ability to analyse history, to be able to pick out the enduring currents and follow them, cutting out the dead wood at the same time. Of course the main currents will always be changing their directions to some extent since neither history nor tradition are static affairs. Thus what has once been tradition may become obsolete and have to be removed - though it will still remain history. Tradition is history pared down to the essential lines which lead to the contemporary scene.

Eliot feels very strongly that the contemporary world has lost touch with tradition, that there is no longer any idea of where the world is going since there is no unity of belief or aim. This is evidenced by the fact that Eliot has written his most important criticism on writers who were being unduly neglected at the time. It was he who did most of the work in drawing attention to the metaphysical poets and the post-Elizabethan

1. "The Rock" chorus I.
2. "Little Gidding".

dramatists. Dryden was spurned, largely without being given a proper chance to show his merits. Eliot wrote a good deal about him and said that "He remains one of those who have set standards for English verse which it is desperate to ignore". [1] It is not, however, to be thought that Eliot merely overpraised those who had been unduly neglected, although there is some truth in the accusation that he was overly harsh towards the then current occupiers of the Pedestals, such as Milton. Eliot gave very thorough consideration to these poets and delivered singularly well-balanced opinions about them. [2] It is this quality that lends much of their authority to his essays. For instance immediately before the last quotation Eliot writes, "Dryden lacked what his master Jonson possessed, a large and unique view of life; he lacked insight, he lacked profundity. But where Dryden fails to satisfy, the 19th century does not satisfy us either, and where that century has condemned him, it is itself condemned. In the next revolution of taste it is possible that poets may turn to a study of Dryden."

Eliot was, in fact, struggling to find tradition in the mass of history, to find what the trend of great writing was. Thus he writes of "our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without his (this?) prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." [3] Later he adds to this by saying "What is disastrous is that

1. "John Dryden" 1922 in Selected Essays.
2. Eliot recanted from his extreme anti-Miltonianism in an essay in Sewanee Review Vol. LVI No. 2.
3. "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

the writer should deliberately give rein to his 'individuality'; that he should even cultivate his differences from others; and that his readers should cherish the author of genius, not in spite of his deviations from the inherited wisdom of the race, but because of them." [1]

"There is (that part of contemporary literature) which attempts to do what has already been done perfectly (and to which) the word 'traditional' is commonly applied; mis-applied, for the word itself implies a movement. Tradition cannot mean standing still." [2]

"Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with the feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity." [3]

"The general effect in literature of the lack of any strong tradition is twofold: extreme individualism in views, and no accepted rules or opinions as to the limitations of the literary job." [4]

1. "After Strange Gods"
2. "After Strange Gods"
3. "Tradition and the Individual Talent".
4. "After Strange Gods".

Thus tradition is, to Eliot, the search for the main road and the elimination of culs-de-sac. Not that he is totally against novelty; he merely feels that novelty and originality are secondary matters on which too much emphasis has been laid in the past. He says "novelty is better than repetition",[1] and, at greater length, "What is objectionable....is not novelty or originality in themselves, but their glorification for their own sake. The artist's concern with originality, certainly, may be considered as largely negative: he wishes only to avoid saying what has already been said as well as it can be.....Of course no writer ever admits to himself that he nas no originality.....If you examine the works of any great writer you may expect to find...that novelty of form has rather been forced upon him by his material than deliberately sought."[2]

Thus in Eliot's own poetry the originality of the form used in "The Waste Land" was necessitated by the need for condensation. Written in a more traditional manner, "The Waste Land" would have run to twelve volumes. It is from this premise that Eliot develops his idea of the completeness of the whole of literature. The body of literature is a whole which is modified into a slightly different whole by the advent of a new work. He writes, "The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe - the mind of his own country - a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind - is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen."[3]

1. "Tradition and the Individual Talent".
2. "After Strange Gods".
3. "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

Out of this also grows his emphasis on contemporaneity, though it has already been shown that Eliot believes a proper appreciation of the above will lead almost inevitably to contemporaneity. To show how widely this idea has spread I quote from a recent volume on Virginia Woolf: "All works of art, to be significant at all, must possess in the first place what may be called contemporary significance. In them must be found the best available interpretation and expression of the contemporary truth. This does not mean that the significant writer sets out to write social criticism: the contemporary truth is more than that. To find the truth and to express it correctly means to find and express correctly a relationship - the relationship between subject and object, the subject being the whole consciousness of contemporary man, the object being the whole environment - physical, intellectual, and spiritual - of contemporary man. It is the function of the significant writer to express this truth, or as much of it as he can." [1] This writer goes on to say that over and above the 'contemporary' there is the 'universal' - all of which is very proper Eliotian criticism.

Actually this exposition of 'contemporaneity' goes rather farther than I think Eliot himself would wish, although it is certainly little more than a consolidation of his scattered remarks.

The question of tradition in Eliot's poetry necessitates a return to the quotation I have borrowed from Spengler. It would appear that Eliot considers that the patchily historical nature of our western culture is due to the waning of the influence of Christianity. It is quite possible, of course, that his argument ran in the opposite direction, but the important thing is the coupling of the ideas. He has considered that Christianity is innately bound up with the essential 'tradition' and that a return to the one may be valuable in helping a revival of the other.

1. R. L. Chambers "The Novels of Virginia Woolf" p. 52.

This, then, is one of the cornerstones of 'tradition' in Eliot's work. It was, of course, impossible for him to write devotional poetry in the manner of Christina Rossetti - no one would listen; it was a form already dead. But it is interesting to note that right at the beginning of his literary career Eliot evinced a strong interest in such religious poets as Donne and Herbert. Later, Vaughan and Crashaw are included. To me there seems a certain affinity between Herbert's "The Collar" and certain aspects of Eliot's work. In each the thought is compact but thoroughly worked out. "I struck the board, and cried, No more" shows the same capacity for vivid imagery as does "Strode across the hills and broke them". [1] Herbert does not seem to have quite such a sensitive ear as Eliot, but that is a judgement drawn from a more extensive acquaintance with the works of Herbert. The rhyme in

"No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
All wasted?"

might easily make one think so. However such technical virtuosity is rare in Herbert. [2]

Perhaps the most important factor in this comparison is the personal approach to the general which is used in each case. It is, of course, true that great poetry gains its merit through being both personal and general, but most poetry starts as being personal and with luck and good management turns out to be general as well. But in the case of both Herbert and Eliot one feels that the generality was the donné, and that this was worked from a personal point of view in order to end up with the correct proportion - for of course the plain generality would be apt to be merely didactic. Both the simple doubt of "The Collar" and the more complex doubt of "Journey of the Magi" seem, though they ring true enough, to have been constructed.

1. Eliot, "Cousin Nancy".
2. See also E.E. Duncan Jones' "Ash Wednesday" where a connection between the Rose imagery and part of Herbert's "Church-Rents and Schisms" is seen.

This effect derives, it is true, from Eliot's rejection of the Romantic movement. It is not that Eliot feels that the Romantic tradition (for by now it is a tradition of its own, though not necessarily part of the greater tradition) is worn out; he thinks the whole system of thought is a cul-de-sac. "What is permanent and good in Romanticism is.....a curiosity which recognizes that any life, if accurately and profoundly penetrated, is interesting and always strange. Romanticism is a short cut to the strangeness without the reality, and it leads its disciples only back upon themselves." [1] "There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters." [2]

Eliot has sought the point where the Romantic movement broke away from what seems to him the main current of tradition - and yet Eliot's divergence from the contemporary pattern of poetry is not terribly abrupt. His method seems very startling if one compares his early poems with other English poetry of the period, but if, as one should, one considers the European literary scene, a rather different picture emerges.

Eliot's debt to Baudelaire has been pointed out, but mainly in regard to borrowed phrases such as "hypocrite lecteur, - mon semblable, - mon frère!" No one has, for instance, noted the many similarities between Baudelaire's "Le Crépuscule du Matin" and "Preludes"; or the probable influence of "Les Litanies de Satan" on the form of the close of "The Hollow Men". What is most important is shown in Eliot's essay on Baudelaire of 1930 [3] where he points out that though Baudelaire talks of the black mass and diabolism, what he is really concerned with is the problem of Good and Evil. Baudelaire approached his subject 'à rebours'. From romantic material

1. "A Romantic Patrician" Athenaeum May 2, 1919. Reprinted in "Imperfect Critics".
2. ibid.
3. Selected Essays.

he made classical poetry. In the essay on Baudelaire, Eliot writes "Indeed, in much romantic poetry the sadness is due to the exploitation of the fact that no human relations are adequate to human desires, but also to the disbelief in any further object for human desires than that which, being human, fails to satisfy them." [1] It is the consciousness of the idea of God behind Baudelaire's poems that redeems them from the romantic abyss.

In "The Anatomy of Nonsense", Yvor Winters has correctly compared Baudelaire's ennui with the acedia of "The Waste Land", but unfortunately he reaches the conclusion that "Eliot, in brief, has surrendered to the acedia which Baudelaire was able to judge; Eliot suffers from the delusion that he is judging it when he is merely exhibiting it. He has loosely thrown together a collection of disparate and fragmentary principles which fall roughly into two contradictory groups, the romantic on the one hand and on the other the classical and Christian." It is difficult to understand how Winters can see the judgement in Baudelaire and yet fail to see it in "The Waste Land" - it is not that much more subtle. In point of fact the attacks are very similar. Eliot has used as the basis of his work poems written almost half a century earlier, but which, due to the slow infiltration of the French symbolists into the sphere of observation of the English poets, seemed desperately modern to contemporary England. He used the most up-to-the-minute in his return to the past.

One is reduced in the end to believing that when Eliot speaks of tradition, he refers to the classical tradition, with its accent on the work

1. Is not the tragedy of Prufrock in many ways due to the fact that he cannot achieve the satisfaction of human desires because he is eternally aware that they cannot really be satisfied by the merely human? Salvation is in the hands of the "sea-girls"; whereas "human voices wake us and we drown".

of art as something made; something divorced from the artist.[1] This idea is the foundation of his idea that in time the poet eventually may only bear to his own poetry the relationship of another reader.[2] Similarly Eliot writes of a reader who may react profoundly to a poem in a strange language: "But at this point the impression is emotional; the reader in the ignorance which we postulate is unable to distinguish the poetry from an emotional state aroused in himself by the poetry, a state which may be merely an indulgence of his own emotions. The poetry may be an accidental stimulus. The end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed; thus we aim to see the object as it really is".[3] This is complementary to Edmund Wilson's definition "A classicist asks you to consider what he has made; a romantic what he is."[4]

Thus Eliot has tried, in his poetry, to acquire that finish that is typical of the classical work of art; a finish which excludes the personalities of both the artist and of the critic. Hence the many poems in the studied quatrains of Théophile Gautier, the use of the central figure around (rather than within) whom the drama takes place. He observes and takes part in the action but he is not essential to it. Even Harry in "Family Reunion" does not seem to be entirely essential to the play. In the same way Oedipus does not seem essential to the drama of Sophocles' play. The important thing is the tragedy, and somehow this seems to be located outside the tragic figure.

1. See also "Not our feelings but the pattern which we make of our feelings is the centre of value". (Introduction to Valéry's "Le Serpent" trans. Wardle 1924.)
2. vide supra p. 41
3. "The Perfect Critic".
4. "Axel's Castle".

The foregoing discussion of Eliot's theory of the necessity of tradition has led rather far from the starting point of this section of the present paper, but this theory is very important to Eliot and therefore to an understanding of his work. In addition it is one of the few poetic generalities that he has written about at all exhaustively. Of his other remarks about poetry in general little can be said since as a rule these are sudden flashes of "principle" that emerge in the middle of a particular discussion. Thus he writes: "But in all those dramatists there is the essential as well as the superficies of poetry; they give the pattern, or we may say the undertone, of the personal emotion, the personal drama and struggle, which no biography, however full and intimate, could give us." [1] This, however, applies mainly to poetic drama: "It must take genuine and substantial human emotions, such emotions as observation can confirm, typical emotions, and give them artistic form; the degree of abstraction is a question for the method of each author." [2] Or again, "Maeterlinck, whose drama, in failing to be dramatic, fails also to be poetic" [3] illustrates the same thing. That Eliot himself has a dramatic concept of poetry is acknowledged, but he does not maintain that all poetry must be dramatic poetry, although most great poetry will contain an element of the dramatic. This is borne out by the following: "Murry affirms that drama is the highest and fullest form of poetry. I should say that in the highest and fullest forms of poetry there is a dramatic element; but I doubt whether the highest and fullest poetry has to take the form of

1. "John Ford".
2. "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama".
3. ibid.

drama. For any form of poetry restricts one's liberty; and drama is a very peculiar form: there is a great deal that is high and full poetry that will not go into that form." [1]

There are, however, one or two more things Eliot has to say about a poet's sense of his own time which bear directly on his ideas of the nature of poetry. Thus: "What every poet starts from is his own emotions... The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time.....It was his business to express the greatest emotional intensity of his time, based on whatever his time happened to think." [2] This is very interesting in that it more or less prevents Eliot from being a great poet according to his own standards, since the basis of "The Waste Land" (and even more so of "Ash Wednesday" and "Four Quartets") is not what his time happened to think. The twenties were not a profoundly Christian period. A superficial reading of "The Waste Land", revealing only the disillusion of this too too sick-making life, is closer to the spirit of the time - or at least to the spirit of the literary time (which, after all, will be the spirit of the time to our remote descendents).

Matthiessen writes that "Baudelaire's intensity is the result of his having "a sense of his own age", a quality not easy to analyse, but one which, as Eliot stresses it again and again in the course of discussing very different poets, is revealed to be one of his fundamental tests for great poetry. Such a sense is at an opposite pole from a familiarity with the surface details of a time, or from a sense of fashion. When Eliot finds

1. Review of Middleton Murry's "Shakespeare", Criterion, July 1936.

2. "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca". See also "The business of a poet is to express the culture in which he lives, and to which he belongs, not to express aspiration towards one which is not yet incarnate." "The Social Function of Poetry".

that Blake possessed such a sense as well as Villon, it is seen to consist in a condensed, bare honesty that can strike beneath the appearances of life to reality, that can grasp so strongly the intrinsic elements of life in the poet's own day that it likewise penetrates beneath the apparent variations of man from one epoch to another to his essential sameness." [1] He continues by saying that to have this sense one must accept one's age, and therefore not be concerned with it, but with the man of today who is the same as man through the ages. One might point out here that in "The Waste Land" Eliot does not accept his age; he tries to join all history in his attack upon it. One feels that Professor Matthiessen hasn't really got hold of this "sense of one's own time" business. He starts with rehashed phrases of Eliot's, [2] which is quite acceptable, but "man's essential sameness" is entirely his own invention, and though Eliot, like everyone else, must have some feeling of this sort, as an orthodox Anglican he should be trying to believe in the perfectibility of man through Grace.

In "What Is A Classic" Eliot writes of the relationship between a literature and the period during which it was written as he searches for the conditions necessary for the appearance of a classic. Thus, indirectly,

1. "The Achievement of T. S. Eliot" p. 16.

2. cf. The peculiarity of Blake "is seen to be the peculiarity of all great poetry.....It is merely a peculiar honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is peculiarly terrifying.....Blake's poetry has the unpleasantness of great poetry. Nothing that can be called morbid or abnormal or perverse, none of the things which exemplify the sickness of an epoch or a fashion, have this quality; only those things which, by some extraordinary labour of simplification, exhibit the essential sickness or strength of the human soul. And this honesty never exists without great technical accomplishment." Eliot in "Blake".

he touches on the sense of one's time, and he also expresses more clearly than in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" the relation that should exist between contemporary and past poetry. "We may expect the language to approach maturity at the moment when it has a critical sense of the past, a confidence in the present, and no conscious doubt of the future. In literature this means that the poet is aware of the predecessors behind his work, as we may be aware of the ancestral traits in a person who is at the same time individual and unique." [1] "The persistence of literary creativeness in any people, accordingly, consists in the maintenance of an unconscious balance between erudition in the larger sense - the collective personality, so to speak, realised in the literature of the past - and the originality of the living generation." [2]

The mention of erudition brings up the objection to Eliot's idea of poetry that it demands too much erudition. Eliot himself comments on this: "It will even be affirmed that much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility. While, however, we persist in believing that a poet ought to know as much as will not encroach upon his necessary receptivity and necessary laziness, it is not desirable to confine knowledge to whatever can be put into a useful shape for examinations, drawing-rooms, or the still more pretentious modes of publicity. Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career." [3]

1. op. cit.
2. ibid.
3. "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

The value of factual education is further denigrated in the 1920 essay on Blake. "It is important that the artist should be highly educated in his own art; but his education is one that is hindered rather than helped by the ordinary processes of society which constitute education for the ordinary man. For these processes consist largely in the acquisition of impersonal ideas which obscure what we really are and feel, what we really want, and what really excites our interest."

The suggestion here of the importance of "what we are and feel" must not be considered from a romantic standpoint. Eliot's meaning is perhaps clarified by a remark he makes in connection with the metaphysical poets. "The poets in question have, like other poets, various faults. But they were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling. And this means both that they are more mature, and that they wear better, than later poets of certainly not less literary ability."[1] The suggested conclusion to be drawn is that there will inevitably be an interest in the poet's own thoughts and feelings, but that the important thing is the reason for this interest. It is the self-exhibition for its own sake - the Confessions of Rousseau - that are (according to Eliot) to be deplored. Only a state of mind that has a universal (or at least wide) recognition can be of value. A poem on hate is written so that the reader who has hated will recognize his own emotion, so that the reader without hate will have some idea of what it feels like; not, on the other hand, so that the reader (hating or hateless) will learn the idiosyncrasies of the author's line of hating. So, in "The Perfect Critic", Eliot says that "The end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which the accidents of personal emotion are removed."

This interpretation is re-enforced by Eliot's statement that "A good poem...is not an outburst of pure feeling, but is the result of a more than

1. "The Metaphysical Poets".

common power of controlling and manipulating feelings." [1] This control is necessary to give the poem proportion, a balance between its intellectual and emotional elements.

Ezra Pound once wrote: "Poetry is a sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres, and the like, but equations for...human emotions." [2] This remark is rather similar to the foregoing quotations from Eliot. But Eliot has made better use of it in an essay on Pound, in which he speaks of the trajectory of a poet's work. A poet's work "may proceed along two lines on an imaginary graph; one of these lines being his conscious and continuous effort in technical excellence, that is, in continually developing his medium for the moment when he really has something to say. The other line is just his normal human course of development, his accumulation and digestion of experience (experience is not sought for, it is merely accepted in consequence of doing what we really want to do), and by experience I mean the results of reading and reflection, varied interests of all sorts, contacts and acquaintances, as well as passion and adventure. Now and then the two lines may converge at a high peak, so that we get a masterpiece. That is to say, accumulation of experience has crystallized to form material of art, and years of work in technique have prepared an adequate medium; and something results in which medium and material, form and content, are indistinguishable." [3]

In "The Metaphysical Poets" also, Eliot has commented on a poet's assimilation of experience. This comment supports his idea that poetry is a

1. "The Idealism of Julien Benda". New Republic, Dec. 12, 1928.
2. "The Spirit of Romance". Quoted from Gregory and Zaturenska: "History of American Poetry 1900-1940".
3. I quote from Matthiessen, who goes on to apply this to Eliot's own work in a most ingenious and convincing manner. Prufrock forms the first, and Gerontion a second, 'fusion'.

mode of perception. "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for his work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes."

Eliot is very conscious of the anomalous position of poetry and its practitioners in the modern world. Thus he writes: "Every poet would like, I fancy, to be able to think that he had some direct social utility. By this... I do not mean...that he should do anything but write poetry, poetry not defined in terms of something else.....As things are, and as fundamentally they must always be, poetry is not a career, but a mug's game." [1] It is from this realization that he finds that "The contemporary poet...is forced to ask himself such question as 'what is poetry for?'; not merely 'what am I to say?' but rather 'how and to whom am I to say it?'" [2]

More immediate and answerable questions that Eliot poses are "what is to be done next? what direction is unexplored? what is there to be done immediately before us, which has not been done already, once and for all, as well as it can be done?" To these he adds a trenchant comment. "When absorbed in these investigations, the poet is no more concerned with the social consequences than is the scientist in his laboratory - though without the context of the use to society, neither the writer nor the scientist could have the conviction which sustains him." [3] The qualification is, obviously, not always valid.

However, these questions leave open the field to which they are to be applied. That is to say, you have to know what poetry is before you can

1. "The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism". p. 30.
2. ibid.
3. "The Music of Poetry."

answer them, and one is left (as far as Eliot is concerned) with the following scattered remarks. "Poetry is a superior amusement....pour distraire les honnêtes gens....not because this is a true definition but because if you call it anything else you are likely to call it something still more false....Poetry certainly has something to do with morals, and with religion, and even with politics perhaps, though we cannot say what." [1] "We cannot afford to forget that the first - and not one of the least difficult - requirements of either prose or verse is that it should be interesting." [2] "The end of understanding poetry is enjoyment, and...this enjoyment is gusto disciplined by taste." [3] "Poetry is not a substitute for philosophy, or theology, or religion...it has its own function. But as this function is not intellectual but emotional, it cannot be defined adequately in intellectual terms. We can say that it provides 'consolation': strange consolation, which is provided equally by writers so different as Dante and Shakespeare." [4]

But these are not very helpful - they are not even all directly bearing on the problem. But they are all there is, with the exception of something Eliot has said about his own aims. "...that which I have long aimed, in writing poetry; to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem points at, and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get beyond poetry, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get beyond music. We never succeed but...(this is)...what I think the forty or fifty original lines that I have written strive towards." [5]

1. Preface to 1928 edn. "The Sacred Wood".
2. "Wilkie Collins and Dickens."
3. "The Music of Poetry".
4. "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca".
5. Unpublished lecture on English Letter-Writers, New Haven, 1933. Quoted from Matthiessen.

This is interesting since it implicitly admits that Eliot has attempted to do more than what poetry alone can do. He has, in fact, treated poetry as a means rather than as an end. The validity of such an attempt can only be judged by its results. In point of fact such an attempt is automatically defeated since one cannot avoid one's medium except by refraining from using it. Attenuation of the medium beyond a certain point weakens it so much that it cannot carry the form the artist wishes to impress upon it - one can see evidences of this in the later pictures of Monet, suggestions of it in Debussy. But Eliot himself never reaches the cracking point - perhaps the greatest attenuation of his medium that he achieves is in "Ash Wednesday", in the "Lady of silences" passage, but even here the subtle care with which Eliot has arranged his sounds buttresses his medium in every line.

The closing lines of "The Fire Sermon" tail off into a void, but this is a necessary construction that ties in with "I can connect / Nothing with nothing" and occurs only for a moment. It is followed at once by the blocked construction of "Death by Water".

What is important in this statement of Eliot's aims is that he regards the sensuous appeal of poetry as a secondary matter. He is on the opposite side of the fence from Keats. Eliot would appear to say "Don't say anything if you have nothing to say" rather than "Don't say anything unless you can say it well". This may seem to be a purely commonsense position to take up - and so it is in the daily round. From the artistic point of view it is not so commonsense since the artist is (according to Renaissance standards) a superior craftsman. He isn't an artist unless his work is above the common calibre. The answer is, of course, that Eliot <u>expects</u> a thing to be said well - it goes without saying. He is speaking of artists - who are not artists unless they can work well with their media. What he does imply is that a poet should not publish his exercises, his experiments; just as a pianist does not invite people to come and listen to him practising. Here at least, there is no question of whether or not Eliot practises what he preaches.

IV CONCLUSION

And this is the point of the present paper. Does Eliot practise what he preaches?

I have prefixed the body of this paper with four epigraphs. The first of these provides the justification to attempt the investigation; the second and third pose the immediate problem, the antithetical and, in the main, unsubstantiated claims; the fourth is a conclusion which might be drawn from the second and third.

I think it is clear that in matters of detail Eliot adheres quite closely in his poetry to the principles he enunciates in his critical remarks. What must always be remembered is that in most of these dicta he is dealing with a specific point in the writings of one author, and thus his remark has validity only in the given environment - a certain combination of colours or sounds may be wrong for one subject and yet right for another. It is only in such essays as "The Music of Poetry", "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism", and, to a certain extent, in "After Strange Gods" that one finds the comment general, and therefore applicable more directly to Eliot's own poetry.

On the larger issues - issues that tend to escape from the mainly literary to the mainly moral[1] - it is more difficult to state precisely where Eliot wanders off the path he himself has laid down. It should be remembered, however, that although the path of an army can be mapped fairly simply, the travels of one of its soldiers will be infinitely more devious. Similarly, the way that seems clear from the critic's cockpit, is full of obstacles and blind alleys for the traveller.[2] This is the meaning of the fourth epigraph.

By and large Eliot has followed his own tenets. Much of the criticism

1. Thus, for Eliot, the classicist-romanticist controversy is inextricably bound up with Christian dogma. See also the sub-title to "After Strange Gods - a primer of modern heresy". For Eliot there is a distinct affinity between romanticism and pelagianism.
2. "It is much easier to be a classicist in literary criticism than in creative art - because in criticism you are responsible only for what you want, and in

(cont'd)

of people who thought that Eliot was leading us in two directions at once, arose out of a failure of these critics to see the orthodoxy that lay behind Eliot's poetry. They were confused, understandably confused, by such poems as "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" and "The Hippopotamus". That these poems are directed not at religion but at some of its manifestations is easy enough to see in retrospect, but at the time of publication it seemed logical enough to consider them as sheer iconoclasm. Such a point of view naturally made "The Waste Land" even more difficult of interpretation than it really is - and "Ash Wednesday" became incomprehensible. That Eliot was perturbed by this misapprehension of his intentions is amply evidenced by the way he dedicates, in the text, "After Strange Gods" to Paul Elmer More, as one of the critics whom Eliot wished to redeem from his errors. One must assume that when More wrote that article on "Ash Wednesday" for the Saturday Review of Literature in 1932, he had not read "Thoughts After Lambeth", although this had appeared the previous year. For, more than anything else, it was "Thoughts After Lambeth" that first definitely indicated the trend of Eliot's thought. I have not referred to this work hitherto since it has no connection with literature, but it is without doubt a very significant work in connection with any study of Eliot.

And so it appears that Spender's is the correct judgement. "The assumption always is that his verse and prose are quite unrelated to each other. Actually they are very closely related." The remainder of the quotation is perhaps questionable if regarded as the facts upon which the judgement is based. It is above all Eliot's ethical approach to both poetry and its criticism that unifies his thinking. Both his prose and his verse are suffused with his

creation you are responsible for what you can do with material which you must simply accept. And in this material I include the emotions and feelings of the writer himself, which, for that writer, are simply material which he must accept - not virtues to be enlarged or vices to be diminished." "Ulysses, Order and Myth". Dial, Nov. 1923.

Christian approach to life; they are related to it. Therefore they are related to one another. This is a very general relationship; to see how there are two main cases where discrepancies exist between Eliot's and creative points of view it is necessary to recapitulate a little.

Eliot considers poetry to be some vital but formalized expression in words of an aspect of either objective or subjective reality. The range of possibilities is, however, too vast for it to be possible to frame any more precise definition. It is rather like trying to define a colour. At exactly what admixture of blue does red cease to be red and become purple? How far can you thin poetry before it turns to prose?

Poetry can use a wad of material (Wordsworth) or a mere thread (Mallarmé) and the material itself may be of any nature, natural or synthetic. Implicitly Eliot says that though poetry can be spun out of the most improbable odds and ends, great poetry needs something more solid to sustain it, and, though he doesn't actually state this, it would seem both from the material he uses for his own poems and from the emphasis he gives to this type of material in his criticism, that he finds moral or ethical problems or situations most suitable as the basis for great poetry. That is to say there should be a problem of the Will involved.

This is not to suggest that Eliot neglects the emotional attributes of poetry. He takes it for granted that some emotional attitude will be expressed, but the emotion itself is not his primary interest as it is for a Romantic. The emotion provides the coherence - it is, so as to speak, the flux between the material and the form, for form arises not so much from the thought as from the emotion of a poem.

Here emerges one of the primary divisions between Eliot's critical and creative practices. In his criticism Eliot tends to emphasize (especially in his earlier works) the intellectual content of poetry, notably in his thorough treatment of the Metaphysicals and Dante and, à rebours, in his

appreciative but crushing essay on Swinburne. It is quickly noticed that in his own poetry the emotion is far more evident than one would expect from reading his criticism, and that the intellectual content, though indisputably there, is far more discreetly incorporated. This faint divergence vanishes when one considers that Eliot's criticism has been largely corrective. It is designed to point out contemporary flaws and forgetfulnesses by the use of past examples that do not contain these errors and omissions. In order to make his point more clearly, Eliot has weighted his criticism, not by overemphasis of individual points in the essays, but by their general trend. He says the same thing over and over again, and no matter how true the particular remark is in each of its contexts its repetition leads one to believe there is more than coincidence behind its recurrence.

This is the key to very nearly all the differences that appear between Eliot's critical and creative practices. The critic is a teacher, an expounder; the poet merely makes. This is especially true of a poet who takes, as Eliot does, the stand that the artist is insignificant once he has created the work of art. Thus the artist cannot overemphasize for the sake of getting an idea across if this overemphasis destroys another aspect of the problem which is also true. One should note that this position is entirely opposed to that of certain pioneers working in various art-forms, who refuse to employ any traditional techniques for fear that this will detract from the truth of their pioneering. The latter position is well illustrated by Mondrian in whose work the formal element is the only element. Eliot could (in this context) be better compared with Orozco who has absorbed the formal element, making compositions more balanced between form and representation.

This is the explanation for differences in the two aspects of Eliot's work where his criticism seems more stringent than his poetic practice. It should be emphasized, however, that this critical harshness only appears when the whole body of his criticism is examined.

There are also cases where Eliot's poetry seems more confined than his critical dicta would demand. This is a more understandable situation since no poet (especially one with as small a production as Eliot) can cover as wide a range as can a critic. Further, however, Eliot is highly conscious of the evolutionary aspect of literature. In his criticism he is dealing with the past, with conventions that were valid in their own time but are now meaningless because of their distance. In his own poetry Eliot can and does restrict himself to the line which he feels is the one in which poetry must develop. Therefore he examines his own poetry much more carefully than that of others to see that it is perfectly functional, and beyond that perfectly directed towards the attainment of a style which is both original and firmly rooted in traditional poetics. All Eliot's work is directed towards getting literature back onto the straight and narrow path of classicism, but the particular brand of classicism he favours in his own poetry is merely a line drawn on that path.

These two general distinctions that can be drawn between the aims of Eliot's prose and verse account for most of the inconsistencies that have been noted. There remains, however, the question of Tradition and the sense of one's own time which has been dealt with at some length in the body of this paper. This idea of Eliot's remains unassimilated; and that is one of the reasons why it is particularly noticeable among his ideas. It doesn't properly fit in with his poetry although it is the rigid backbone of all his criticism. Perhaps it is that when, as Eliot has done, one works at a frontier one cannot tell where the path of tradition will lead. One can see it leading up to the point where one is working, but beyond that there is only one's personal belief to guide one. To Eliot's way of thinking we are working in a blind alley; the paths must be retraced beyond where they

fork out from the Romantic Tradition to where the Romantic Tradition itself broke away from the (then) main stream. In fact Eliot is implicitly asserting that the Classical Tradition is the only tradition, but since he usually writes of it merely as "tradition" the largely personal bias is obscured. "A particular tradition" must be read for "tradition" throughout.

The sense of one's own time is, as has been shown, something that Eliot himself lacks by his own definition, unless the above distinction be drawn between what Eliot says and what he means. If the latter be taken into account and the sense of one's own time is construed merely as a term for one's sensitivity to the contemporary state of "tradition", then Eliot does have it. However the idea has been so circumscribed and pruned by this process that it has little or no significance.

This is, however, the only large discrepancy between the points of view that Eliot expresses through his prose and verse that remains when these are examined closely. The apparent discrepancies are merely a function of the fact that "the poet turned critic is faced with the novel danger of contradicting himself".

Bibliography

I Sources - Eliot

A. Poetry

Collected Poems 1909-1935. Faber and Faber.
Four Quartets. Faber and Faber. 1944.

B. Prose

The Sacred Wood. Methuen. 1928. Including:
The Perfect Critic.
Imperfect Critics.
Tradition and the Individual Talent.
'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama.
Hamlet and His Problems.
Philip Massinger.
Swinburne as Poet.
Blake.
Dante.
Homage to John Dryden. Hogarth Press. 1924.
Selected Essays. Harcourt Brace. 1932. Including:
Dante.
Four Elizabethan Dramatists.
John Dryden.
John Ford.
The Metaphysical Poets.
Andrew Marvell.
Lancelot Andrewes.
Baudelaire.
Wilkie Collins and Dickens.
Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca.
The Sacred Wood (etc.)
The Music of Poetry. Partisan Review Reader.
The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. Faber. 1933.
What is a Classic? Faber. 1935.
After Strange Gods. Harcourt Brace. 1933.
Introduction to Selected Poems of Marianne Moore. Macmillan. 1935.
Foreword to A Choice of Kipling's Verse. Faber. 1935.
Preface to Valery's Le Serpent trans. Wardle. 1924.
Religion Without Humanism. "Humanism and America" ed. Foerster. Farrar & Rinehart. 1930.
A Note of the Verse of John Milton. "Essays and Studies of the English Association". Oxon. 1936.
Byron. "From Anne to Victoria" ed. Dobree. Cassell. 1937.
A Note on Two Odes of Cowley. "17th Century Studies". Oxford. 1938.
Prose and Verse. Chapbook. April, 1921.
The Poetry of W.B. Yeats. Southern Review. Vol. 7, #3.
Kipling Redivivus. Athenaeum. May 9, 1919.
Warpaint and Feathers. Athenaeum. Oct. 17, 1919.
The Method of Mr. Pound. Athenaeum. Oct. 24, 1919.
Ulysses, Order and Myth. Dial. Nov. 1923.

Marianne Moore. Dial. Dec. 1923.
The Silurist. Dial. Sept. 1927.
The Social Function of Poetry. Adelphi. July-Sept. 1945.
Isolated Superiority. Dial. Jan. 1928.
The Idealism of Julien Benda. New Republic. Dec. 12, 1928
Poetry and Propaganda. Bookman. Feb. 1930.
Review of Housman's "Name and Nature of Poetry". Criterion. Oct. 1933.
Review of Murry's "Shakespeare". Criterion. July, 1936.

II Sources - Other

Gregory, H. and Zaturenska, M. History of American Poetry 1900-1940. Harcourt Brace. 1946.
Lewis, C. Day. The Poetic Image. London, 1947.
Matthiessen, F.O. The Achievement of T.S. Eliot. Oxford University Press. 1935.
More, Paul Elmer. The Cleft Eliot. Saturday Review of Literature. Nov. 12, 1932.
Spender, Stephen. The Destructive Element. Cape. 1935.
Wilson, Edmund. Axel's Castle. Scribner's. 1931.
Winters, Yvor. The Anatomy of Nonsense. New Directions. 1943.

III Background - Eliot

A. Poetry

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats. Harcourt Brace. 1943.
Murder in the Cathedral. Faber. 1935.
The Family Reunion. Harcourt Brace. 1939.

B. Prose

Thoughts After Lambeth. Faber. 1931.
The Idea of a Christian Society. Faber. 1939.
Translation and foreword to Anabase by St. J. Perse. Faber. 1930.
Preface to Nightwood by Djuna Barnes. Harcourt Brace. 1937.
Experiment in Criticism. "Tradition and Experiment in Present Day Literature". Oxford. 1929.
Classics in English. Poetry (Chicago). Nov. 1916.
On Henry James. "The Shock of Recognition" ed. Edmund Wilson. Reprinted from Little Review. Aug. 1918
American Literature. Athenaeum. Apr. 25, 1919.
Beyle and Balzac. Athenaeum. May 30, 1919.
Criticism in England. Athenaeum. June 13, 1919.
The Education of Taste. Athenaeum. June 27, 1919.
A Foreign Mind. Athenaeum. July, 4, 1919.
The Romantic Generation if it Existed. Athenaeum. July 18, 1919.
The Comedy of Humours. Athenaeum. Nov. 14, 1919.
The Preacher as Artist. Athenaeum. Nov. 28, 1919.
John Donne. Nation and Athenaeum. June 9, 1923.
George Herbert. Spectator. March 12, 1932.
The Mysticism of Blake. Nation and Athenaeum. Sept. 17, 1927.
A Brief Treatise on the Criticism of Poetry. Chapbook. March, 1920

Rencontre. NRF. April 1925.
Note sur Mallarmé et Poe. NRF. Nov. 1926.
Alfred Edward Housman. Nation and Athenaeum. Dec. 18, 1926.
Literature, Science and Dogma. Dial. March, 1927.
Le Poème Mallarmé Contemporain. NRF. May 1, 1927.
The Oxford Jonson. Dial. July, 1928.
The Golden Ass of Apuleius. Dial. Sept. 1928.
Introduction to Poetry. Nation and Athenaeum.
Jan. 12, 1929.
Review of Murry's "Son of Woman, The Story of D.H. Lawrence". Criterion. July, 1931.
Audiences, Producers, Plays, Poets. New Verse. Dec. 1935.
Review of Wyndham Lewis' "Time the Tiger and the Fox". Twentieth Century Verse. Nov.-Dec. 1937.
The Responsibility of the Man of Letters in the Cultural Restoration of Europe. Sewanee Review. Summer, 1945.
Milton. Sewanee Review. Spring, 1948.
Introduction to "All Hallows' Eve" by Charles Williams. Bellegrini and Cudahy. 1948.

IV Background - Other

T.S. Eliot. A Study of his Writings by Several Hands. ed. B. Rajan. Focus 3. Dobson. 1947.
Comprising:
Brooks, Cleanth. The Waste Land: An Analysis.
Jones, H.M. Duncan. Ash Wednesday.
Gardner, Helen L. Four Quartets: A Commentary.
Rajan, B. The Unity of the Quartets.
Wheelwright, Philip. Eliot's Philosophical Themes.
Ridler, Anne. A Question of Speech.
Bradbrook, M.C. Eliot's Critical Method.
Tannowitz, Wolf. Notes on Geronticn.
T.S. Eliot - a Symposium. Ed. Marsh and Tambimuttu. Poetry, London. 1948.
T.S. Eliot: a selected critique. Ed. Leonard Unger. Rinehart. 1948. Reprinted material only. Besides articles already listed this collection includes:
Aldington, Richard. The Poetry of T.S. Eliot.
Barber, C.L. Strange Gods at T.S. Eliot's Family Reunion.
Blackmur, Richard. The Double Agent. pp. 184-216.
Brooks, Van Wyck. Opinions of Oliver Allston. pp. 214-227.
Cowley, Malcolm. Exile's Return. pp. 125-128.
Van Doren, Mark. The Private Reader. pp. 131-136.
Forster, E.M. Abinger Harvest. pp. 89-96.
Hicks, Granville. The Great Tradition. pp. 258-274.
Lesh, Harold J. Faith, Reason and Civilization. pp. 96-104 and 131-132.
Martz, Louis L. The Wheel and the Point: Aspects of Imagery and Theme in Eliot's Later Poetry.
Muhn, Ferner. The Mind Blew from the East. pp. 205-221 and 246-255.

Pound, Ezra. Prefatio aut Cimicium Tumulus.
Praz, Mario. T.S. Eliot and Dante.
Ransom, John Crowe. The New Criticism. pp. 155-158.
Richards, I.A. Principles of Literary Criticism. pp. 289-295.
Savage, D.S. The Personal Principle. pp. 91-112.
Schwarz, Delmore. T.S. Eliot as the International Hero.
Sweeney, J.J. (Untitled) from Southern Review vol. 6, #4.
Tate, Allen. Reactionary Essays. pp. 210-220.
Unger, Leonard. T.S. Eliot's Rose Garden.
Aiken, Conrad. Scepticisms. New York. 1919.
Kreymborg, Alfred. Our Singing Strength. Coward-McCann. 1929
Leavis, F.R. New Bearings in Modern Poetry. Chatto & Windus. 1932.
Lucas, F.L. Studies in French and English. London, 1934.
MacCarthy, Desmond. Criticism. Putnam. 1932.
McGreevy, Thomas. T.S. Eliot - a study. Chatto & Windus. 1931.
Mégroz, R.L. Modern English Poetry 1882-1932. London. 1933.
Muir, Edwin. Transition. London, 1926.
Preston, Raymond. Four Quartets Rehearsed. Sheed & Ward. 1946.
Riding, L. and Graves, R. Survey of Modernist Poetry. Heinemann. 1927.
Smith, L.P. Milton and his Modern Critics. Oxford. 1940.
Tillyard, E.M.W. Poetry Direct and Oblique. Chatto & Windus 1945.
Voight, F.A. Milton Thou Shouldst Be Living. 19th Century. 211:130.
Williamson, Hugh Ross. The Poetry of T.S. Eliot. London. 1932.

V Miscellaneous

Chambers, R.L. The Novels of Virginia Woolf. Oliver & Boyd. 1947.
Pound, Ezra. Personae. Liveright. 1926.
Russell, Bertrand. History of Western Philosophy. Simon & Schuster. 1945.
Spengler, Oswald. The Decline of the West. Knopf. 1939.
Taupin, René. L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur la Poésie Americaine.
Weston, Jessie L. From Ritual to Romance. Peter Smith. 1920.

It would have been desirable to include in this bibliography both William Empson's "Seven Types of Ambiguity" and Elizabeth Drew's "T.S. Eliot - The Design of his Poetry", but for various reasons these were unprocurable while this paper was in preparation.

---

67 1/4
68