

RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT IN THE POETIC WORKS
OF T. S. ELIOT

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis uses inductive reasoning to produce the theory that Eliot's poetry and plays reveal religious quest. "Religion" is used in the wide sense given by Tillich to include both ultimate concern and the pursuit of answers to that concern. The poet probably, and the personae certainly, are in reaction against romantic standards which seem falsified by the condition of the real world. Angst is obvious from the first, and the quest is for a meaning in life powerful enough to overcome fragmentation, isolation, and relativism. Quest began with the earliest poems and continued throughout his work without discontinuity or radical breaks. A variety of attempted solutions is obvious in the poetic works: psychology, eastern religions, Christianity, ethics, asceticism, rootlessness, rootedness, myth, and aesthetics. Each poem builds on the previous discoveries, and development did not stop until his death. Even there no "final" position exists, for there is evidence that he could have moved further still.

Each development is documented by close reference to the poetry and plays. Chronology has been scrupulously kept, with the intrinsic evidence alone speaking wherever possible. Emphasis on pattern and on close documentation has led to novel interpretations of some poems, but the interpretations are well substantiated; and the opinion is advanced that no poem in the Eliot opera can be understood properly outside the pattern of Eliot's religious quest.

RESUME

Cette thèse suit une méthode inductive de raisonnement pour présenter la théorie suivante, à savoir que la Poésie et le Théâtre d'Eliot révèlent une quête religieuse. Le mot "religion" est employé au sens large que Tillich lui a donné pour englober à la fois l'état de préoccupation ultime et la poursuite des éléments qui répondent à cette préoccupation. Le poète probablement, et les personnages certainement, sont en réaction contre les valeurs romantiques qui semblent être faussées par les conditions du monde réel. L'Angst est évident dès le début et la recherche d'une signification dans la Vie qui soit assez puissante pour triompher de la fragmentation, de l'isolement et du relativisme engendre la quête qui commence avec les premiers poèmes et continue à travers toute son oeuvre sans coupure, sans cassure radicale. La variété des solutions envisagées est évidente dans les oeuvres poétiques: La psychologie, les religions orientales, le christianisme, l'éthique, l'ascétisme, le déracinement, l'enracinement, le mythe et l'esthétique. Chaque poème s'édifie sur les découvertes des poèmes précédents, et cette croissance organique ne s'est pas arrêtée à la mort de l'auteur. Même là, il n'y a pas de position finale car il existe des preuves qui montrent qu'il aurait pu progresser encore plus loin.

Chaque étape de cette croissance est étayée dans la thèse par des documents en relation étroite avec les poèmes et les pièces de théâtre. L'ordre chronologique a été scrupuleusement respecté, et chaque fois que cela est possible les preuves intrinsèques parlent d'elles-mêmes. L'accent

mis sur la structure d'ensemble de cette quête religieuse et la documentation minutieuse ont mené à de nouvelles interprétations de certains de ces poèmes, mais ces interprétations sont bien justifiées. Il en ressort qu'aucun poème dans l'opéra d'Éliot ne peut être convenablement compris en dehors de l'optique inhérente à la structure même de sa quête religieuse.

PREFACE

The originality of this thesis lies first in the pattern it develops, secondly in the close documentation of that pattern, and thirdly in the interpretation of certain poems. Other writers, and Unger is one of the most notable, have discovered pattern or patterns in Eliot's work. Some have seen religious pattern, though only one, Audrey Cahill, takes it back to his poetic beginnings in 1909; and her pattern is not the same as that developed here. Those who have glimpsed a religious pattern often have other things on their minds and therefore give the pattern little mention, and documentation of it less. Kristian Smidt is an exception. His work, like this thesis, attempts to marshal the evidence and prove the idea that is advanced. Our ideas, however, are quite different. Certain poems have been analysed in new and sometimes radical ways. I would point out in particular "Conversation Galante," "Gerontion," and the first section of Ash-Wednesday. All poems discussed are interpreted in an original manner insofar as they are seen in the light of Eliot's unfolding pattern.

It is difficult to list works relevant to the thesis since few critics have approached the subject in a similar manner. Besides the two books of the two writers mentioned above, there are two dissertations of interest, one by Mathewson on Eliot's poetic development, and one by Huisman on the development in his critical writing. None of these critics comes to the same conclusions as this thesis though there are similarities. I should mention my own two theses since they expand what the last three

chapters of this work have to say. For more general information on the poems no list would be complete without the names of Matthiessen, Gardner, and Kenner. For the plays there are Smith and Jones, and Raymond Preston is a close study of Four Quartets. Needless to say, none of these can substitute for the reading and re-reading of Eliot himself.

There are two brief matters of format. When poetry is cited, I have indicated omissions in the same manner whether it is a word or several lines that have been left out. Secondly, some titles of poems are quoted, others underlined. In general, complete works published individually are underlined whereas parts of works or pieces appearing in collections and periodicals are quoted. Exceptions are made for the short Ariel Poems which were published individually but are best known in collection.

There is a long list of people whose help and information has been given along the way. First is Dr. Joseph C. McLelland, my thesis advisor, whose advice was invariably sound and whose patience was even more remarkable. I should mention previous thesis advisors for previous theses, Dr. Donald Evans and Dr. Roger Hazelton, not only for the help they offered in those earlier Eliot efforts but for the discouragement they gave when I wished to attempt this longer work at too early a stage. Professor Louis Dudek conducted a seminar on "Image and Myth in Twentieth Century Poetry" that gave background necessary to this study. He also read my rough drafts and made many helpful suggestions. For his help and encouragement I am grateful. Other ideas came from seminars or discussions with various McGill professors: Dean George Johnston, Dr. John Kirby and Dr. Robert Culley in Biblical Studies, and Dr. McLelland in Philosophy of Religion. Dr. McLelland's tutorial on "Theology and the Arts" was particularly helpful in that it began the line of thought which culminated

in the comparison of The Waste Land and cubism. Four typists handled my final draft in a rapid and accurate manner: Lynn Boyle, Vivian Goldstein, Debra Lamoureux, and Heather Smith. Without their help it would have been impossible to meet my deadlines. Most of all to my wife, for her encouragement, patience, and proof-reading, I owe a great deal more than mere acknowledgement can say.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

a The Contentions

This thesis attempts to demonstrate four things: that the poetry and plays of T. S. Eliot reveal an author beginning in reaction, undertaking a life-long quest, developing towards the goals of that quest without radical breaks, and arriving at no final position. The implications of these four points need some discussion since they are by no means accepted unanimously by critical writers.

The first statement is the least controversial: Eliot began in reaction. His early pieces are so different from the poetry of his predecessors that no one can call it blind acceptance that they display. Something is new. What is overlooked occasionally is the extent of the change. Here is no mere aesthetic revolution, but a revolution in viewpoint. The content of the earliest poems shows a strong reaction against romantic optimism, which was the prevailing spirit of the times.

Since the Zeitgeist is not the subject under study, little mention will be made of Eliot's contemporaries. If it were necessary or helpful, parallel reactions could be found among them. Thomas Hardy had been rebelling for over three decades when Eliot began to write. A. E. Housman's A Shropshire Lad came out in 1896, over twenty years earlier. The Poets' Club, the forerunner of Imagism, started in 1908 under T. E. Hulme, then freshly expelled from Cambridge. Eliot's first mature poem was written in

1909. These things demonstrate that change was in the air. They could be used to substantiate the idea that the aesthetic renovations of the time were the outward signs of the rebellion against romantic standards and the rejection of the romantic outlook on life, which chronologically preceded the stylistic changes.

The possibility of such a sociological approach to Eliot's early distaste for romanticism must not hide the uniqueness of his reaction. He was not jumping on a "modernist" band-wagon, nor was his poetic and personal behaviour a carbon copy of a few men whom he admired. Laforguan dandyism is a mask for something not borrowed from French influences. Nor did his vision come from his English revolutionary contemporaries. A wrestler with second-hand conceptions does not generate the intensity of an Eliot poem. The horror was his own; and it was the motive force that sent him questing: the second point.

The fact that revulsion is intense and one's own does not necessarily mean a quest for something else. Some men satisfy themselves with negative emotions and hover around the object of their displeasure like vultures waiting for their meal to die. Hardy wrote for forty years and never got beyond rejection and rebellion.

In Eliot's case a quest resulted. That his search began from the earliest poems is a fact critics have not considered. "The Hippopotamus" of 1917 is the usual early date, though most commentators do not take up the matter of search before The Waste Land in 1922.

Even in his early career Eliot apparently needed a belief on which to base his life. When romanticism repelled him it drove him off in all directions like shrapnel. It sent him hunting for something in which to

embed or bury himself. At different stages Eliot looked into psychology, eastern religions, Christianity, ethics, asceticism, rootlessness, rootedness, myth, and above all aesthetics, as bases for life.

The word "but" brings up the third and fourth points: development and lack of resolution. Many critics consider that Eliot, in the late 1920s, stopped developing as a poet or critic. They see his acceptance of Christianity as a retreat, an escape from the problems his earlier works had described, and they bitterly decry it. Others see his Christian declaration as a point from which no further development was necessary, and still others consider his Christian works a radical break with his own past. In other words, some critics see Eliot stagnating at some point along the way, and others see him marking time for a number of years before developing. Both views are wrong, as is the view of radical discontinuity. This thesis will attempt to show, as a third point, that in Eliot's poetic works there is constant development from the beginning to the end of his career with no radical breaks along the way.

By "development" progress is not necessarily implied. Descriptive analysis of the collected works is the aim, and judgments of evolution or devolution cannot be gained from the works in themselves. What is meant by development is that each new work is based upon previous ones. There is an organic connection between poem and poem. The growth is like that of a tree (or, if one prefers, a cancer). What is new in each work is an outgrowth of an earlier thought, or else it is there because the earlier thought was seen to be inadequate and a new idea needed.

Not only does each work depend on the previous ones. The line of development is that traced by the various meanings of "religion" to be outlined in a subsequent section. After feeling the demands of insecurity

(angst), Eliot first turned for answers to various secularisms. Later he discovered with more and more clarity the realm or dimension this thesis calls sacramentalism, and later still moved into Christianity.

The fourth matter is that at no point did Eliot reach a final position or an end to his growth. Development continued from the beginning to the end of his life. Even after committing himself to Christianity he never stopped exploring his beliefs. It may be said that the line of development shifted from a search for an object of faith to an investigation of the found object; but that is still development. After the late twenties his commitment grew, his beliefs became more clearly defined, and their implications became more and more far reaching. Between Ash-Wednesday and The Elder Statesman there is as much change as there was in the period leading up to his Christian writings. Changes continued to the very last work. There is evidence that development would have continued beyond that point.

The Approach

The aim of the writer--an admittedly impossible one so that what is said in these two paragraphs is only theoretical--is to disappear and let Eliot's changing positions define themselves. The opposite approach would be to adopt a position and view Eliot from there. Such an approach would be perfectly legitimate. The interplay between the positional "form" and the Eliot "content" allows both to be tested and may uncover interesting possibilities in each.

Nevertheless, by adopting a particular viewpoint a critic is taking a stance that may hide the difference between viewed and viewpoint. In the second place, should non-conformity become evident between them, it is the viewed rather than the viewpoint which tends to be put in the bad light of being "other" and different. Thirdly, emphases may shift when one sees

a man's thoughts from a different perspective. Defining Eliot as a Tillichian, a Kierkegaardian, or an existentialist may be helpful in some ways, but he loses his separate existence; and the viewer, by using a foreign viewpoint, loses the ability to see the man for what he is.

Eliot has been such a giant figure in twentieth century literature that people have tried to cope with him by loving or hating. Sympathetic objectivity is needed. I hope to look at Eliot's thoughts in order to understand them, not to show that they may corrupt youth or purify the dialect of the tribe. He is one man who started in a certain position and, moved by understandable pressures, passed along a certain road. In other words this thesis hopes to uncover a significant pattern in the light of which individual poems and articles become more understandable.

The material available for such an approach is such that arbitrary limits have had to be set. The dissertation aims to document the pattern of Eliot's development from his poetry and plays alone. This has various implications that should be mentioned.

In the first place, a literary assessment of Eliot's work is not what is being undertaken. The poetry and plays are used to demonstrate the thought of the author behind them. A balanced literary estimate might dismiss some of the works most useful in a study of the pattern. "Conversation Galante" is slight, "The Death of St. Narcissus" defective, and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" unclear; but all reveal aspects of development. Similarly, audience reaction has little bearing on what is said. Murder in the Cathedral and The Cocktail Party were well received, and yet from the point of view of Eliot's purpose they were, as were all his works, partial failures leading to new considerations.

At the same time, the overview this dissertation gives should affect literary criticism. A full criticism should see each piece as part of the pattern. Each can be enjoyed in its own right, a point Eliot often made, but greater understanding produces greater enjoyment in works of depth. Eliot himself said,

The lyrics of Shakespeare are beautiful in themselves, but also they have a dramatic value, each coming where it does in the play. You don't get all the delight they are capable of giving you, unless you read the plays in which they occur. Look at Cymbeline for instance. And you don't really know any one play of Shakespeare fully until you have read them all. It is I think true of all major poets that you need to read a great deal of their work. In some cases all.

One of the many strands of understanding prerequisite to a full critical evaluation of any one or the whole of Eliot's works is the pattern this thesis attempts to demonstrate.

The second implication concerns Eliot's critical essays. Since the thesis concentrates on the poetry, the criticism he has written is, for the most part, ignored. Yet if the ideal is complete concentration on the poetics, the twenty or so references to the essays need to be explained. Some introduce Eliot phrases that are useful or which state ideas concisely and clearly. Such "ready made" material is hardly an intrusion. But other references occur when a particular step in the pattern is not easily deduced from the poetry alone. Sometimes several interpretations are possible from the latter. Perhaps, especially after The Waste Land, there are long periods when no poetry was published, and prose is used to fill in the gaps. The ideal, then, is not always reached.

The prose is important in another way. If the poetry and drama evolved in the manner described herein and if they represent a development

in Eliot's thought as I am sure they do, naturally the same pattern should be evident in his essays. Such matters lie beyond the scope of this study, but the pattern does appear in the prose also. Documentation is possible and could be gathered by anyone wishing to test my inductions.

The third implication of limiting the study to the poetic works is that biographical material is excluded. This may seem strange. The thesis does imply that the pattern seen in the personae must have some close relation to the pattern in the life of the author. The sensible place to look for such a pattern surely would be in letters and documents, personal reminiscences, and the remarks of close friends. To search his poetry is to look for the second-hand.

There are three responses to the matter. The first is to point out Eliot's extreme reticence in personal matters. He disclosed next to nothing about himself (that is not obvious in his essays), and little more has come out since his death. A study of pattern must go to where the information is available: either his prose or his poetry. In the second place, the information that has become available does not contradict the hypothesis the thesis presents. Those wishing to check this claim could begin with Valerie Eliot's edition of The Waste Land,² or any of several³ collections of essays and reminiscences, notably that of Allen Tate.

⁴Margolis' study gives some biographical information, though he concentrates his effort elsewhere. T. S. Matthews is soon to publish a biography, one⁵ section of which has appeared in the Atlantic Monthly. In the third place, should some future information turn up to disprove a part or the whole of the hypothesis, the work still will have value. The pattern presented is there in his collected works whether it should prove to be real to Eliot or ideal. If it represents the pattern of Eliot's own thinking it has wider

applications than otherwise. But even if the pattern is ideal only, it still sheds light on meanings and importances of individual passages. In 1940 Eliot said he wished to be the kind of poet--

...who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make it a general symbol.⁶

If such is the case, the experience and the "general truth" may not match completely but will have a relation.

The fourth implication of concentrating attention on Eliot's poetry and plays is that relatively few critical works are cited. It would be possible to demonstrate in the poetics the various steps of Eliot's development and then support many of the inductions by an appeal to the authority of critics who have said something similar. Such "proof" is generally omitted. That is not evidence of unfamiliarity with secondary sources. Such citations would lengthen the thesis beyond all bounds and would subtract attention from the poetry. When critics are mentioned it is often to acknowledge indebtedness. Occasionally, where the thesis casts doubt on a customary interpretation, the critical reference gives the other side of the picture. Wherever possible the critics are used to focus attention on the poetic idea.

The matter of brevity raises another matter. The author's development is much more carefully studied between the years 1909 and 1919 than in any succeeding decade. One reason is that less work has been done on that period by the critics; so most needed to be done. But the more important reason concerns limits. So much material is packed into the four long poems and six stage productions of his later period that a thorough study of any one of them would take as many pages as there are in this whole dissertation. It will be possible to give only a brief sketch of his later

development and to choose only the most important points for emphasis.

The approach taken runs three risks. The first is extraneous influence. In any attempt to see Eliot at a certain point in time and from the inside, one must block from his mind not only what the critics have said about his work but also what a later Eliot may have said. For example, what Eliot said in 1932 about a poem written a decade earlier should not be allowed to affect one's view of how he saw things when the poem was written. Nor should what Helen Gardner or F. O. Matthiessen said years later be taken as final though they did have an historically later and presumably more objective overview, a firm grasp of the poetry, and a copious assortment of related facts. It is possible I have not been able to raise sufficient barriers and have unconsciously allowed someone to influence my judgment.

Checks against that danger are of two types. The first is the pattern. It has come from the poems and plays. When a great number of works written over a long span of time seem related as closely as these works do, it is unlikely that there is misinterpretation. Secondly, there is the criticism Eliot wrote. When the critical works show a parallel development it makes a good cross-check for the poetry from which came the original hypothesis.

The second danger is the matter of misinterpretation. Several individual poems discussed in this thesis are given interpretations which they have not generally received. That most prominent critics interpret them otherwise is cause for concern. Again both pattern and contemporary essays act as evidence to support the interpretation that was arrived at intrinsically. Orthodoxy is not always gospel.

The third danger is the logical leap that is made. When there are developments in a poem or a series of poems it is concluded that the movement is ~~in~~ the poet's own mind. Should it not be attributed to the persona instead of jumping to a conclusion for which (because of the "intentional fallacy") there can be no evidence? In a way this is related to the phenomenologist's problem that we can never know another person. Even his writings are subject to interpretation. And what is to guarantee that his words, let alone the interpretation one puts on them, reflect his inner being?

As with most philosophical conundrums there is no final defence against that charge. But when there is a steady development through a number of works, either the development was planned, or it has some other logical explanation. When the works stretch over fifty years an artificial plan of writing is unlikely. The reason must be the poet's own development.

The discussion of approach would be incomplete without some reference to modern literary criticism and the relation this work has to sociological, archetypal, moral, psychological, and formalistic criticism. All schools offer benefits in a study like this, and no approach should be barred for ideological reasons.

Since the pattern outlined here sees Eliot beginning in a reaction against the romantic Zeitgeist, there are sociological implications to the dissertation. Eliot's work is related to the social climate in which he worked, but the stress given such factors is minimal after the second chapter.

The stress on pattern resembles the archetypal approach. Quest is a basic pattern in any analysis of universal patterns of man, and quest is the central theme of this thesis. Eliot himself, in the "Notes" to

The Waste Land, acknowledged his debt to Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough, and the poem itself is mythically structured. No claim is made in the dissertation that the quest pattern behind Eliot's poetry is "a participation in collective unconsciousness," nor is it necessarily the "protoplastic pattern of the race." On the other hand, such thoughts are not excluded.

Similarly the idea that Eliot's search implies a "criticism of life" is welcomed. This work maintains that in a very real way every step in Eliot's development was forced by his vision of chaos and his hope for order. It stresses his later concern for the effects of literature on ideas and attitudes and shows how this concern moved him. No one lacking patience with the moral approach can read this thesis with full sympathy, for it is about a man who lived much of his life by its tenets.

Psychology is present in the work through the authorities quoted, through Eliot's own interest in the workings of the human mind, but most importantly in the assumption that Eliot's poetry documents the workings of his mind. It is nowhere implied that psychology is the key to the processes of art. What makes a work into art is not the question at hand, but a psychological understanding of the artist's mind may at times shed light on the question.

The formalistic approach (the "new criticism") has influenced this thesis greatly despite the exclusiveness its advocates preach. Attention must first be on the works themselves if knowledge of what they are saying is the goal. And the structure of what is said is a prime part of the experience. Genre and structural criticism appear equally in the realms of philosophy and theology. This dissertation should be more at home with formalistic critics from those fields, for more scope is allowed there to concepts like "value" and "influence" than usually has been the case among

the new critics in the field of literature.

The Meanings of "Religion"

If this thesis is to speak of religious development in Eliot's work some discussion of the meaning of "religious" and "religion" is necessary. More than one meaning should be expected: if Eliot's works are connected organically one with another, and if they end in a religious position, then no poem can be called non-religious in the sense of being totally divorced from religion.

There are actually five ways the word "religion" could be used to describe the whole or the stages of Eliot's development. To use the same word throughout would be ambiguous. To use different words might imply discontinuity. A few pages should be taken to settle the terms and their relations with each other.

Paul Tillich either uses or comes to the verge of using "religion" in the five ways needed here. The discussion could be structured around his meanings. Nevertheless it should be added, in fairness to Tillich, that his purposes are not mine. I will be abusing his meaning in some places to bring out meanings of my own. Nor do I give a hearing to his hierarchy of values. Rather than taking his various "narrow definitions" in order of importance as he would have them, the later sub-sections will list them in order of chronological appearance in Eliot's life and work. Tillich's value system can be questioned, but Eliot's development is clear and precise.

Religion: The Broad Meaning

Tillich has one broad meaning of religion and four narrow uses that amount to separate categories within the broad definition. Each and

every narrow use is a "sufficient condition" of the broad use (as opposed to a "necessary condition"). In other words, the presence of any one narrow use allows the broad term to be applied, but the use of the broad term does not imply the presence of a particular narrow aspect.

An illustration may help clarify the matter. The broad definition and its several categories arise in the following passage:

Both the theological and the scientific critics of the belief that religion is an aspect of the human spirit define religion as man's relation to divine beings, whose existence the theological critics assert and the scientific critics deny. But it is just this idea of religion which makes any understanding of religion impossible....A God about whose existence or non-existence you can argue is a thing beside others within the universe of existing things....When we say that religion is an aspect of the human spirit, we are saying that if we look at the human spirit from a special point of view, it presents itself to us as religious.... Religion is not a special function of the human spirit! History tells us the story of how religion goes from one spiritual function to the other to find a home....Moral...cognitive...aesthetic...feeling....Religion is the dimension of depth in all of them....Depth...means that the religious aspect points to that which is ultimate, infinite, unconditional in man's spiritual life. Religion, in the largest and most basic sense of the word, is ultimate concern.⁸

When Tillich uses religion to mean "an aspect of the human spirit," he is being vague. He says he does not mean a relation to divine beings, yet in his Systematics the view that relates man to divine beings is studied as one aspect of religion. It is called "heteronomy." He also studies there that aspect of the human spirit which he calls "ultimate concern." And the concern drives a man to "go from one spiritual function to the other" in search of answers to his unrest. If he should fasten on one or other special function he is "autonomous." If he should perceive the "depth" and also avoid the false gods of heteronomy he is "theonomous." Yet all

these are aspects of the human spirit. Therefore all qualify as religious. Whenever this thesis uses the words "religion" or "religious" it will be using them in the same broad way. They may mean any or all the "narrow" meanings of the next four sub-sections, but the stress will be on the relation of the narrow category or categories to the whole. When a more restricted meaning is desired other labels will be used.

Angst: The First Category

The first particular or narrow way "religion" or at least the adjective "religious" could be used would parallel the popular understanding of "ultimate concern." The popular understanding of concern is feeling: a feeling of unease or disquietude, having questions but no answers. Ultimate concern must therefore be concern over the ultimate questions of life and death and meaning.

Tillich said, "Theology formulates the questions implied in human existence," and this would seem to match the popular understanding of what the discipline that studies the "ultimate concern" aspect of religion should do. "Religion of this first particular or narrow type means being ultimately concerned: asking the question of "to be or not to be" with respect to the meaning of one's existence.

Whatever Tillich would say to this definition, it is clear that the question is a part of "religion" as he defines it and a part of the "religious" study this thesis presents. Being so closely related, they qualify under the broad definition already outlined, and the words when referring to this category and used in that manner stress the integral relation. But if this thesis should prefer to study the category in itself it will use words that describe the psychological condition, words like anxiety (or angst), concern, restlessness, fear, dissatisfaction, and unease.

Secularism: The Second Category

"Fear" is the word Susanne Langer uses for the anxiety and dissatisfaction:

The driving force in human minds is fear, which begets an imperious demand for security in the world's confusion: a demand for a world-picture that fills all experience and gives each individual a definite orientation amid the terrifying forces of nature and society.¹²

Tillich's "questions" are complemented by answers, and Langer's "demands" result in action. That brings up the second category of religion and a further way the word could be used. When the search, either for answers or for the satisfaction of felt demands, does not lead to answers normally considered religious, one might hesitate to apply the word; but when the search reaches religious answers, there is no hesitation in calling it a religious search even at the stage where the examination is of "pre-religious" possibilities.

The religious search does often take paths that stop short of what one would normally term religion. Tillich in the long quotation near the beginning of this section spoke of moral, cognitive, aesthetic, and feeling aspects of human nature; but it was "religion," he said, that searches from function to function in hopes of finding the ultimate answer.

The answer that settles on some function of human nature contains no notion of holiness nor any feeling of worship. A man may decide that ethics is the ultimate structure of reality. Or he may settle on science. By doing so he decides to conform to natural laws as he sees them. But he has, at this level, no thought of worshipping those laws. Langer says,

Religion is, first and foremost, a system of ideas by means of which individuals can envisage the society of which they are members, and the relations, obscure yet intimate, which they bear to it.¹³

"Religion," used in this way, is any answer that explains isolation and fragmentation, and that satisfies. It need not involve God nor give the slightest consideration to spiritual matters. When it does not and when it is treated as a condition of man in its own right, this thesis will speak of "secular answers" rather than the more generic "religion."

Sacramentalism: The Third Category

The thing that would distinguish this level of definition from the previous two levels is the inclusion of holiness within the definition. The person who stands within this category has, rightly or wrongly, fastened on an answer involving an object or a concept that is regarded as holy. It should be mentioned here that this is a categorization meant to describe the person's feelings. The onlooker's opinions about the man's relationship with reality is not the question.

An ethical system, a scientism, or a gnosticism could be regarded as holy and worthy of worship, or they could be seen more objectively as facts and descriptions of the universe as it is. If the latter were the case, the "religion" would be the autonomous secularism described in the previous section. If the former, then it is sacramentalism. The word will be used whenever it becomes necessary to distinguish an answer that implies a depth, or height, or realm of holiness either from an answer that has no such dimension or realm, or from the "fear" condition or question that institutes the search.

The word "sacramentalism" came to me from Moorman's Arthurian Triptych,¹⁴ but I would modify his definition to make clear that sacramentalism recognizes the concept of holiness as opposed to the mere unified sensibility where one's self and the world, as well as symbol and object, may be unified. The added implications would fit into Langer's sixth

chapter, where the use of both "sacra" and "sacrament" imply worship as well as belief in ontological existence.

Tillich's general definition of religion covers all the meanings looked at in this chapter, but his most important category (the one often referred to as "the narrow definition" of religion) falls within the boundaries of sacramentalism. That is the field of definition he used when he referred to the "dimension of depth" in all man's separate functions, and it is what he meant when he contrasted his idea with the definition that made God into a "thing beside others." Sacramentalism and what Tillich there meant by religion are not the same thing however. Sacramentalism would include the meaning Tillich condemned for making God into a thing as well as his preferred meaning. It covers all heteronomies as well as what he called theonomy. If we measure only subjective commitment, idol worship is indistinguishable from true worship.

Christianity: The Fourth Category

As a person moves from an undifferentiated sense of holiness into a Holy that is given attributes such as personality, he is probably moving further away from Tillich's preferred meaning and closer to the meaning that makes God a thing. In Tillich's view, then, the movement from the previous sub-section to this one is most likely a descent. With Eliot it is a chronological development. As he moves from poem to poem, that which Eliot would give the name Holy becomes more differentiated and better defined. Since the movement in definition is towards the position Eliot would call Christian, this dissertation will refer to the Christian stage of development when it wishes to stress the unique features. Christianity is a part of the sacramental category. Exactly where its borders are is a matter of personal choice, and the choice to which most attention should be given in

this thesis is Eliot's.

Despite Tillich's reservations about such a categorization as I have put forward, it is a moot point whether Eliot ever made God into an object among objects. It is also debatable whether that is any different from making God a dimension among dimensions. Once, after some statements about God as the "ground of being," Tillich said,

Everything religion has to say about God, including his qualities, actions, and manifestations, has a symbolic character and...the meaning of "God" is completely missed if one takes the symbolic language literally.¹⁵

If that is true for "ground" and "depth" it is equally true for other ways of speaking, and Eliot must be judged similarly.

Implications in Literature of Religious Categories

The answers a man accepts or even considers reflects his more general outlook on life, his Weltanschauung. Weltanschauung or viewpoint is an opinion about the ontological structure of reality. Much of this dissertation deals with two viewpoints (or more accurately two families of viewpoint) and Eliot's shift from one to the other.

The first is the secular (and the angst condition could be included here). This was Eliot's position whenever he investigated ethics, aesthetics, ascetics, etc., as answers completely divorced from a supranatural realm. It was also the viewpoint of the romantic position Eliot rebelled against in the beginning, and that of some of the groups and individuals he encountered along the way. Ezra Pound and his Imagiste group's concentration on-"things" would serve as examples.

The other viewpoint or family is the sacramental (including the Christian). Eliot may have considered it first in 1915, but even by 1917-18

it was of small importance in his life. By 1919 he had accepted one sacramental viewpoint as having a genuine ontological basis, but it was a viewpoint he did not want. The succeeding years brought reconsideration and acceptance in the manner outlined in Chapters VIII and IX.

If one were to attempt an orderly analysis of the viewpoints, it might pay to remember that, just as a view from a scenic standpoint is made up of various fore-, middle-, and backgrounds, the Weltanschauungen have four grounds or levels important to an Eliot study: the supranatural, natural, social, and historical. At every level each of the two viewpoints has its characteristic ontology, its characteristic interests, and its characteristic means of coming to knowledge.

The Supranatural

The supranatural level of the Weltanschauungen concerns a man's relation to divinity and to his origins and destiny, though thoughts of spiritual "geographies" also enter. The secular man thinks in terms of this world only. In practice, if not in theory, there are no other realms. God is not a consideration. Either he does not exist at all, or if he does exist he does not enter into practical relation with man for one reason or another. Man is therefore on his own.

A romantic corollary to this opinion has entered the thesis. It is the opinion that human effort is effective, the effects being in direct proportion to the effort or skill. Human glory is thus the ideal, and human perfection is not unattainable.

This romantic optimism is not a necessary consequence following from the absence of an active divinity. Beckett and Camus are as much a part of the twentieth century as the Herculean hero. And Eliot's unease is as prominent in his early poetry as any of his secular answers. In the

early years of the century, though, the romantic faith dominated all of Europe and used as its evidence the apparent progress man was making in a wide variety of fields, especially those related to science and technology.

The sacramentalist tends to see the world as a single part of a wider stage. Dante's three-tiered supranature would be a case in point, with heaven, purgatory, and hell supplementing the world of the senses. In Dante's case these stages normally came after death; but other writers, notably Gerard Manley Hopkins, see them also in terms of the spiritual condition of a man in this life.

The sacramental view is that man is dependent on divinity. There may also be a sense of God pursuing man rather than vice versa. The most obvious example in recent literature would be Francis Thompson's The Hound of Heaven.

By this view man cannot succeed on his own. It may be because the sacramentalist believes that an admission of dependence is the highest and only fulfilment a man can have, and that other successes are detractions from this true fulfilment. Or it may be because the sacramentalist believes that there is within man either a quality or else a lack that makes success on one's own impossible. In either case effort is not the whole answer.

Suppose a man held one or other of the two ontological positions, the secular and the sacramental. What tools would be available to him? If a secular man suffered from anxiety and began a quest for answers he might place reliance on some form of inner light, but in the end his methods reduce to self-reliance. If divinity is passive, non-existent, or a supernatural force analogous to natural forces then methods of manipulation such as magic may be attempted.

The sacramental person, on the other hand, feels inadequate and counts on outside resources and revelations. Perhaps it will be some form of direct contact with divinity, perhaps prayer, conscience, ritual, the use of Scriptures, Sacraments, or church fellowship.

If a researcher had not been told a man's viewpoint, but could see the same tools being used over and over, he would have good cause for declaring the man's belief in an ontology consonant with those tools. The metaphysical and theological views of the secular man and the sacramentalist are fundamentally different, and the tools they use are distinctive.

On the next three levels the tools are much the same, but their manipulation is different. The secular man will use them to widen his natural, social, and historical knowledge whereas the sacramentalist uses them--or trusts them--to clarify the relations between these depths and the supranatural.

The Natural

The viewpoint at the level of nature concerns man's relation to creation. Secular man prefers to think in objective terms. Nature is there to be studied, whether by the scientist, pragmatist, or Imagist poet. This is not to say that "belief" is absent. For example, a secular man who happens to be a romantic at heart will believe in the organic unity of all nature, including man. He will not, however, interest himself in any form of supranature nor in what nature may tell him about such nether regions.

The sacramental position with regard to nature is ambiguous. The Christian, for example, sees man as lord of creation, though responsible to God who made him overseer; but at the same time the Christian is often accused of denigrating nature because of his supranatural preferences. One

stanza from Spenser's "Hymn to Heavenly Beauty" makes the point clear. The poem's protagonist discovers divine beauty and has this to say of the earthly variety:

Ne from thenceforth doth any fleshly sense,
Or idle thought of earthly things, remain;
But all that erst seemed sweet seems now offence,
And all that pleased erst now seems to pain;
Their joy, their comfort, their desire, their gain,
Is fixed all on that which now they see;
All other sights but feigned shadows be.

Charges that sacramentalists denigrate nature may not be even-handed. Camus, Sartre, and other existentialist writers seem equally guilty. In their case it is seldom the recognition of God's primacy that leads to absurdity in life. Moreover, the absurdity in nature that the sacramentalist sees is sometimes turned upside down after it is seen in the light of supranature. A good example is G. K. Chesterton's "The Convert":

After one moment when I bowed my head,
And the whole world turned over and came upright,
And I came out where the old road shone white,
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,
Forest of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,
Being not unlovable but strange and light.

For secular man, nature is a means to power or to self-knowledge; but the sacramentalist will use it as a tool to open up supranature or allow it to be the means of divinity's self-revelation. There are three ways nature may serve.

The first is the movement from nature to nature's God or from creation to Creator. Many arguments for the existence of God rely on this movement, and poetry has followed natural theology. The basic thought behind James Thomson's A Hymn on the Seasons is that nature can show us its Creator, while William Bryant's "A Forest Hymn" says,

My heart is 'awed within me when I think
Of the great miracle that still goes on,
In silence, round me--the perpetual work
Of Thy creation, finished, yet renewed
Forever.

The second way nature points to supranature depends on the two being much the same thing. The level which one would call nature is merely a light veiling of a wider metaphysical depth, a veiling that actually "participates" in the spiritual realm if one has the eyes to see it. Henry Vaughan's "The Morning Watch" is like that:

In what rings,
And hymning circulations the quick world
Awakes and sings;
...all is hurl'd
In sacred hymns and order, the great chime
And symphony of nature.

Such a use of nature presupposes sacramentalism, but its relation to Christianity is more difficult to define. Evelyn Underhill's "Immanence" is well within Christian borders. So is the state of childish innocence that appears in so much of Traherne. His "Wonder" begins:

How like an angel came I down!
How bright are all things here!
When first among his works I did appear
O how their glory did me crown!
The world resembled His Eternity.

But portions of Pope's Essay on Man, Coleridge's "To Nature," and almost all of Wordsworth seem pantheistic.

The final "use" of nature as a tool to supranature is to withdraw. Nature in itself is ambiguous, as often "red in tooth and claw" as it is an echo of the divine. The distasteful aspects of nature in themselves may lead to sacramental conclusions. Robert Burns' "Winter: A Dirge" does so:

The wintry west extends his blast,
And hail and rain doth blaw....
Thou Power Supreme whose mighty scheme
These woes of mine fulfil,

Here, firm I rest; they must be best,
 Because they are Thy will!
 Then all I want--O do Thou grant
 This one request of mine!--
 Since to enjoy Thou dost deny,
 Assist me to resign.

The usual first reaction to a distasteful view or situation, though, is withdrawal rather than acceptance. And the reaction is not unique to sacramentalists. Secular man may feel anxiety over nature's obvious fragmentation and attempt to withdraw by means of asceticism or else attempt to overcome the reality by means of ivory tower aesthetics. Both paths amount to a denial of nature and neither need imply supranature.

Withdrawal from the natural level may be a tool enabling one to "descend lower" to supranatural depths. This is the negative way recommended by St. John of the Cross. George Herbert's "The Pulley" implies such an ascetic negative way in that it is a lack of something in nature (rather than what nature does contain) which finally leads man to the breast of God. George Sandys has similar thoughts in "Deo Opt. Max."

Thy wonders in the deep have I beheld,
 Yet all by those on Judah's hills excelled:
 There where the Virgin's Son His doctrine taught,
 His miracles, and our redemption wrought.

In the use of the negative way, how one turns away from nature is important. It is interesting to note that neither Herbert nor Sandys discredits the good points of the world or calls nature evil and corrupt. It is just that nature in itself is a dead-end as a means to God. They turn instead to what nature does not have and depend on revelation.

The Social

The social level is man's relation to other men. Here the secular and sacramental viewpoints are even harder to separate than at the natural level. Some sacramentalists stress brotherhood while others prefer a lonely

desert hermitage. Similarly, some secular people ignore others to the best of their ability, while still others feel and practise the deepest responsibility.

This confusion tends to make the tools of this level ambiguous. Anxiety concerning isolation may or may not indicate discontent with secular objectivity, and a desire for isolation may or may not indicate the withdrawal of St. John's negative way on a social plane. The desire to follow personal example stresses the desirability of certain standards but says little about whether those standards are secular or sacramental. And the whole matter of ethics is left vague since morality may rest on any of several bases, some of which are sacramental and some thoroughly secular. Is an action done to please God, to avoid hell, out of a sense of responsibility to self, to others, to "life," or out of contempt for competing values? Morality per se, emulation, personal relations, or withdrawal from contact are rickety bases on which to argue secular or sacramental viewpoints. They tell more about personality than viewpoint.

Where the social depth is used as a tool, it is distinctly sacramental only if the end towards which it is directed is clearly specified as being so. An example in literature would be Richard Crashaw's "Two Went up to the Temple to Pray," a reformulation of the parable. Sometimes the life of a respected figure may at once guide and deter. Crashaw seems to have been such a figure for Cowley, judging from these lines from "On the Death of Mr. Crashaw":

His faith, perhaps, in some nice tenets might
Be wrong; his life, I'm sure, was in the right;
And I myself a Catholic will be,
So far, at least, great saint, to pray to thee,

Sometimes the examples that others set revolt against all standards.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote of the children sent down in English mines and pictured them saying,

... "Grief has made us unbelieving--
 We look up for God, but tears have made us
 blind."...
 For God's possible is taught by his world's
 loving,
 And the children doubt of each.
 ("The Cry of the Children")

Such cases, of course, or even a less focused sense of wrong, could lead to the desire for isolation, a removal from society's pollution in hopes of reaching other values.

The Historical

The final level to be considered is the historical: a man's relation to past, present, and future. The secular ideal is objectivity, usually a line of cause and effect on a purely natural level.

Some sacramentalists have tried to hold to the same causal principles, but usually supranatural influences are considered to be operative. Those in an orthodox Judaeo-Christian tradition will speak of Holy History and Providence, terms implying intervention from beyond the natural and human levels. It is this pattern that underlies Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The Psalms and other Hebrew poetry are full of the idea,

A sacramentalist may regard certain historical events as indications of deeper levels of meaning and action; but history is like society and nature in its ambiguity, and the sacramentalist may prefer to withdraw from rather than to use history. In such cases withdrawal is usually into an ideal past or else beyond a cataclysmic future. There may be a touch of both buried in Christina Rossetti's "In the Bleak Mid-winter," but there certainly is in her "Mother Country."

The foregoing discussion of viewpoints and levels is not definitive. It is intended to be an outline of points to be noticed as Eliot's trek through the wasteland is traced in succeeding chapters.

Footnotes

¹ "T. S. Eliot Talks about Authors, Poets and Meanings," The Montreal Star special entertainment section, April 6, 1963, p. 2.

² Valerie Eliot (ed.), T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

³ Allen Tate (ed.), T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1971).

⁴ John D. Margolis, T. S. Eliot's Intellectual Development, 1922-1939 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

⁵ T. S. Matthews, "En Route to 'The Waste Land': The Early Years of T. S. Eliot," Atlantic Monthly, CCXXXIII.1 (January, 1974), 35-50.

⁶ T. S. Eliot, "Yeats" (1940) On Poetry and Poets (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), p. 299.

⁷ See Wilbur Scott, Five Approaches to Literary Criticism (New York: Collier Books, 1967) for a good handbook on critical types.

⁸ Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 4-8.

⁹ Tillich might of course doubt that this "ultimate concern" is ultimate enough to be called ultimate. But when a man first becomes aware of this aspect of the human spirit it is usually in the guise of a number of penultimates. Tillich is making his definition with the whole of his system in mind. I want it to be seen as a man first experiences it in the depth of not a dimension but insecurity.

¹⁰ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), I, 61. He continues: "...and theology formulates the answers implied in divine self-manifestation under the guidance of the questions implied in human existence." That takes us on into religion as it will be defined in the two following sub-sections.

¹¹ Paul Tillich, "Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art," Christianity and the Existentialists, ed. Carl Michalson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 132. This is again a serious distortion of what Tillich had in mind for "religion." The full quotation reads:

Religion means being ultimately concerned, asking the question of "to be or not to be" with respect to the meaning of one's existence, and having symbols in which this question is answered.

The "question" in the quotation is merely one part of "religion" as he uses it here, and its relation to "ultimate concern" depends on the vagaries of punctuation. Another quotation will make it clear that ultimate concern for Tillich is certainly more than a matter of questions:

Our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not-being....Nothing can be of ultimate concern for us which does not have the power of threatening and saving our being....The term "being" means the whole of human reality, the structure, the meaning, and the aim of existence. (Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 14)

Here it is clear that concern is not the feeling alone but refers to the "that" which causes the feeling. And ultimate concern refers to the "that" which has ultimate power over our very being: the "that" we usually label "God." Still, calling the concept "ultimate concern" rather than "ultimate interest" shows how deeply questioning and unrest figure in Tillich's thoughts of religion.

¹² Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: Mentor, [n.d.], p. 138.

¹³ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁴ Charles Moorman, Arthurian Triptych (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1967). See especially pp. 128-30, 143-48.

¹⁵ Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 9.

CHAPTER II

FIRST STIRRINGS OF UNEASE

Early Influences

Tracing influences on an artist is more than a matter of looking at intake and output. Obviously there is a connection between what a poet produces and what bits of information he has taken in. But between the intake and output is a selection process, a matter of arrangement, or attraction for some bits and repulsion from others. Why has the poet chosen this information rather than that? Why has he noticed this and ignored that?

It is not a new idea to say that a mind accepts and arranges its information according to mind-set or preunderstanding. Less has been said on how preunderstanding comes to be; but, in so far as the question relates to Eliot, what little work has been done in tracing his early development has emphasized the role of certain authoritative individuals like Pound, Hulme, Babbitt, Russell, and a few others.

Eliot, because of some of his later statements, is often thought of as a man hag-ridden by authority: the church, the monarchy, the classicist writers. That is not incontrovertible, but even if one assumes it he must also grant that things were not always so. Somehow these authorities came to be authorities, and there was a time when they were not so:

In my opinion Eliot is much more of an inductive thinker than he is normally considered to be. He is not a man depending on authority. If and when he did come to accept authority it was because of the evidence he

saw. His poetic career did begin in a reaction against established romantic authority, but it was a reaction based on his own observations of sociological conditions and not on someone else's say-so.

Those who would argue for the influences of individuals on Eliot point first to Ezra Pound. There certainly was a connection between the two men. Eliot's earliest mature poems appeared only after Ezra Pound took an interest in his work and recommended him to some publishing acquaintances. In a September, 1914 letter to Harriet Monroe, the publisher of Poetry magazine, Pound wrote:

An American called Eliot called this P.M. I think he has some sense tho' he has not yet sent me any verse.¹

Nine months later Poetry published "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Various poems followed in the same magazine, in Others, and in Blast (the Vorticist organ). All of these contacts were through Pound. He was later to do some editorial work on The Waste Land for Eliot, and Eliot has acknowledged the influence Pound had over him. For these reasons some have come to think of Eliot as getting his start in the modern poetry movement that centred in Ezra Pound.

Such a coterie existed. There was a group that for a time collected around Pound. But modern poetry has never been an organic whole. Poets tend to be individualists and, though ideas may gather them together, they soon scatter. That can be seen in Pound's school, the Imagistes. They derived some vague shape from the ideas of T. E. Hulme and his "forgotten school of 1909," the group that Pound also labeled the "'School of Images,' which may or may not have existed."² The Imagistes lasted no more than two years before fragmenting into "Amygism," Vorticism, and several independents. This fragmentation was well under way when Eliot happened on the scene.

The Imagistes and their descendants did not have a monopoly on reformation in the years immediately before the war. Pound mocked the Georgians, but they too were attempting poetic reform. Hardy and Housman had walked away from traditional "poetic" subjects years before, and Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology began to appear in May of 1914, four months before Pound and Eliot met. These were all separate and distinct movements. Techniques or ideas may have been borrowed here and there, but reform was a thing in the air and not the possession of any group or individual.

Eliot was one of the earliest new voices, an unpublished and therefore unrecognized innovator, but certainly an independent one. His 1909-12 poems were written in as solitary an atmosphere as any poems of the period. Symons' book on the French Symbolists had sparked Eliot, but thereafter he was his own master. All the early poems were created in academic cloisters far away from the new springs of poetry. As an undergraduate at Harvard he had found modern philosophy and some criticism, but not modern poetry. Then at the Sorbonne in France he was well out of the stream of modern English poetic influence. He has disclaimed any real knowledge of T.E. Hulme until Speculations came out in 1924. And Pound had no effect on the earliest poems. They were written before the 1914 meeting and only published subsequently. With the exception of his discovery of Laforgue through Symons' book, Eliot's contemporaries were not authoritative influences on him.

If others did not move him, what did? That is { really a question in several parts. To answer it his whole spiritual journey must be studied: what drew him, what repelled him, and where he stood at each stage along the way. The information is available in his collected poems, plays, and critical essays. They form a set of tracks with each footstep dated and tell us approximately where he was in his trek. But the information,

especially the motives that drew him and the repulsions that drove him away, is seldom openly present. A great deal of inductive reasoning is needed.

Furthermore the earliest trustworthy impression is gained from "Conversation Galante" and not the more immature and unsure juvenile poems. There Eliot is already in motion, and the "push" that started him is in the past. And the poem is not an outline of a position where Eliot is. It is a destructive criticism of a position where Eliot does not want to be. Positive views are not attempted. That is true of all the earliest poetry which will be studied in this chapter. What one learns from them of Eliot's beliefs are mainly negative insights and not necessarily well integrated.

What this chapter will attempt to reveal is that Eliot was a rebel against the authority of the romantics, and that his rebellion sprang from observation of the sociological facts around him. Only occasionally will these poems offer hints of some more positive philosophy.

"Conversation Galante" (1909)

"Conversation Galante" is the earliest poem the mature Eliot saw fit to preserve in print. It dates from 1909, or about the same time as "Nocturne," "Humouresque," and "Spleen," the works it most resembles. Whereas those other poems found their way into The Harvard Advocate during Eliot's senior undergraduate year, "Conversation Galante" did not. One can only speculate why that should be so. Perhaps the poem was in a semi-developed state at the end of the school year and had to be completed or polished later. Certainly the poem has more assurance, though an immaturity of tone remains.

Whenever it came to stand in its present form, it marks a good starting point in our study of Eliot's trek. Here we are presented with a

persona very much aware of himself and the world in which he is placed. From the movement of the poem, we are given an absence of point of view and a dissatisfaction, both of which we share with the persona and no doubt with the author.

Romantic disparagement underlies the whole poem. "Romantic" is a vague word that has come to mean slightly different things in the context of philosophy, literature, and criticism. And within each discipline the definition will vary as one is guided by the Schlegels or by Schelling, by Wordsworth or by Byron. The elements I have in mind as I use the word are sincerity, spontaneity, and passion, a direct, immediate and naive manner, and a stress on "natural" sentiment over "artificial" reason. Most important is a belief in the organic unity of all nature, including man, a view not so different from the classical except in so far as the romantic believes that the unity is progressing. He is an optimist at heart.

This romanticism is the view Eliot rejected. It is the unstated basis for "Conversation Galante" and every other early poem. It is the point of departure, the reason for departure, and the ground under attack.

A quick look at the manner of the poem will show a tone that is direct, immediate, and naive on the surface only. The whole poem is a rejection, by means of mockery, of "natural" feelings. The setting gives everything needed for romantic rhapsodizing. There is a hero and his girl out under the moon listening to a tune, a nocturne, coming drifting to them on the night air. At such a time, in such a place, ecstasy is the expected result. That romantic ideal, Eliot tells us, is a lie. It cannot endure the light of reality.

The first stanza, therefore, deflates any romantic notions we

might expect about the "sentimental moon." The second stanza destroys our musical expectations, and the third is far from the expected rhapsody on woman as a symbol of love, purity, and inspiration.

The hero's tone of voice has, on the surface, the liveliness and gaiety we would expect from the scene; but we can soon see it is a mockery of sincerity, spontaneity, and passion. There is an emptiness under the jaunty veneer that sees ridicule in scene and situation, and hollowness within himself. Nothing is as it should be.

The tone is relevant in that it discloses the point of view from which the hero speaks. The poem begins in a mood of urbane lampoon. It is a rather civilized and sophisticated mockery, as I have said, of moon and tune and romantic love. The metre is an iambic pentametre that eddies and shrinks a little in the lady's replies, but it is basically steady. The rhyme is somewhat more complicated than a reader of the period would expect, but not that hard to follow. The word order is perfectly straightforward.

In the last verse, however, all this is changed. An interrupted, nervous rhythm is the rule. The line endings still rhyme; but they are hard, bitten-off dentals or, with one pair, whimpering double-feminine endings. Word order--

With your air indifferent and imperious
At a stroke our mad poetics to confute--

is disjointed, not seriously, but enough to be noticeable. The result is a complete change in tone. Urbanity has gone, and the detached irony has vanished. A note of hysteria has entered the picture. The problem confronting the young man is far too personal, too close to him, to allow the detachment with which he began. He has lost control. For the first time she can successfully interrupt him with a comment to which he has no

answer: "Are we then so serious?"

The important question at this juncture is: what is the young man's problem? One theory might be that he is not so much a man of the world as he would like to seem to this woman. He can talk of the moon with a detached and cynical smile, but the closer his gaze comes to the woman the more flustered he becomes. Supporting this view is the immaturity one sees here and there in the poem. This is the kind of theme a young man might choose. Furthermore, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," a major poem written only two years later, definitely has this element of insecurity.

Nevertheless, the poem cannot sustain such an interpretation. As the hero's glance turns from nature to the woman, it is not fluster he feels. The second stanza, for instance, cannot adapt itself comfortably to the theory. It is rather morbidity that is entering. "Our own vacuity" has not a feeling of boyish unease so much as deep disillusion. When she takes him up on the subject--"Does this refer to me"--his reply is not a red-faced hesitation but an ironical flourish more bitter than any line hitherto.

His problem is a complete loss of standards and a total deprivation of point of view. In his distress ~~he~~ personifies his universal complaint in her. She, and the whole world with her, is an "enemy of the absolute," "twisting" and "confuting" the absolutes to which he might have hoped to cling. Romanticism's conviction of art's priestly and prophetic function and its reliance on the "sole authority of the inner voice" have become reduced to relativism, to a matter of "mad poetics" and "vagrant moods."

Most interesting of all is the final stanza where the hero's monologue is interrupted by a most apposite question, the very question Eliot is framing. The romantics' "mad poetics" Eliot would confute by questioning

if we, the human race, are "so serious," so important, that we can depend on the universe revolving around us without the "slightest twist."

If Eliot could have given a positive response to that question, this poem would never have been written. Eliot was no optimist, had no faith in man nor in the stability of man's universe. He felt impelled to defy such belief. This poem attacks romanticism, but it replaces it with no more solid position.

What the poem gives is anti-romanticism. Romanticism pictures a world united for progress. This the poem denies, first, subtly, in nature itself, and then, more obviously, in human affairs. Nature is not a unity but meaningless disorganization. This is implied in the bathetic deflation from sentimental moon to balloon to lantern. Furthermore, nature is not only fractured but fractious, vicious: the moon is a luminescence guiding "poor travellers to their distress."

Nor is there unity in human relations. Rather, there is isolation. Too little of the woman is revealed by the poem to give her an unambiguous and definitive character, but there is no doubt that the hero and lady are talking on different levels and that he is aware of the fact. Thus he is led to compare the music and his own mood: it is--

...music which we seize
To body forth our own vacuity.

The term anti-romanticism for the position, being negative, and the negation of a vague word besides, is not fully adequate. The standpoint could have been called "realism," for the poet is denying the romantic view with one eye on the world and people around him. Yet realism is an even more misleading description of Eliot's viewpoint in 1909. In the first place, since we are given so little of the position itself, it is better to accentuate

the negative. In the second place, the reality that Eliot dimly sees and uses to combat romantic faith is too biased a view to be realism. Nothing anywhere in Eliot's writing resembles Thomas Hardy as much as the final verse of this poem. Hardy denied God from the evidence he saw around him, but continually ranted against this "First Cause" or "President of the Immortals" in whom he supposedly did not believe. In a similar way, Eliot, seeing fragmentation around him, goes on to deny the "gospel" of romanticism which the evidence seems to contradict. But nothing could fill Eliot with a deeper discontent than that fragmentation. In this poem there is a voice saying he would like to believe in any absolute, even romanticism, if only he could. That is not realistic acceptance. It is the painful dilemma that very often prods a man into further motion.

"Portrait of a Lady" (1910)

The previous section mentioned nature and personal relations as two aspects of "reality" revealing fragmentation. "Portrait of a Lady" is a longer poem full of interesting nuances relating to the topic, but I shall approach it only from the point of view of the interpersonal relations it displays.

The lady's speeches say a great deal about relations in general and her relations with the young man in particular. Consider first the connections between fragmentation and what she calls "friendship."

In the opening section she remarks on--

"...How rare and strange it is...
To find a friend who has these qualities,
Who has, and gives
Those qualities upon which friendship lives....
Without these friendships--life, what cauchemar!"

Life without friends may be nightmare in her opinion, but

association with general humanity, with groups or masses of people, is just as bad. The concert room she deplures because it is a place of gathered humanity where the "bloom" is "touched" and "rubbed and questioned." Many years later, Eliot was to use the verb "to question" again, this time of a surgeon's knife questioning--probing--a wound. In the "Portrait," thirty years the earlier piece, there may be no phallic intention, but the verb fits into a pattern of intimacy of contact with definite sexual overtones, and such a pattern the lady finds not nice.

With such patterns running through her mind, she has come to prefer her friends one at a time: "I have saved this afternoon for you." At most, there should be two others plus herself:

"So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
Should be resurrected only among friends
Some two or three."

Even in the first section we are brought to wonder if one reason she prefers her friends in the singular case might not be because they are more manageable that way. Certainly her gentleman caller is aware of the scene arranging itself, "as it will seem to do," through her words. If "friends" are those on whom she can employ strategy and tactics, it is little wonder that she is reduced to seeing her life "composed so much, so much of odds and ends."

There are other elements present in her speeches that would seem to indicate human fragmentation. The rhythm patterns of her speeches are conversational rather than lyric. It is the kind of affectation, though, that we would find among the bored and superficial in high society. It invokes the kind of scene we often find in a Henry James novel. Moreover, the title of the poem is the title of one of James' books. James chose to write on the theme of communication and its difficulties. As a setting for

this theme, he usually chose the upper classes of America and Europe, and then drew out the misunderstanding and isolation. Whether or not we allow ourselves to be influenced by the Jamesian parallels, we must admit that affectation does not aid deep communication.

Although much of the poem is given over to the lady's speeches, the centre of consciousness is actually within the male protagonist. The poem is what he hears and feels. In Section I, he hears her speak two sentences that are intended to lead him into believing that some level of communication has been established between them. She first indicates that he has had insight into her inner feelings:

"...You knew? you are not blind!
How keen you are!"

Then she adds, "How much it means that I say this to you." Nevertheless he is not deceived by her ploy, for he feels "at least one definite 'false note.'" By the second section he is associating her voice with--

...the insistent out-of-tune
Of a broken violin on an August afternoon.

A deeper search into his consciousness will reveal further signs of inadequate communication. The opening lines indicate that the lady has arranged the scene for a cosy tête-à-tête, whereas he sees instead "an atmosphere of Juliet's tomb"; death instead of intimacy.

Second is a remark Maxwell has made about the "constant intrusion³ into the affairs of Eliot's characters of the background of reality." It is in the gentleman caller's thought processes. The protagonist notes the background of candles in the darkened room as much as he notices her speeches. Eliot's grammar makes it unclear whether the music is the overheard background for or the imagined representation of her words. In either case, the music is noticed no less distinctly than the lady. Here,

then, is inattention to the personal.

The third thing one remarks in his consciousness in his over-all attitude. He begins in what Williamson has called a sense of superiority.⁴ That may be too strong a word, but as the poem begins and the hero enters the scene he does have a sense of being in control of the situation. After feeling the "false note" at the end of Section I, his feelings are much altered. Now he desires escape. His ideas of escape are revealingly impersonal: admiring monuments, setting his watch, the late news, beer, and a "tobacco trance." Williamson calls these "the masculine escape to externals."⁵ Escape, control, and superiority are all "externals" in human relations and do not set well with interpersonal communication.

All this I have gathered from the first section alone. The succeeding sections confirm these interpretations and add a few more items as well. The first matter to investigate is the struggle for psychic superiority in which they are engaged.

I have hinted that the woman likes her friends one at a time because she is thinking of friendship in terms of manipulation. Management is evident in Section II. Her words to him,

"Youth is cruel, and has no remorse
And smiles at situations which it cannot see,"

are not said as an accusation or complaint about his present or previous conduct, but rather to manoeuvre him into a corner. The comments on his "invulnerability," "prevailing," and her old age are similarly intended. And they are similarly successful, for he comes to feel he must

...make a cowardly amends
For what she has said.

Even his decision to withdraw in the third section shows how she has come to control and is dominating him. He feels the heel: as if he had mounted the stair on hands and knees. The empty smile she invoked in Section II returns as he faces her for the last time. She is still in control, and he sees himself as a trained animal, like a dancing bear or an ape, moving and chattering in a formal pattern that she has taught.

Even if she were to die he would not be left in peace. His sense of self-possession and control has vanished. She has punctured his bubble of isolation, not with communication, but with torment. Under the social amenities on the surface of this poem has been a war. She has wrested control from him with a decisiveness even her imagined death cannot restore.

There are several difficult passages in the poem where the absence of an I-Thou relation is implied by or involved in the most probable interpretation. The first of these is in the final section, where the young man is arrested by these words:

"I have been wondering frequently of late...
Why we have not developed into friends."

His reaction is more than can be explained away by reference to some game plan he had held for this final meeting and that she has managed to destroy with one remark. His disconcertion is so complete it can only be explained by some such thought pattern as the following: "If it is not friendship we have had, what is it? She has told me often enough it was friendship; but it is not, for I wish to end it. If we were not friends, have I any friends at all? No, I have not. I and she, and everyone, is, in reality, completely lost in the dark."

We see in Section II that she has had, and probably hardened

herself to, similar thoughts: between her and everyone, there exists a "gulf" across which she can pretend to reach and be reached by an occasional hand.

A final difficult passage really involves the matter of how the young man got himself into this tangle in the first place. Only one small hint is given. Towards the end of Section II, the common song and smell of hyacinth remind him of "things that other people have desired."

Unger gives a representative critical interpretation of the passage:

In this passage the speaker tells of one kind of awareness being displaced by another. While reading the newspaper, he is self-possessed, a spectator standing aside from the commotions of the world, of other people--until the common song of the street piano and the smell of hyacinths provoke an awareness of "things... desired," desired by the speaker himself as well as by "other people." The speaker loses his self-possession when he becomes aware of the desires which are common to mankind, including himself.⁶

This is a possible interpretation, but nowhere in the poem does it state that the young man shares the feelings "other people have desired."

My own interpretation involves a slightly different use of "self-possession." What the speaker loses is not control of his head through the motions of his heart. He has lost command of his freedom. When he hears the music and senses the flowers, he is reminded of a lost possession: himself. In the second place, no clear statement is made of who the "other people" in the poem are. If the others referred to are the romantic poets and their ilk, moving with ease from moon, music, and flowers to love, it is possible to see how a young man might get himself into an entanglement by following, not so much his own desires, but what his age has drummed into him as the dictates of his own and everyone's nature.

The lady's vague dissatisfaction with life indicates fragmentation. In Section I she expressed some discontent over an isolated life composed "so much of odds and ends." This thought is reiterated in the twice repeated line, "I shall sit here, serving tea to friends." The same pathos is present here as later will be seen in Prufrock measuring out his tedious life with coffee spoons. Whether the lady feels the pathos in the same way as the reader is another matter.

Her dissatisfaction has a further implication. We cannot help feeling that she is the cause of her own discontentment. She has mangled her own life. Eliot has given us an apt image for this fact when he has her say, while holding lilacs,

"Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
What life is, you who hold it in your hands;"
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks).

The lines leading into this speech show that Eliot fully intended this meaning. It was no accidental juxtaposition. He intended to put blame upon her and make her responsible for her own life.

This opens the way for a discussion of Eliot's attitude toward his characters. He does not, in the first instance, invoke our sympathy for them. We dislike the lady. The man is as bad, though we can feel a certain amount of sympathy for his situation. Furthermore, Eliot does not sympathize with them himself, despite Unger's claim to the contrary. They are as isolated from him as they are from each other. The poem is not compassionate, but is a criticism of life. She has ferried herself across to hell. He entered the situation intending to control her; and he not only met a just retribution, but one intensified by the fact that at the end of the poem his feeling for the victim--now himself--is still one hundred percent selfish. He is still looking for the last smile if not the last laugh.

This poem is typical of the poems of the 1909-1912 period. When Eliot puts people in contact with people, the result is not communion nor any path promising some ultimate completion. Unlike the romantics, Eliot's human being is isolated and his people are parted from each other by a deep and apparently abiding fragmentation.

The Imagistic Poems (1909-1912)

The "Conversation Galante" section of this thesis mentioned fragmentation under the aspects of personal relations and of nature. The succeeding section dealt with the aspect of personal relations. Now, as we discuss "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," the theme followed will be fragmentation as it is revealed in nature. "Prelude I and II" were written in 1909 or 1910. "Rhapsody" is a 1911 poem, and "Prelude IV" must be dated somewhere in 1911 or 1912. Thus, what we find in these poems is indicative of the whole early period of this chapter.

A good place to begin the study is Leonard Unger's conclusions:

"Preludes" is a series of four sketches of urban scenes in winter; followed by an explicatory comment.... "These images" constitute the main body of the poem. The poet has tried to guide the reader toward the "meaning" of the poem by mentioning the "fancies" which attend the images, and then by illustrating with a particular "notion." There are still other fancies or notions in the conclusion to the poem.... The final image picks up thematically from the first scene the image of "newspapers from vacant lots." The poem thus ends on the note of the fragmentary, which is in various senses the subject of the poem.⁸

In his interpretation, the last seven lines of the poem form a conclusion. The rest of the poem is a series of images to which certain fancies, or emotional responses, cling. These responses, and therefore the images themselves, are associated in the mind of the speaker, and in the conclusion he draws them all together into one idea or notion:

The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

This idea, in turn, evokes a response. The response does contain an image of fragmentation as Unger says, but the despair the image evokes is the thing to be noted. It is a despair that draws the speaker to the edge of hysteria and sympathetic madness.

The first thing we notice as we study the images of this poem is that "nature" is an urban world with signs of man everywhere. This is no pastorate. Showers and leaves do exist, but far more prominent are the products of man: chimney-pots, window blinds, and newspapers.

Secondly, the "fancies" that gather around these images are strongly indicated in the adjectives the poet uses. The leaves are "withered" and mixed with "grimy scraps" of newspapers. The blinds are "broken" and the shades are "dingy." The street is "muddy," "blackened," and "sawdust-trampled." Unmodified nouns usually have something unpleasant or--to the normal reader of the period--unpoetical about them: passageways, furnished rooms, gutters, city block, and coffee-stands. The sense of smell is invoked as well as sight. Smell of steaks may not be repulsive, but note the adjectives in "faint stale smells of beer." All these things invoke unpleasantness.

Unpleasantness is not a necessary correlate of fragmentation, but wherever distaste arises the poet seems to be thinking of disunity. The withered leaves are associated with newspaper through the wind only, and not through any underlying purpose. The muddy feet pressing to early coffee-stands are linked with hands raising dingy shades only under the aspect of time. And time is a "masquerade," a devious thing we cannot accept at face value.

People appear in pieces: fragmented objects rather than human beings capable of interrelation. Feet press, hands are raising, fingers stuffing, eyes assured; insistent feet, soiled hands, and yellow soles of feet.

People are a mere part of a dismembered universe. Time reflects it too. Evenings are "the burnt-out ends of smoky days." Nights hold "a thousand sordid images," and mornings are a coming to consciousness of unpleasant and disjointed sights and sounds and smells. This is the world recreated in the image of man. To the poet it is at once an objective view of things as they exist and a subjective reaction to them.

Finally, in the closing lines of the poem, we must ask what is the "thing," gentle and suffering, to which the kaleidoscopic fancies and images point the mind of the poet. We could call it "soul" since the poet uses the word twice. But if we are tempted to infer sacramental connotations from that word, we would do better to call it a human, sensitive consciousness. It is that part of a man's nature that, though it may contain its own share of sordidness as the third "Prelude" tells us, is "stretched tight across the sky" (like the muscle tension of a man in agony) by the "vision of the street" and a world split in shards and having no more meaning than the Brownian motion of old women gathering fuel in vacant lots.

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night" covers much the same ground as "Preludes," though it makes it even clearer that human beings are no more than things. This is the horror of the poem and the message the poet seemingly wishes to impart. He feels that, irrespective of what should be, these are the facts. The woman in the poem not simply has but is a torn dress, and an eye twisted like a branch eaten smooth or a rusty spring. The child is his hand, automatic like a cat's tongue, and an empty eye; an eye

in no way resembling the prying eyes in the street, eyes like the prying grip of a crab. And the mad-woman moon is smells, and dust, and dry geraniums.

This poem evades definitive analysis. The occasional facile rhyme--"gutter...butter," and "life...knife"--introduces a jarring note in what seems to be a tragic subject. Perhaps it was intended as macabre humour. Whatever the intention behind the French line, its assonance is overdone. Perhaps Eliot was hoping to add to the mood of instability that his irregular line pattern indicates, a mood heightened by the scenes of impoverished squalor, the memory associations connected with the scenes, and such phrases as "lunar synthesis," "lunar incantations," and "dissolve the floors of memory." Certainly instability and fragmentation are very real parts of the poem. They affect people, making them into objects, and they make objects, whether human or not, either meaningless or else of unstable and untrustworthy significance. "Reality" becomes a synthesis produced by incantation in the light of the moon, and it cannot stand the light of day. The knife twists because the unity is unreal.

It should be obvious from these two poems that, while Eliot uses images from nature and sees disruption and disintegration in nature, his primary interest is people. When an object is mentioned, the mind of the poet invariably correlates it with an aspect of human nature. That is true in every early poem. In "Conversation Galante," the moon is not mentioned for its own sake as an object. It is related to man-made objects and finally, in "travellers," to man himself. In "Portrait of a Lady," the setting is the lady's apartment except for the passage where the young man takes the air. But in either situation the objects mentioned are usually human constructs. Where they are not, such as the lilacs in

Section II of the poem, they are being touched and menaced by human action. In "Preludes," the leaves, relics of a living past, are juxtaposed with bits of newspaper and are found in city streets. Even the horse is harnessed, and the vacant lots are being picked over by human hands. "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" depicts the moon as a "she" with feeble eye and pocked face. The cat in the gutter and the bleached branch on the beach are treated as symbols for people and their emptiness.

Waggoner talks of Eliot "relating neutral 'facts' to human values."⁹ This is true though perhaps not immediately obvious. In the poems themselves, one sees the "facts" and feels the poet's revulsion. The standard of values offended by the scene or situation is not explicated. It is the hidden third term one must gather from description and reaction.

For example, when one looks at "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," there is more than fragmentation in the poem. Headings puts it this way:

In Rhapsody on a Windy Night the young man walks through the streets....He is searching for some essence or experience which comes at him or looms at him obliquely but never appears--searching for what in the nature of things, as Gerontion later explained, he could not allow himself, even if it were offered.¹⁰

Headings' psychology of what the young man could or could not allow himself is conjecture, but the "something" the critic describes is a real presence in the poem. Perhaps it has no reality. Perhaps it is merely the shadow of a wish, the hope that somewhere there is reason in the madness, and unity in all the fragmentation.

To turn to thoughts of hope, or even to wish fulfilment, is a first step away from negativity and into a search for positives. Positives do creep into the early poetry. If they are at first not quite answers they are at least ways of living with the fragmentation Eliot found so

repulsive. The two sections of the following chapter will look at the two ways in turn.

Footnotes

¹ Quoted by Stanley K. Coffman, Imagism: A Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry (Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 42.

² Ibid., pp. 5, 6.

³ D. E. S. Maxwell, The Poetry of T. S. Eliot (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 79.

⁴ George Williamson, A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot (New York: The Noonday Press, 1960), p. 71.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Leonard Unger, T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 173.

⁷ Ibid. (referring to the final three lines of the poem): "With the speaker's reference to the poem as 'music' the identity of the speaker merges with that of the poet. — 'Portrait of a Lady' is primarily a portrait of the man who speaks the poem, just as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is a portrait of Prufrock, and both poems are in respects portraits of the poet." Such an identification is simplistic. The matter will come up again when aesthetic unification is discussed at the end of this chapter.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁹ Hyatt H. Waggoner, American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 333.

¹⁰ Philip R. Headings, T. S. Eliot (New Haven: College and University Press, 1964), p. 25.

CHAPTER III

FIRST EXPLORATIONS

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1911)

This poem, like so much of Eliot's work, has as its theme human separation and isolation. Unger, for one has noted this fact:

In "Prufrock" the theme of isolation is pervasive and represented in various ways, from the "patient etherised upon a table," at the beginning, to the mermaids, at the end, who will not "sing to me"--but especially in the well-known lines "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." In a sense, all of Eliot's works in verse are variations on the theme of isolation.¹

Unger notes that this isolation is present not only in the content but in the form of the poetry:

The poem "Prufrock" is like a series of slides. Each slide is an isolated, fragmentary image, producing its own effect, including suggestion of some larger action or situation of which it is but an arrested moment. For example, "Prufrock" proceeds from the half-deserted streets at evening, to the women coming and going, to the yellow fog, to Prufrock descending the stair, and so on, to the mermaids at the end of the poem. Each part of the poem, each fragment, remains fragmentary even within its given context--a series of larger wholes is suggested, and yet the series of suggestions is itself a kind of whole.²

This should be sufficient to show that the same kinds of problems are present in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as have been seen so prominently displayed in the earlier poems.

What this chapter will do that has not been done for earlier pieces is examine how the protagonist copes with the problem. This will

give some insight into possible solutions that were running through Eliot's mind.

Prufrock is a study in living with one's problem rather than an attempt to solve it. Solving a problem is a matter of analysing the situation, accepting what cannot be changed, and working on what can and must be changed if there is to be a solution. If no solution is possible or if the possible solutions are too costly, attempts are made to adjust oneself to the situation and live with it, as Prufrock does.

Of course, what has just been said is a rational outline of procedures. The mind that puts this strategy in motion need be neither logical nor conscious of what it is doing. That is obvious in the poem, for Prufrock is totally incapable of conscious analysis of the situation. He never faces his problem, even to himself. We know this because the poem uses a stream of consciousness technique by which we are present in Prufrock's thought processes. The principal point of the epigraph is that Prufrock could never lay bare his soul to another. It is just not in his nature. We overhear him talking with himself, and even in that dialogue he cannot face his problem. He is indirect even with himself. The closest he comes to his problem is to call it an "overwhelming question," and then forbid himself to think about it: "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'"

On the other hand, though he shows himself incapable of acknowledging the situation, somehow Prufrock has become peripherally aware of it. Although he never allows it to come to the foreground of his conscious mind, he knows first that he is in isolation, secondly that he has certain desires of escaping the situation in which he knows himself to be, and thirdly that an action is required to bring about his

escape: to go and make his visit.

These three facets of his awareness are too obvious to require proof, but mention might be made of some aspects that show the inherent indirection. First there is his isolation. It is a hidden aspect in many of the images that flow through his mind. The most obvious it becomes is when he is searching for words with which to begin the vital conversation:

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow
streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of
windows?

This is the situation he hopes to avoid. If he can make contact with this woman he can avoid being one of those old men, leaning out of windows with emptiness behind.

The desires that make up the second aspect of his peripheral awareness are also approached circumspectly. Even to himself he will not make a plain statement of what he has in mind. He is fascinated by arms:

Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed by light brown
hair!)...
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a
shawl--

instead of about his shoulders. A note of envy enters as he thinks of the woman's pet,

Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep...tired...or it malingers.

The cat image in the third stanza is at once a picture of Prufrock's repressed desires and of his fear of action, for the cat rubs its back, rubs its muzzle, lingers, slips by, and makes a sudden leap; then curls once about and falls asleep.

In the third place, the tactic Prufrock has settled upon is no more clearly voiced. Is he planning to propose to the woman? Or does he wish to proposition her? The former would seem better able to solve the problem of his loneliness. Nevertheless, it is nowhere made clear, and scholarly argument continues. What is made clear is the dramatic action and the trauma such action means. We see him setting out to "make our visit;" on the way and imagining the scene ahead, peopled as it has been on previous visits; mounting the stair and hovering at the door while wondering if he "dare disturb the universe;" seated and wondering how to begin; the afternoon, the evening passing; Prufrock donning his coat, and "in short, I was afraid."

As neutral observers, our estimate of the situation may not be the same as Prufrock's but that is unimportant. For the purpose of this essay, what we need to see is Eliot's estimate of the situation, and that is well hidden.

Before seeking what is in Eliot's mind, there is one matter that is definitely not in his mind. The isolation in which Prufrock finds himself is nowhere blamed on misunderstanding. It is not simply a matter of a man and a woman failing to catch each other's spoken or signalled meaning. The thing Prufrock has in mind has never before arisen between them. Since these thoughts are hidden at present, he is not the person she envisions him to be. Her reactions are therefore based on and directed towards a mask. If he reveals himself, her responses to him must change; and in what direction will the change be? The poem nowhere states that a frank discussion might clear the air. This is his problem. Perhaps she will accept the maskless Prufrock. Perhaps the mask is a social necessity, the removal of which might cause consternation or revulsion, and subsequently

social exile. The problem is not misunderstanding but whether or not the risk of communication is possible. There is also a wonder if communication itself can be.

Much of the problem would seem at first sight to relate to Prufrock's own character: his indirection, insecurity, and indecision. Is the risk worth taking? Prufrock's indirection limits his social contact because a person who will not directly state his wishes, even to himself, is unlikely to have them understood. His insecurity is the result of a poor self-image. He is self-conscious over his bald spot and over his thin arms and legs. There is the feeling that every move is a "presumption" that disturbs the universe. All these things imply social withdrawal and separation from all close contact. Finally, there is his indecision. A man of "a hundred visions and revisions" is probably estimating risk.

There are indications that it may be more than risk Eliot and his persona are examining. It may be the very possibility of communication that is in question. If indirection and insecurity are inherent that might be so. And if all men are indecisive, they may not have minds that can be understood. The Prufrock character may be written over-large, and the reader may not feel able to identify with him. In this poem, nevertheless, Eliot seems to be mulling over the same apartness problem as Prufrock, who is his creation, and is at least giving Prufrock's "answer" a hearing. Evidence for this lies in the following considerations.

Critics see Prufrock avoiding issues, avoiding even thinking about them. They cannot condemn him for that. Man, like all creatures, flies from pain. Within limits he may face up, but when pain becomes intolerable a reflex may be formed to avoid the feared pattern. Once the avoidance reflex is established it is not easily broken. That is especially true if

reflex has become subconscious, as seems to be the case with Prufrock. If all men do not have this problem, they could have.

Eliot and his critics all share with Prufrock in the second barrier to communication: self-image. Self-consciousness is present in all men and urges them toward self-protection rather than communication. Feelings of incapacity and fear of failure cause a huddle reflex. There is a related problem that could be called self-image if the word is allowed to cover not only the "me" but the "mine". The problem is caution, another kind of insecurity. It is the opposite of risk: the thought that it is better to hold what one has and gain nothing than to risk all one has for everything and face the possibility of nothingness. This is Prufrock asking, "Would it have been worth it, after all?" and giving a resounding "No!" His present shallow relationship is better than having her turn from him and shatter what little contact there is with the words,

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

Thirdly, Prufrock can be accused of indecisiveness, changing his mind more often than his underwear. Again this can be thought of as a universal problem, and certain aspects of it are perhaps worse than others in that they are not self-inflicted. The aspect most harmful to relationship is not mere indecision but change. No man is single-minded for very long, even in his conscious purposes. In fact, a person may be too resolute, too determined. Growth implies change, even in minds. But change from moment to moment makes people hard to understand, and it may also become difficult to "know thyself."

Prufrock is larger than life in those three barriers. Eliot may have made him so in order to reflect more clearly the human condition. The

three elements are in men. Those who deny the reflection the mirror of this poem shows them would have to do so because they believe there is some threshold of size or intensity beyond which representation becomes distortion. Eliot saw no such threshold. He felt he had created a human being. We can see that from the sympathy Eliot has for his protagonist. Matthiessen describes the sympathy this way:

What renders the character of Prufrock not just grotesque or absurd but poignantly real is that as a result of a gradual accumulation of undertones and especially of the final dramatic lines, one can glimpse, beneath the banal surfaces and futile indecisions of his life, his perception of beauty, his understanding of the meaning of love and sympathy, if an utter inability to gain them.³

There are two other barriers to communication within the poem that are not Prufrock's alone. The first, masking, has already been mentioned. Masking is putting on "a face to meet the faces that you meet." It is a defence action not unique to Prufrock. In the poem women come and go "Talking of Michelangelo" in whom they have no interest beyond what they feign in order to appear cultured.

The face these women wear is also one demanded by society and is therefore a "role imposition." Role imposition is the act of forcing another to act a role or be a person he is not: it is a kind of interpersonal aggression. It is present in the pressure society applies to the women forcing them to appear interested in art, but it is also there in the line, "The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase." Prufrock's behavior is imposed on him from outside so that he cannot be himself:

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin?

These five barriers constitute the situation Prufrock would find if he were capable of the analysis. Some may be considerations of risk primarily, since they seem self-induced. But role imposition is thrust upon a man from outside, and the changeability under which men live is not their own doing. It is the possibility of communication these matters raise. Eliot is exploring what it is like to live with a handicap. He accepts the imperfection of communication and goes on from there. That is why Prufrock attempts but is not able to put his self-image and mask aside. That is why he does not even attempt to modify his indirection.

After proving to his own satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, no solution to his problem of isolation is possible, Prufrock turns to adjusting himself to live with the situation.

The first step is to admit to himself what he thinks to be the facts of what he is: he acknowledges his own cautious self-image. He is not like Hamlet, no tragic hero. He is capable of neither rising above situations nor going down grandly. He is instead "an attendant lord" with all the deficiencies of a Polonius: "almost, at times, the Fool." This admission, this statement that he considers to be an acknowledgement of reality, is not one at all. It is the burial of the real Prufrock. What he is is lost for him behind a category, the self-image of fool. His "admission" is the creation of a new reality rather than acknowledgement of an old.

With this step comes also an admission, or a decision, that he is really not worth getting to know deeply and personally. In the play of life he will do to "start a scene or two," but he sees himself, in the end, as an object rather than a person, a "tool" that is "glad to be of use." The adjectives he uses to describe himself are "deferential, ... politic, cautious, and meticulous;" advice he can give, but friendship, as he knows,

is a state requiring more than that.

With his self-image and caution firmly in mind, he takes the second step of securing his mask. Because he sees himself aging he will hide behind the styles and wear cuffs on his trousers. This kind of masking buries the real Prufrock one layer deeper.

Finally, with all five barriers present and accounted for, he must deal with the hopes he has had. There are really only two ways of doing that. He may repress them, or he may think of them as beautiful memories. Actually he does both.

Sometimes he manages to forget by concentrating on the simple problems of life, like his stomach: "Do I dare to eat a peach?" Sometimes he diverts himself by adjusting his mask. He will comb his hair in the latest fashion, no doubt concealing his bald spot. Or he will project a different image by sauntering on the beach in elegant white flannels.

Such diversions do not always work. On the beach for instance, are reminders of the beauty he has seen. So, he finds himself deciding: accept the memory of the mermaids singing. Just remember it is memory, that they "do not...sing to me."

Following this self reminder come five of the most lyric, sensuous, almost erotic, lines that Eliot has written:

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown....

The hypnotic metre, the skilful use of certain consonants and vowels, combined with the word-picture itself form an image of exquisite beauty. This is the memory Prufrock has. This is what he possesses.

Prufrock would not wish to be without the memory. Any sensitive person would consider it better than nothing. But he knows something else full well, and it is here that the persona and the poet become one. He knows that a memory or an ideal representation of human fellowship is no substitute for the real thing. As an attempt to cope with its absence, memories or abstractions may be needed, but they are not soul satisfying. If the hint the epigraph gives us may be applied to Prufrock in more than his reticence, then it is telling us he is suffering the agonies of hell.

If the alternative Prufrock chooses is an unsatisfactory course of action, where is a young man like Eliot to turn? An earlier Matthiessen quotation mentioned the key-word "beauty." Spender may have a similar idea in mind:

In "Prufrock" and the early poems, despite the elaborate self-mockery, the point of view is essentially aesthetic. The artist, too sophisticated to be a Ruskin, a Pater, or a Wilde, nevertheless has a deep nostalgia for the past--almost any past--in which men lived by their visions.⁴

Beauty and what Spender terms "visions" are not necessarily the same thing. Prufrock had them both but (in a way Spender did not mean) he lived by his visions. As we now turn to the last poem of the early period, it is to beauty we must look.

"La Figlia che Piange" (1912)

The previous section explored the hypothesis that if life has nothing else there is always memory and day-dream. Where such ideas were put forward they were tentative and tinged with a note of dissatisfaction. This section will explore a second alternative to the acceptance of fragmentation. Here will be examined the idea that if life has nothing else significant there is beauty: the aesthetic answer to the vision of disruption in life and nature.

Before examining "La Figlia" in detail, I would like to posit two alternative ideas of beauty, and then see if the poems already studied show a preference for one over the other. First, the two possibilities.

Beauty was mentioned as an element present in "Prufrock" but the poem nowhere states whether beauty is found or created. There is a big difference between the two. If beauty is found in nature or life, then order and meaning, of this one kind at least, are inherent there. If this is not the case, then, so far as beauty is concerned at least, the world is inherently fragmentary, and the mind must not so much search for as create and impose its ideas of beauty.

The implications are far-reaching. If beauty is merely created and imposed, it has no reality outside the mind. Reality itself is disordered even in the corners where the mind sees order. Except with the most hardened aesthetes, we might expect to find such a bifurcation between idea and reality producing a note of unease. Along with the vision of beauty there may very well be a sense of its unnaturalness and unreality, perhaps even a feeling that beauty is not enough. On the other hand, if beauty is considered in some way objectively real, it may not be the only reality and it may not be considered enough. But though there may be a quest for further unities, the frantic search for something else to cling to should not be intense. Furthermore, the feeling of unnaturalness and unreality will be absent.

The early poems deal in ugliness and emptiness. "Conversation Galante" mentions "vacuity" and "vagrant moods." "Preludes" has swivelling backsides and discoloured feet. "Rhapsody" is composed of rusty springs and a "crowd of twisted things." "Prufrock" has the twisted "ragged claws," and the boudoir scenes in "Portrait" are notably artificial. This seems a strange mixture of reality and unreality. But what is real and what is not?

In every poem we have the impression that the things are more real than the synthesis that brought them together. The beauty of the poems is elaborately, delicately constructed; but somehow chimerical. And that beauty, it would seem, is not enough. Every poem ends in dissatisfaction.

These tendencies seem most evident where beauty is most present in the poetic structure. There is, for instance, the aesthetic element in the final three lines of "Portrait."

I have already quoted Unger's remark that "with the speaker's reference to the poem as 'music' the identity of the speaker merges with that of the poet." The "poet" is Eliot himself, according to Unger's interpretation. By my reading of the poem, the speaker and the poet are one and the same protagonist that Eliot has created: the hero undergoes the experience and then writes about it. This makes it unnecessary to bring Eliot into the poem to explain its closing; and making the "speaker" and "poet" one leaves Eliot's connection with the expressed feelings undefined. Nevertheless, I suspect Unger is right in involving Eliot here. He is the "third who walks beside," because this is a matter that concerns him deeply.

Much of the importance of these closing lines depends on how the word "music" is interpreted. There are three possibilities, but only one makes consistent sense. The speaker has shown himself sensitive to background music throughout the poem. This could be a reference to music that he is overhearing. If so, the ending of the poem is pointless. Or the reference could be to the web the woman wove to entangle the young man. Since he is now completely entrapped, so much so that even her death could not free him, her "music" has been brought into a successful conclusion. If this is how we are to take the word, it is inexplicable that he should want to smile. The best interpretation would seem to refer to the poem itself, as Unger implies:

out of their totally fragmented relationship he has managed to create a poem, a "music," a thing of beauty.

To create something out of nothing should give the right to smile, and so it would if beauty were enough in life, or even if beauty were a solid value among other values. Still, the poem ends in the uncertainty of a question: "Should I have the right to smile?" He has created beauty but he suspects there may be other equally important values, or even values that could kill his joy.

The suspicions of the closing lines of "Portrait" are strengthened by the final line of "Prufrock." "Human voices" would seem to mean reality that intrudes upon our dreams. Is beauty merely one of those dreams from which the world will wake us ... "and we drown"?

Now we turn to "La Figlia che Piange." It does not give a final decision between beauty as real or as idea. The beauty present is a creation of the mind, but no statements are made either for or against the possibility of beauty in the real world.

As in "Prufrock" and "Portrait," "La Figlia" concerns the end of a relation between a young man and a lady.⁵ The poem has fewer difficulties than most of Eliot's works,⁶ but an analysis with one eye on the aesthetic might be helpful. It will show that the beauty being considered is a created thing.

The greater portion of the poem deals not with what happened, the factual events, but with what has been made of what happened. The scene in the first stanza has been extracted out of life and made into a thing of beauty by the mind of the young man. He imagines their pose, their actions, their feelings, not as they were but as they should be. And the "should" is based solely on aesthetic standards.

As in "Conversation Galante," the note of unease becomes striking toward the end of the second stanza. There is the grim analogy of soul and body followed by the desire to find some way of making the parting into something understandable, no doubt by means of its beauty. The "some way" is to be "light and deft," but instead ends in the unstable metre of the last long line: "Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand." Visions of beauty die and in the final stanza reality appears.

Reality is the fact that "she turned away." It is also the fact that, though he could and did create aesthetic pleasure from the scene, she continued to haunt his memory for "many days and many hours." Using an impersonal mode of expression to separate himself from his feelings, he asks himself "how they should have been together." His aesthetic nature answers. If they had continued on together, he would have lost for himself the beautiful picture he has created out of gesture and pose. That this leaves him dissatisfied is clear in the last two lines:

Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

Beauty, whether real or ideal, is a standard of judgment. As such it should be open to testing. There are two practical ways of testing a standard or set of values that Eliot may be using in this poem. The first is to test it against the facts. This is what Bradbrook sees happening in the poem:

The curious shifts between second and third person in the address, the hint of a Henry James situation at the end of the second stanza, and the summing up, "I should have lost a gesture and a pose," indicate clearly that the very substance of the poem is the relation between life and art--particularly between those moments when life falls into the ordered pattern of art; but the beautiful movement, the alternation of longing and control, conveys most poignantly a human situation.

The phrase after the dash is incorrect. The poem has nothing to do with moments of life that fall into the ordered pattern of art. The ordered pattern of art is what the persona creates for himself because life is disordered and unsatisfactory. The poem states the relation between life and art rather clearly: art is ordered and life chaos.

Despite that misreading on Bradbrook's part, she has put her finger on two important points. The first is that the protagonist, having as he does the self-image of an artist, is deeply concerned with the relation of life and art, of reality and a standard that must itself be measured. The second point is that the hero is existentially--"poignantly"--involved.

The second way to test a standard is by means of a second standard that is thought to be of some value.

Headings may have had this obliquely in mind:

"La Figlia che Piange" makes of a described parting of lovers something of a Joycean epiphany--a recreated moment of dawning moral awareness. The protagonist pretends to have been only an observer, but his deep involvement in the scene makes the reader feel that the narrator was a participant. He sees himself as the mind of an artist, and he regards the girl as a body torn and bruised. And the parting is described as resembling the mind's desertion of the body it has used.... The protagonist tries to use artistic significance as justification for the desertion, but he has not wholly succeeded in convincing himself, let alone the reader.⁸

I see no reason to read the poem as a moment of "dawning" moral awareness, but it is certainly a clash of ethics and aesthetics. His self-image is that of artist, as Headings asserts. He may even be wishing for himself the image of an aesthete who denies all extrinsic principles of judgment, for there is more than a hint that he would like to dispense with the claims ethics have upon him. This he seems unable to do. As a result

his aesthetic principle and therefore his very self-image are, at least by implication, brought under judgment.

Headings sees the same "deep involvement" of the young man that Bradbrook pointed out. The protagonist's assessment of his aesthetic standards by means of fact and by means of ethical comparison has not been a passionless pursuit of knowledge. Passionless is what his art would like to be. The facts of disintegration and the standards of morality forbid detachment by throwing him into self-conflict. We neither live in art nor live by art alone. This is the hero's problem. It may very well be the artist's--Eliot's--admission. Ethics cannot be abandoned. Life cannot be ignored.

What can be said in summary of these early poems? Hobbes described human life as nasty, solitary, brutish, and short. A summary of the early Eliot poems would describe life as nasty and solitary, but it would wish to affirm a saving grace. What that positive value is is never stated. Indeed, it is undiscovered, no more than a faith or hope in something unseen. Despite the negativity of these early poems there is a firm but buried belief that somewhere in the isolated inner life of a man there must be something of value. It is, it must be, something that is somehow bigger than the fragmentation about it. It may show its value by the order and beauty it can dream and create, but those dreams and those beauties are not the thing itself.

The early poems seem to suggest two roads for further exploration. One is an intensified search for that something of value that "lies behind action and beneath experience."⁹ The second path of exploration might be directed towards a further understanding of the barriers to communication and the causes of fragmentation that make that

something so hard to find.

Yet these seem to have been the goals Eliot had been pursuing throughout this early period. His "La Figlia che Piange" in many ways the summation of the period, had given no answers that the other poems did not contain. Not even the hints of ethical considerations were new, for "Portrait," one of the earliest pieces, had closed on an ethical question. Whether we measure the poetic progress or the ideas contained, there is no progress. "La Figlia" can be read as reiterated frustration.

In 1964 Eliot referred to this particular poem as the most innocuous he had written as a young man and consequently his most anthologized piece of the period. Certainly on its completion he wrote no more poetry for three years.¹⁰

Footnotes

- 1 Unger, pp. 13-14.
- 2 Ibid, p. 19.
- 3 F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 99.
- 4 Stephen Spender, "Remembering Eliot" in Allen Tate, T.S. Eliot, The Man and His Work, p. 65.
- 5 Unger makes clear how common a theme this is in Eliot: "'Conversation Galante'...is obviously modeled on 'Autre Complainte de Lord Pierrot,' which is quoted entire by Symons....If we consider these two poems, Laforgue's and Eliot's, and then recall Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady,' it is easy to see how that poem, too, is...a dialogue between a man and a woman in which at once too much and too little is being communicated.... 'Prufrock' is also related to the 'Portrait' and 'Conversation Galante.' The poem opens with the promise 'To lead you to an overwhelming question...' and this question is not so much an interrogation as a problem--the problem of communication between a man and a woman....This theme of the failure of communication, of a positive relationship, between a man and a woman is found again in the other early poems 'Hysteria' and 'Figlia che Piange,' and it is indeed a major theme of the whole body of Eliot's work. It appears early in The Waste Land with the image of the 'hyacinth girl.'...It becomes related to other emerging themes, especially to religious meanings--for example, in the symbolic imagery of the 'rose-garden' which appears in the works Ash-Wednesday, Four Quartets, The Family Reunion, and The Confidential Clerk." Unger, pp. 10-12.
- 6 Even the simpler works have been subject to controversy over not only their value but their very meaning. Eliot has not always helped to clarify his meaning, for when asked concerning them he is as likely to give a false lead as a genuine one. "It has been said, on good authority, that La Figlia che Piange is written about a statue of a weeping girl, which the poet hoped to see in Italy but never located. Even the word of Eliot himself would not convince me that a poem beginning [quotes first stanza] had very much to do with marble." M.C. Bradbrook, T.S. Eliot (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1951), p. 14.
- 7 Bradbrook, p. 14.
- 8 Headings, p. 25.
- 9 Mattiessen, p. 70.
- 10 Neville Braybrooke, T.S. Eliot (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), p. 13.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER THE INTERLUDE

Boston Poems and Other Observations (1915)

Eliot met Pound for the first time in September, 1914. In the following twelve months, all the early poetry except "Conversation Galante" and "La Figlia che Piange" were put into print through Pound's literary contacts. Whether Eliot had resumed writing before that meeting or because of it is unknown; but in the twelve to eighteen months following, seven new poems were written. Six of these had been published by September, 1915; but one, "The Death of St. Narcissus," was suppressed for a number of years. The latter poem casts significant light on the others of the period, but I will reserve it till the end of this chapter. "Mr. Apollinax" is also an important poem of the 1915 period. Since it is set in Boston, and since so many of the comments I will be making in this section apply to it as much as to the other pieces, I have not excluded it completely from the following discussion despite the fact that it will be receiving separate treatment in a section of its own. This section will concentrate on three poems set in Boston, "The Boston Evening Transcript," "Aunt Helen," and "Cousin Nancy"; and on two poems that are not Bostonian but whose content is similar: "Morning at the Window," and "Hysteria."

All seven 1915 poems constitute the first of many fresh starts for Eliot. A literary critic would find these poems minor at best, but

for our purposes they mark an important extension of exploration. A surface reading might not show that. The same ideas as were in the 1909-12 poems all appear again. Little is genuinely new. The important things to note are that some emphases have shifted and that a slightly different narrator personality is being projected.

I should say a word about the narrator since a basic assumption is being made. If we except "St. Narcissus" from the discussion, four of the six poems use the first person singular. In the remaining pair, "Aunt Helen" and "Cousin Nancy," opinions are spoken from a distinct point of view. All six poems are narrated, and the narrator personality is uniform throughout. We may treat him as one person without serious distortion to sense or structure.

Parallels with the early poetry are too striking to require elaboration. There are distinct similarities in the presentation of the problem in particular. I will point out three obvious ones. Isolation was a continuous problem in the earlier poems and it is present again here. In "Morning at the Window," the narrator's window is high above the street, removed and at a distance from the people he watches. This separation is reinforced in many ways. There are at most two instances of people touching. Miss Nancy is doing "all the modern dances" in "Cousin Nancy"--which may or may not have involved touching the partner--and the maid sits on the footman's knee in "Aunt Helen." Too much stress should not be placed on such physical contact, for two instances in six poems is hardly an overabundance. Furthermore, there is a fastidiousness about the narrator's person that makes such happenings highly distasteful.

A second parallel is fragmentation. Even the techniques of presenting the idea are the same. In "Morning at the Window" again, the people seen are not people at all, but bits and pieces. There is the "face" from the bottom of the street and a "smile" hovering in the air above a muddy skirt. In "Hysteria" also, the woman is dismembered in the narrator's imagination. She is a matter of teeth, throat, muscles, and breasts. Such bodily fragmentation we have mentioned already in our review of "Preludes."

A third similarity is again one both of technique and of the end the technique produces. The adjectival denigration used in "Preludes" and other early poems reappears in "Morning at the Window." Faces are "twisted," souls "damp," and smiles "aimless." This technique is still building a mood of dissatisfaction.

It would seem, then, that Eliot in 1915 was still caught up in the same life problems as he had been five and six years before. Certainly his character is. Isolation, fragmentation, and dissatisfaction are rampant.

I implied that the 1915 poems do have something new. Actually, there is novelty in the life problem presented as well as in the method of handling the situation. Since we have just been looking at the problems, let us begin our search for novelty there. We will find the major difference to be moral relativism.

The 1909-12 poetry revealed fragmentation in many aspects of life, but certain ethical standards had stood as a fairly solid background. It is true that the narrator-poet in "Portrait of a Lady" may have had

doubts as to whether or not he could ignore morality in favour of aesthetics, but the poem was so written that the reader felt no doubts. The same could be said of "La Figlia che Piange." The early poems may have shown people isolated or even broken and twisted, but they were subjects of concern, and their agony was shared by the narrator.

The 1915 poems present a narrator who is detached from the situations he describes and seldom shows a reaction. The narrators of the earlier poems had occasional doubts or questions about their own standards, and these functioned so as to guide the reader to something better. The technique does not recur. The narrator's reactions, when they do come, relate to aesthetics rather than ethics. Ethical situations are presented as facts with little obvious positive or negative bias, and these "facts" would seem to indicate relativism in values.

"Aunt Helen" is the most obvious comment on relativism. After the woman's death there was nothing unchanged except the clock on the mantel. The conduct of the servants seemed based on her wishes rather than on absolutes. And the wishes of one who leaves her dog more than her people may be open to ethical question. Death itself is devalued by the undertaker: "He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before." The aunts in "Cousin Nancy" are "not quite sure" of their niece's conduct although they supposedly have the standards of Emerson and Arnold to guide them. People, too, are devalued not merely by society's wearing action as in the early poems. People now are worthless in the eyes of the narrator. Cousin Harriet is just a woman to whom he hands the newspaper. Mrs. Phlaccus and the Cheetahs are of no more significance than "a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon." The opinions

of the various personae in "Mr. Apollinax" are so relative they are meaningless: one thinks, "He is a charming man," while another decides, "He must be unbalanced."

The foregoing should make it clear that while the old problems remain the new dilemma of relativism has been added. The next matter to be examined is what is new in the responses the characters show to the various problems of existence. Are the answers shown in the 1915 poems solutions? Or do they reveal adaption in order to live with the problems?

Several hypothetical responses could be built from the evidence in the poems. The question is which ones were in Eliot's mind. The hypothetical construction to be examined in this section has much evidence to support it but does not explain all the facts fully. This is the idea that loyalty and patriotism is what Eliot is examining as a solution to life problems.

The earlier poems, with the one exception of "Portrait of a Lady," seemed culturally neutral. Their locale does not strike one as being in any one part of the world rather than another. The "Portrait," though, was distinctly Jamesian, and as such seemed European.

Society in the poems under consideration here is American, Boston in particular. We could quibble over this generalization. For one poem, "Hysteria," has no particular setting; one poem, "Morning at the Window," may have an Oxford setting; and the one positive character in all the 1915 poems, Mr. Apollinax, is an old world character "visiting the United States." Still, the general flavour of the 1915 work is

Bostonian.

All this is evidence for a contention. "Portrait" shows that Eliot may have had an early interest in Europe. The 1915 poems show, one might argue, much more than an interest. "Morning at the Window" is the least corrosive poem of the period, and Mr. Apollinax is the only persona the narrator treats with even qualified approval. If we may take these to represent things British, we may conclude Eliot is giving a general approval. In contrast, and far more obvious and certain, is the cold disapproval of things Bostonian. Here may be the first symptoms of an eventual severance from the land of his birth and a dedication to England.

Possibly here are the first symptoms. The argument may be valid as far as it goes. The problem is that by implication the hypothesis wishes to go further, to say that here is an attempted solution to Eliot's problems. The problems that faced Eliot and set him in motion were fragmentation and isolation, both in his own life and in the world he saw around him. These matters would be intensified in 1915 in a country at war; and patriotism might very well suggest itself as a solution. Attachment to certain standards could not be used to remedy his sense of loss, but could be used to disguise it. However, there is absolutely nothing in these poems that indicate a connection. If he is rejecting his old home for the old world--which is far from proven--it is no cure. The narrator at the window and Mr. Apollinax in various New England drawing rooms are still totally isolated; and the narrator is still unhappy. Finally, we cannot accept that Eliot was at this time in fact rejecting his homeland. The evidence is circumstantial at best,

and there is some evidence to the contrary. Within a few months he was to try to enlist in the American navy. In the final analysis we must admit that attachment to country is in no way suggested as a salve for personal isolation and a universe in pieces.

"Mr. Apollinax" (1915)

"Mr. Apollinax" is the poem of the 1915 period that tells us the hypothesis Eliot was really examining. It is not adherence to place or principle that is under study so much as a type of personality. The idea is given consideration, admired even, but in the end is rejected.

The personality that Eliot considers, admires, but rejects as a solution is not that of the narrator. It is Mr. Apollinax. The narrator's personality, though, is extremely important. He is the foil through which the problems under consideration are revealed. Before we study Mr. Apollinax himself, we must analyse the narrator. That will involve a re-examination of the Boston poems discussed in the previous section.

In the Boston poems, the old techniques were continued and were used to express the same old life problems as were in the 1902-12 writings. An addition was the new relativism in ethical matters. Isolation was always a major factor in Eliot's poetry. The narrator always stood at some distance from what he described. There was, however, a sympathy present. In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," for instance, the woman and child are described in terms that are objective but that at the same time reveal an awareness of horror. The horror in the narrator is tinged with repulsion, but it is much more deeply coloured by fellow-feeling. Even

in "Portrait of a Lady" the young man who narrates the poem is aware of his own, if not the woman's, human situation.

Sympathy is totally absent from the 1915 poems. Relationships in "Mr. Apollinax" and the five poems of the previous section can be represented by one phrase from "Mr. Apollinax" "'But after all what did he mean?'" There is never communication, never concern.

This is, firstly, true between character and character. Miss Nancy goes her way, and "her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it." The footman and housemaid take no thought of their dead mistress.

This lack of sympathy is also true between narrator and character. He sees housemaids "sprouting despondently" in "Morning at the Window." Between him and his cousin Harriet are no "appetites of life" but only the newspaper. His aunt Helen is of no more importance than either footman or undertaker. Involvement with the woman's laughter in "Hysteria" is something distasteful to the narrator, and something from which he would withdraw. The characters in "Mr. Apollinax" give him the impression of left-over half-eaten food.

Detachment is a second attribute of this narrator. The isolation that was obvious from the beginning stands firmly in the 1915 poems even though the sympathy falls. Therefore the detachment of the narrator has become total. "Mr. Apollinax," as I have indicated, reveals a definite repulsion for most of the characters. Though there is an attraction to one character, it is nevertheless significant that the pronoun "we" never occurs. There is never the slightest hint of identification, real,

contemplated, or imagined. Instead of identification we are offered a series of revealing verbs following the first person singular: "I thought," "I looked," "I heard," and "I remember." These are the activities of a distanced analytic observer. This total detachment is new in Eliot's poetry, where hitherto sympathy had been a moderating factor. Earlier narrators may have wished such detachment in order to ease the pain produced by their vision of horror. They never achieved it.

A picture of the narrator is slowly evolving. He is isolated. He seems coldly aloof, totally detached, with more than a touch of fastidiousness in his nature. What solution to fragmentation and isolation is Eliot contemplating? The big clue comes when we turn our minds to the one character the narrator seems to admire. At the same time as we examine him, I would like to reconsider the barriers to communication we studied in the opening section of Chapter III.

Those barriers are again present. Society is just as disruptive as in the first poems. The footman and maid in "Aunt Helen" revert when the old woman is no longer projecting at them what they should be. The masks of "dowager Mrs. Phlaccus and Professor and Mrs. Cheetah" are resumed when the unpredictable has left them. But one thing, one barrier, has changed: self-image. Self-image still exists, of course. But Prufrock had an inferiority complex. Mr. Apollinax is the opposite. Therefore the narrator's attitude, possibly the author's too, has changed from sympathy to respect.

What is it that is respected? Mr. Apollinax is just as isolated,

but his superiority feelings have freed him from concern about such matters. He can live in the face of isolation and even enjoy it. He is sufficient unto himself. Dreams or memories, so necessary for Prufrock, are totally unnecessary. The narrator sees him as Hercules and a series of images about Greek gods.

A self-image of superiority is not a solution to isolation. It in no way overcomes isolation. It is a method of living with the problem. Superiority tends to cut a man off from mere mortals. It could even destroy sympathy and lead to the total detachment we see in the narrator of these poems. It would give a self-confidence, though, that would enable a man to live above fragmentation and pay no heed to isolation or crumbling values. This seems to be what the narrator sees in Mr. Apollinax, but is it the life-style he wishes to emulate?

A sense of superiority may explain those parts of the narrator's character that we have so far seen. There are other aspects in his outlook, and two of these do not fit the pattern.

Fear is hardly compatible with superiority. "Hysteria" actually takes us a step beyond the total detachment already mentioned. There is a fear of attachment, of being "drawn in." So the narrator withdraws from the situation by means of "concentration" and "careful subtlety." Fear of life may be present in "The Boston Evening Transcript" also. When evening "quicken[s]" in the street, waking life "in some," the narrator turns his back on the street and leaves the scene. A similar cause may be behind Miss Nancy's so different and so frenzied activities. More than the hills may be "barren."

In the second place, there is the irony. It has become a very potent weapon for the narrator. Bathetic deflation was mentioned in the "Conversation Galante" section of Chapter II concerning Eliot's treatment of the moon. The technique reappears in "The Boston Evening Transcript" where its readers are likened to ripe corn. Irony and ironic detachment have become the dominant method and mood of the Eliot poetry. In "Aunt Helen," the aunt dies and the parrot dies "too." In that one word the events become ironically equivalent and the aunt irrevocably removed from the concern of the nephew. Similarly in "Cousin Nancy," neither Miss Nancy nor the aunts are given human nature. Even the laws of behaviour are deflated when their "guardians" are put on a first name basis, and when called "unalterable" and an "army" though powerless in both older and younger generations. The irony is not only effective. It is bitter.

A person with Mr. Apollinax's superiority complex would use irony perhaps. He would, however, have no need of the bitter irony the narrator espouses. Bitter irony bespeaks a man filled with anxiety. It is a defensive measure. This, together with the fear of life also present in the narrator, would indicate that Eliot is not satisfied with a gospel of superiority. Not for himself at least. He may admire Pound and Bertrand Russell, men of an Apollinax nature, but he is not one of them. He must operate within the limits of his own not so certain personality.

"The Death of St. Narcissus" (1915)

In "The Death of St. Narcissus," Eliot is examining and, it would appear at first, rejecting yet a third hypothesis. It is an

alternative much more in keeping with Eliot's own personality than the superiority shown by Apollinax. St Narcissus, and Eliot through him, is exploring the possibilities of asceticism.

The poem is especially strange when we see it in its 1915 context alongside his other works. Whereas all the other poems of the period, and the earlier ones as well, make it clear that isolation and fragmentation are the problems, this poem keeps its attitude towards fragmentation well hidden and treats isolation as an answer rather than a problem.

Fragmentation is evident in the same bodily dismemberment remarked upon in "Preludes," "Morning at the Window," and "Hysteria":

If he walked in city streets
He seemed to tread on faces, convulsive thighs
and knees.

But are the fourth, fifth, and sixth stanzas evidence for fragmentation or its opposite? It is a question of interpretation, and the evidence either way is slim. St. Narcissus is described by these three stanzas as being in a state of mental identity with a tree, a fish, and a young girl. His centre of consciousness is the combined awarenesses of the viewer and the viewed. For example, he knows at once by immediate experience what the fish feels as well as what the fish feels like. The tangled roots and intertwined branches of the trees are therefore symptomatic of his experience. He is one with the things he touches. At first glance this will appear to be some sort of ecstatic unity of man and his world, and a far cry from fragmentation.

If we look more carefully into the experience, we could ask

what happens to the finite centre that undergoes this experience of unity. As the barriers fall and oneness comes, it may feel itself becoming infinite; or it may feel loss of identity. One side of the coin is boundlessness. The other is nothingness. One side is peace, and the other ultimate anxiety. Which does St. Narcissus feel? Evidence must be found in his reaction to the happenings, and that can be found in the one line immediately following the three stanzas in question.

"So he became a dancer to God."

The line echoes two previous lines. The co-ordinating conjunction, "so," reminds us of its other occurrence in the poem: "So he came out under the rock." Because of the revulsion his city life engendered (in stanza three), he flees out under the rock. The rest of the line echoes--

He could not live men's ways, but became a dancer
before God.

Because of sensual self-love (in stanza two), he found human ways unacceptable and retreated to God.

Both the earlier lines that are echoed by the line in question clearly indicate retreat rather than acceptance. It would seem safe to say the line in question, the first line of the last stanza, is again a retreat, and that the experiences described in stanzas four, five, and six are regarded as events from which to retreat. They are not seen as visions of unity, but as the dissolution of personal identity: a further, deeper, more frightening fragmentation.

Isolation is an equally difficult topic in "St. Narcissus." Instead of a problem, it seems here to be grasped as a solution to the

personal fragmentation described above. If intercourse with fellow humans is repulsive, retreat under the rock. If your world is split in shards and your very personality shatters and splinters, escape to "God," or to the dance in the hot desert sands, till death comes and "satisfies."

Isolation in this poem is not solely an answer to fragmentation. It serves a double purpose. The most amazing thing about this poem compared with the other poems so far studied, is its animal sensuality. The other poems had all stressed the sense of sight with occasional awarenesses of sound and smell. These are senses at a distance. The touch of skin on skin had been virtually nonexistent. St. Narcissus, though, is

...aware of his limbs smoothly passing each other
And of his arms crossed over his breast.

Convulsive thighs and knees catch his attention. Then there is the

...slippery white belly held tight in his own
fingers,
Writhing in his own clutch,

caught in his "pink tips," "the pointed tips of his own fingers." This sensual awareness is at once fascinating and repulsive for him: he is "stifled and soothed" by it. In the end, though, it is the "horror of his own smoothness" that dominates. Isolation becomes an escape from these feelings as well as from fragmentation.

Retreat from fragmentation and sensual awareness is an answer that has only a tenuous connection with reality. The truth of the world, as St. Narcissus sees it, is admittedly fragmentation and sensuality. A retreat into isolation merely ignores the situation. It

gives attention to only those elements capable of easy reconciliation. It is really a compromise that ignores facts, one that can satisfy only if truth ceases to matter.

Eliot has always been intensely concerned with honesty. Such a compartmentalization of the mind as this poem requires, with one part admitting the facts of fragmentation and sensuality while the other part ignores them, could not satisfy him long. If there is to be an answer, it must be an honest one, not one based on self-deception.

We see that sort of dissatisfaction as the poem closes. To the poet, this cultivation of desert isolation, even one completed by sensuous and burning Blakean arrows, is unsatisfactory. For the poem ends on a sour note. Though, in the word "green," there is the hint that death will lead to a new season, the poem still leaves him

...dry and stained
with the shadow in his mouth.

I said earlier in this chapter that there were to be three sections and therefore three hypotheses to be examined in relation to the 1915 poetry. The first, patriotism, does not seem to be something Eliot was as yet seriously considering. The second, superiority, Eliot seems to have examined and rejected. But the third hypothesis really seems to have been Eliot's position during this period. And that third theory is the flight into isolation that we have seen in "St. Narcissus."

Yet I have also said that Eliot, being the kind of person he was, could not rest content with a position that at once affirmed and denied fragmentation or any other problem. And the isolation position

of "St. Narcissus" does just that. It affirms the problem, but denies it by ignoring it. So the poem ends, as I have said, in a lack of confidence in the solution.

It would seem that the two statements I have made are contradictory. Either he does or does not accept the position.

There is evidence, as we have seen, that he denies the validity of the isolation answer. The last two lines of "St. Narcissus" show his discontent with the solution. The superiority of Mr. Apollinax had been a similar method of ignoring fragmentation. Both should be equally rejected. Since Eliot rejects the one, it should follow that he rejects isolation in this other form as an answer.

Nevertheless, though there is a conscious rejection, there is an unconscious acceptance. He is retreating into a shell that at once affirms and ignores fragmentation. His fear of life and his bitter irony show that. Both are escapes. The narrator has kept himself aloof from the lives of his characters and from their problems. It can be asked of one who remains carefully neutral whether his lack of visible reaction is a sign of unconcern or suppressed emotion. Since in the poems the characters' problems are the narrator's problems, unconcern is highly unlikely. The author who felt deeply about the people and problems he presented in the early poems still feels deeply, but he has taken to masking his emotions in an air of unconcern.

To fool others with a mask is one thing, but does he fool himself? "St. Narcissus" is the key to this 1915 period, for it shows two things about the Boston poems and "Mr. Apollinax." It makes clear

how the Eliot of 1915 was in fact hiding in isolation, and how he had in part hidden this fact from himself. His desire for isolation is what produced his bitterly ironic mask. His wish to separate himself, even while denying it, is what made him admire Mr. Apollinax. Only through "St. Narcissus," therefore, do we really see the "Mr. Apollinax" poem and the others for what they really are.

From this passionless ivory tower it is easy to discuss Eliot's love-hate relation with isolation. But the real question is whether or not Eliot ever came to see it. If he did, we could expect a radical change in his poetry.

CHAPTER V

THE FRENCH BEGINNING

"Mélange" and "Lune de Miel" (1916)

"Panorama" is a word used by literary critics to describe certain novels. It means that the characters in the novel as well as the places in which the characters involve themselves are not restricted to a narrow locale nor to a coterie or even a distinct class of society. The people come from all walks of life, and the action carries the reader into a "mélange" of conditions and places. "Panorama" is not a word that could be applied to the poems we have so far studied.

It does very much apply to the poems we will study in this chapter. In fact, the word even applies to the creative process; for, though the poems are in French, they were written in England and first published in America. The two poems we will be examining in the following section are each set in a single place. Their panorama will be their cross-section of society. "Mélange Adultère de Tout" and "Lune de Miel," the two poems of this section, limit the types of people mentioned but vary the scene in a kaleidoscopic manner.

"Lune de Miel" touches Holland, crosses France, visits the Alps and Switzerland, then Ravenna, Padua, and Milan in Italy. "Mélange" begins in America, touches London and Yorkshire before moving on to Paris

and the German Alps, mentions Damascus, Africa, and finally predicts some sort of grave marker or commemorative monument in Mozambique.

"The Death of St. Narcissus" explored isolation as a means of combating fragmentation. These two French poems are not quite the inverse. They investigate fragmentation--disruption of place, in this case--but not quite as a means of combating isolation. Still, 1916 marks a radical enough change from the 1915 poems to cause many critics to speculate about Eliot's dissatisfaction with his work of the year before.

Some ideas are carried over. The poems studied in the last chapter explored some possibilities of the isolation theme. The French poems deal with isolation too. They seem to accept it as a fact of existence that cannot be altered. It is not something to be sought as a balm for fragmentation, nor is it to be avoided. It is simply there. It--and in some instances the lack of it--must be accepted. It is interesting to note that as early as 1916 there is the implication that Eliot is holding such a final position.

No indisputable evidence of this can be furnished, but the following are worth noting. It would seem from the description of the rootless trek from place to place in "Mélange" and from its narrator's similarities of character with the narrators of earlier poems that the protagonist is Eliot himself. Whether or not this is so, he is certainly isolated from all others. He is here a professor, there a journalist, and somewhere else a banker. Such occupations might seem to imply contact with others, but such social intercourse could be and--

judging from his attitudes--is indeed the "I-it" relation described by Martin Buber. His ideas of the ultimate relation is given to us in the final two lines when he looks forward to a time when people will point out his cenotaph.

The same could be said of "Lune de Miel." Though the honeymooning couple relate to each other physically, there is no meaningful interrelation with each other, with the narrator, nor with the monuments they barely notice. The narrator goes so far as to imply that the only real relationship in the poem is between the groom and his money. Even the bedbugs receive barely an off-hand scratch.

Instead of using the honeymoon "for your closer contact," the couple have spent their time running hither and yon across four or more countries of Europe. The poet shows us in graphic detail how the trip has been squandered. The Last Supper is juxtaposed with hotel prices and gratuities as if one mattered no more than the others. In fact it seems to have been the hotel rather than the painting that decided their itinerary. They stay within two miles of St. Apollinaire during one leg of their trip but pay no more attention to that "ancient deconsecrated works" than to any other long abandoned factory. For all we know, they did not see it. Instead we have a night in bed and a cheap, malodorous hotel described to us. Failures in human relations, and failures as simple sightseers, they have "connected nothing with nothing." The product is again nothingness: in the final three lines the narrator holds up a standard of excellence against which glory the couple's lives fall hopelessly short. The verbal economy of

these lines compared with the rest of the poem multiplies the effect, and the reader is left with a reinforced dislike for any solution to isolation, curative or palliative, that sends us running in aimless-- and visionless--circles. Multiplication of fragmentation is not division of isolation.

"Mélange" says the same thing in a more covered manner.

Here the protagonist-narrator wears a happy-go-lucky, couldn't-care-less mask that almost convinces us of his "Emporheben." It seems a carefree life: "tra-la-la" in a "giraffe skin." Even the ending, unlike so many of Eliot's poems, closes with romantic optimism; for in death his memory will be glamorous.

That all this is a mask rather than reality is revealed in the title: "Mélange Adultère de Tout." It is from a Corbière poem, but that information is unnecessary. All we need is the wording. The man's life is not merely a "mélange," but a "mélange adultère." In French as well as in English the two quite different words, "adulterous" and "adulterated," have the same root, and the meanings can be made to slip and slide into each other. If his life is an "adulterous mixture," it is also an adulteration of everything with everything, or everywhere with everywhere, until nothing pure is left. Movement for movement's sake is as empty as single-minded aesthetics.

I have looked at these two poems more from the point of view of isolation than of fragmentation. This has been in order to give more weight to my argument that isolation is by 1916 an accepted fact. Admittedly, the evidence is far from univocal. What is more evident is that fragmentation forms a large part of this poem. There is also a fairly strong suspicion that fragmentation is being embraced in the hope that, like a firm grasp on

nettles, the pain will go away.

One further post script should be added. The previous chapter discussed the Boston poems and "Morning at the Window" with its Oxford setting. There were indications there that Eliot was, consciously or unconsciously, weighing and measuring his American homeland against his new country of residence, possibly in ~~the~~ hope of finding a solution to his problems of isolation and fragmentation. In that chapter, I said that Eliot was not considering allegiance to England as a solution to his personal problems, that he was in fact not considering such a move for any reasons. The reasons I gave were biographical and intrinsic to the works themselves. The two French poems under discussion here could be regarded as supporting evidence for my view. They roam over four continents and specifically mention six European countries. There is no evidence that the honeymoon couple have a home to which to return, and the sometime professor, sometime playboy of "Mélange" manages to express his rootlessness in the lines,

J'erre toujours de-ci de-là...
De Damas jusqu'à Omaha.

The verb has overtones of moral as well as physical nomadism.

Since these two poems express no interest in a home from which to set out and to which to return occasionally or finally, it is doubtful that a few months before Eliot could have been considering adopting England. It is more likely that the Boston poems express the divestment of American claims rather than the adoption of another loyalty.

"Le Directeur" and "Dans le Restaurant" (1916-17)

"Le Directeur" was written at about the same time as the poems of the preceding section, and "Dans le Restaurant" only a few months later. Nevertheless they are distinguishable from the other pair in two distinct ways. In the first place, the two poems just studied have no fixed locations. The two we are about to study are firmly situated. "Le Directeur" places us in the vicinity of a London newspaper building on the bank of the Thames. "Dans le Restaurant" carries us to a restaurant in France. The second distinction is equally glaring and equally important. "Mélange" and "Lune de Miel" depicted no interpersonal relations, no reaction of character to character, no drama in short. The two poems of this section have drama.

There is one further matter of importance. In earlier poems, from 1909 on, various conditions of people have been depicted, though the majority were definitely from the middle to higher classes. That was certainly true of the central characters. Moreover, those players were, without exception, possessed of a well-developed artistic sensitivity. There were some lower characters in supporting roles; but their action, again without fail, related only to the protagonist-narrator himself and never to the other characters. The protagonist observed the slum child in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," the passing people in "Morning at the Window," and the women gathering fuel in "Preludes." The prostitute in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" is mentioned only after she hesitates towards the narrator, but after that their relation is no more than her description. With the half-hearted

exception of the Boston poems, where housemaids are allowed to sit on footmen's knees and where Miss Nancy romps around, the bit players act as fixtures. There has certainly been no interaction between classes in those poems. The same could be said of "Lune de Miel" and "Mélange Adultère de Tout."

"Le Directeur" is the first break in this pattern. It is not an obvious one till seen in the light of "Dans le Restaurant." The first thirteen lines give sardonic comments on the editor and shareholders of a conservative newspaper. Despite the "arm-in-arm" of line eleven, there are no interrelations, and no one from the lower classes appears. When the ragamuffin is introduced in lines fourteen to seventeen, it is description only. Such description can be found in Eliot works as far back as 1910-11. Then in line eighteen she looks at the editor from her gutter. This is hardly action on her part, and is no real advance over the woman in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" who hesitates towards the narrator. It is not until the last line that something new is given: Elle "crève d'amour." She says nothing, makes no approach, but merely "bursts with love." The line is as sardonic as any in the poem, for the verb "crêver" is more commonly followed by the phrases "with laughter" or "with jealousy." "With love" comes as a surprise to the reader and will leave him questioning the quality of *that* love. More important is the fact that never before has Eliot attributed feelings to a lower class character, and never before has a lower class character had

her feelings in relation to an upper class figure. This is the first instance of class barriers cracking. It is a small but important beginning.

The two different classes also meet in "Dans le Restaurant." The broken-down waiter hovers over the customer's shoulder and inflicts thoughts upon him. The customer shows resentment and sees the waiter as an "old lecher," a talkative slobber-mouth in a soup-defiled vest.

Why this resentment? There are three reasons. In the first place, the customer has found his social isolation interfered with. It is the same resentment the editor would have shown if he had been approached by the child of the gutter.

The second reason is aesthetic. The situation echoes that of Dante in the Vita Nuova, but there are--

in the obscene boastful reminiscences of the old waiter of his first sexual awareness at seven years old, reminiscences which deform the vision of loveliness into something salacious and ugly.¹

Worst of all is the third reason: "De quel droit payes-tu des expériences comme moi?" The waiter is echoing the customer's own experience, something he had till now considered precious and unique. By having the same experience, they are brought together into one category, one class. The customer feels not mere loss of isolation but actual defilement.

The aesthetic complaint has a seriousness that depends on one's estimate of the importance beauty has. The matter is not stressed in this poem. The first reason for resentment, that an unsolicited approach, such as the waiter makes, interferes with one's rightful

isolation, is quite important to one who considers his solitariness precious. The customer does, and thus the rancid thoughts and comments. But when the situation is viewed objectively, no permanent and ultimate damage is done. In the end, the waiter will cease his encroachment or else the customer can leave. Isolation, limited in such a way, can be restored.

It is the third item that does permanent damage. The customer has found himself in a situation where isolation is not so much encroached upon as shattered. The waiter and customer have had the same childhood experience, have nursed the same unique memory; and, though their present appearances and situations seem so different, they cannot be classed apart.

When we review "Le Directeur" in the light of "Dans le Restaurant," it becomes obvious that the two poems are influenced by one and the same lesson: social position does not matter; we are all the same. Eliot, in the next few years, was to borrow a line from Baudelaire's Fleur de Mal: "You! hypocrite lecteur!--mon semblable,--mon frère!" While Eliot's two French poems do not address the reader directly, the implication is there.

In conclusion, then, the confrontation of waiter and customer is really the confrontation of two aspects of isolation. There is an isolation that can be encroached upon and rescued, lost or won. The poem tells us little about it except that some people in some circumstances desire it. The other isolation is one that can be shattered. There may even be an obligation to destroy it,

for it is based on misunderstanding. With such isolation, the communion is represented as more painful than its absence. The poems in no way deny isolation in all its aspects. They maintain only that in some painful ways we are one with fellow-men, our brothers. Isolation may be unavoidable in some areas of life, but in others it is impossible.

The implications are far-reaching. The ironic aloofness and total detachment we saw in the Boston poems cannot survive the recognition that all men are brothers--unless, of course, the very fact is a cause of irony. If there is to be pity for one's own condition, there must be pity for others. If there is contempt for others, there must be contempt for self. When the logic of the situation is seen these two possibilities take on a light very similar to a dramatic scene Eliot was to describe more than thirty years later. For of these two choices it may also be said that

Both ways are necessary. It is also
 necessary
 To make a choice between them.

In the light of the two choices, the sardonic tone of "Mélange Adultère de Tout" is now understandable. It is Eliot admitting he is no different from the honeymoon couple. All his cosmopolitan learning and his various positions come to naught. The emperor is without his clothes, like everyone else.

At the close of the previous chapter, I speculated on the possibility of a radical change in Eliot's poetry after 1915. His discouragement with the 1915 work augured something. And immediately after he turned away from his mother tongue.

Some critics have speculated on the reasons for Eliot turning to French. They wondered if he felt the need for a totally new beginning. Perhaps his springs of inspiration had been drying, and he was hoping to prime them with a different language and culture.

If that was the case, it was successful in some ways but a failure in others. With it came a fresh idea, for Eliot: the first thoughts of destroying social barriers. Here also was the first attempt to see all men as one. On the other hand, the brief foray into homelessness proved to have no abiding roots.

His French experiment was soon abandoned. Critically speaking, that was understandable. Except for a few lines in "Lune de Miel" and the final section of "Dans le Restaurant," there was nothing memorable that came out of the experiment. Still, when he returned to English in 1917, he brought Gautier's verse pattern with him. And more than the verse form would be new. He would use his sardonic wit to explore the implications of being one with his brothers. Again there would be a new beginning.

Footnote

¹Matthiessen, p. 150

CHAPTER VI

SACRAMENTAL BEGINNINGS

"The Hippopotamus" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" are the early Eliot poems most often called religious. They seem to have come to birth in 1917 and the first half of 1918, the closing months of the Great War. They mark Eliot's return to English for another attempt at his own language, but they carry the verse scheme of the Frenchman, Gautier (but also the Elizabethans), into his prosody. In several ways, in verse structure, in the use of English as the vehicle, and in the use of religious concepts as well, they mark another beginning for Eliot.

The task of this chapter will be to investigate the Christian allusions. They actually began to appear quite early in Eliot's work but reached a peak in the two 1917-18 poems we will be discussing. What do the allusions imply? For the most part, critics have taken one of three approaches, but in each case the approach is based on an incorrect use of evidence. In all three of these illegitimate approaches, the critic remarks on Eliot's 1928 declaration of faith and then, ignoring chronological differences, uses that later evidence side by side with the earlier poetry. Some critics feel that by this procedure they can show Eliot's acceptance of Anglo-catholicism to be an inevitable thing in much the same way as an acorn must end up an oak. Others feel they can show the 1928 declaration to be a matter of coming out in the open, that he always was Christian even in the earliest work. Still others use the evidence in the opposite manner to prove that the later poetry is no more Christian than the earlier.

Poem by poem studies of the Christian allusions, taken in the light of their own contexts and not in the light of Eliot's 1928 statement, have been rare indeed. Such a chronological study will show that Eliot's so-called religious beginnings were very tiny steps indeed into the sacramental.

Earlier Allusions (1911-15)

Before examining the poems of the 1917-18 period some time will be spent on earlier allusions. They are particularly numerous in the 1911 poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Some lines are faint echoes only. They may or may not have been intended to produce religious overtones. An example would be the repeated use of "there will be time" in stanza four,--perhaps faint reminders of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Then there is the passage where Prufrock pictures himself as "ful of hy sentence." This alludes to the General Prologue of The Canterbury Tales and relates to the clerk of Oxford. "Clerk" there carries the old sense of "cleric," and if it were not for the Polonius deflation Prufrock might be seeing himself in some priestly role.

There are two passages in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" where Christian echoes are distinct to any ear:

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head...brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet;

and--

...I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all.

The first line of the first quotation is distinctly religious but difficult to pin down. It may echo II Samuel 1:12 or 12:15-23, but it does bring up thought of Jesus in the wilderness and in Gethsemane. The following two lines refer to John the Baptist, who was imprisoned and beheaded at the instigation of a woman. The Lazarus passage Eliot has carefully worded so

as to echo both the John 11:1-53 episode and the Luke 16:19-31 passage. There may also be an allusion to John 14:26, where the Holy Spirit is promised to "teach you all things."

When we study these several passages in their contexts (poetic and social) without the benefit of aftersight, we will see that, while the form may be Christian, the substance is mere social convention. Take, as an example, the Baptist reference. It is a fitting allusion in the dramatic context. Prufrock is faced with a lady who may treat him, figuratively, in the way John was treated. As for social context, the story of John the Baptist is the sort of knowledge a poet could expect his readers to know. Eliot could have made reference to a lion's den and been equally understood. That he did not do so is a compliment to his poetic sense; for Daniel came through his ordeal successfully, and Prufrock is not the sort of character to contemplate success.

The point is that such social knowledge implies no more belief than the various allusions to Hesiod's Works and Days or Shakespeare's Hamlet in other parts of the poem. Grandeur and nostalgia are equally invoked by Christian and classical references, but the Christian allusions still held a currency in Georgian England that the Greek ones did not quite have. And, of course, there is the bathos created by juxtaposing Prufrock with Lazarus, David, or John the Baptist. No artist could overlook that. But as far as belief goes, how little these references mean can be seen in the ease with which prayer, fasting, and John the Baptist are juxtaposed with the eternal Footman's snicker. For Eliot in 1911, religion was no more than a useful tool for making poetic points.

"The Death of St. Narcissus" was probably written in 1915. If I were to subject it to the same careful scrutiny as I have just given "Prufrock,"

little dependable information would be gathered. Eliot may or may not still be using religion as a tool. The Narcissus of Greek myth is thoroughly confused with the lives of a couple of Christian saints of the same name, and the result is a rather complex mood combined with a few thoughts on asceticism. How much sacramentalism there is is unclear. What the poem may be offering is not belief but rather an assumed belief not unlike the use of Greek myth in some of H. D.'s poetry. That is to say, the belief may be one that is adopted or borrowed for the sake of the poetry rather than something in which faith (or even genuine questioning) is placed: it may be poetic fiction.

What may also be new to Eliot in "The Death of St. Narcissus," and again this resembles H. D.'s poetry, is the occasional note of longing. It is as if Eliot were wishing the belief were true. But too much weight should not be placed on that note. If it is there at all it never comes fully to the surface. Indeed without the light thrown by later poetry the wish and the belief both might have gone undetected. If the poem is taken in its chronological context it would have to be admitted that such a faint and indefinite note could very well be explained by any number of secular syntheses.

"Dans le Restaurant" (1917 or 1918)

There is one other poem of the Great War period that should be discussed before going on to the two "religious" poems. It is "Dans le Restaurant," the last poem of his French period, and it dates from early 1918 or possibly late 1917. It resembles "The Death of St. Narcissus" in the note of longing it carries and in the indefiniteness of its religious content. Unlike the earlier work, "Dans le Restaurant" is assumed by scholars to have definite sacramental implications. Here is part of what Leonard Unger has to say:

To observe that the passage on drowning follows a reference to the waiter's need of a bath seems to me to be more than simply amusing. Here, as elsewhere in Eliot's poetry, water is symbolic of spiritual rebirth....The shift illustrates again the "commonness" of the experience, bringing the lives of the two modern men and the ancient Phoenician within a single category. The Phoenician's death is cryptically, ironically, meant as a rebirth. The undersea current (symbol of a spiritual force) carries him "aux étapes de sa vie antérieure," presumably to an ecstatic moment in childhood and its final cause. The return by stages suggests a progress according to purification or purgation.²

Unger's interpretation of the poem is based on a 1929 Eliot essay³ on Dante where religious themes are stressed. He admits his special interests have produced "perhaps an over-reading."⁴ Since my purpose at the moment is to locate Eliot's position at one point during his lifetime rather than to draw out a theme, the question I must ask is whether Unger's interpretation can stand when the poem is taken alone.

At first reading, the poem's irony--which Unger barely mentions--is far more obvious than the spiritual implications. The move from bath to death by drowning seems more a wish on the part of the customer than some esoteric baptism. But were the narrator of the poem merely making an ironic comment on the customer's wishes, the tone of deep seriousness would not be present. It is present, and strongly so.

The final paragraph of "Dans le Restaurant" is, taken literally, a statement of futility. Profit and loss, tin, bodily stature, even memories like the cry of gulls and the swell of Cornish seas are subject to a change that the poem calls "un sort pénible." The only lines that allow a positive construction are the two lines,

Un courant de sous-mer l'emporta très loin,
Le repassant aux étapes de sa vie antérieure.

Unger takes the positive course when he calls the current "a symbol of a spiritual force," and the stages of life "an ecstatic moment in childhood and its final cause." There is, however, nothing intrinsic to the poem that demands such an interpretation. Buried, as those two lines are, in the midst of a seemingly negative stanza, it would be far more sensible to interpret them negatively. Indeed, such an interpretation could be brought much closer to the literal statement if the undersea current is seen at face value as an undersea current moving the body along, and if the "repassant" is thought of as an unfastening of flesh that once had been fastened to bone or else as an undoing of the recapitulation the foetus passes through in the womb: a return to the mud and rock from which it came. Such decay would better explain the final two lines of the poem:

Figurez-vous donc, c'était un sort pénible;
Cependant, ce fut jadis un bel homme, de
haute taille.

Literal decay would be "un sort pénible." It would also supply the contrast that the "cependant" demands.

Such a negative interpretation would have to be further justified by making it complement the first part of the poem. This can be done quite easily by agreeing with Unger: the shift in the last stanza is intended to place waiter, customer, and Phlebas "within a single category." This would make customer and waiter equally subject to death. Their differences then become empty of meaning. This, of course, is a very different interpretation from that of Mr. Unger, and has little to do with explicit religious categories.

Whether Mr. Unger's reading or mine conforms most closely to the facts may be decided through reference to other poems of about the same period. "The Hippopotamus" preceded "Dans le Restaurant" by a few months, and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" followed right on its heels and was

published in the same September, 1918, issue of the Little Review. These two poems are generally considered to disclose something of Eliot's religious nature. They do talk about the church, its clergy and liturgy, and quote the Scriptures. This might seem to favour the Unger interpretation of "Dans le Restaurant" and of Eliot's point of view. But before we conclude these are sacramental, we had better examine their statements and implications.

"The Hippopotamus" (1917)

"The Hippopotamus" is a poem with nine four-line stanzas. Each of the first six stanzas presents a contrast. In the first we are given the hippo: how he appears contrasted with what he really is. The next five stanzas set the hippo against what is termed "the True Church."

At each comparison the hippo is inferior. He is mere "flesh and blood," and as such is "susceptible" to shock, to error, and to various other limits. The True Church, on the other hand, is secure since "based upon a rock" and "one with God." Good things come its way automatically, or, as Eliot puts it in the ironical sixth stanza, "the Church can sleep and feed at once." If we were to treat these various statements as logical propositions we would have to declare the hippo sadly worsted. The list of his positive qualities would be an empty category.

The very movement of the verse does not allow us to think of the narrator's words as emotively neutral statements. The musical pattern belies the verbal pattern. Whenever the hippo appears, the verse pattern is completely regular. Whenever the True Church appears, the verse swirls and eddies in an untoward manner. The latent irony the narrator has for the Church is brought to the fore by the verse structure and becomes the dominant feeling of the poem.

The final three verses give us the end of both hippo and True Church. Anyone who missed the earlier irony is in for a surprise. It is the hippo that ascends to ~~heaven, is washed in the~~ Blood of the Lamb, and joins the angelic choir. The True Church remains below in its own fetid fog. Somehow their destinies have been interchanged.

This raises the question of who the hippopotamus and True Church are. Roman Catholicism has long claimed to be the True Church. This claim is based, in part, on an Apostolic Succession coming from Peter who, in Matthew 16:13-20, was given the keys to the kingdom. Significantly, allusion is made to this passage in stanza two, where the True Church is described as "based upon a rock." Nevertheless, I doubt that Rome is being singled out over and above any other established denomination. The True Church, as Eliot seems to define it, is any church that finds it need not bestir itself (stanza three), that refreshes itself on the fat of the land (stanza four), and that every Sunday gathers (more or less) to congratulate itself on being one with God (stanza five). The epigraph--"And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans"--is from Colossians 4:16. Eliot has changed the meaning slightly though there is no change in the words. "This epistle," in Eliot's use of the verse, refers not to the letter from which it is an excerpt but to the poem to which Eliot has attached it. "The church of the Laodiceans" becomes not one of the churches struggling with various doctrinal and human problems, not the church to which Paul intended his letter, but rather the later lukewarm church of Laodicea described in Revelation 3:14-22, the church that is to be spewed out of the mouth in disgust. It would seem that Eliot has a low opinion of the organized church.

There is not only the problem of who the hippo is, but also the question of whether his fate, as described in the poem, is real or imagined.

The animal arrives at the final condition that the True Church expected for itself. Is this Paradise, and the implied after-life, considered real; or does the poet allow the hippo in, not because heaven and eternal life exist and he qualifies, but because such a state of affairs would be a suitable vengeance on the True Church? The sardonic tone of the poem befits a mind that says, "If only it were true it would be poetic justice." But there is little else within the poem on which to base a decision one way or the other.

How do you know a hippopotamus when you see one? It is by the sweat of his brow that he compasses his material ends. Even then the execution of his plans may go awry through weakness of mind or frailty of body. Inevitably the top branches of the mango tree are beyond him. Life for him is a dissonance of passion and a diurnal discord. How literally we are to take all this is made no more clear than how genuine is the belief in heaven.

Nor, if there is a heaven, is it made clear what the factors are that distinguish those who make it from those who don't. We might argue that stanzas three through five inveigh against passivity, self-indulgence, and arrogant certainty (with stanzas two and six reinforcing the first and third points), but we must beware the danger of seeing more than is there. The poem is not so much a reasoned hypothesis with an informative message as it is a diatribe against the institutional church. In other words, belief is not a strong factor; it is disbelief--in the visible church--that is printed here.

"Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" (1918)

"Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" is not one of Mr. Eliot's successful poems. It contains a couple of coined words, several rare or

technical words, and a mistake in the only Greek word used. Furthermore, the sixth verse is an incomplete sentence.

Such things need not be faults, but they are certainly not always advantages. Coined words generate impatience in all but the most devout of a poet's followers. Rare and technical words can be well used, but a word like "gesso" is emotionally vague and of doubtful utility in the poem. The meaning of the sixth stanza, the incomplete sentence, is unclear. Several critics feel it describes a second painting. Even if it does, how does it relate to what precedes and follows in the body of the poem? Does it describe, or is it intended as a contrast with, the pustular youths and hairy bees of stanzas five and seven?

I am not taking the position of a literary critic in this pursuit of blemishes. Critics aim to judge a poem. For the purposes of this thesis, we need only understand it. But the faults I have mentioned are faults that affect the understanding! "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" is often vague in its propositional meaning and as often indefinite in its emotional connotations. To measure the religious content of this poem is no easy matter. We must not too quickly assume vagueness is the same thing as vacuity of mind, but I cannot help suspecting that Eliot has associated indefiniteness with religion in his own mind.

As we look for a way into the poem, we will notice that the four stanzas of the poem's first half present a temporal medley. Four ages of the church are offered to us. Eliot has taken these four ages and played them off one against another. Since the poem advances its meaning through this interplay, it would be wise to examine each of the four periods and see what parts they play.

The first age is the present. In that present we are given "sapient sutlers of the Lord" who are in the midst of some action which most commentators have associated with verse five and assume to be the taking up of the offering during a church service. A difficulty arises immediately. This interpretation would mean that those receiving the "piaculative pence" directly from the congregation are "presbyters" or priests, a custom that does not reconcile itself with fact in churches Eliot is likely to have encountered. Whether sutlers are to be identified with presbyters, or are their lay assistants, or are members of the congregation drifting into church and settling down before the service; and whether the ritual act of verse one is the same ingathering as that of verse five or is a different one, the modern age Eliot is describing is a distinctly sarcastic picture of the church in action. The "sutlers"--a word with unpleasant connotations--drift across the pews like flies, or perhaps the bees of the second section, while the presbyters and "young" (the sutlers are "polyphiloprogenitive") of stanza five are described with words full of violent labials, a sound that reminds one of Laodicea and "I will spew you out of my mouth."

In direct juxtaposition with the modern scene is the second period: "the beginning." It comes to us through a direct quotation from John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word." Presumably the beginning Eliot intends is the gospel period, the time covered between John 1 and John 21. Exactly what the content of "Word" is for him will be investigated later. Here it is sufficient to note that this beginning period is in contrast with the present and as such receives a positive charge.

The third time unit that the poem gives is in stanza two. Again there is a sharp contrast, all the sharper because of the repetition. This

time the beginning is set over against, not the present, but the third period, a time of "superfetation" that reaches its climax in Origen. Again there is an incomplete sentence, and it is difficult to decide whether "Origen" is subject or object of the verb "producé." Origen produced and produced. Epiphanius⁵ estimates he wrote six thousand works, which makes Origen more prolific than Mickey Spillane. On the other hand, his work was a wedding of Greek philosophy with Christian thought; so it could be said that the times produced Origen. Eliot probably intended both meanings. But again, whatever doubts are entertained about the meaning, it is certain that the tone of these three lines is uncomplimentary.

The final slice of time that Eliot has incorporated into his work is the fifteenth century. The painting described in stanzas three and four is of the Umbrian school in the Italy of that period. The painting is partly cracked and browned, but--

Still shine the unoffending feet
And there above the painter set
The Father and the Paraclete.

The three lines are mainly straight description. One word that is not so describes the feet as "unoffending." The concept is so customary it is almost trite. Eliot has taken it over along with the positive feelings the description evokes. There is no sarcasm whatsoever in these two verses.

Of the four periods, two receive adverse criticism and two a more positive slant. An investigation of the reasons for this split will reveal an interesting fact. Words that normally have overtones of divinity--Word, Baptized God, Father, Paraclete--are in the positive sections. The one exception is "Lord," but that word has been placed in a modifying phrase and, unlike all the others, receives little inflection. It is "sutlers" rather than "Lord" that bears the brunt of Eliot's ill-humour.

All this might seem to imply that Eliot had, in 1918, great respect for God but little use for churchiness. Such a theory would agree with the findings for "The Hippopotamus;" but is it the only theory to fit the facts, or even the best one? The question will have to be answered in two parts. The first part of the answer is intrinsic and will receive attention in the rest of this section. The second is extrinsic and will make up the content of the subsequent section.

Origen and his period are open to criticism because of "superfetation of τὸ ἓν." Superfetation is "a biological term meaning multiple impregnation of an ovary, resulting in twins or larger multiple births."⁶ τὸ ἓν is "the One," a term used a great deal in Greek philosophy. George Williamson interprets the line as a criticism of any move from Greek philosophy's idea of the One to a philosophy of the Many.⁷ Movement from the Word to Origen's weak wordiness is, according to Williamson, what Eliot fastens on to illustrate this philosophical dilution.

A second possible interpretation of "superfetation of τὸ ἓν" is slightly more theological than the previous philosophical interpretation. It is an explanation that borrows freely from the "poliphiloprogenitive... sapient sutlers" idea of the first stanza. Origen is thought to have castrated himself. His love of producing many offspring thereby became limited to writing books. Lacking the necessary equipment,⁸ his superfetation was by means of Greek thought, but the cross-fertilization of Christian doctrine by philosophy was enervate, a sterile monster. Origen, Eliot may be saying, is the origin (through his sterile works) and representative (in his emasculated person) of this monstrosity.

The two interpretations resemble each other in many ways, but one is metaphysical while the other is more religious. The first explanation

censures Origen for destroying a philosophy based on unity. The second condemns him for diluting a pure belief with philosophical trivia. Can we choose one interpretation over the other from the evidence within the poem?

The ideal, of whichever kind it is, seems not completely lost after Origen. Stanzas three and four tell us that; for, though philosophy or theology is a "wilderness...cracked and browned," there "still shine" elements of value. The question is whether this worth abides in the theology or in some other field. References to Father, Baptized God, and Paraclete prove nothing. They form the content of the picture, and a picture may be admired for content or for aesthetic unity, a quality more strictly philosophical than theological. "Unoffending" in conjunction with "feet" does not tell us whether the offence would be against Eliot's philosophical or theological standards; and the choice of the term "Baptized God" rather than some other epithet is emotively potent, but does he think of it as historically real?

Whatever Eliot is holding up as his mark of excellence, he makes no bones about the present's lacking it. Besides the first and sixth stanzas which I have already mentioned, the last quatrain of the poem is a representation of our own age. Sweeney is modern unchurched man. His bath is the closest he comes to baptism, and his secular hams replace the unoffending feet. The reason for his dissociation is given in the final lines:

The masters of the subtle schools
Are controversial, polymath.

Vaporous teachings by church leaders have hidden from him the very existence of higher values. Bathwater is all he knows. If we inquire again after these higher values, we can be sure from Eliot's statement that they are

things not found in subtle schools, in controversy, or in polymath teachings. In these conclusions there is more than a hint of the anti-church opinions we saw in "The Hippopotamus", but very little unambiguous statement beyond that.

Has Eliot confused a philosophical notion with Christian doctrine? Could it be he values pure Christian doctrine, not for its own sake, but rather for the sake of a unified world view and the rescue from the many it would offer? These doubts may or may not be justified. If we look only at the poem, what the underlying faith or hope is could be interpreted either as Christian or as a secular philosophy of unity. If we look at other works of the period we might be given direction.

Visions of Glory and Decay (1918-19)

"Whispers of Immortality," "A Cooking Egg," "Burbank with a Baedeker; Bleistein with a Cigar," and the two Sweeney poems all have one thing in common. It is an element that will help us decide how religious the "Religious Beginnings" are.

"Whispers of Immortality" is a more important poem than I have space to show. Since it is a poem dealing with the unification of sensibility, it lies well within the field of this thesis. But Maxwell has covered the idea sufficiently, and I refer you to his third chapter.⁹ The one point that I wish to make is that the poem presents a contrast: Donne and Webster on the one hand, and Grishkin on the other.

"A Cooking Egg" is not an easy poem to interpret, but an obvious contrast is being made between present and past, to the detriment of the present:

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?
 Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.
 Over buttered scones and crumpets
 Weeping, weeping multitudes
 Droop in a hundred A.B.C.'s.

The rhyme pattern ("trumpets...crumpets") removes a good deal of the pain from the loss of former glory, but the invocation of weeping multitudes makes it clear the loss is real and important.

"Burbank," as its epigraph reveals, takes place in Venice. The poem again makes a contrast, this time between the present Venice of princess Volupine and its past glory. The allusions of "Sweeney Erect" carry us at once to Elizabethan England and Ancient Greece. Both come in contrast with the present, and the present again suffers in the comparison. In "Sweeney among the Nightingales," Sweeney is the modern-day figure of Agamemnon, but the modern king has lost his mighty stature.

Each poem is a reiteration of the same theme: a contrast of the heroic past and the unheroic present. The past may be represented by great writers, mythical gods, or heroic leaders. The present has Sweeney, Bleistein, Grishkin, Volupine, Pipit, and a score of lesser figures. Whether cultured or uncultured, those of the present age are mean brutes in the original meaning of both words. It is a Hobbesian existence.

The contrast can be taken one step further. The past standards which all five poems use to judge the present are not real, are not historical times, people, and places. They are ideals and artistic constructs. That can be demonstrated in all poems, even when the past presented seems most historical.

The Greek ideas that lie behind the Sweeney poems have only a tenuous relation to historical reality. Whether or not an Agamemnon or an Ariadne once existed is of no importance to Eliot. It is the stories as

woven into aesthetic creations by the Greek playwrights that matters and that makes for the greatness with which Sweeney's world is compared. The Greek plays were steeped in myths about gods in whom nobody today would want to believe; but Eliot has no wish to make us believe in them. He wants to point out worlds that are obviously beautiful and unified creations and contrast them with the sordid world around him.

Nor is the past Venice of "Burbank" a reality. The present we are to accept as real, but the past is a fairyland made from the dreams of centuries. Shakespeare and Marston, Browning, Gautier, Ruskin, and James all wrote works whose action took place in Venice, not the real Venice of the past, but an ideal Venice, a place of exotic greatness. When Eliot incorporates his allusions into the epigraph or the body of the poem, he is punctuating those dreams with today's reality.

The warlike past towards the end of "A Cooking Egg" is also an idealization. "Eagles and trumpets" is a romantic description of a reality that was usually far from romantic. Earlier in the poem Eliot refers to "Honour in Heaven," and the capitalization (of both words perhaps) makes it clear we are dealing with an ideal conception. The rhyme pattern, "Sydney...kidney," makes it clear we are not to take the ideal as an unqualified positive. The succeeding ideals, Capital, Society, Pipit herself perhaps, and the subtle shift in the meaning of "want" from "lack" to "desire" crush our romantic hopes even further. The "trumpets...crumpets" deflation is not unexpected in the light of what goes before. Eliot is holding up the present beside a series of past ideals, then popping the romantic dreams one after another in a manner that makes us even more aware of the poverty of the present.

"Whispers of Immortality" is unlike "A Cooking Egg" in that the

past ideal is in no way slighted. Webster and Donne represent the past, but it is not so much a historical period as a past way of thinking, the unified way of thinking Eliot found in their writings.

"A Cooking Egg" is to "The Hippopotamus" as "Whispers of Immortality" is to "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service." "A Cooking Egg" pokes fun at past ideals and makes use of them to impoverish our vision of the present. "The Hippopotamus" has an air about it that causes us to wonder how seriously we are to take its religious concepts. They are not quite ridiculed, but Eliot is certainly having fun. And there is no question that he is using religious ideas to blast the church of today. "Whispers of Immortality" treats past ideals with real respect. That is natural since they represent something Eliot had come to believe in himself. Similarly, there is about the Umbrian painting in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" a seriousness that marks it off as something special. What that something is is still the question. But the poem indicates, in a way "The Hippopotamus" and "A Cooking Egg" do not, that Eliot is no anarchist. He firmly believes in something.

What is it he believes? If the "unoffending feet" of the "Baptized God" tend to persuade us of a religious interpretation of the "Sunday Morning Service," the "Abstract Entities" of "our metaphysics" in "Whispers of Immortality" tend to push us in the direction of philosophical content. But we cannot sum the references to make our decision. We must measure the overall tone in the 1917-19 period.

It is most important to notice that the five poems from "Whispers of Immortality" to "Burbank" treat the past in terms of idealizations. The past is without fail the standard whereby to judge the present; but nowhere is it implied that the past is real. Even in "Whispers of Immortality" the

standard of which Webster and Donne are representative is a way of thinking, a way of looking at facts perhaps, but not in itself an objective reality irrespective of subjective reaction.

This has implications for Eliot's value system that could be a discussion in itself, but the point I wish to make relates to the two seeming religious poems of the period. In the absence of any certain intrinsic evidence of religious belief in the two poems, we turn to other works of the same period to estimate implications. These other poems, all five of them, concern themselves with philosophical perspective rather than historical. Factual evidence that may disprove or weaken the position is ignored, and the historicity of the point of view is left uninvestigated or even blatantly contradicted. What matters to Eliot is the fragmented present and the unified vision that the past supposedly had (usually in its literature). Parallel polar statements can be seen in "The Hippopotamus" and the "Sunday Morning Service." On the one hand there is the present church as Eliot sees it. On the other ideal side is scriptural literature. If Eliot is unconcerned with facticity in the five "secular" poems of the period, it would be problematic to try to assert facticity in the two "religious" poems without definite intrinsic evidence. We should rather expect that Eliot had no interest in Christianity as a historical religion. It is a literary ideal as he would see it, an ideal that unifies all existence, that can be used as contrast to the fragmented present (symbolized in the church), but an ideal whose facticity is a totally irrelevant matter. If this is Christianity--and most would deny it--it is on the extreme edge. If it is religious, it is a broad definition of religious that we are using.

Footnotes

- ¹ An example is Headings, p. 72.
- ² Unger, p. 72.
- ³ Ibid., pp. 69-70.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 73. These words are followed by Unger's explanation of his thematic purposes.
- ⁵ Haer. lxiv. 63.
- ⁶ B. C. Southam, A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 61.
- ⁷ Williamson, p. 93.
- ⁸ The preposition "of" in "superfetation of τὸ ἐν" is to be interpreted as instrumental rather than as governing the recipient of the action. Τὸ ἐν is what Origen used to impregnate Christian doctrine, and not what he operated on.
- ⁹ Maxwell, pp. 74-76.

CHAPTER VII

SACRAMENTAL REJECTION

Incubation (1909-19)

"Gerontion" is a major poem. It could be analysed in a variety of important ways and give grounds for a number of important conclusions. This thesis will review it with an eye to its fragmentation and unity. The poem reveals parallels between two Eliot goals and between the two sets of strategy he uses to arrive there. The two goals are aesthetic unity within the poem and belief in the unity of the universe. The one involves artistic practice, the other religious quest. A comparison of these two sets of data will reveal not only similarities but differences. For, after all, in this poem the aesthetic problem is solved whereas the religious is not.

"Gerontion" is a development of ideas that have sprouted here and there in earlier work. The reader reads it and better understands the workings of the earlier poems. "Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds" had its parallel in the factory yard of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night." Both say that the world is made up of scattered pieces. From the earliest poems the world has been described as a place of "fractured atoms," and there the latest poem adds nothing new.

It does give, though, a clearer picture of the categories in which Eliot has been thinking all along. Simply to speak of fragmentation

is one thing. It is quite another to define precisely how Eliot has been making use of the concept. "Gerontion" helps in that.

Eliot is using three techniques to emphasize the formlessness he sees. These have to do with the classical "unities". A fourth matter that is closely related to all three, and to which some separate attention will be given, is allusion. This section will examine the early stirrings of those techniques in the poetry. It will also look beyond them to see how they fit into a unified poem.

The most loosely held of the three classical unities is that of place. The classicist felt that a play or poem should happen in one place. To pretend that the stage, imaginary in the case of a poem, had to represent several places in succession might confuse the audience. The work should have a unity, a singleness, of locale. The rule received some lip-service in the seventeenth century, but little since. Instead, poets and playwrights have tried to make clear where an action occurs and when the scenes are changed. That has led reading and viewing audiences into certain expectations.

Eliot has overthrown those spatial expectations. We have seen that already. Unity of place was destroyed to produce universal dissolution in "Mélange Adultère de Tout" and "Lune de Miel." Those poems skipped from place to place until the reader was breathless. They were little more than long itineraries. In a second and somewhat different way "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" swept the reader along. It used the refrain,

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

to move the reader without any preparation from one scene to another and back again. This was disconcerting to the early readers.

The unity of time as stated by Aristotle maintained that the action of a work should fall within the limits of a single day. Whether that meant twelve hours or twenty-four was much disputed, and Corneille felt very daring when he wrote,

I, for my own part, find there are subjects so hard to enclose in so little time that I will not only accord them the entire twenty-four hours, but I will even avail myself of the license given by the philosopher to exceed them a bit, and without scruple push them up to thirty hours.

Unity of time, like place, has not been observed in this era. Audiences are content with a simple statement of time or season and an absence of anachronism.

Even those expectations Eliot disdains. "Prufrock" does not offer a definite time-span, nor does it make clear what happens when. The poetry reader is not given time as an ever-rolling stream but time as bits and snippets. There are flashbacks and premonitions. The past is present memory and the future present anticipation. Present, past, and future are therefore inseparable. Moreover, the present is in motion. The "now" of the first page is not that of the last nor of any page in between. That made the poem difficult when it first appeared in 1915. Similar temporal disjunctions are in the second and third stanzas of "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar."

The third unity, unity of action, is a matter of causal connection. A work is to have beginning, middle, and end, with no loose ends, and with a logical development throughout. Aristotle had

used the terms Complication and Denouement in the eighteenth chapter of the Poetics, but it amounted to the same thing. And audiences had come to expect such unity.

Helen Gardner links that logical development of action with feeling:

A situation is incipiently dramatic if it is on the point of change and we feel: "This cannot go on; something must happen." It is fully dramatic when we feel: "Something is happening that is changing everything for those concerned." And the drama has been completed when we reach a situation where we feel: "Something has happened; everything is now different."²

Early Eliot readers, with few exceptions, had none of these feelings. "Prufrock" left them wondering if there had been any action. The recurrent memories and imaginings made for abrupt shifts in content from paragraph to paragraph, and that his readers could not follow. Succeeding poems were no better. "Preludes" had no plot development, yet did not seem to fit any lyric genre. "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" may move, but what has happened?

Allusion became a dominant poetic tool after 1917. As a technique it participated in the three categories of disruption I have listed. To "take Sweeney and Agamemnon together, as does "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," is to interchange them in space and time. They play off against each other. Once the technique is understood and anticipated, the tiniest allusion brings forward a whole scene and situation together with the similarities and differences it represents. The point becomes at one and the same time that Sweeney is and is not Agamemnon, that he is and is not Theseus and Amintor in "Sweeney Erect." That is a situation

having no connection with traditional unity of action.

The 1909-19 poetry had aspects of fragmentation built into their structure in those various ways. Yet few critics from the first appearance of New Bearings in English Poetry in 1932 until the reassessment following the great man's death have dared call an Eliot poem disjointed. That was partly because of the poet's stature. Critics had become accustomed to feeling that one who had so shaped modern literature could do no wrong. But their forbearance was mainly due to the fact that most of his poems had achieved unity. And that was managed despite the fragmentation. Somehow the unity of the poem embraces the pieces of life.

He managed that unification by finding other ways of showing unity. In the light of "Gerontion," three techniques can be seen developing in these early poems. They are, firstly, mood and tone; second, stream of consciousness; and thirdly, the association method based on suppression of connectives.

Mood and tone were obvious choices as unifiers for Eliot, and were so from the beginning. "Conversation Galante" manages unity through a progression of tone and feeling. The poem's protagonist begins with an extravagant flourish, and that flourish is answered by an empty-headed female foil. Gradually his words become hysterical, and his foil turns into a menace in the night. The movement is rapid but not difficult to follow. What unity "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" has is achieved through that same use of mood and tone.

Prufrock's mind is the key to unity in "The Love Song of J.

Alfred Prufrock." What happens is not seen as it chronologically happens but as it passes through his head. Nothing is offered but his maunderings. We can gather something of times, acts, and locations from what he thinks, but all is unavoidably subjective. Still, this is interior drama by Gardner's definition of it. It has beginning, middle, and end, though not exactly of exterior action.

The "Half-past two" passage from "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" will illustrate yet a third Eliot technique for unifying the pieces. What is the connection between the cat in the gutter and the child's hand? Both "Slip out." Eliot has printed that connection for us. Then we have the child's eyes, eyes in the street, and a crab in the pool. What are the connections here? The idea of a child's hand could lead an observer to notice the eyes. The emptiness there could remind him of other eyes, presumably empty; and those peering eyes, reaching for the life within houses, could lead by association to the empty life in the pool reaching out for nothing. In all cases but the first one, the connective has been suppressed. Eliot does not state what the link is between the child's hand and his eyes. The association is the reader's own creation, though the artist may have forced him to it. Eliot's poetry at times becomes like the psychology tests where one is offered five words and told that four of them belong together in a category. In the psychology test the idea is to identify the odd word out. In Eliot's poetry all the parts belong. We need to find the concept that subsumes the parts. This association method becomes a dominant tool in Eliot's middle and later poetry.

All three techniques have their difficulties. I have called

them techniques producing unity, but their effects may be the opposite. Mood and tone, since subjective, may encourage a relativism. The jungle-like tangle of thought processes in stream of consciousness may lead to confusion. Or the unifying concept behind a series of unlike images may go unnoticed. To weigh those problems we must give the concept of unity further consideration.

What unity a work of art has and where that unity lies have become more and more vague in this century. We are nevertheless still able to posit one fact. An artist must have some reason for beginning and ending his work when and where he does. The work must seem to him to form a pattern which is complete in itself, or else suggest a pattern that would be a completion of what the artist has said. That pattern, for our purposes, exists first as a concept in the artist's mind. How he comes to that idea is irrelevant to our discussion. It is what he does with it that matters.

The artist takes the concept and not only puts it on paper, but "credits" it. The traditional classic or neo-classic artist will give the credit to nature. Nature, he says, owns the pattern; his work merely reflects it. Imitation is the word used. When we read such a work we do not notice the mind of the artist. It seems instead that we are looking at an actual pattern of the real world. Yet that is appearance only. The pattern we are beholding, however closely it matches our opinion of objective reality, is a product of the mind of the artist. That he should credit it to nature is his decision. He could equally well have emphasized the thought as his own viewpoint. He could have made it appear the idea of another in the guise of one

of his characters. He could even make it seem the invention of the reader.

The classic and neo-classic writers had confidence in the unity of nature in its own right. It was a natural choice to give nature credit for the unity of his poem. For a writer like Eliot, whose confidence in the unity of the universe has been badly shaken, the choice of nature would be far from natural. He would place the appearance of unity elsewhere.

If we first consider mood and tone, it will be obvious that this unity Eliot is using has nothing to do with nature. It is sometimes in the mind of the author, sometimes in the mind of a character. Arnold's "Dover Beach" would be an example of the former, and a Browning dramatic monologue would serve to illustrate the latter. "Conversation Galante" has a protagonist, but the unity is not credited to his mind. He is filled with a vision of the world in shards. Unity appears from somewhere behind him in the mind of his creator and through the mood and tone implanted by the artist. Similarly in poems like "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," though a narrator persona exists, the unity usually seems to be within the mind of the artist. It is probably fair to say that the more perfectly a character is created the more the unity, whether of mood, tone, or whatever, will appear to reside in the persona. Eliot's characters seldom have this quality, a fact we will return to in later chapters.

Stream of consciousness also has nothing to do with unity being credited to nature. As in the more traditional methods of character creation, the more perfectly an artist uses stream of consciousness the

more completely he disappears and allows the interplay to be between character and reader. The reader then has the feeling that the unity lies, perhaps to some extent in the mind of the character, but more fully in his own rearrangement and understanding of that mind.

Finally there is the association method based on unstated connectives. Again the reader is forced to search out the pattern. The more the artist has managed to step out of view the more the reader will feel that the poem is raw material and the pattern is what he himself is creating and ~~imposing~~ imposing on the matter.

The purposeful suppression of stated connectives makes this association method the antithesis of classicism's natural unity, for the classicist sees nature as raw material stating pattern. Not all raw material is of the same worth to the classicist, but in general any slice of nature is thought to contain some built-in pattern. The association method, by suppressing the connectives and thereby the pattern, stresses a fragmented view and produces the feeling that all unity is the mind's creation. The same can be said of the stream of consciousness technique: pattern is so easily lost in the confusion it comes to be seen not as natural but as a mental entity. Similarly, emphasis on feelings, even when a pattern is evident, brings relativism to the forefront. For one person's feelings need not be the same as another person's even when the stimuli are the same.

In other words, all three techniques have aspects of both fragmentation and unity, and while the fragments may be real the unity is always someone's idea. Much responsibility is being placed on the

reader, but it is the artist's intention that the unity should embrace the fragmentation. The tangle of thoughts in the stream of consciousness, the dissimilarities in the association method's listed items, and the relativism natural to mood and tone are not to be forgotten. Nor is the pattern to be neglected. Both are to live on in tension. Where that happens the poem succeeds artistically whatever it may do to the hero's and the author's view of the world. That point will receive more attention shortly.

There are two further things one should notice about the techniques as Eliot uses them in the poems before "Gerontion." In the first place, their use is intermittent rather than studied. It is as if the poet were not consciously aware of them or had not fully comprehended their possibilities. The first technique, mood and tone, might be an exception. It is hard to imagine an Eliot poem without some unifying basis in feeling. Occasionally he slips for a word or a line and falls short of perfect unity. Some of his immature and distracting rhymes serve as examples. And "The Death of St. Narcissus" is somewhat uncertain in tone. Nevertheless, in control of mood and tone Eliot is probably the most assured writer of this century.

Stream of consciousness, entering a persona's mind as Eliot did with Prufrock, is also used in "Portrait of a Lady." Those two poems, his most successful early works, date from 1910 and 1911. Then for a number of years he abandoned the idea and used what he called "observations." The Boston poems, for example, treat various aspects of Boston society. But, I should add, the unity does not lie in the things observed. Rather it is the tone of cold analytic objectivity

that holds the poems together.

Depending on the mind of reader to create an association is also used intermittently. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in its use of stream of consciousness, forces the reader to reach for unifying principles. What connection has the fog with a cat, or Prufrock himself with a pair of ragged claws? Then in "Preludes," what principle unifies "these images" into a single "notion"? It is left for the reader to find. The poems of 1915 are less taxing for the reader (and therefore less interesting). The concept that brings "damp souls" together with "sprouting" in "Morning at the Window" is not difficult to find. Nor is that which unifies "readers" and "ripe corn" in "The Boston Evening Transcript." After 1917 come the first stirrings of allusion. The connectives are more hidden but seldom obscure. For example, the exact content of the Sweeney-Agamemnon equation is unclear (as are most analogies), but the general outline is reasonably straightforward. Still, allusion is only one aspect of the association method. Eliot had yet to discover the full range of its possibilities.

The final thing that should be noted about Eliot's techniques before "Gerontion" is that the unity the poems achieve is the unity of the poem and not a unity of life. The mind of the poet almost always manages to impose order on the facts that he considers; but it is a mental arrangement, a thing within the poem, poet or reader, an idea but not an aspect of external reality. Yet it is order in reality he is seeking. Each poem, in creating rather than discovering order, is at once a success and a failure. It may be a successful creation; but by ending where it does, short of a real unity, and by accepting that

ideal unity, it is a retreat from reality.

Such complaints give some justification to the critics who call Eliot a romantic. For a classic or neo-classic writer,

external reality is the primary concern; the classical attitude has always meant a comparative lack of interest, therefore, in the artist himself. ...The foundation of the classical tradition is its confidence in a rationally ordered and harmonious universe.³

On the other hand, the romantic has tended to be "Characteristically preoccupied with the creation of a dream-world."⁴ The example Leavis uses is Victorian poetry:

Victorian poetry admits implicitly that the actual world is alien, recalcitrant and unpoetical, and that no protest is worth making except the protest of withdrawal.⁵

When an Eliot poem ends in a poetic unity, when it sees that unity as enough and ceases to search for unified reality, it is retreating into a dream-world. It is placing aesthetics before reality. Such a choice is explicitly made in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Towards the end of that poem the protagonist attempts a retreat into dreams when reality fails him. In "La Figlia che Piange," it is the artistic dream to which the young man clings. Yet in both cases the poem admits a sense of loss, as if dreams were poor substitutes. I have shown this to be true in "The Death of St. Narcissus" also. And "Portrait of a Lady" wonders about the matter, though it avoids a decision. Nevertheless the four poems show that the thought, and perhaps even the tendency, is there. We must turn to "Gerontion" with that in mind.

"Gerontion" (1919)

This poem obviously deals with fragmentation, and not just in content but also in form. At first glance the poem seems piecemeal and the transitions not only sudden but random, as these lines will illustrate:

I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.
Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a
sign!"
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvencence of the
year
Came Christ the tiger
In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering
judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers....

The first two lines of the excerpt can be taken as a summary of lines one to fourteen in the poem, where the narrator reflects on himself and his "decayed house." But the third line quoted seems to have no connection, and the fourth and fifth send us shifting again. What have the ideas to do with each other, and why the randomness? The style is fragmented indeed.

I mentioned allusion in the previous section and said it participated in the three kinds of fragmentation discussed there. Allusions are again present. In the quoted passage, "We would see a sign!" is a quotation from Matthew 12:28. "The word within a word, unable to speak a word, 'Swaddled in darkness'" is an adaption from Lancelot Andrewes' Christmas Day sermon in 1618. "Christ the tiger" brings to mind a poem by William Blake, and the next line is a condensation from The Education of Henry Adams. "To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk" alludes to the bread and wine of the Eucharist. That is

an amazing assortment of references for a six-line passage. The question is whether and how the snippets fit together.

If we analyse the shifts throughout the poem they will fall into the three categories discussed in the previous section. First are the shifts in action or plot development. The lines quoted above move erratically from the old man to signs, to the word in darkness, to Christ the tiger, to depraved May, and on to various other topics. That is a far cry from traditional plot development.

The second kind of shift the poem offers is temporal. To some extent temporal dismemberment enters the above allusions. The Bible passage naturally carries us back to New Testament times. We picture the encounter of Jesus and the pharisees where the sign was first demanded. Andrewes' sermon was preached in 1618, and the Blake poem came a century later. The Education of Henry Adams was published in 1918, and the Mass has a status beyond time since it has been instituted down through the ages. Following immediately on the quoted passage is a list of people in the midst of various actions: Mr. Silvero "walked"; Hakagawa "bowing"; Madame de Tornquist "shifting"; Fraulein von Kulp "turned"; and then the present tense, "I have no ghosts." When do these actions happen, and does it matter? At what point in time are we to stand as we read the poem? It seems a point with a great deal of mobility.

Finally there are spatial dislocations. Henry Adams, in the allusions above, is American, Blake **English**. Andrewes preached at court in London, and Jesus in Galilee. In other parts of the poem we

have mention of Thermopylae, Antwerp, Brussels, Limoges, the Polish Corridor, Belle Isle, and Cape Horn. Names further expand the geography: De Bailhache, Madame de Tornquist, Fräulein von Kulp, Mrs. Cammel, Fresca, and Hakagawa. We are even--

...whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms.

Those relativisms say something. The basic classical doctrine is that art is the imitation of nature. One should be able to hear the music of the spheres in a poem. This poem is not imitative harmony. In line after line there is evidence of dissonance and discord. If that is imitation, and I am sure it is, Eliot has a low opinion of the universe.

While it is true that fragmentation enters the structure of "Gerontion" with a force never before equalled, it is also true that unifying techniques are being applied with unequalled vigour. A proof that "Gerontion" is an artistic whole would be tedious. I will use the matters we have been examining to show that unity is indicated.

Stream of consciousness Eliot had used in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady," but he allowed it to languish. In "Gerontion" it is back with a new assurance. What the poem is is not a set of actions arranged in a plot, nor is it a mood piece. It is stream of consciousness. In case we miss that fact, Eliot states it explicitly in a coda: the poem is thoughts, "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season." The technique can be considered under the two aspects of "stream" and "consciousness." We can see it as a flow

or arrangement of thoughts, or we can regard it from the point of view of thought content. Both aspects have a unity new to the poetry of this man.

The flow of "Portrait of a Lady" was much simplified by the presence of the lady. We hear her conversations as they actually fall on the young man's ear. Speech has a logical order that thought often lacks. The conversational element, therefore, gives the poem a structure to which the man's other thoughts may cling, and the reader's task is thereby made reasonably easy.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" has a female foil also, but she says nothing except in Prufrock's imagination. There is therefore no straightforward and obvious action between characters in which to frame the flow. Furthermore the mind of Prufrock is a devious one. Because of his personality he cannot face certain situations and ideas. He approaches them by what several writers have called indirection: rather than touching on various central subjects his mind goes around them. We must give as much attention to what he cannot think as to what he does allow himself to consider.

Because of the nature of the situation, then, "Portrait of a Lady" is overly simple in its technique, and because of the nature of the main character "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is overly difficult. "Gerontion" falls between. No words are heard that act as a framework; yet, on the other hand, the mind is not devious but entirely open. It has what Williamson calls "unflinching honesty."⁶ Eliot has found that blend of character and method that gives purity in technique.

The second aspect of stream of consciousness in which to look for unity is content. The content of the mind Eliot has created in "Gerontion" is far more difficult than the consciousness of either earlier stream of consciousness poem. Gerontion thinks much more deeply about much more difficult matters. The young man in "Portrait of a Lady" has little in mind beyond his own ego. Certain passages reveal him using devices to prevent thinking. He ends in retreat to an aesthetic question. Prufrock is too busy avoiding thoughts of the lady friend and his own relation to her to do any real thinking. He too ends in a retreat to aesthetics, though he considers it an unsatisfactory solution. Gerontion, a little old man drying up in a decayed house, is not bothered by women but by life. He is giving open consideration to the meaning of existence and is fearlessly facing the possibilities. "Gerontion," then, is a purified technique applied to a mature subject matter.

Before continuing the search for unity I want to say a word about the association method. Suppression of connectives is a dangerous tool if unity is the desired end. In the first place, the reader may not find the unifying principle. And second, he may find the wrong one and assemble the parts in a way that was unintended. Even though the poet may give hints in the body of the poem of how he wishes the pieces assembled, when he makes no explicit unity himself, there is no way of disproving a construction. One critic of "Gerontion" has noticed the gulls, Trade-winds, sea places, and lists of foreign names. He concluded that Gerontion had been a sailor and that these things were fragments of his experience. That is a possible reconstruction but it falls short

of giving the bits and pieces meaning. The lists of people and places are unified by their very universality. There is no one anywhere who does not face the problems Gerontion is considering. All know a touch of beauty, a taste of sordidness, fear in rejecting and being rejected, and all in the end face dissolution into non-being.

Allusion, the association method, and mood and tone were closely interrelated in the pre-1919 poetry. Allusion sometimes worked to produce unity through a suppressed connective and sometimes did so more through mood and tone. In "Gerontion" the three are so worked together that it is virtually impossible to distinguish them, and it is certainly unrewarding to do so. As I continue my illustration of unity, I will discuss them together.

"Gerontion" can best be distinguished from its predecessors in the way its allusions work. The earlier poems, as was seen in the previous section of this chapter, use allusion as one side of an association that is held together by a suppressed connective, and suppressing the connective was meant to show similarity and difference at one and the same time. Sweeney, for example, was and at the same time was not Agamemnon. The allusions in "Gerontion" are not the same straightforward comparisons. It is not the case that Gerontion and his situation are being compared with and contrasted to the Word or Christ the tiger. Rather the mind contains the allusions, and they are supposed to interrelate with the other thoughts of his brain. This leads to three important conclusions about unity.

In the first place, there is a new singleness of location for

the reader's attention. The poem is "about" one thing. All the other poems of Eliot's Poems 1920 volume used the association method to double the movement of the poem. There is the physical action of Burbank descending at a hotel, then procuring and losing the princess; but beside that action is the movement of the narrator's mind as he looks over Burbank's shoulder, remembers the past, and either snickers or snivels. The reader must give his attention to both foci of the poem. The creator of "Gerontion" no longer feels the need to take upon himself the credit for an active mind. He has stepped completely out of the picture and leaves the reader with an undistracted view of Gerontion's mind. In having a single centre for attention the poem is naturally more unified.

The second unity is emotional. The allusions are now a part of the principal character instead of being imposed by an outside mind. That gives a seriousness not unlike Prufrock at his best. Prufrock, though, made occasional descents into mawkish comparisons. That left him double-minded, almost as if the later double movement mentioned in the previous paragraph had been placed within a single mind with a split personality. Subsequently he took the two halves and put them, one each, into a character who had the problems and a narrator who did the mocking. "Gerontion" eliminates the immature narrator that the earlier works had separated out, and the result is a psychological unity. "Gerontion," therefore, is an emotional whole unblemished by poor use or inadequate control of the allusion, the association technique, or the mood and tone that bring it about.

The final conclusion has to do with the function the various

techniques have in the flow of the poem. Before making my point I must defend the poem from one of its attackers.

F. W. Bateson says,

The difference between the allusions of "Gerontion" to A. C. Benson, Lancelot Andrewes and Henry Adams and the more or less learned quotations and references in The Waste Land is that the former are essentially private (their function is simply to supply Eliot with poetic material), while the latter are public (their function is to supply a poetic commentary on the modern world and they must therefore be recognizable by the modern reader of poetry).

"Private function" is close to a contradiction in terms. A private reference in a poem is one which has a special meaning for the poet because of his own private experiences, a meaning which is lost to everyone else since they do not share the experience. Such a reference may have an intended function, but since it does not transfer the intended meaning to the audience it is not a functional element, and probably should not be spoken of as a function at all.

Even if we accept the bracketed definitions of private and public function, Bateson is still wrong. The differences between "Gerontion" and The Waste Land lie in matters like singleness of emotion and unified point of attention. And those are differences in which "Gerontion" is by no means inferior. The similarity between the two poems lies in what Bateson calls private and public function.

It is true that the reader does not need to recognize that the eighteenth and nineteenth lines of "Gerontion" come from Lancelot Andrewes' sermon in order to gain an appreciation of what Eliot is saying. That is what Bateson seems to mean when he calls it a private function.

However, to my mind, the allusion is also public. The reader simply must understand that the lines refer to the Christ, even to the view of Christ given in the Prologue to John's Gospel. Without that knowledge the reader is lost.

* The same can be said of the Marie passage at the beginning of The Waste Land. It is public, as Bateson would have us believe, in that the reader must understand it as being spoken from the bored empty spaces of upper or upper-middle class society if he is to understand the passage's presence in the poem. The reader must also link its content with the stirrings of dull roots in a previous line. But in no way is it necessary to know the idea comes from My Past by Countess Marie Larisch. By what Bateson says, that should make it a private allusion. And that would make the two uses of allusion very similar.

If the functions Bateson mentions show "Gerontion" to resemble The Waste Land, and indeed the earlier allusive poems also, what is the functional novelty of this poem? There must be something new there if I am to claim a new unity of function.

"Gerontion" places its allusions right in the flow of the action. They advance the "plot," if I may call the mental flow of the stream of consciousness by that title. This is unlike the earlier poems. The immediate predecessors used allusion to produce an ideational overlay to the action. And "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," one of his earliest poems, used allusion to deepen the meaning rather than to advance the action:

Would it have been worth while;
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile;
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball
 To roll it towards some overwhelming question,⁸
 To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead..."

The allusions here say nothing really new as we move from one line to another. They say the same thing in several ways. The action eddies around them and comes virtually to a standstill. Each allusion is a pause, an aside, before the plot resumes its flow. The flow in "Gerontion" never pauses. If allusions are made to signs and wonders, Christ the Word, or Christ the tiger, each is an introduction of something new and each something rooted in what went before. There is no circling, no repetition: each is an allusion, but each is action that advances the plot.

In summary, the points I would make are these. The poem is a happy union of character with the stream of consciousness method. It has a new maturity of content, a singleness both of viewpoint and of point of interest, an emotional unity, and a complete integration of all techniques from stream of consciousness, through the association method, mood and tone, to analogy, into the movement of the piece. No Eliot poem before or since has had such a straightforward, powerful movement nor such an artistic logic.

Aesthetic Completion

I have demonstrated the spatial, temporal, and causal disintegration "Gerontion" portrays, and I have shown something of its aesthetic unity. It remains to show how these two concepts relate within Eliot's philosophy of life. To do that more must be said about the possibility of a real reintegration of the world's shards.

The poem discusses disintegration both from a personal and from a somewhat objective point of view in that it gives us both what Gerontion feels and what he observes. Paragraphs one and two (the two-line coda) act as an introduction to the man and his circumstances. Paragraphs three and four give us his history and his observations about other people's histories. The next three paragraphs form the body of the poem. There he orders history into an argument complete with rhetorical climax. Paragraph eight and the final two-line coda give an emotional reassessment of what it all means.

We learn from the introductory paragraph, and a few hints given elsewhere, that Gerontion is an old man without fame, without fortune, without friends, whose very senses have faded away. Three times he denies all claim to fame and does so emphatically. He has no fortune, for the house in which he lives, a rented one, is "decayed," and its landscaping is somewhat less than auspicious. He is friendless, for those around him he describes in impersonal terms (a nameless boy) or with tones of contempt ("the woman," "the Jew"). The words of the third paragraph do not seem very personal at first glance. They pose as an objective view of the significance of Christ. The paragraph opens with a challenge: "We would see a sign!" The answer to that challenge is the silent Word, the baby unable to speak a word. But that answer is not as powerless as it would seem, for it is also Christ the tiger, possessing all the "absolute unapproachability" Otto describes in The Idea of the Holy.⁹

Those lines are dressed in impersonal appearance, but they are personal. The emotional movement within them indicates that. The

rhythm of the first line is brash. Even the nasal final consonant is chopped by the exclamation mark. Then in mid-paragraph the rhythm changes abruptly. The "w" sounds of that second sentence act as a brake and create a ritardando. The mood becomes not sombre, but studious, thoughtful, and more than that. It is the "stupor...filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment" that Otto has described.¹⁰ Then the movement quickens into "tremor".¹¹ at the presence of the tiger. Throughout the passage there is no hesitation, no grasping to describe from outside. The tone control indicates personal knowledge of all those things. Gerontion's life was not always empty. He has known something of challenge and something of the two sides of wonder.

The next paragraph continues his history. It shows his numinal sensibility, and those of a few acquaintances, in decay. Sacramental terms are still used but are now mixed with negative concepts or alternate secular values. May is "depraved" with intimations both of Judas' betrayal and of a guilty beauty. The Mass enters, is cheapened "among whispers," and finally transmutes or decays into beauty of Limoges pottery which is "caressed" and of paintings which are "bowed to," into the occult, and into culpable posturing. The threads of the religious lives of Gerontion and his acquaintances have disappeared one by one until, like Job, the shuttle of their lives is empty and without hope.

Paragraphs five through seven are bound together in that they are directed to an unnamed listener whom most critics have taken to be Christ the tiger. That is certainly the case in the seventh paragraph, where no other explanation of the "you" will quite do. To assume a

different referent in the preceding pair of paragraphs would be an unnecessary complication. Paragraphs five and six are held together by their five-fold use of the verb "think." They are kept apart by the addition of "at least" to the verb in the sixth.

Paragraph five asks whether there is forgiveness for one who has known Christ and fallen away. The question is not asked as if information were being sought but as if the negative answer were expected. Then three arguments for mitigation are presented. The first points to the numerous deceits offered us by history. The words allude to the contrived Polish Corridor of modern history but, in placing the lines immediately after his own personal history, Gerontion must be remembering his degeneration through proffered lessons in beauty, mystery, and sensuality. The fault, he is saying, is not the individual's. Our natures are open to too many attractions. The second argument, elaborated four ways, states that the gift of religious "knowledge" or experience is inevitably given in the wrong way or at the wrong time. Blame for rejection of that gift cannot be placed fully upon us but upon circumstance. The final argument, beginning at the third "think," is closely allied to the concept of salvation by works. There is no salvation here, says the argument, for there is never purity of motive or result. All three arguments are encapsulated in the final line of the paragraph: "These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree." These shortcomings are not our own but are the result of Adam's transgression in eating fruit shaken from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are not culpable but subject to Original Sin, or, a word Eliot may have preferred in 1919, Fate.

The arguments are fruitless. Gerontion knows he has been found wanting despite his pleas. The tiger springs and devours him. Nevertheless, there is no thought of submission. "We have not reached conclusion," he tells the tiger. He has not rehearsed his thoughts and created this poem purposelessly. Nor has his purpose been appeasement of "backward devils." Exactly what he means by that term is unclear. Perhaps he has in mind ghosts of his past, or perhaps he means to deny that this poem is a confession with a view to absolution.

"I would meet you upon this honestly," he says in a tone that mixes exhilaration and defiance. "I that was near your heart," he continues, "was removed therefrom." The passive voice should not be over-stressed; but a note of injured innocence may linger there as if the removal were not his fault but something forced upon him. He goes on to say he has lost his "passion." The word here means his love of Christ rather than his intense emotions, for he then goes on to indicate that his other passions have all been adulterated. Why, he is asking, should his passion for Christ be different. In a final thrust of scorn he reaches his climax: he is old and even his five senses are gone; what is there left with which to contact God?

The eighth paragraph reveals Gerontion's attitude after that grand dismissal of God. The movement is by no means a "chilled delirium." If it is a delirium at all it is an exalted one. The tone is soaring, the mood one of freedom. The content speaks of scattered atoms and of birds shattered by the snows and claimed by the sea; but the slow rise and fall of the rhythm shows that--

...an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner--

is a picture of contentment. He is satisfied, not by things as they are, but with his poem, his construction, "this show."

It is difficult to decide what tone the final coda deserves. "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" could be regarded as a rejection of the emotional contentment that has gone before, a counter-statement, similar to the end of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "La Figlia che Piange," that aesthetic unity is not enough. That is unlikely though. The exaltation and contentment of the previous lines are spoken with such strength that they are virtually indestructible. A more likely interpretation would see their reconciliation spreading into the coda until the final line is stated with the same contentment and feeling of completion.

That interpretation tells us something of Gerontion's philosophy of life. It also contains clues in our search for thoughts of reintegration in the real world. The poem gives Christianity consideration as a possible means of unifying reality. For that reason I must now give careful consideration to the Christianity implicit in the poem.

There are three things that must be said about Gerontion's picture of Christianity. The first concerns Christianity's metaphysical status. The second thing is an examination of what Gerontion considers Christ's work to be. The third concerns the boundaries beyond which that work is ineffective.

It is interesting to notice the metaphysical status Eliot has given religious answers throughout his early career. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" there was little to indicate what he felt about

Christianity. He did find it useful poetically since it gave him a means of communicating concepts to a large audience. "The Death of St. Narcissus" in 1915 was little different. Perhaps it indicated some shred of belief, but more likely he was using the Christian myth in much the same way H.D. used the Greek ones. The way he confounded the Greek Narcissus myth and the Christian saint made the latter more probable. "The Hippopotamus" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" admitted the existence of value somewhere in Christian tradition or thought. There existed "unoffending feet," but whether Eliot thought of them as a great idea or as an incarnate reality was not clarified.

When we come to "Gerontion," the tone of the piece gives three strong indications that the Christian religion is based on a metaphysical reality and is no mere idea. The first indication is found in the mood of the whole third paragraph. The word that is "swaddled in darkness" and "Christ the tiger" do not radiate the kind of feeling one would have towards an idea or ideal. In the second place, the words of paragraphs five and six could be addressed to one's own created idea rather than a real Christ, but the emotional strength of the succeeding paragraph ("I would meet you upon this honestly") makes that highly unlikely. A third indication of metaphysical reality is the trauma the desertion of Christ involves. The fourth paragraph, the one showing the fall away from that first religious knowledge, is full of guilt- and sin-ridden overtones. An ideal when deserted may produce emotional disturbance, but that will happen only at the time of desertion and not years later when the ideal would be considered dead. The emotional pitch of the paragraph better fits an alternative

still considered real even when it must finally be rejected as too demanding. Exactly how Christianity is too demanding will come up shortly.

The second aspect of Christianity which needs some brief attention is the work of Christ. Throughout the poem Gerontion shows himself far more aware of the tiger aspect of Christ than the lamb. Gerontion is not considering propitiation, expiation, or any kind of atonement. Therefore Christ evokes fear. The only hints that Christ is or has been more than tiger, that he has a function other than rending, lies in obscure hints like the word swaddled in darkness, in the memory of an "I that was near your heart," and in the Mass. There are implications that the Eucharist has validity if and only if one is not removed from Christ's heart.

That raises the third matter. When is it that one is subject to Christ the tiger rather than to Christ the lamb? How a person is removed from Christ's heart is not clarified in the poem. There are indications that what is sacred can be profaned, can be lost amid distractions and alternate values. It is not simply a matter of becoming sinful, for all men are under the "wrath-bearing tree." Nor is it a matter of evil works, for no other kind is possible:

...Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.

In the second place, it is not made clear whether reconciliation with God is possible once one has been removed. The word "concitation," an Eliotism for "stirring up" or "excitation," is an unreliable indication, for it is not his love for God but his "backward devils" Gerontion

thinks to stir. Nevertheless there is one good indication that atonement is possible. Gerontion says,

I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and
touch:
How should I use them for your closer contact?

I have remarked on the note of scorn within that rhetoric, but behind the question is an assumption, on the part of the "you" who is addressed, that closer contact is possible. Gerontion's brand of Christianity seems not to be some present-day form of Donatism.

Gerontion's decisions are based on certain observations of the world and of his own position in it. What he sees there is what I must now analyse and then relate to the view of Christianity he holds.

Paragraph five and the first line of six are in the first person plural. Gerontion has knowledge of himself and others both. It is through that knowledge that he comes to much the same conclusions as the psalmist:

There is none that does good,
no, not one.¹²

Goodness, he feels is a physical impossibility in our fallen world (lines 44-46), and even the possibilities we are offered have an unfairness about them (lines 37-42). In the physical world the Polish Corridor is a "contrived corridor." Contrivance, it is implied throughout, is the most any of us can make from our atomized universe, and then our jury-rigging only "deceives" and "guides us by vanities." Gerontion has managed not even contrivance. He has lived life through, and what has he made of it? He has no friends, no material possessions, no fame or deeds of valour to give him meaning, and now his senses are dimmed

to nothing. Before him is death and final dissolution. Here is life so empty that there is little left to be called fragmented.

In the face of that universal disorder, Christ the tiger enters with what Gerontion must feel is a demand for reconciliation. What Gerontion needs is relief from his burdens. What he must feel is offered is the final weighty straw. For reconciliation appears to him to leave the world unchanged. He will still face death. The outside world will still be dragged hither and yon by the insalubrious sinuousities of history. Men, all men, will still be trapped in Original Sin with no possibility of pure action. There will still be the unfairness of blame where no personal guilt lies, and he himself will still be a cipher, destitute of worth. In fact, a return to Christ's heart would, as Gerontion sees it, be an acknowledgement of his own meaninglessness, and admission that he has been and is nothing.

Through atonement only one thing would change: his present isolation. His acquaintances have been whirled away from him and from Christ he has been removed. A return to Christ would at least break that closed circle around his being. But at what cost? It would force acknowledgement of all that is around him, of all the fragments his closed circle has kept out. It would be a final admission that his world is as it is, and there is nothing he can do about it. Whether or not Gerontion's understanding of Christianity is complete or adequate is not the point. The point is that, as he sees the situation, a return to Christ's heart means the denial of unity in the universe.

Since Eliot's purpose has always been real unity, he naturally

has his created character turn away from such a proposition. Instead, Gerontion chooses to retreat from both the material confusion and this spiritual dilemma. He is quite willing to admit the reality of the material and spiritual spheres but, since faced with what seems irreconcilable difficulties in both, he denies them ultimate value. No answer short of unity can be ultimate for him. He will keep the circle of being closed and build a poem, an ideal structure, from the pieces of his experience. By imposing order where none exists he will have created unity. It may be mere idea, but it will at least be self-affirmation.

Footnotes

¹ W. J. Bate, ed., Criticism: the Major Texts (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1952), p. 119.

² Helen Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1959), p. 131.

³ Bate, pp. 3, 4.

⁴ F. R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), p. 10.

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶ Williamson, p. 113.

⁷ F. W. Bateson, "The Poetry of Learning" in Eliot in Perspective, A Symposium, edited by Graham Martin (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p. 39.

⁸ Collected Poems, p. 16.

⁹ Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. by John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 13-19.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 26. See also pp. 13-19.

¹² Psalm 14:3 (RSV).

CHAPTER VIII

THE WASTE LAND (1921-22)

So much has been written on The Waste Land that it is difficult to be original. Worse still is the length of the poem. What this chapter posits is said too briefly for every point in the argument to have full documentation and defence.

If the analysis of "Gerontion" outlined in the previous chapter is correct, that poem is a rejection of Christianity. Not that it is a denial of the metaphysical basis of its beliefs. The poem is, in fact, an affirmation of that. To Gerontion Christianity is no ens rationis. He might or might not wish to question some of the component doctrines, but on the whole he seems to concur intellectually that they express an actual state of affairs. Rather, the poem is a rejection of allegiance. He will not give his heart. To put it another way, a person who stands within the tradition Gerontion is rejecting would call him perverse rather than ignorant, for the poem shows him knowing the right but wilfully turning his back upon it. Gerontion understands the beliefs (or many of them), considers them valid, but has not made the commitment of faith.

What generally follows rejection of allegiance? A rebel existence is possible, or possible for a while; but in the end some less negative pattern is more likely. After all, if, as seems to be the case, the rebel must affirm that against which he rebels in order to deny it, it would be less taxing to try something else. There are three patterns that could

unfold under such conditions. The belief could be set aside in one manner or another so that the character could relax his aggressive posture and slip into a life without commitment. Or again, a different set of beliefs to which allegiance could be given might be found or created. Thirdly, the rejected belief could be re-evaluated and accepted with or without some modification.

Critics have interpreted The Waste Land in all three ways. This thesis contends that though elements of all three patterns are present the poem does not belong to any of those three categories. The poem stands at the cross-roads, and the choice from among the various possibilities has not yet been made. The poet and the hero are in a state of indecision. If the options they see were stools, they would be in the midst of a great number and firmly planted on none.

Each of the three patterns has more than one option. The pattern of setting belief aside and living without commitment has two main options: anarchism and resignation. Alternate beliefs are many. Some, like aesthetics and asceticism, Eliot has already examined; but others, like myth, have something new about them. Re-evaluation of sacramentalism could concentrate on the same partial understanding as Gerontion. It could develop a fuller understanding, or it could lead to any number of other "-isms" within the sacramental viewpoint.

Many of these various options are important enough for separate treatment in this chapter. All but one stand before the poet and his persona as possibilities. Some may be more favourably treated than others, but no decision has been reached. Critics who say there is a decision in the poem, or even a strong possibility that a particular option will be taken, are wrong.

Anarchism

This and the following section are closely related. In order to show the manner of their relation something should be said of what the two sections are to accomplish. There are five points to be made. In the first place it must be made clear that anarchism and resignation are two options within the first pattern mentioned above. In the second place it must be shown that the first pattern is one of the dominant possibilities in The Waste Land. Thirdly, it should become obvious that though the two options within the pattern are quite similar in some ways there is a world of difference between their implications. Then, toward the end of this section anarchism, the first option, will be explained more fully and dismissed. Finally, in the following section, it will be shown how one interpretation of the poem that appears to be the anarchistic option is really an example of resignation.

Mention was made of three patterns that could unfold once the strain of rebellion weakened the will to rebel. The first pattern mentioned was belief set aside in one way or another so that the character could slip comfortably into a life without commitment. There are two principal ways of doing so.

The most obvious way would be to dismiss the belief outrightly, to deny it any validity, and thereby break its hold. Doing so without recourse to other beliefs as "counteragents" means a life no longer subject to the demands of, or perhaps even the desire for, unity answers. Free of outside rule, the option could be called anarchism.

The second option is more devious. Here the mind may allow itself to become compartmentalized into two portions. One compartment would continue to hold the belief, either accepting it or rebelling against it. The other

compartment becomes totally unrelated, living without commitment, belief, or ultimate meaning. This is a form of resignation since it posits a fact and acknowledges its truth with one part of the mind, but refuses to use it in the whole of life. Further consideration will be given to the two options after something more has been said of the general pattern of which they are components.

The pattern of setting belief aside may not be the most immediately obvious element in The Waste Land, but it makes its presence felt in certain ways. It is, in fact, a dominant element of the poem, as will now be shown.

The poem dwells on the setting and things of the setting rather than on the meaning or belief that pulls objects and attitudes into unity. There are river scenes, desert scenes, city scenes, pubs and boudoirs, all with only tenuous connections. Maxwell puts it this way:

What must strike the reader most forcibly about Poems 1920 and The Waste Land is their insistence on the setting. Temporal human affairs are presented directly within this setting, while their spiritual significance is left implicit, in the imagery and in the allusions to past literature.¹

In its insistence on the centrality of things, in the repulsive quality of those things, and in the fragmentation implicit throughout, The Waste Land resembles "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," two poems which are called imagistic in an earlier chapter. The word imagistic recalls Pound's Imagisme, his "direct treatment of the 'thing,'" and the whole movement in the poetry of the period away from "speculation" toward the physically tangible and optically apparent. In its "insistence on setting" The Waste Land seems to be following that trend.

Yet it must not be thought that imagistic tendencies are the only thing the poem possesses. Nor does their presence necessarily decree that the poet has set, is setting, or will set beliefs aside. It is possible that the poem is following a this-worldly trend, and it may be doing so because the poet and his persona are about to walk away from unity answers. Nevertheless, imagistic elements do not ensure such to be the case. "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" were imagistic but made no statements about belief. They were describing the condition of the world as Eliot saw it. They expressed horror at that condition, and that horror at that condition is what launched Eliot on a quest for answers. They were preliminary to belief, or at least to a search for belief, rather than expressions of no belief. If The Waste Land is a return to the imagistic condition, one might assume it to be an empty-handed return; but it might equally well be preliminary to a renewed search.

Certainly Maxwell in the above quotation is not univocal in his emphasis on physical objects. After mentioning Eliot's stress on setting he does not cease speaking. He continues, and talks of "spiritual significance." By doing so he implies that there is more to the poem than setting and that what Eliot is really interested in is not the setting at all. The poet may even be holding the setting, the people, and their condition up for us to ridicule so that we will be forced to go beyond the thing itself. That is a possible element in the poem and one to which Eliot is, I am convinced, giving full consideration. But he does not make up his mind, and imagistic considerations are also there. Rain has not fallen by the end of the poem, and we cannot be sure it ever will fall. The indecision with which the poem ends is symbolic.

The point to be made is this. The poem is prior to decision. A great many options face the poet. He may set all beliefs aside one way or another, or he may fasten on one; but the time is not yet. In the meanwhile he is keeping his options open, and one of the most obvious options is the dismissal of beliefs.

I would now like to return to the two options within the imagistic pattern in order to contrast them and show the importance of the differences between them. The importance lies in the implications they have for my interpretation of "Gerontion" and Eliot's subsequent development.

Resignation is the view that Eliot in The Waste Land is about to resign from and give up his quest for an object of allegiance, or that he at least leaves that an open option. If such a decision had been made or were about to be made, it would imply that Eliot had decided the pursuit of ultimate answers is too difficult and he will live with the penultimate.

Such a decision would mean that the trek period of Eliot's life ended with "Gerontion," and The Waste Land shows the poet settling down in the wilderness of modern life that within a few months he was to call "futility and anarchy." ³ Some early critics believed Eliot had determined on that option. They saw the poem expressing "the disillusionment of a generation." No doubt they were thinking of young people raised to believe the world was becoming better and better suddenly confronting the Great War.

Let me stress how this option blends in with my interpretation of "Gerontion." "Gerontion" made the decision to ignore the ultimate answer, and The Waste Land is at least giving consideration to living with the decision. The resignation option does not claim the poem is denying

ultimate beliefs or retracting the statements of the earlier poem. Like "Gerontion" this poem would be thinking of the ultimate belief as impracticable. Commitment to whatever vague ideals or governing principles there are is unreasonable, and the swirling scenes of the waste world are all we should aim to work with. This is what he is considering in this option, and this compartmentalization and resignation are the natural outgrowth of the rebellion "Gerontion" portrays.

On the other hand there is anarchism. This is the option where Eliot considers the possibility that flux is ultimate and that there are no answers beyond it. To be open to this Eliot would have to accept the confusion and stop all search for ordering principles because there are none.

Critics who first fastened on this view lauded the poem for its realism and its scientific detachment. I. A. Richards felt in the poem "a complete severance⁴ between his poetry and all beliefs." Belief here would seem to refer to the ontological status of systems and doctrines unifying or making sense of the natural by supranatural means as well as dedicated commitment to that system.

Such a view would see the poem as an advance beyond "Gerontion" where, though commitment was withheld, the facticity of the system was asserted. The Waste Land is not only withholding commitment, they say. It is denying the unifying answer itself. The 1922 poem is saying that flux is all and commitment belongs nowhere.

The two imagistic views have definite similarities besides their stress on physical objects, but anarchism does differ from resignation in the metaphysical status given to the disorder expressed in the poem. With anarchism, disorder is all there really is. Resignation would still posit

an ideal beyond the motion. Nevertheless, from a purely practical standpoint there is complete agreement that anarchy is what one works with. Therefore many of the arguments showing one option was or was not Eliot's sole concern in the poem could be used of the other option.

The consequences of the two options in so far as they relate to my interpretation of "Gerontion" are what I wish to stress. Here the views are dissimilar. Resignation, as already mentioned, would be a logical consequence of "Gerontion." The Waste Land would then be a further step along the path "Gerontion" explored. If, however, anarchism is about to be adopted by Eliot or his persona. "Gerontion" must be seen as a false step. The Waste Land would become the statement that the ontological status of Christianity should never have been affirmed in the first place. In fact the 1922 poem might even be proof that my interpretation of "Gerontion" is wrong, that Christianity was never more than an ontological possibility under consideration by Gerontion or (more likely) the people around him. So much depends on whether or not anarchism is present in 1922 that the option must now be considered more carefully.

There is some evidence that anarchism is not a sufficient explanation of the poem. Many critics, early ones especially, have thought it sufficient. But when they claimed to see unillusioned or disillusioned concentration on fact in The Waste Land, were they voicing the mood of the poem or were they, because of the mood of their generation, reading it into the poem? Concentration on fact rather than ideal, pragmatism for example, was definitely present in post-war Europe and America. Eliot had this to say in 1931:

When I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the most approving critics said that I had expressed the "disillusionment of a generation," which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own

illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.⁵

On the other hand, Eliot spoke those words nine years after the poem appeared; and a lot can happen in that time. Eliot had joined the Church of England, and his subsequent opinions may very well have been changed or distorted. The poem itself, in content and technique both, does make disintegration, flux, and discontinuity very obvious. It follows none of the usual rules of structure, scene, movement, event, character, or even gender for that matter. The element of disruption is overwhelmingly visible while ordering principles are well hidden.

Yet without looking very deeply there is evidence of unifying principles both in the structure and in the thought. Humour is an elementary example. The comic vision by its very nature both upholds and ridicules at the same time. It usually takes the form of a comparison in which is a gross disparity. That disparity is, as often as not, between reality and some kind of standard. The standard may be a cheap one, or it could be that the standard is the butt of satire rather than the reality; but when the standard acts as standard of judgment it gives us a vision of something beyond the real. Even sick humour or graveyard humour can indicate a disgust for or fear of standardlessness. The "Keep your Dog far hence" passage is of that kind. Comic vision in The Waste Land is often so.

If the poem in the end should prove not to be reaching for unifying principles, it is surely not enjoying the real. There is, in the first place, lack of enthusiasm for the fragmentation the poem presents. Scene after scene of futility makes it clear that the poet-narrator does not consider flux something to be grasped for its own sake the way physical

objects are in William Carlos Williams, Rilke, or Francis Ponge. Eliot lays down his views of disintegration to give us an understanding of the disease. He does not celebrate the condition nor is he neutrally disposed towards it.

In the second place, there is a lack of dignity the poet-narrator gives to the people of his waste land. They are almost uniformly in the anarchistic condition that many critics have taken to be the point of the poem, but as we meet character after character and as they are compared with ancient heroes of history, literature, and myth it becomes clear that they participate in and are to a small extent aware of their participation in boredom and horror. They are never aware of glory. Eliot is not presenting anarchism as an answer as much as he is showing it to be ~~a~~ lack of answers.

These points and many other unity matters which will appear in subsequent sections do not prove The Waste Land to be a further quest, nor do they completely disprove that the poem ends with some form of imagistic solution. Humour can be used to ridicule universal standards by comparing them with each other or with present conditions. The sense that dignity and enthusiasm are missing need not prove Eliot's disenchantment with things as they appear. It may indicate sour resignation. If he had so resigned himself to living with fragmentation, a bitter humour directed against the standards he had hoped to find and use would be psychologically appropriate. Many have interpreted the poem in such a way. On the other hand, though, the humour, the sense of futility, and the lack of dignity could be the most visible portion of the continuing search for universal answers. But before going on to unity something must be said of the resignation option.

Resignation

The anarchist interpretation of The Waste Land has been making a comeback in recent years. One of the forms it has taken has involved the analogy between the 1922 poem and cubism. What I hope to prove in this section is that the analogy supports resignation better than anarchism.

How the comparison came to be made between the two art forms is understandable. A cubist picture does seem a dismembered array, and The Waste Land has a like appearance. Furthermore, the poem can be thought of as examining its subject matter coincidentally from several stances in much the same way as Picasso and other early cubists incorporated several perspectives of a subject onto a single canvas.

Let us first compare classical and cubist methods. The older methods of painting stood the viewer in one position and gave him a single perspective as before a window. Classicists set down objects spatially arranged. There was a foreground, middleground, and background; and there was an up and down, left to right progression filling up the canvas in a recognizable imitation of nature. The details might be bright or dark, sharp or blurred, depending on the artist's hierarchy of values. The result was a series of objects in a meaningful, purposeful arrangement with the whole canvas being a unity.

That is not to say cubism is meaningless or purposeless. The cubist dances the viewer around the subject he wishes to stress. The "motion" produces a neutral wash of the middle- and backgrounds while giving several planes of observation to the foreground object. Since the artist depicts only a foreground, as often as not a single object, in early cubism, the object is lifted out of the world and seen in isolation. Since seen from

all angles, though, it does receive a fuller treatment than it would by the older stationary methods. The meaning of a cubist picture, in other words, is to be found more in its complete description than in its relation to the rest of the world.

Classical and cubist techniques differ then. Their interests also differ. It would seem no great leap from those observations to several conclusions: to say on the one hand that classical art is goal directed, that the goal or conclusion it aims for is the portrayal of universal harmony, and that as such classical art has taken a stance of commitment to unity; while on the other hand cubism begins with not goals but presuppositions, that the presuppositions are of disunity, and that these artists are against not only commitment but ideals. Cubism would therefore be the embodiment of the anarchistic stance, and the analogy between The Waste Land and cubism would seem to put the poem firmly in the same position.

There are two ways of fighting the analogy and thereby weakening the case for anarchism. The first way is to examine what are the real implications of the comparison. The above leap, from observations about technique and interests to statements about presuppositions and conclusions, universal harmony, fragmentation, and commitment may be greater than it appears. That can be shown by adopting the stance of a classical critic first, and later assuming a view more sympathetic to cubist ideas.

The classical critic would, it is true, think of art as reaching for reconciliation. A painting, as he sees it, contains a variety of objects. By this variety the work images the world, and the artist's aim is, or should be, to make his work a unity. If the artist succeeds, the critic will tell him he has captured the unity nature has provided,

a unity that is often hidden but is always there. The artist who acts in this manner is reaching for reconciliation and may be spoken of as goal directed, but the point to be emphasized is not that unity is the conclusion but that it is the presupposition.

The traditional critic and artist alike hold such a presupposition and therefore would find it difficult to understand the cubist's pre-occupation with objects in isolation. They would tend to expect a painting to be a universe, and a universe with such a limited range and number of objects would seem facile as well as distorted. This is not so much because the classical artist and critic aim for unity as it is because they hold it as a presupposition.

The distinction is important. Many artists as far back as El Greco⁷ or Bruegel⁸ aimed not at unity but at fragmentation. They began, though, from presuppositions of unity. That is, to say, they began fully aware of traditional classical expectations and theory. In breaking the presuppositions and depicting disarray in the world they gave their art a very real power. But the effect depended to a large extent on the presuppositions of the classical viewer. Classical art, then, was built upon presuppositions and expectations of unity whether the artist chose to honour them or thwart them in his conclusions.

If we now take our stand within the modern art viewpoint, we can see how the expectation that a painting will be a universal statement would bother the cubist. Traditional styles have implicitly made statements about the whole universe, and to use a traditional style is to take a stance with a predetermined relation to unity. The artist may fulfil what his stance implies or he may fight it, but he cannot ignore it.

Cubism, in theory, makes no inherent statements about a whole universe. It sees and paints more deeply with singleness of concentration instead of breadth of subject. The early cubist at least would call the multiplicity of objects in traditional art a distraction. Moreover, no object can fit into a genuine unity when it is half hidden and therefore half unknown. An apple that blends into its background may have a worm-hole behind. If so the unity is dishonest and the viewpoint more distorted than paintings with multiple perspectives.

All this should make clear that the difference between traditional painting and cubism is not that the classical styles aim for unity as their conclusion while the modern school presupposes fragmentation. Rather the traditional methods presuppose unity while cubism wishes to avoid all presuppositions.

This may not at first seem an important distinction. The cubist's initial lack of interest in a universal synthesis would still seem to support or at least parallel the criteria of the anarchistic position: that there be absence of commitment and no movement beyond flux to solutions of unity in actual fact it does not support these criteria at all. To deal with a limited number of objects, to examine them in various seemingly contradictory perspectives, and to ignore their relationships with the rest of the world not only does not rest on presuppositions of fragmentation but does not necessarily begin nor end with a lack of commitment nor does it necessarily prevent a movement to a unity solution.

The critics who have compared The Waste Land and cubist paintings have not always taken sufficient care in pointing out that cubism is a technique rather than a presupposition about reality, or a conclusion about it for that matter. A tool can be used with any presupposition to

produce any result. If Bruegel could turn the world upside down using traditional techniques, there is no reason why some cubist could not right the world again using cubist techniques.

It may be argued that certain conclusions are easier with certain techniques, that tools are meant to cut in certain ways and are clumsy when put to other uses. In art there will always be pressures on the meaning from the form the work takes. Those pressures may be fought, as was the case with Bruegel. If they are not fought it will be for one of three reasons. The poet or artist may understand the pressures of his tool and intend them. It may also be that they are unintended but acceptable. Or they may be the unwanted products of unsuitable technique. There is usually no way to tell which of the three is the case except to watch the poet's development in future works. A poet of intelligence, which Eliot is, soon sees the effects he has created and either accepts and uses them or else develops measures to overcome them. But to pursue that would take us beyond the work itself and is therefore beyond the scope of this chapter.

What should be indicated again here is the importance of whether the cubist analogy shows The Waste Land to be an anarchistic or a resignation piece. If it is anarchistic the poem is rejecting not only commitment to but the very existence of unity, specifically the answer which "Gerontion" implies. It would mean that Eliot considers the Christian implications of "Gerontion" an unwanted product of his poetic form, and The Waste Land is his remedy of the situation. But if the poem is not anarchistic nothing is denied and neither "Gerontion" nor The Waste Land need be poetically or philosophically a blind alley.

The second way of fighting the analogy and any anarchistic

implications it may have is to deny the analogy. The Waste Land is not at all like a cubist painting. It is more like Bruegel. It uses traditional expectations of unity as presuppositions but aims (perhaps) not to fulfil those expectations so much as to disappoint them.

If the contrast of the analogy were the simple one of static versus dynamic, the traditional forms being "picturesque" or static in perspective while the cubist is in motion, The Waste Land would be closer to a cubist painting. Dynamic The Waste Land is, but the orbit perspective implied by analogies with cubism may not be the right one. In Eliot's poem the reader is circling the object of interest only if that central interest be called some abstract name like despair, or boredom, or horror. But then the central interest is such a huge object with so many facets that it is doubtful whether the analogy with cubism holds. Better to think in terms of rotation rather than revolution. The reader is set spinning at the centre (a fixed point) and sees all the world, like Tiresias, as the objects of the world pass before his eyes. There is a real resemblance, then, to the flickering, shifting scenes of modern cinematography.

That the poem can in any way be described as giving us a "world" shows how the cubist analogy breaks down. Cubism in itself has no interest in background. Traditional techniques have such an interest even should the natural expectations be thwarted. In this Eliot is being traditional. He has taken a world and packed it in a poem for the consumption of readers who, though they have had some doubts lately, have traditionally spoken of world and poem in terms of comprehensive unity. Eliot has counted on traditional expectations of a unified world and has demonstrated fragmentation. His world is as upside down as that of Bruegel. The question is whether or not any attempt is made at rehabilitation.

The possibility that unity answers are beyond reach, that they are impracticable is an open possibility in the poem. Perhaps the poet will resign himself to this and deal with the world in any way he can. But other options are open.

Secularism

There are indications throughout the poem that Eliot is giving consideration to a wide variety of ordering principles as he faces the flux he wishes to explain. Some of the explanations are sacramental, but others involve no notion of holiness or reverence. These secular options will be investigated here.

In order to make clear exactly where the 1922 poem stands in Eliot's development it will be necessary to make one further categorization. There is a multiplicity of secular options in the poem but they can be placed in two general categories, real and ideal, depending on the metaphysical status the believer attributes to them.

Take the example of myth. A few months after The Waste Land first appeared Eliot called myth

...a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.⁹

In Eliot's mind, was myth a pattern in reality that he had found and identified, that therefore is meaning? Or was it a mental pattern, an idea, an invention of the mind that was an escape from the confusion, a solution not to the flux itself but to the concern the flux generates?

The same problem arises with archetypes. Northrop Frye's archetypal system is certainly a universal meaning pattern. But is it

credited as the pattern in which the universe is built? Or is it to be thought of as a pattern that satisfies the mind but is in the end an alternative focus of attention to the universe?

The distinction is the same one we find in the two Joyce novels, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses. In the earlier novel Stephen Dedalus, like Eliot, is searching for a place to put his commitment. In the end he decides to dedicate himself exclusively to his art. The decision is, in effect, to create an ideal world in which he will live and by means of which he will be enabled to withdraw from and ignore the fragmentation of the real world around him. The option Stephen Dedalus adopts is the opposite of resignation. In resignation the unity answer is put aside as hopelessly out of reach and the person operates pragmatically in the world. Dedalus puts the world aside in order to live in his dream.

Ulysses is a more complicated book. First of all, there is a mythic pattern behind the book that A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man lacks. The wanderings of Odysseus act as a paradigm, and every step in Leopold Bloom's day follows that quest pattern. There are resemblances between that pattern and the aesthetic decision of Stephen Dedalus in the earlier novel. They are literary worlds and creations whose metaphysical status is open to question.

Ulysses, however, is another pattern, one in which both Bloom and Molly involve themselves. It concerns their decision to say yes to life. They differ from Stephen Dedalus in that their belief in the value of life is thought by them to correspond with reality. They do not feel they are escaping or creating another world in which to live. They also differ from the cubists in that Ulysses is not isolating meaning into a

small corner. Meaning for Leopold Bloom is universal as well as particular. There is an over-all into which the particulars fit.

The real-ideal division is true for a great number of secular answers, perhaps for them all. The ideal side of many we have already seen in earlier poems, and we have seen something of Eliot's inability to rest in mere ideal. I shall now turn to the more important secular options one at a time and attempt to indicate their status in The Waste Land.

Aesthetics is an obvious place to begin. Eliot's poetry has had a long history of aesthetics. In his works, has beauty been the real basis of the real world, or has it been a dream into which one may escape from reality?

The mermaids singing each to each at the end of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was what Prufrock longed for and as such may seem an escape from fragmentation and isolation into ideal beauty. But were they an ideal he had created in his own mind from the woman and the sea waves he had seen, or were they the symbols of real beauty? "I have seen..." he says, but there is little to support the claim except his own aborted actions. Certainly the poem ends with beauty beyond reach: "I do not think that they will sing for me."

At the conclusion of "Portrait of a Lady" the hero is toying with an aesthetic solution to his woman problems. He has created a poem from the fragments of his relations with the lady, but the synthesis is something he has made, an ideal instead of reality. The poem ends with him questioning his right to be satisfied with that. The beauty of "La Figlia che Piange" is again ideal, an artistic invention, and again the protagonist

is uneasy with it. Since it is not real, since it clashes with the facts of the world, and since it does not mesh with other standards of judgment, it is not enough and Eliot turns away.

Reality in the early poetry was uniformly ugly. If there was beauty it was inevitably ideal. At the same time we have seen that Eliot's poetry, particularly between 1915 and 1919, became more and more literary: dependent on quotation, complicated, and effete. "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published September 1919, gives a glimpse of an Eliot that the poetry of the period does not reveal. In the first place the aesthetic option may be a little more than merely possible. In the second place it may be more than an ideal. Perhaps he sees it as the actual framework of the universe, for he says:

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.¹⁰

But if certain aesthetic implications are present in this essay, which is by no means certain, the poetry does not follow them.

It is not until "Gerontion" in 1919 that an Eliot poetic hero embraces aesthetics. There the beauty the protagonist embraces is the poem. It is therefore created, ideal. The aesthetic solution of that poem is offered in strong contradistinction to the Christian alternate answer, and the aggressiveness of Gerontion's embrace is to be explained not by his attraction to beauty as the solution to fragmentation but by

his repulsion from the implications of the other answer. It is a case of any port in a storm.

The tendency we have seen in Eliot's work to set the world around him side by side with a literary realm is present in The Waste Land. There he demonstrates again his repulsion for the real one and his longing for the other. His note to line 221 is an example. The Sappho lines to which he refers are a prayer to the Evening Star who restores the sheep to the fold after a day in the fields and the child to his mother after a hard day of play. Eliot further refers to the restoration of the fisherman to their homes after the dangers of the sea. But peace and restoration are ironically treated in the modern scene of the poem. Aesthetics is a very obvious option in The Waste Land. There is the same interest in literature, sometimes seemingly for its own sake. Quotation and allusion are still there and are used with even greater intensity, and the poetic form has taken on higher complications and further elaborations. Matthiessen gives pages of examples. Is Eliot about to abandon the wastes for the higher planes of an aesthetic world? The answer to that lies beyond the end of the poem, but if he should do so indications are it will be an ideal realm he occupies and he will be there as a refugee.

Myth and archetype are further open options in the poem. Whenever Eliot has given serious consideration to any universal it has been because he is searching for ways out of fragmentation and isolation, or because he is at least seeking to explain them to himself or to live with them. Myth is no exception, though its history in Eliot's writings has been much entangled with aesthetic considerations through his use of allusion. Whether the technique falls under the heading of literary device or whether, because it involves companionship with the dead, it is seen as part of the mythic

or archetypal consciousness, it has had a great deal to do with escape. As a technique it is stronger than ever in The Waste Land. Ian Hamilton has the tool in mind when he refers to--

...those who habitually observe life through a haze of literature, those who have read "more than they are interested in experiencing. The judgements of The Waste Land are the judgements of a supremely literary sensibility and one can detect an unacknowledged pathos in the ready stock of futile, apt quotations, ¹² the lonely invocation of dead kindred spirits.

The use of myth in The Waste Land is by no means restricted to allusion as it had been in earlier works. There are two new developments that need to be stressed. The first is the poem's use of the Grail myth as the structural rationale of the poem. Gardner says:

In The Waste Land Mr Eliot took the Grail myth, as interpreted by Miss Weston, for his ostensible subject, or starting point. The Waste Land is given coherence not by its form, but by this underlying myth, to which constant reference can be made, and of which all the varied incidents and the many personages are illustrative.¹³

Jessie Weston's book, From Ritual to Romance, is a study of literature rather than a study of myth. It shows where mythic themes have appeared in literature. By basing his poem on the Weston interpretation of myth rather than on the myth itself, Eliot is open to the charge that, first, he is using a literary device rather than genuine myth, but more important, that he is left with a literary ideal rather than even an aspect of reality. That is a charge that has been leveled at Joyce's Ulysses also.

It is at this point that the second development enters. Referring to Weston's book, Matthiessen says:

What he learned especially from it was the recurring pattern in various myths, the basic resemblance, for example, between the vegetation myths of the rebirth of the year,

the fertility myths of the rebirth of the potency of man, the Christian story of the Resurrection, and the Grail legend of purification. The common source of all these myths lay in the fundamental rhythm of nature--that of the death and rebirth of the year; and their varying symbolism was an effort to explain the origin of life.¹⁴

Eliot was not so much interested in the origin of life as in its present condition. Myth offered a pattern, an archetype, that could explain fragmentation. The question is, did Eliot consider it a genuine solution that rested on the structure of the universe, or did he see it as another ideal that might relieve the pain though not the condition? There is probably no answer within the poem. Both alternatives seem equally open, though from what we have seen of Eliot the satisfactions they would bring him are not the same. Headings, referring to this matter, speaks of the "synthetic mythic method."¹⁵ Obviously he sees Eliot's use of myth as an elaborate game, an ideal rather than an attempt to explain the structure of reality. Whether Eliot sees myth as symbol or real he seems to have felt a genuine kinship with the mythical method. Men through the ages have used myth to satisfy their need to explain the world, and Eliot felt that need too.

As a corollary to the mythic method I should speculate on the status of sex in The Waste Land. At first glance it seems part of the problem the poet describes. Indeed that is a dominant theme. The sexuality depicted in "The Fire Sermon" is particularly unrewarding. The young man carbuncular and the typist find no pleasure:

His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.

The Thames maidens, even with carnal knowledge,

...can connect
Nothing with nothing.

If the lines of "The Fire Sermon" at times echo Spenser's "Prothalamion,"

it is in order to contrast the real with the ideal and thereby destroy any thought that the present is a pastoral vision. The nymphs at the start of the sermon recall for us the marriage Spenser is describing, but the contrast is made clear in the ironic last three words of Eliot's description:

The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs
of City directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.

There is so much sex in various low, disgusting, or disappointing forms that I need not pursue the point further. It is there and it is a description of a large part of the waste land problem.

Is that all sex is? When we dig deeper there are hints that sex may be not only the problem but the solution. Freudian overtones abound. Even the chastity required of the successful knight in the Grail myth, his sword, and the empty chapel have been interpreted in that way.

The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed--

may, of course, refer to any giving of one's self to another, any breach of isolation, but sexual meanings are likely intended. Rain, awaited at the end of The Waste Land, is often used as a sexual symbol, and the use of fertility myths as a structural device is also significant. It is possible Eliot is thinking of sex as a means of integration.

There are problems with such an interpretation. In the first place such positive uses are relatively scarce. In the second place the interpretation clashes with the more frequent and more obvious ascetic references we will investigate shortly. Of course, both could be held as possibilities by the same mind if that mind had not yet committed itself. Nevertheless, the positive use of sex in the poem probably represents a

condition longed for rather than a curative method.

Asceticism is another open option in the poem. We first met it in "The Death of St. Narcissus," though the last line seemed a partial rejection. In The Waste Land opulence is a negative quality, as we can easily gather from the opening lines of "A Game of Chess." Rank and class, as they are depicted in Marie, the arch-duke's cousin, have privileges; but there is little life in the dry tubers. It is immediately after the Marie passage that we find the lines adapted from "The Death of St. Narcissus," an invitation to "come in under the shadow of this red rock." Desert scenes follow intermittently until the fifth movement of the poem takes us to where...

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.

Yet it is at such moments apart that the tension eases a little and we get the smell of rain. It is by descent into places without water that we find hope of a third who walks beside. Maxwell says this of the poem:

It is ascetic and unbending; it seems to offer
only torment as a means to salvation.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the hope is there. If torment is the means to integration the poet is willing and eager to embrace it. But first he must convince himself the pattern is real.

The final secular matter to be considered is ethics. Is the universe created on ethical lines in such a manner that ignorance of moral rules results in chaos while a return to law produces order and a return to meaning? Eliot displayed some interest in ethical questions in "Portrait of a Lady." There he was not so much holding to an ethical system as an

explanation of life's problems as using it for a yardstick with which to measure the aesthetic solution his persona was considering. In his later Gautier verse, value judgments were quite evident. Grishkin lacked something Donne and Webster had. The hippo went to heaven while the Church remained below. Eliot's standards may have differed somewhat from those common to his contemporaries, but his decisions were based on interpretations of good and bad, justice and mercy.

The Waste Land has a thin strand of ethics. When boudoir scenes are depicted they are not intended to be titillating. Nor can we say that such scenes are reported with journalistic neutrality. The episodes and descriptions have a disturbing quality and inevitably demonstrate isolation and fragmentation.

That is not much evidence and admittedly there may be more. Toward the end of the poem is the question, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" This could be interpreted on a moral plane, but it is extremely doubtful that Eliot is there considering personal reform as a step towards an understanding of the universe. The line is an allusion to Isaiah 38:1, where Hezekiah is facing death, and as such the words would seem to be considering the creation of an island of order in the face of ultimate disintegration. Furthermore, from the word "order" in the quotation, we may equally well infer a sacramental meaning as an ethical one. Too much has been made of Eliot's ethically Puritan background.

Headings may be interpreting the poem's destination in ethical terms when he says of the poem, "Social responsibility is at the very core of the mythic and traditional elements combined in it." ¹⁷ Rather than remedying social divisiveness (a real goal as opposed to ideal), it is more likely that the poem is the poet's desire to understand and explain

to himself the social pieces he sees around him. If Eliot was later to develop a social responsibility there is little or no sign of it here.

Sacramentalism

Sacramentalism has made appearances in Eliot's poetry before.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" alluded to Christian texts and concepts, but sacramentalism seemed not to be implied as a live possibility in the mind of the hero. The references were used because of their cultural prominence and situational relevance rather than because they were believed. "Preludes" made two references to "soul," but the concept may have entailed little more than an idea of sensitive human personality. Certainly there was no aura of holiness or "depth" there or elsewhere in the poem and no note of worship.

The first note of possible worship came in 1915 when "The Death of St. Narcissus" was written. There besides the idea of sainthood, the word "God" was used. When the mood of the whole poem was considered, though, it was doubtful that any worship at all was involved. A "follower of God" seemed to mean no more than one who practices asceticism, and the end of the poem casts doubt on the validity of even that method of unification. The 1917-18 period saw two poems about the church: "The Hippopotamus" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service." The latter, in particular, gave some recognition to the sacramental ideas that lay behind the primitive Christian church, and even acceded to granting those ideas some validity. The purpose of both poems, though, was satire on the modern church, and thus sacramentalism was not given prominent attention or even considered as a possible means of ordering the fractured bones of the waste land valley.

"Gerontion" was the first poem to give sacramentalism a genuine hearing. The hero had at some point embraced Christianity but had later

fallen away. Worship and various distortions of worship are described in the poem; and holiness, or at least religious awe, mystery, and fear enter. In the end, however, Geronion considered the demands of Christianity too heavy and retreated into aesthetics, where there is neither holiness nor worship, but where there can be independence.

The critics have found sacramentalism at least an incipient element in The Waste Land. Maxwell describes the poem as:

...the final statement of the poems of the 1920 volume. The themes that troubled Eliot there are here interrelated, and a considerable step taken towards his affirmation of the Christian faith. One can see in the insistence on subordination of self to external control, in the desire for leadership, a mind deeply sympathetic to some authoritarian religion....As yet, however, there is not complete acceptance. There are only the signs that it might well come to a mind so sharply aware of the uncomfortable truths of religion, so profoundly stirred by moral problems, so unwilling to believe that humanity can, by its own unaided efforts, overcome the "traces du péché originel".¹⁸

Gardner has a similar view of a poem moving from angst to the admission of original sin and therefore opening to further possibilities:

At the centre of its spiral movement there is simply "the abyss," "the void" or "the overwhelming question," the terror of the unknown, which cannot finally be evaded. For all this, its ending is not despair. Stripped of his illusions, his pride broken, man is left to face the final possibility. The Waste Land ends with the truth of the human situation as the religious mind conceives it: the beginning of wisdom is fear.¹⁹

I need not stress the Tillichian concepts.

Christian allusions are rampant in the poem. The title of Section I alludes to "The Order for the Burial of the Dead," a section in the Church of England Prayer Book. The poem ends with mention in a footnote to the last line of "the peace which passeth understanding,"

words taken from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. In between are dozens of references to Christian texts, liturgy, customs, and even a mention of one church building. Some references are open and direct, like "the torchlight red on sweaty face" passage (Gethsemane) or the "Who is the third who walks always beside you?" (Emmaus). Others are filtered through the Grail legend and the other myths the poet used. Even the Fisher King could carry Christian import if such a king were to be defined as one who appoints fishers of men. The allusions to past literature are rich in Christian meaning. This is especially true of the Dante passages, for Dante was writing of spiritual matters.

There are many sacramental references over and above the Christian ones. "The Fire Sermon," title to the third section, is a sermon preached by the Buddha, and in a footnote Eliot links it with some words of Augustine. The fifth section is named for a fable in the Upanishads. Several of the words are transliterated, and the texture of the Hindu work is a major strand of the mood and meaning of the section. The poem ends with another reference to Hindu scriptures, a word that corresponds to the Hebrew greeting and has something of the meaning of the Christian benediction.

There are several things to be said about The Waste Land and sacramentalism. The first is that it is an open option. What has been said already should be sufficient proof of that. Yet we must remember that it is one option among many, that no decision has been made as to where his head or heart finally belong. On the other hand, the number of references and allusions to sacramental matters makes it a most important, at times even the dominant option.

The second thing to be said is that sacramentalism is real in this poem. That is almost tautologous. No one stands in awe before a

creation of his own mind nor calls an idea holy (unless he first convinces himself of its independent status). Of course, one can take someone else's sacramentalism, call it mere idea, and treat it objectively as an anthropologist or sociologist would. That Eliot did in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," where he used Christian concepts belonging to his forefathers and some contemporaries to create a different image. That he is not doing here. He is convinced that, though it can be missing, something is there as an answer right in or behind or under the universe, and that whatever it is it is awesome. It has the mystery of an entity who walks beside but isn't there to be counted. It has the suddenness of a flash of lightning, the promise of a damp gust, and the otherness of far rivers and mountains, unknown tongues and customs. It is of the same realm or at least produces a like feeling to that created by bats with baby faces, voices singing out of empty cisterns, and bells that toll instead of peal. Eliot makes it plain, he does not fully understand what he is describing. He approaches it indirectly by insinuating a truth behind the manifest untruth of tarot pack and legend. When he is more direct he asks questions: "Who is the third...?" And he borrows from a wide variety of traditions, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and several other forms, in the hope of surrounding his meaning. Yet it is clear that what he is grasping for is something he considers real.

That leads us directly into the third matter. In The Waste Land, though Eliot refers to Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu writings, he is not considering a choice among several sacramental options. He has religion (as opposed to a religion) in mind. What it is he cannot say exactly, nor can he tell us what area it includes or what denies. He invokes the various customs and systems of thought and belief as a circumference within which his own belief lies. He is aware of what has been called the depth dimension,

and his sacramentalism rests on that. In Tillich's terms, this is religion. And if Eliot's option seems vague and syncretistic, we should remember those charges were made of Tillich. Christian the poem is not, but religious it is. And needless to say it has been strongly influenced by Christian tradition as has its religious expression.

A further point again concerns what the poem is not. "Gerontion" was an exploration of sacramentalism with a view to seeing if it was worth the sacrifice of self and effort. The Waste Land does not repeat that study. "Gerontion" found that submission to Christianity meant a sacrifice of self, and that was something its hero was not ready to make. Gerontion might recognize the meaning of Original Sin but could not confess a total depravity. He would admit he could not of his own effort raise himself to heaven; but he could raise himself to something, he felt, and that was far better than becoming nothing. To raise himself through aesthetics to the status of creator is what he set out to do and what he feels he has done by the end of the poem. The viewpoint of The Waste Land is that of a sadder but, the 1922 Eliot would say, wiser man. Perhaps the persona he has created for the poem has tried to make something of himself but failed. Perhaps he has failed times without number, for he seems to believe the self that Gerontion was so fond of is not worth preserving. Earlier in this section, Maxwell and Gardner quotes spoke of "the insistence on subordination of self to external control" and "pride broken" as strong elements of the poem. We could also repeat Headings' words: "The necessity to transcend one's self is a basic theme of the poem." So "Gerontion" and The Waste Land are two different points of view and point to two different purposes. The 1922 poem is not repeating Gerontion's self-assertion.

The fifth point, then, is to ask what The Waste Land is doing.

The poem and the poet are looking for sufficient solutions. Will any one explanation of life and the world stand by itself? As far as sacramentalism is concerned, Eliot is asking not merely if religion is a possible solution, not merely if it is the best solution, but if it is sufficient: if it solves everything that the poem has revealed of life and the world. And the poem has revealed some grim and difficult situations. It is no wonder the poem ends short of decision. Southam introduces The Waste Land with the words,

The theme of the poem is the salvation of the Waste Land, not as a certainty but a possibility: of emotional, spiritual and intellectual vitality to be regained.²¹

The poem ends still reaching for possibilities, and the search goes on.

Footnotes

- ¹ Maxwell, p. 97.
- ² As quoted in William Pratt (ed.), The Imagist Poem (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1963), p. 18.
- ³ In "Ulysses, Order and Myth," Dial, LXXV, 5 (November, 1923), 483.
- ⁴ I. A. Richards, Science and Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1926), p. 76 fn. Eliot commented on the comment in "Dante," Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 230. Richards' "last word" can be found in his re-issue of Science and Poetry (under a new title): Poetries and Sciences (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970), p. 64 fn.
- ⁵ "Thoughts After Lambeth" (1931), Selected Essays, p. 324.
- ⁶ H. M. McLuhan, "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," The Interior Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan, 1943-1962 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), pp. 135-55; and Jacob Korg, "Modern Art Techniques in The Waste Land," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XVIII (June 1960), 456-63.
- ⁷ Eg. "Crucifixion" 1590-95 in Portfolio and Art News Annual, p. 154.
- ⁸ Eg. "The World Upside Down" in Our Bruegel, ed. by Bob Claessens and Jeanne Rousseau (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1969), plate IX following p. 40.
- ⁹ Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," Dial LXXV (Nov. 1923), 483.
- ¹⁰ T. S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 49.
- ¹¹ See particularly p. 31.
- ¹² Ian Hamilton, "The Waste Land," in Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium, ed. by Graham Martin, p. 106.
- ¹³ Gardner, p. 43.
- ¹⁴ Mattheissen, p. 36.
- ¹⁵ Headings, p. 54.
- ¹⁶ Maxwell, p. 116.

- 17 Headings, p. 50.
- 18 Maxwell, pp. 116-17.
- 19 Gardner, p. 98.
- 20 Headings, p. 50.
- 21 Southam, p. 69.

CHAPTER IX

FURTHER SACRAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Hollow Men (1924-25)

~~The thing that distinguishes The Hollow Men from The~~
Waste Land is the way the options reduce. Secular options have disappeared as separate and distinct possibilities, and the only choice remaining is sacramentalism.

How close that sacramentalism is to Christianity is not entirely clear. Outside of certain allusions to the Divine Comedy and Vita Nuova of Dante there are few distinctly Christian intimations. Whether the Christian elements of the Dante allusions were sought or merely accepted is hard to say. There is nothing distinctly foreign to Christianity in the poem, and there is nothing introduced to restrict the operations of the Christian elements. Probably they are not excess baggage accepted from Dante as part of an otherwise valuable consignment. They seem something sought.

Have secular answers really gone? Traces of ethics, aesthetics, and asceticism are present. The following paragraphs will examine these elements one by one in order to see if the poem regards them as viable options.

First are the moral implications in the period. The minor poem "Eyes that last I saw in tears" was part of an early draft of The Hollow Men. It was probably composed in the second half of 1924. Helen Gardner feels that the last meeting it mentions was a parting reminiscent of "La Fidia che Piange." The concept,

...Tears
Through division,

in conjunction with "golden vision" can carry no other sensible meaning. Now the eyes have reappeared "Here in death's dream kingdom," but without the tears. Gardner infers that without tears is not simply tearless but accusing. The parting was his fault, and his conscience is bothering him: "This is my affliction."

Gardner is correct, for in the second stanza the protagonist moves beyond his guilty life to "the door of death's other kingdom." He fears it as a place where those eyes will reappear and, in a final judgment, hold him "in derision."

It should be clear from this analysis of the brief 1924 poem that ethical considerations are no longer a secular matter. It does happen sometimes that the borderline between secular and sacramental is vague. "Honour your father and mother that your days may be long in the land" could be a call to conform one's self to the workings of a secular universe that happens to be built in a particular moral fashion. That is to say, it could mean that if it were not for the words that follow that commandment. In context it is distinctly sacramental. The poem is also.

A sense of guilt is very different from a sense of having committed foolish indiscretion, and a judgment in a hereafter is clearly supranatural.

The second section of The Hollow Men reinforces a sacramental interpretation of ethics. There the second paragraph opens with a request: "Let me be no hearer," It could very well be a prayer. The protagonist in this paragraph wishes to hide, presumably from the "Eyes I dare not meet in dreams. For him,

...that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom,

the final judgment, is a thing to be dreaded.

The location of Section IV has shifted to "this last of meeting places," and "The eyes are not here." The protagonist's worst fears are not realized, yet he finds himself in a more terrible situation: the realm of Dante's trimmers, spurned by evil as well as good. Now the possibility that the eyes will reappear, as Beatrice's did for Dante, is the one hope he has. The poem has passed beyond some sort of Moral Re-armament to salvation from outside one's own self and efforts.

Asceticism is the second aspect of the period that needs consideration. The first thing to notice is that city scenes are entirely missing from The Hollow Men and the two minor poems of the same period. We have noted how Eliot in "The Death of St. Narcissus" turned away from the city, with its crowds of people, in order to find himself through isolation and ascetic practices. The Waste Land began with city crowds in city places, but gradually turned to the

arid wastelands. The poem showed no real hope till the city had vanished. It was in the wilderness, a place of ascetic deprivation, where hope appeared. If urban images are considered closely, never have they been used as instruments of promise, hope, or blessing in any of Eliot's poetry.

The same pattern continues in The Hollow Men. It is on the barren beach of the tumid river that thoughts turn to the "perpetual star." It is when all comfort is gone and the dance is around the desert prickly pear that an attempt is made to say "Thine is the Kingdom." And the prayer of the second section of the poem comes after a glimpse of a Paradise where the only hint of city is a broken column caught in a ray of sunlight. The prayer is not for a return to the city but for disguises that will match the rural scene:

Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves.

Better to be a lonely scarecrow in Paradise than to have reunion with city acquaintances on the banks of the tumid river.

Deprivation in The Hollow Men is not a mere matter of retreat from the city and from physical comfort. There is the whole matter of sense deprivation:

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

In part, this uniform grayness is symptom of the disease of empty men. But Section IV indicates that necessity may be a virtue, and hope is one possibility of death's twilight kingdom.

The poem does not declare, however, that asceticism in itself is the road to salvation. It declares that those in the described condition of deprivation are "Sightless, unless..." something is given from outside. Asceticism has become a portion of the sacramental answer.

The third area of study is beauty, and the disappearance of the city has aesthetic implications as well as ascetic. Eliot invariably pictures the city as dirty and dismal. That has been his way of pointing out the boredom and horror he wished to portray. With the city gone, there has been removed much of the unaesthetic. There are still "rats feet over broken glass" from time to time, but somehow the straw men are caricatures of humanity instead of monstrous travesties as were the young men carbuncular and women gathering fuel in vacant lots.

Moreover, the poem has lyrical passages. The closest The Waste Land came to song, other than the parodies, was the delirium of Section V's "No-water" passage. In The Hollow Men, the first and third sections are too staccato to be lyrical, and the fifth section is composed of jagged ends. But Sections II and IV could be sung. Eliot has also begun to use "poetic words." He speaks of sunlight, voices singing, eyes, and stars instead of soot, yellow fog, broken springs, and dingy shades. Compare the following passages, from "Preludes" and The Hollow Men respectively:

And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;

There, is a tree swinging
 And voices are
 In the wind's singing
 More distant and more solemn
 Than a fading star.

Both have something of a lyrical quality, but only the latter uses traditional poetic language.

The aesthetic Paradise depicted in Section II is no more a natural means to reconciliation than was the asceticism of Section IV. One critic has suggested that "Sunlight on a broken column" is an early version of the shaft of sunlight passage in "Burnt Norton." Whether or not that is true, it is evident from the intensity of the whole section that this hollow man is reaching for something beyond the natural. Supremely natural are the images, and extremely beautiful; but the meaning is more than natural beauty. The second paragraph recalls Dante again. Here is the same love-shame relationship that existed between Dante and his Beatrice. Then there is the rose image in Section IV. Again it is Dante's, and again it expresses more than natural beauty. If the sunlight passage can be taken at full value, aesthetics is a means of supranatural grace. If that is an over-reading, aesthetics is at least an image that expresses the supranatural.

Enough has been said of sacramentalism to show it is a live option in The Hollow Men period. Whatever aesthetics, ascetics, and ethical points the poem contains are facets of it. There are several further points to be made though.

In the first place, the "geography" which Eliot has adopted for his poem is exactly that of the Divine Comedy. There are Limbo, the Inferno, Purgatory, Eden, and Paradise. And much more is made

of Limbo (than either place of fire.

That leads to the second point. The emphasis on Limbo reflects the persona's self-estimation. He feels he is not worthy of entering hell, let alone heaven. His disease, judging from the Dante cantos, must be apathy. Section V reinforces that interpretation. There a "Shadow" falls between idea and action so that nothing reaches completion. He lacks the will power to sustain his drive, and his prayer becomes the sigh, "Life is very long." The sacramental geography the persona sees may be Christianity or something very close to it, but its higher and even middle regions are beyond reach. The answer to his angst question still escapes him, and the seat of his trouble is his will.

The matter of will needs further investigation. Instead of steadily searching out a sacramental solution, the persona wishes to hide:

Let me also wear
...deliberate disguises.

Prufrock also donned a mask in order to protect himself. With Prufrock, too, it may have been a protection from decision. The shape of the disguises--"Rat's coat, crowskin"--indicates a wish to be merely animal. Animals do not have to make spiritual decisions. Another wish is to behave "as the wind behaves": acceptance of the easy direction, without aim or purpose.

Two images recurring throughout the work have a close connection with will. The first is the image of eves. Those who go to "death's other Kingdom" (the capitalized "K" indicates Paradise)

do so with "direct eyes." On the other hand the persona avoids people's eyes. He cannot even meet the eyes of those in a similar condition of Limbo. Instead they must "grope together."

The second recurring image, like the first, indicates both lack of will and personal isolation. It concerns speech. In the hollow valley of Limbo, souls "avoid speech." All attempts at prayer in Section V are inarticulate. Another thought in relation to the failure of articulation comes from Williamson.² He believes the first and fifth sections of the poem take place in church where the persona is unable to collect his thoughts. Whether or not this is so, the words,

Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless,

remind very much of "Gerontion," where whispers occurred during Mass, and worship was diluted in various ways until it became meaningless.

There is one final point to make in regard to the persona's beliefs. Not only is sacramentalism a live option in his eyes. It is the only option: He will be--

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose.

The outside agency of a Beatrice or Mary has been noted before, but that this is the only answer should be emphasized.

The persona's final condition is the next concern. He has no will of his own that can bring him to an answer. There is the one small hope of outside agency. But he has no control over this

agency. He is isolated. The agency is totally external. If the eyes appear there is little hope that he will be able to meet them.

The end condition, then, is despair. It is not total, black; it is "twilight." It is a "shade without colour." The question is whether the twilight is dawn or the dusk before darkness. The only indication is the line, "In this valley of dying stars." Stars die at sunrise, but that is--

The hope only
Of empty men.

There is little else that is hopeful. Despair comes out in the "Shadow" (capitalized) coming between him and fulfilment. It is there in the "whimper" with which the world ends. The whole poem though lyrical at moments, is closer to a keening lament. There are numerous broken rhythms and inserted thoughts. The tone is monotonous, the voice of a person at the thin edge of despair; Gardner calls it "the ghost of a play" totally lacking variety.

Despair is over the unsolved condition of fragmentation. In Section II, the refusal to embrace the joy of Eden is followed by "the cactus land," a desert desolation where lips that could have kissed instead "Form prayers to broken stone." In the minor poem, "The wind sprang up at four o'clock," the waking echo is "confusing strife." Further fragmentation can be seen in the repeated use of "broken." "Wind" is a frequent image. It sings, it swings the trees, but it also breaks the bells and behaves erratically. So the poem that begins in meaninglessness, and even there uses the word, ends in the same manner.

A final word concerns the Conrad sources of The Hollow Men.

The Heart of Darkness was obviously a prime source of ideas for the poem. The question is, what use did Eliot make of those ideas? Unger⁴ sees the same "tepid scepticism" in Eliot's poem as can be found in Conrad. There is a world of difference between scepticism and despair. The word does not apply to the Eliot poem at all, and to the Conrad book in only limited ways. Some writers have noted Eliot's remark that Conrad's Heart of Darkness was a supreme example of the invocation of evil. They have decided Eliot's poem must be the same. It is not. It is nothingness, emptiness, vacuity the persona feels.

A summary of the persona's condition would say of him that he is in a state of belief but not a state of commitment. He believes his answer lies in sacramentalism. He may not be clear on exactly what form the sacramentalism takes, but it is close at least to the borders of Christianity. Moreover, the answer is beyond his reach. Thus according to his view commitment is out of the question. There is no way he can give himself to what he believes. The final section in particular shows him attempting to commit himself, but only to find that his own weak will is not enough.

Sweeney Agonistes (1924-27)

⁵
Carol Smith has found evidence that early drafts of these two fragments date back to September 1924 or earlier, though they were not published until October 1926 and January 1927. During that span they were considered part of a projected work that Eliot called "Wanna Go Home, Baby?" The "Sweeney Agonistes: Fragment of an

Aristophanic Melodrama" title did not appear until 1932 and, though attractive from a religious perspective, should not influence considerations of the earlier period.

Professor Smith's book is the definitive study of this work, virtually the only one of importance. Her interest is in the dramatic possibilities it displays, whereas this thesis is concerned with religious development. Furthermore, instead of taking an intrinsic stance, she regards the work from a point in time far removed from the two fragments and allows and encourages the intervening developments to shape her view. For these reasons some ideas within this section do not agree with her own.

The most obvious difference concerns the matter of "social usefulness." Smith quotes Eliot's 1933 statements about social usefulness, and it is clear she is thinking of Eliot's work as a means of propagating spiritual insight. By 1933 that may have been so; but in the mid-twenties it was no more than a means of expressing those contents and feelings. That the poem is the address of its principal character rather than his propaganda or socially useful teaching fits Eliot's description of the fragments as he gave it in 1933:

My intention was to have one character whose sensibility and intelligence should be on the plane of the most sensitive and intelligent members of the audience; his speeches should be addressed to them as much as to the other personages in the play--or, rather, should be addressed to the latter, who were to be material, literal-minded and visionless, with the consciousness of being overheard by the former. There

was to be an understanding between this protagonist and a small number of the audience, while the rest of the audience would share the responses of the other characters in the play.⁷

The character Eliot had in mind as he spoke those words was Sweeney. Presumably the plane of sensibility and intelligence on which he is created is Eliot's own. However, that is a 1933 remark. It is wiser to build a description of the spiritual standpoint of the 1924-27 Eliot using only the evidence within these unfinished poems.

Doris is Sweeney's main foil in the poem. She has made earlier appearances in Eliot's work. That the first draft of The Hollow Men should have been entitled "Doris's Dream Songs" tells us little; but the Doris of "Sweeney Erect" gives an idea of the setting in Sweeney Agonistes. It was she who administered spirits--of a distinctly material kind--to the epileptic while the "ladies" of the "house" looked on. Mrs. Porter's name is mentioned as the "Queen of Hearts." She appeared in The Waste Land, and a case could be made for her being a house madame. From such characters and from their associates one would not expect great spiritual sensitivity.

The Doris of the Sweeney fragments is no longer in Mrs. Porter's employ (or Mrs. Turner's). She has graduated to better things. Pereira pays the rent. Doris therefore has certain responsibilities, and they clash with her desire for a good time.

The responsibilities are a necessary evil. He is owed for the rent, but "it wouldn't do to be too nice to Pereira." Pereira never appears on the scene; so one has no chance to estimate

his character directly. The girls, though, whether from true knowledge or because of their sense of debt, have definite views:

He's no gentleman, Pereira:
 You can't trust him....
 And if you can't trust him--
 Then you never know what he's going to do.

It is not until later in the scene that we begin to suspect a sacramental meaning behind this "profane" language. Doris and Dusty turn to casting their fortunes with a pack of cards. Things begin badly with Pereira appearing in the first card; but then there is promise of a party, the guests no doubt bringing--

A small sum of money, or a present
 Of wearing apparel.

Later cards bring doom: "A quarrel. An estrangement. Separation of friends;" and "The coffin," which Doris feels is her own.

Cards appeared in The Waste Land. There they had two functions. In the first place, they represented mystery cheapened, and as such served to describe the "believers." In the second place, they proved to be accurate and therefore acted as intimation to the reading audience of a genuine sacramental realm.

The same purposes are served in Sweeney Agonistes. Doris and Dusty believe the cards in the same way Madame Sosostris and her visitors believed. In other words, it is not merely that their fears are occasioned by the cards, not merely that the cards are thought to correspond with reality. The correspondence is a superstition, a "spell," rather than the rational objectivity of a secular person. Their belief, though, is primitive in that they have little more than a general dread and no way of handling it.

Again the cards are accurate. There is a party, and Sam (the Knave of Hearts) doubtless brings gifts of money and wearing apparel for his two queens. The Knave of Spades is either Snow or Swarts, and both come to the party. Sweeney (the King of Clubs) turns up; and the conversation turns to death, with a stewpot and bathtub for coffins. The accuracy in itself is not the point. Through the cards the audience catches a glimpse of sacramental deaths.

Pereira takes on a new role in this sacramental light. Doris and Dusty dread his appearance, for it is he through whom they live and move and have their being. His appearance will be an accounting, and thus the telephone is the voice of doom for them. Dusty makes excuses in the hopes of postponement. Doris, she says, has a "chill." "Pereira," according to Professor Smith, is a medicine used to fight fever and not the thing for a chill. The accounting is postponed until Monday so that Doris may make use of a home-made heat preparation to overcome her chill.

The time, though, is used in partying. As in The Hollow Men, the path of least resistance is the easier way. But life without a depth dimension is empty. Despite the easy familiarities of "Loot" and "Cap," the characters are in isolation:

I'm afraid I didn't quite catch your name--
But I'm very pleased to meet you all the same.

The gentleman visitor is not to be blamed for this. Dusty and Doris seem indistinguishable to the audience too. Pleasure for its own sake--and again the city appears--is meaningless:

...London's a little too gay for us...,
Don't think I mean anything coarse--
But I'm afraid we couldn't stand the pace.

Thus the end result is boredom, not unlike that of The Hollow Men.

Doris is not fully aware that it is her own boring situation she is describing when she says, in response to Sweeney's summary of life:

Birth, and copulation, and death.
I'd be bored....
That's not life, that's no life
Why I'd just as soon be dead.

Doris, despite those words, does not wish to face the subject of death. It is too much a part of the whole subject she wishes to avoid. When Sweeney brings it up she says,

Oh Mr. Sweeney, please don't talk,
I cut the cards before you came
And I drew the coffin.

But Sweeney persists.

That brings up the role Sweeney plays in the poem. Wherever he goes he carried a swirl of violence with him. He is the cannibal who will convert Doris into a stew. It is he who lays bare the horror of animal life:

You see this egg
You see this egg
Well that's life on a crocodile isle.
There's no telephones
There's no gramophones
There's no motor cars...
Nothing at all but...
Birth, and copulation, and death.

9

He then proceeds to beat the eggs to show how futile that life is.

Later, he tells of a man who "did a girl in," and says,

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

The reactions of those at the party are divided. Doris, the more spiritually pursued, is repulsed and tries to hide. Swarts, the least sensitive, has no idea what Sweeney is saying and heads off

in directions that "don't apply." Sweeney, though, relentlessly rounds them all up and hauls them back on track.

Exactly what that track is depends on what role Sweeney is playing. And that question is best answered by asking why all that violence is there in Sweeney's character. There are three possible explanations.

By 1930 Eliot had become convinced that inaction is the worst of human conditions, that "It is better...to do evil than to do nothing."¹⁰ Though those words come from an Eliot several years beyond Sweeney Agonistes they may describe the Eliot of the 1924-27 period also. For The Hollow Men, written about the same period, seems to say the same thing. There it seems better to be--

...lost
Violent souls

than to be completely hollow. While this element of The Hollow Men could be an unnoticed import from Dante only later to be understood and embraced, the idea of a violent man sending forth ripples through a placid society is not new to the mid-twenties. Mr. Apollinax did so some ten years before. His violence was admired by the author though not emulated. Perhaps the intervening years had changed Eliot. There is little internal evidence either way. Violence is present and it may or may not be an end in itself.

The second reason is that violence could be a means to an end. Sweeney may have the role of Guardian like Henry Harcourt-Reilly in The Cocktail Party. Sweeney's violence may be an attempt to drive the other characters to the sacramental. Those other characters have surrounded themselves with distractions in order to protect themselves from anxiety. Violence could be the means of stripping away the illusions.

That is what Carol Smith believes to be Eliot's purpose:

He expresses in this fragmentary piece the theme which, with variations determined by his changing theological position, was to be his throughout virtually all of his dramatic work: the dilemma of the spiritually aware individual forced to exist in a world unaware of spiritual reality.¹¹

Such an interpretation of Sweeney's role would make him the hero of "sensibility and intelligence" who, in Eliot's 1933 remark already quoted, addresses the "small number of the audience."

There is some internal evidence which would indicate that Sweeney has the role of Guardian. In the first place, there is some connection between Sweeney and Pereira-God. When the King turns up in the pack, the card is ambiguous. Dusty says, "It's Pereira," but Doris maintains, "It might just as well be Sweeney." Both are feared by the pleasure-seekers. Later on Sweeney says,

I've been born, and once is enough.
You don't remember, but I remember,
Once is enough.

Baptism is sometimes described in terms of death and rebirth. Commitment could be too. If Sweeney had come to commitment he might remember the agony of the rebirth; whereas the others, being uncommitted, would not remember.

These explanations are heavily dependent on external ideas and seem a little weak in the light of the third possible explanation of Sweeney's violence. Sweeney could be a fish hooked but by no means landed. His thrashing is not purposely directed against the other characters in hopes of bringing them to enlightenment, nor is it part of a dialogue for an enlightened few in the audience since he is not fully aware of his own meaning. Dusty and Doris withdraw from him, not because he is an apostle of Pereira, but because his

pain reminds them of the knowledge they are avoiding. Furthermore, the "born again" quotation indicates dread on Sweeney's part: "Once is enough" does not mean once is efficacious; it means once is all he can stand. What he remembers is what the others don't remember because they have succeeded in repressing it: that "Somebody's gotta pay the rent." The birth is not to commitment but to the condition of being half alive. Sweeney refuses to go further. Once is more than enough, a "nightmare" in which he eventually involves the others; but to the final knocking he stubbornly proclaims that "It's nothing to me and it's nothing to you." If he were committed to the sacramental cause rather than caught in it he would not be repeating such statements.

This third interpretation would be more appropriate to someone bearing Sweeney's name. Sweeney appeared several times in earlier Eliot poetry, but never as the sensitive hero the second interpretation of his violence would imply. He was something of an anti-hero in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service." He was crass and crude and highly insensitive in "Sweeney Erect." And whatever sensitivity he has in "Sweeney among the Nightingales" was more animal perceptiveness than a spiritual quality. In using the same name Eliot is asking us to recall such traits. Whatever picture we build must not deny those qualities.

It therefore seems probable that the track of Sweeney's life and the track to which he drags the other characters is not some form of sacramental salvation. Judging from the final chorus,

it is the path of fear; the fear spreads from a sacramental point of origin; and it is an unavoidable danger. What we see of Sweeney supports such an idea. He, too, is pursued by hidden fear, a fear that penetrates the whole piece and is multiplied by the pounding rhythms. Like the man who did the girl in, he cannot always tell the real from the phantasmagorical. He is as isolated as the others in his failure to communicate: he "gotta use words" whether or not the others understand and, more to the point, whether or not he understands. There is nothing else to use.

Does Sweeney understand what he says? The audience is addressed by Sweeney according to Eliot's 1933 quotation. However, does he address a mood to them or a firm concept? The audience must be careful not to read into his words more understanding than he has. If Eliot had been totally happy with Sweeney's address he would not have decided in the 1932 issue of Selected Poems to label the fragments as irrevocably "Unfinished Poems."

Whether or not Sweeney's sacramental thoughts are half-formed is somewhat beside the point. The real question is whether the author in the mid-twenties was aware of anything more than his principal character. Both were aware of the "horror and desolation" of spiritual awareness. But had Eliot brought it to a sharper focus? Better still, had he seen beyond it something of glory?

"Journey of the Magi" (1927)

The poem is an interview with one of the three Magi who, according to Matthew's gospel, visited the Christ soon after his

birth. Not only is the theme sacramental, but the images are distinctly Christian. There are three paragraphs, the first two of which describe the journey, and the third of which is interpretation.

The first paragraph is poetically flat (though skilfully handled). It is a list of complaints and problems that the Magi encountered on the journey from their eastern Kingdoms to the Jordan valley. The Magus mentions the adverse weather, the length of the journey, the poor trails or "ways," the transportation break-downs, regrets at undertaking such a trek, the poor quality of the employees, discomfort, poor accommodations, inhospitable centres, and doubts that what they were doing would come to anything at all. The adjectives are bleak, and the rhythm is as austere as the mood of the content.

The second paragraph brings the Magi to a "temperate valley." The lines lengthen, the rhythm and descriptive words become sensuous and the whole mood inviting, charged with expectation. Moisture appears. The land is "Wet, below the snow line," and there is a "running stream." Aridity is spiritual drought in Eliot's poetry. Water is the opposite. The hooded hordes of The Waste Land swarmed and stumbled "in cracked earth," longing for the sound of water; but, said the 1922 poem, "there is no water." Here in 1927 is water and meadows, and the smell of vegetation replaces the "faint stale smells of beer" in "Preludes." The rhythm and imagery combine naturally to lead to the arrival in Bethlehem at the infant's cradle. The contrast between the first and second paragraphs emphasizes the closing words of the journey description: "It was (you may say) satisfactory."

The same contrast also reveals how highly charged are the images of the second paragraph. They are supremely natural but with an undercurrent of something more. Images such as water and lush growth (the "vine-leaves over the lintel") are used to point to a realm beyond the natural, and as such are sacramental. So is the water-mill "beating the darkness." Some images are distinctly Christian. The "three trees on the low sky" are premonitions of Calvary. The white horse galloping is from Revelation. The six hands dicing remind one of the soldiers dividing the garments of their crucified prisoner by lot. The pieces of silver were given as the price of betrayal, and the wine-skin being abused is the new one for the new wine of Jesus' parable.

The "charge" of these images is not all positive. This is especially true of the Christian ones, where so many times the hidden component is not merely Christ but Christ's death. The freshness of water and vegetation, the invigorated tempo, and the anticipatory rhythm subdue the dark elements, but they are there. Thus the stanza ends with the parenthesis: "... (you may say) satisfactory."

The final paragraph examines the implications of these dark prophecies as well as the bright facts. It is a confusing matter:

...I have seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

The Magi were men living between times. They had had a glimpse of the New Covenant, enough to know the inadequacies of the old way, but not enough of a view to comprehend the new way. They must return to

the Old Dispensation, "But no longer at ease here." The Magus concludes: "I should be glad of another death." Whether he means physical death and an end to his frustration or the death of the Old Man by being born into the New Covenant is ambiguous. Probably he does not himself understand his meaning, for he can clearly see only his dis-ease.

Eliot is standing behind his characters and manipulating them. What the personae say may be said for a purpose beyond their comprehension. It is doubtful that Eliot would stumble on the same rebirth theme in two successive poems by accident. Far more likely is it that Eliot realized a good thing when he had created it, and he decided to use it again. Eliot, then, knows more than his characters.

Nevertheless, at the same time, the Eliot who understands something of Christian concepts and believes in their facticity is still dwelling on the journey rather than its termination. With the exception of the one word "satisfactory," there is nothing but agony in the lives he portrays. Sweeney Agonistes ends with the characters transfixed by the horror of the knocking. The Magus wishes for death. And these are the successes, the people who have come to some spiritual awareness without the intervening shadow of willessness. They are not in the greyness of Limbo but in the flames of Purgatory. In his "Notes" to The Waste Land (published in December 1922) Eliot draws special attention to a line he has taken from Dante: "Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina." This is an account of Arnaut Daniel diving back into the flames of Purgatory to purge himself of his lust. Pain

is a means to an end for him, and perhaps for Sweeney also, though the end may not yet be conscious. Certainly it is a conscious end for the Magi crossing the upland wastes on the way to Palestine. They face difficulties, but "...in their suffering is hope."¹³

Between 1924 and 1927 Eliot has made great strides into the sacramental realm, but he has not yet found respite from his restlessness. He himself may have entered within the Christian domain, but his poetry has barely reached the border. The hollow men had not the will to enter. Doris wishes not to enter, not to think. Sweeney has thought but wishes he had not. And the Magi do not fully understand what they have experienced. For Eliot, this seems to have been an arduous part of the journey, a trauma not forgotten even when new experiences begin.

Footnotes

¹Gardner, p. 108.

²Williamson, p. 156.

³Gardner, p. 105.

⁴Unger, p. 113.

⁵Carol H. Smith, T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 51.

⁶Smith, p. 54 ff.

⁷T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 153.

⁸Smith, p. 65.

⁹Smith, p. 62 fn. quotes an Eliot letter to Hallie Flanagan where this stage instruction is mentioned.

¹⁰Eliot, "Baudelaire" (1930) in Selected Essays, p. 380.

¹¹Smith, p. 12.

¹²Smith, p. 118.

¹³Eliot, "Dante" (1929), Selected Essays, p. 217.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Simeon and Animula (1928-29)

"A Song for Simeon" was written about a year after "Journey of the Magi." Both poems follow Eliot's baptism and confirmation in the Church of England.¹ Yet it is far from clear whether Eliot would wish to call either poem Christian. He has purposely chosen for protagonists characters living between the Testaments, and in the case of the Magus it is someone completely outside the Jewish tradition.

Both poems do take as their speakers someone mentioned in the Gospels. Matthew's birth narrative speaks of Magi coming from the east, finding the baby, and departing "to their own country." No words are recorded. In fact the focus of attention is more on Herod's reaction to them than on the men themselves. Eliot takes the story, omits Herod completely, adds details of his own, and concentrates on the Magi's reactions. Luke tells of Simeon receiving a promise from God, meeting the child's parents as they bring him to the temple, and speaking of what the child would be. Eliot alludes to the details of the story more fully than he had with the Magi, but again adds details and focuses attention on the man's feelings more than Luke does.

There are other similarities between the two poems. Both begin by setting the scene. One gives a description of a journey, the other

of a man and his national background. Both end in seemingly parallel statements: "I should be glad of another death," says the Magus; while Simeon asks, "Let thy servant depart." Both speakers are old men at the time the words of the poems are spoken.

Both personae receive hints of things to come. Those of the earlier poem were forebodings of the betrayal and crucifixion. The second Ariel Poem makes reference to the "scourges" Christ will receive; to the "stations" of the cross on the way to Golgotha, "the mountain of desolation;" to the "maternal sorrow" Mary will feel at the ninth "certain hour" at the foot of the cross. Luke's statement concerning that prophecy is echoed in these lines of the poem:

And a sword shall pierce thy heart,
Thine also.

Both the Magus and Simeon feel the weight of what they have seen. The Magus is ill at ease in his old ways, and Simeon speaks of being tired with life.

Despite these numerous similarities the poems are quite different in one very fundamental way. The Magi obeyed their urge to make the journey, but once the journey was completed and Bethlehem again lay behind them they had no idea what to do with themselves. Their purpose seemed fulfilled, the whole matter over and done, and yet there was a sense of incompleteness. Life marked time after Bethlehem and there was nowhere, seemingly, to go. They were left with an unresolved question: what "were we led all that way for...?"

Simeon has a more penetrating gaze than the Magus. He sees beyond Christ's death, first in echoes of Mark XIII to the destruction

of Jerusalem:

...Where shall live my children's children
When the time of sorrow is come?
They will take to the goat's path, and the fox's
home,
Fleeing from the foreign faces and the foreign
swords;

but beyond that to the generations of saints and martyrs still to come:

They shall praise Thee and suffer in every
generation
With glory and derision,
Light upon light, mounting the saints' stair.

Simeon's vision does reach beyond the death of Christ to further death and destruction. It is therefore easy to read pessimism into the lines,

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

Nevertheless, those words are not spoken out of a condition of discouragement or despair. For the history Simeon sees is holy history: providential. There is something within his vision that makes both "martyrdom" and "ecstasy of thought and prayer" "ultimate" and dressed in "salvation." The weight of life he reveals in the two lines quoted is not the tribulation of generations but the wisdom of centuries. His final thought--

Let thy servant depart,
Having seen thy salvation--

is the prayer of a contented man and far from a discouraged death wish.

The difference between the Magi and Simeon involves comprehension but it is basically something more. The Magi were aware of something sacramental happening but were unable to understand it.

Belief was therefore a primitive thing in them, and they could not really make a commitment since they were unable to grasp what it was they should give themselves to. Since they were not aware that anything more was asked of them, they ended their lives believing there was something to believe but dedicated to nothing in particular.

Simeon, though, saw more and understood more. There is no final proof that dedication or commitment resulted, but we may read it into the contentment of the last lines. But Simeon is luckier than the Magi. As the poem begins he is eighty, "waiting for the death wind," and knowing he has "no tomorrow." Had he been a younger man he might have faced the same problem as the Magi: what to do with the later years. Eliot has been equally fortuitous. He has stumbled upon a situation where he has not had to worry about demonstrating dedicated living in everyday life. One may feel in Simeon's case that there would have been enough belief to enable him to commit his life as well as his death to the object of his belief. Whether Eliot could demonstrate that in different circumstances is another question.

The third Ariel Poem, "Animula," assumes a special point of view. Its narrator believes and is presumably struggling towards commitment. From that point of view the poem investigates the progress of a "little soul" from the time it "issues from the hand of God" until it reaches "the silence after the viaticum." In effect, the poem is a study of how commitment is lost or damaged through the agency of "the hand of time."

The poem begins with quotation marks. This is Eliot's way of

notifying his reader that he is using someone else's concept. He did it once before in "Journey of the Magi," but there the reference was not vital. Here it is. The quotation is from Dante, and it just happens to be a passage Eliot quoted at length elsewhere and translated in this manner:

From the hands of Him who loves her before she is, there issues like a little child that plays, with weeping and laughter, the simple soul, that knows nothing except that, come from the hands of a glad creator, she turns willingly to everything that delights her. First she tastes the flavour of a trifling good; then is beguiled, and pursues it, if neither guide nor check withhold her. Therefore laws were needed as a curb; a ruler was needed, who should at least see afar the tower of the true City.²

The "simple soul" is simple in its inability to differentiate, not merely the physical sensations of "light, dark, dry or damp, chilly or warm," but between "the actual and the fanciful," and "the imperatives of 'is and seems'" (or is and ought to be). Both Eliot and Dante make this point clear.

Dante makes a second point concerning the growth of that simple soul which Eliot does not use directly. Coming from God, says Dante, the soul is conditioned to turn to what delights her. Eliot is more scientific, describing the turning as--

Moving...
Rising or falling, grasping...
Advancing...
Retreating...
Eager to be reassured, taking pleasure--

but setting forth no theological or natural cause. From the poem alone the reader could conclude natural development, but Eliot has with the opening quotation put Dante at the back of the narrator's mind.

The third point Dante stresses is the need for curbs and checks to prevent the soul from going astray. Dante seems to have had an adult in mind as "ruler" of the young soul. Eliot ignores this almost completely, though hints come in phrases like "may and may not."

What Eliot is more interested in showing is how the soul becomes warped by its "flat world" environment. In this he is thorough. The soul begins "content," then learns to distinguish the real from the imaginary, has obligations laid upon it, learns of "desire and control." All this is a "heavy burden" to the growing soul, a "pain of living." This anguish together with the fancies of a time and a place where life is painless send the soul into withdrawal:

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

In the end, time has produced something of the simple soul that is figuratively "misshapen" and "lame" but literally:

Irresolute and selfish...
Unable...
Fearing...
Denying.

With such a view of life it is no wonder Eliot began his quest for meaning and no wonder the breadth of his search in the two decades before this poem was encyclopaedic. If life is such a disfiguring process, what hope is there?

Eliot, the new member of the Church of England, sees no hope but intercession. "Pray," he says, "for Guiterriez," the avid industrialist. Pray "for Boudin," the victim of modern industrialization. And "Pray for Floret," the soul who does not fit the modern pattern.

Then in a strange but meaningful twist of the liturgy he closes: "Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth."

The three Ariel Poems so far discussed show something of pre-Christian and Christian problems. There is the condition of the man who does not quite understand, the magus who lives in mystification and discontent. There is Simeon who dies, who does understand but who, through his death, does not have to live his commitment. There is the simple soul and the crippling burden it and every man face just by being born.

What Eliot has not shown thus far is what exactly is the focus of the beliefs these poems result from. Nor, of course, has he shown how it is possible to live one's commitment in the face of burdensome difficulties.

Eliot's Developing Sacramentalism (1909-29)

The introductory chapter of this thesis mentioned two Weltanschauungen or viewpoints, the secular and sacramental, and said that each had its characteristic ontology, interests, and means of coming to knowledge. It was said that the methods, interests, and ontologies could be investigated on four levels: the supranatural, natural, social and historical. These categories should be kept in mind in the sections and chapters to follow.

"Conversation Galante" (1909) shows Eliot with a thoroughly secular viewpoint. On the natural and social levels the poem casts doubt on unity. The hero does not feel at one with nature or the girl, and when the poem ends he is still less at ease with them. Unity is a

myth as far as he is concerned, and fragmentation and isolation the malignant reality. His isolation from men and nature has repercussions on the theological level. Man is not the self-contained manipulator. Rather he is at the mercy of his problems. The tone of the piece makes it clear Eliot is rejecting romanticism and the naive optimism it implies. Man cannot succeed on his own; but since man seems to be on his own the poem ends on a note of hysteria.

"Portrait of a Lady" (1910) concentrates on the social level of viewpoint again, and shows man "using" man. People are not only isolated. They find their selfish interests conflicting with those of others. No one wins from such manoeuvrings. The lady is left holding the field, but he has walked out on her. Both lady and protagonist retreat to lick their wounds. This is not progress but, as the reader if not the characters can see, degeneration.

"Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" were written between 1909 and 1912 and therefore have similar social implications. The same horror is present in the viewpoint, the same disbelief in the efficacy of personal action, and the same resultant despair. There is, though, a growing mood of resignation. Both poems concentrate their interest on the natural level of viewpoint much more than "Conversation Galante" or "Portrait of a Lady." The unpleasantness of city surroundings makes itself obvious for the first time and highlights the fragmentation the persona sees all about him. Another element that makes a first appearance is time. Morning succeeds night, hours pass, but time does not improve things. History is as meaningless a round as nature. People end up objects under either agency, and nothing is

advanced seriously as a remedy.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1911) is the first real attempt at a solution to meaninglessness, fragmentation and isolation. Its general orientation is secular, for the solution is sought for rather than given from outside. The heroes of all the succeeding poetry until the late twenties either despair of or (in the case of Gerontion) do not want help from some divine agency, and therefore seek to save themselves. The method Prufrock studies is resignation. That may sound like a sacramental tool, but in his hands it is not. For him resignation means not only rejecting impossible answers but also seeking distractions to cover the problems.

The distraction that is used to cover reality in "La Figlia che Piange" (1912) is a created and imposed beauty. It is not the discovered-in-nature beauty that might lead one from creation to Creator, but a self-created ideal that can only lead back to self. Since the hero's creation has no basis in fact the poem, like "Prufrock," ends in dissatisfaction.

The Boston poems of 1915 introduce the problem of relativism. If a person's metaphysical viewpoint is thoroughly secular, that is to say no wider than natural and social limits, it becomes difficult to build a solid basis for morality or any other standards. That need not worry a person, but if it does the door is open for metaphysical reconsiderations. By 1915 Eliot is worried, but his anxiety is not yet directing him to the supranatural.

His most immediate response is to examine the historical

level for answers. If a man belongs to a time and a place perhaps he will be given a basis for values. But the Boston of "Aunt Helen" and "Cousin Nancy" is not the place, and the Oxford of "Morning at the Window," though less corrosive, is still no answer. By 1916 he abandons the hope of finding fixed values in his roots and, even changing languages, investigates the possibilities of rootlessness. Detachment from time and place, though, prove even less satisfactory than attachment.

Total detachment from social contact is also considered in 1915 as a possible solution to the futility and anarchy he perceives. This detachment is of two types. First is the self-containment of Mr. Apollinax. It allows a man to stride through fragmentation and relativism without concern and gives a sense of superiority that allows a man to manipulate or ignore the lives of others. For Eliot Mr. Apollinax is an appealing figure but not one he could hope or wish to emulate.

St. Narcissus also chooses total detachment from social contact but by means of withdrawal rather than self-containment. Ascetic techniques might prove a better distraction than the resignation of Prufrock or the aesthetics of "La Figlia che Piange." There is some question as to whether or not Eliot has stepped within the bounds of sacramentalism in this poem. There is the concept of union, though whether it is a oneness with nature and man only, or an image for supernatural union is open to question. Whichever it implies, the whole idea is distasteful to the persona, for union threatens his personal identity. A further possible indication of sacramentalism might be

the poet's use of the word "God." Exactly what he wishes to denote is not revealed, though there is probably some sacramental intent. Whether or not Christian implications dwell behind this reference to deity, the concept of sainthood, or the person of Narcissus is open to a great deal of doubt.

"Dans le Restaurant" (1917 or 1918) ends in pessimism. At one point, though, reference is made to a bath, and there may be implications of baptism in the reference. If so Eliot may be making a sacramental wish and a confession that man's own efforts do not avail, that help from beyond himself is an urgent need. Without it man faces "un sort pénible."

"The Hippopotamus" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" (1917-18) are too vague to be of much help in estimating the sacramental aspects of Eliot's mind. The former poem mentions a heaven to which the hippo is given admission. Is Eliot affirming the existence of heaven, harps of gold, quiring angels, and the efficacy of "Blood of the Lamb"? No final judgment can be made on the basis of the poem. But the hippo is protagonist in the piece and is set over against the "True Church" as antagonist. It is likely that the fate of the hippo is put in sacramental terms mainly to affront the followers of the True Church who, of course, would believe in the actuality of the various sacramental concepts. "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" makes it less certain that Eliot is using sacramental language without the belief. When he describes the "unoffending feet" he not only uses trinitarian language but his adjectives are positive and his rhythm straightforward. One might suspect that Eliot respects the owner of those feet, though

not what later generations did to him. Eliot's metaphysical and theological viewpoints are not developed, but there are some indications he has diluted his secularism with a touch of the supranatural.

"Gerontion" (1919) is of tremendous importance in any assessment of Eliot's viewpoint. For the first time he asserts the existence of metaphysical and theological realms in forthright terms. Allusions are made to Christ's birth and death, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and to the concept of Original Sin. Penance, though, is not understood; for Gerontion asks, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" and it is clear in the subsequent lines that he neither expects nor wants pardon. Indeed he has raised all those sacramental matters only to deny their claim on him. Christianity, as he understands it, offers no solutions for the meaninglessness, fragmentation, and isolation he feels. Better to retreat into aesthetics. Better to be creator of a work of art than to be beholden to a Creator and still have empty pockets.

The Waste Land (1921-22) re-examines the problems and many of the secular solutions Eliot earlier considered, but of much greater importance are his sacramental explorations. By the end of the poem no final decision has been made between the various options, but sacramentalism is a very real possibility. There is little said directly about the theological and metaphysical, but the poem builds an awareness that something exists beyond the borders of nature, history, and society. Eliot has settled on no particular tool for producing this awareness. Sometimes he uses the unknown to invoke awe, but sometimes it is nature he uses: the flash of lightning or sound of rain. Occasionally a Christian concept creeps in, but the poet's sacramentalism is not

necessarily that. The necessity of transcending self is what he urges. He is still at the stage of indicating the supranatural and has not settled on either descriptions or valuation. To urge the supranatural he is as likely to use Buddhist or Hindu concepts as Christian. The Waste Land gives no indication that Eliot now understands Penance. In fact the whole quest metaphor around which the poem is built would suggest Eliot is still thinking of gaining answers by his own effort rather than accepting them from beyond himself. The key words of the final section are "give," "sympathize," and "control;" and though these commands are received as oracular advice, their worth depends upon human action. The supranatural would therefore seem to give advice but little else. Even the Passion and Emmaus passages may be displaying a Christ who is example rather than aid. The most one can expect from him is that he walk "always beside you."

By 1924-25, when The Hollow Men was compiled, Eliot had reduced the options to two: sacramentalism or despair. The sacramentalism bears a close resemblance to traditional orthodox Christianity. The metaphysical level has its heaven, hell, and possibly purgatory. Though will is still a strong element in Eliot's idea of salvation, for the first time intercession is clearly suggested in the--

...perpetual star
Multifoliate rose--

of Mary. Without that one hope men are "sightless." Prayer appears in three of the five sections. The third speaks of "prayers to broken stone," or false worship. The second section prays for the wrong thing ("Let me be no nearer..."), and the final section fails in its attempt at the Lord's Prayer. Though prayer does not succeed, the concept is

at least present and implies that there is one to whom prayer should be directed. Sunlight, trees, and wind are natural images, but the poem has used them with greater clarity than The Waste Land to point to an ideal beyond nature. In this case it appears to be Eden, a Paradise beside which the present world is impoverished.

If Eliot's "golden vision" in the minor poem, "Eyes that last I saw in tears," is a Beatrice, as many writers have speculated, here is an instance of human agency guiding him towards the divine. Most of Eliot's human characters have been negative or "hollow," people from whom no positive lesson could be gained. Withdrawal into asceticism or solitary quest has until now seemed the only choice. Yet if the author understands that he is one with mankind, a lesson he seemed to learn in the French poems of 1916-17, contempt for others must be contempt for self, and hope for self can come only if there is hope for others. In Eliot's Beatrice there is the hope and also the suggestion that sometime "supplication" may be raised to more than the "stone images" of The Hollow Men.

"Journey of the Magi" (1927) and the Sweeney Agonistes fragments (1924-27) have one lesson in common. Once a person views the meta-physical level from a sacramental viewpoint he is no longer at ease in the old dispensation of secularism. All values must be reviewed, and the re-evaluation is painful. The struggle is analogous to that of a young child faced with a new-born sibling. Whatever possibilities the new baby may offer the older child, the feeling is that much has been lost. Sweeney Agonistes also gives the first firm indication that God pursues man. It is not always the other way around. "Journey of the

"Magi" alludes to various Bible passages concerning Jesus' death. Although the poem purports to report Jesus' birth, it is clear that Eliot identifies much more closely with his suffering and death. Like Arnaut Daniel he seems ready to dive back in the flames; and perhaps Eliot's purpose, too, is purgation.

Whatever that identity with suffering may mean, the figure of Jesus has become very important to Eliot's sacramentalism. "Journey of the Magi" mentioned his birth, and "A Song for Simeon" (1928) repeats the reference from another perspective. Again prophecies of suffering dominate, and identification is again with death rather than birth. Simeon's attitude to history is an interesting development. History as a causal sequence of human events has never appealed to Eliot. His method of allusion used past and present in conjunction, almost always to the detriment of the present and often to the past as well. Simeon's prophecies of the future are the first indications that historical disaster may take on different colours in the light of Providence. Side by side with disaster is martyrdom and the "ecstasy of thought and prayer."

"Animula" (1929) definitely assumes a whence and whither for the soul. A man comes from the hand of God, and returns after Extreme Unction. The poem makes allusion to the importance of discipline for the spiritual welfare of the little soul, but Eliot's emphasis is on the warping a soul receives as the hands of time. The degeneration is put in the strongest terms, and the poet's picture is the complete opposite of romanticism's self-perfection. The only hope Eliot sees is intercession. The prayer he puts forward is a modification of the

Catholic prayer to Mary as Intercessor. That modification certainly points to denigration of this world.

Ash-Wednesday (1927-30)

Ash-Wednesday is not as long as The Waste Land nor as packed with material. It does, however, explore any number of fields within sacramentalism. A mariology could be constructed from it. The denigration of nature is a strong element that needs some attention. The poem also shows how Eliot's attitude to society has shifted since 1922. Liturgy and ritual have a large part to play, as have prayer, the Scriptures, and the Sacraments. All these could be studied in their own right. The geography of Eliot's metaphysical realms could be up-dated. Time and place enter the poem, and with them attitudes to history. But the most important fact of the poem relates to concepts like will, submission, works, faith, and humility. Only one of those words, will, enters the poem, and it is from that concept this study will move. Secular man is wilful. If he believes anything can be done in the world he will see it as a project for his own resources or those of other men acting in their own strength, will, and imagination. Sacramentalism, on the other hand, tends to rely on supranatural powers. In doing so it becomes necessary to settle the position to be given to man's efforts and will.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent in the Christian calendar. The "ash" recalls the Old Testament concept of repentance in sackcloth and ashes, but the name of the holy day comes more directly from the Roman Catholic rite that marks the observance of the day. Eliot was a confirmed Anglican by the time the poem was written, but

an Anglican with strong Catholic interests. The poem has nothing to do with his own church's commination service. In liturgy and theology it relies heavily on Roman traditions, and it is there one must begin.

The priest on Ash Wednesday wears violet, the colour of mourning (and a colour mentioned frequently in the poem), for it is the season of penitence. He signs the cross (as does the Lady in Section IV) upon the foreheads of the congregation with the blessed ashes and says the words, "Remember, O man, that dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." The words come from Genesis 3:19 and are spoken there by God to Adam just before the expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The relevant doctrine for this study of Ash-Wednesday is the Sacrament of Penance. Scholastic theologians since Peter Lombard and also the Council of Trent have spoken of Penance as three distinct acts: contrition, confession (including absolution), and satisfaction. Contrition is a difficult concept as can be seen in the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has found it necessary to distinguish it from the less satisfactory attrition. Contrition requires a proper attitude to the past, a recognition of the present, and an aspiration to holiness in the future. In order to do any of these things, some self-knowledge is necessary. Thus, for the purposes of this study, it is best to separate out from the three traditional parts of Penance the act of self-examination.

A three-fold organization is evident in the phraseology of the first three paragraphs of Section I. These paragraphs belong

together as three subordinate clauses of the same principal verb:

Because I do not hope to turn again...
 Because I do not hope to know again...
 Because I know that time is always time...
 I rejoice....

They relate to the future, past, and present, and are the poet's first attempt to perform the act of contrition.

The first paragraph is his aspiration to holiness. He has resolved to live henceforth without turning back and striving after temporal advantages. He will in the future turn away from the competition for power and from covetous desire for the personal advantages that lead to such things. Because he is so resolved, because he has set his will and does not hope to turn again to his old ways, he can rejoice.

If the first paragraph wills to set aside vain striving, the second relinquishes idle thoughts. The past he is resigning here is Eden, a subject that follows naturally from the words of the priest at the Ash Wednesday Mass. According to the Genesis story, after the expulsion of Adam and Eve God placed cherubim at the entrance to the Garden so that there could be no return. The "positive hour" in the Garden and the "one veritable...power" have proven "infirm" and "transitory" because of disobedience. Now for all men there is no hope of knowing the hour or the power again or of drinking "There, where trees flower, and springs flow." Since the whole paragraph once more begins with the strong conjunction, "because," it would seem that the will is again in operation. The unstated assumption may be that hopes for a return to Eden would produce enervation and that by setting

the hopes aside the will is strengthened. The flow of the verse, though, denies the logical construction. The strong "because" at the beginning of the paragraph fades into soft regret for the beauty behind him.

The third paragraph deals with the present. Here in present time and place God does not walk, does not show his face or speak. Man is therefore in the condition of--

...having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice.

This in part may mean action as an instrument to whatever salvation is possible, but the whole tone of these paragraphs indicates that a much more basic meaning is present. It is not so much the will to work as the will to hang on, the British "stiff upper lip" in the face of adversity, that is shown. Utter exhaustion wraps the words of the whole poem. One reason for this, at least at the beginning of the poem, is that whatever has been gained has been the result of hard spiritual labour. In the light of Eden and what could have been,

...that time is always time
And place is always and only place--

marks the depth of deprivation: "there is nothing again." Yet in spite of emptiness the persona Eliot has created will maintain his dogged determinism to "rejoice that things are as they are."

There is much more to those three paragraphs than has been mentioned here. All lines have additional meanings than those outlined. But what has been said will emphasize how large a place will has here at the beginning of the poem. The past, present, and future moments of the persona's first attempt at contrition all involve will: the will to renounce sorrowing after a lost past, the will to accept the

empty present, and the will to be no longer "usual" in the future.

Such an emphasis on will makes it doubtful that his attitude to past, future, or present is indeed proper. When Eden disappeared men were left without perfect will. Human decision is insufficient to overcome all future temptation. And the mind that thinks in terms of will alone does not, according to the traditional tenets of Christianity, sufficiently understand the present condition or the Lord of the present who can restore the past. If self-examination does not reveal to the penitent his real sin, then contrition is misguided, confession empty, and satisfaction useless.

The last three paragraphs of Section I do not diminish the importance of will despite the mention of prayer. The mercy requested is not for what he is, but for what he had done "not to be done again." In the confidence of a sincere will he can say, "I do not hope to turn again" to worldly ways. Then he adds,

Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again.

If the will is present and is carried through in the future it is a work that should "answer" for the deeds of the past, if not to cover them at least to cause them to be taken in mitigation. Thus he closes the first paragraph of his prayer with the words, "May the judgement not be too heavy upon us." Whether a lapse of will-power would be considered in the same light as apostasy was by the Novatians is not clarified. The persona is expecting fulfilment of will rather than failure.

The second paragraph of the prayer uses the word "will" for

the first time and says that it is not the fault of the will that man cannot rise to God. The air that man's wings must beat against is too "small and dry" since the expulsion. This is a return to thoughts of the present condition which is supposed to be accepted in the act of contrition. But in the prayer, as in the earlier examination of the present, the here-and-now view of the situation does not lead to self-recriminations. Instead, his thoughts take another line. If we cannot rise to God, then: "Teach us to sit still." While sitting we are to learn to care for what is worthy of our care and not to care for all else. When we approach the hour of death, the Virgin Mary will intercede for "us sinners." But from what has been said in earlier paragraphs her intercession will be on behalf of the strong-willed and will be for deeds prior to their decision to "not hope to turn again." That, needless to say, is not the usual definition of sinner.

If this analysis draws out in terms overly stark the implications of the opening section, it is in order to show the position from which the poem departs. There, will is dominant and humility hardly known. Works are relied upon, grace little mentioned. Intercession is on behalf of the past which no amount of will can change. Determination should cover the rest, and the future is there to show a man worthy of intercession for his past. If such a position turns out to be the final position of the poem, certain conclusions must be drawn about Eliot's viewpoint on the theological level. If the poem shows development, the final position is more likely to approximate Eliot's sacramentalism of 1930. The beginning position may or may not

have any relevancy to him. It may be his stance of some two years previous; or it may be a literary construct, a position created for a persona so that he may develop from darkness to light. Since the section was published separately in 1928 it may represent an early Eliot position.

Where does the poem carry Eliot? In Section II, the "I" within the bones no longer says, "Because I do not hope to turn." He and his bones depend almost completely on a Beatrice's intercession:

Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness.

There is irony here, for it is the Lady's beasts who have disassembled him. Yet "to dissemble" is also to bring out of hypocrisy, a saving act for which his reaction is to make an offering:

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

Since his earlier reaction had been to will perfection and then ask for mitigation for prior mistakes, the sequence of blessing received then thanks (in deeds and love) offered is a distinct change. And, he says, "It is this that recovers" him. Perhaps the devotion, "concentrated in purpose," is an offering too. Whether it is the case that between the first and second sections the persona learned some lessons in humility or that he stumbled upon grace and still does not understand the extent of his own wilfulness, he seems at least on the road to contrition. For Eliot himself, though, this progression says little or nothing, for the second section of Ash-Wednesday was published

separately some two or three months before the first section.

Section III of Ash-Wednesday introduces three temptations that must be overcome. The image of stairs gives the idea of actively overcoming, climbing past temptations. That seems an indication that effort and skill and will are still the means of salvation. "I turned," he says; "I left them." But of the third encounter he says he had to have "strength beyond hope and despair." When he needed it, it came from beyond himself. Then, realizing the true status of his own efforts the persona confesses in true contrition:

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy
but speak the word only.

The succeeding words in the liturgy are: "...and my soul shall be healed." This Eliot intended the reader to recall. Strength is a blessing received and not an individual's possession. So is healing.

The identity of the veiled woman in Section IV is vague, as vague as the one to whom deeds and love are proffered in Section II. She seems partly the Beatrice figure and partly the Virgin Mary. It is through her instrumentality that the fountains and springs of Eden are made real for the poet, and it is through her that he experiences his absolution:

...restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme.

It is to her also that the final words of the section are directed: "And after this our exile...", which the liturgy continues, "...show us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

It is also in the fourth section that the persona reaches the stage of satisfaction. To make atonement the persona must--

...Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision of the higher dream.

The second sentence of the quotation is associated with pageantry or ritual in Eliot's mind, but the first echoes two Scripture passages:

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools,
but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days
are evil;³

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without,
redeeming the time.⁴

Both are advice given by a Pauline writer to church people, and both indicate that Christians have an exemplary duty on behalf of others. Some would also see an intercessory function.

Section V first meditates upon the Christ whom the final prayer of the previous section asked to see, then turns to consider those who "walk in darkness." He implores intercession on their behalf too:

...Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray:
Pray for those who chose and oppose.

The final section of Ash-Wednesday modifies the opening section's "because" to "although." Then Eliot underlines the diminishing reliance on will: "Although I do not hope to turn again" to the ways of the world the persona is "Wavering." Any pride he had is gone and with it any sense of self-sufficiency. In the midst of his renewed temptations the words of the confession, "Bless me father," are inserted; and later comes the meaningful plea:

Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain,
 spirit of the garden,
 Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood.

He has learned of his own imperfection, his own lack of will. He knows he has fooled himself in thinking otherwise and is now of the same mind as Dante: "Our peace is His will," with the emphasis on His will. Thus he concludes with a fragment of the prayer preparatory to reception of the Host: "Suffer me not to be separated" from Thee.

Eliot's theological understanding has changed considerably by 1930. Effort has given way to grace, pride to humility. Works still enter. There is no doubt that the poem is describing an arduous journey and tremendous spiritual effort is demanded of the pilgrim. But the place the poem has assigned to works is in the category of satisfaction. It is a thank offering after absolution. It is the effect rather than the cause of forgiveness. And it is to be directed towards "them that are without."

What has his growing theological understanding done to his view of nature? As the poem begins and the persona strives to perfect his own will, an image of the Garden of Eden enters his mind. Natural ideas, trees and springs, are used to sketch that earthly paradise. The rhythm hovers to emphasize the beauty, then moves on to show that the Garden is lost. It is "because" he does not hope to turn to it again that he can rejoice. Whether it is fair to gather from this a rejection of nature in favour of ascetic deprivation is a matter of opinion; but when he later prays, "Teach us...not to care," if it is not nature and possibly society that he is not to care for, what are

the distractions he wishes to overcome?

The second section marks the persona's growing dependence on supranatural aid. The lifeless bones are the symbol of the self's nothingness. Yet here are indications that not only the self but all worldly things are in the process of being set aside and "forgotten" in the pursuit of the supranatural:

Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness.
There is no life in them. As I am forgotten
And would be forgotten, so I would forget
Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose.

Later still there is the line, "This is the land. We have our inheritance." But the land is the desert around a juniper-tree, a "blessing of sand" full of scattered and shining bones. This is what he accepts as his. It is a far cry from acceptance of nature.

In Section III, when the persona comes to the "first turning of the third stair," he describes a scene from a bellied window. The terms he uses are sensuous, even sensual, magnetically attractive. It is the distraction of nature's beauty he is representing, and it takes strength from beyond himself to manage to set it aside. Shaken by this sudden view of nature, he can only pray, "Lord, I am not worthy."

In Section IV, the fountains and springs that were willed away in the opening section are restored by supranatural grace. Yet this is symbolic of Eden rather than the natural garden. Its restoration represents hope of absolution, not hope that nature's God will show up in or behind nature.

It is the social world rather than the natural that is being denigrated in Section V. It is a place where "there is not enough

silence" for the word of the Word to resound. Those who "walk among noise" tend to "deny the voice." It is society but also the natural world which comes to the fore in the question,

Will the veiled sister pray for..
Those who are torn on the horn between season
and season, time and time, between
Hour and hour, word and word, power and power,
those who wait
In darkness?

Human history is part of the disparaged world, then. In the final section it is called--

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

Any value it has is in the dreams of the supranatural which cross it. If dreams of the natural enter the poet's consciousness, he feels he must struggle with them and put them aside as temptations. They are signs of rebellion in a weak spirit, empty forms of false dreams in the ivory gates of the Aeneid. So it is in the desert, "among the rocks," in withdrawal from nature, society, and history that he will make his final prayer.

Marina (1930)

The preceding section noted how Ash-Wednesday degraded nature, society, and history in its attempts to represent supranature. The 1930 Ariel Poem has indications of the same. The epigraph is from Seneca's Hercules Furens. There, the hero in a fit of madness induced by the goddess, Juno, murders his wife and children, then falls in a deep slumber. On awakening in his right mind, and just before his discovery of the bodies, he asks himself where he is. Despite the interference of Juno from outside, Hercules is in the natural and human

world, and it is a place full of horror.

Then in the second paragraph of the poem itself, Death is dressed in various animal forms: the tooth of the dog, glitter of the hummingbird, ecstasy of the animal, and pig-sty are natural images all used to represent human failings. It is therefore nature as well as the deadly sins that in the following paragraph "become unsubstantial."

Finally, there are these lines toward the end of the poem:

...Let me
Resign my Life for this life, my speech for
that unspoken.

The image around which the poem moves is the reunion of father and daughter, but the poem reflects on the theological level the joy of the man to whom a long-absent God has returned. "To resign my life for this life" therefore implies that this world is to be sacrificed for the next.

Despite those indications of nature-denigration, there are copious indications of the opposite. The epigraph is countered by the title. Marina was the daughter of Pericles, Prince of Tyre. Allusions are made to many lines from the Shakespeare play of that name. Eliot, in using this reunion situation, is using a natural theme as analogue for the supranatural. The supranatural in such a case can flourish only if the natural is invested with every benefit available. A sloppy natural scene would destroy the analogy. Eliot in no way blights the human reunion. The social sense, in fact, is purified by the meaning that lies behind it.

In the second place, though the line, "resign my life for this life" has the connotations mentioned above, the "this life" has as part of its meaning the life of the daughter. To place one's child before one's self or to live for another is no unworthy sacrifice; so the line has mixed implications with the positive meanings perhaps the stronger. Certainly one of the results of this natural-supranatural reunion analogy is the restoration of meaning to human history. In the daughter there are "the hope, the new ships" that will replace the old whose seams need caulking.

Again, there is the matter of nature as well as the deadly sins of the second paragraph becoming unsubstantial in the third. How do they become so? Nature is the agency that destroys them. They are--

...reduced by a wind,
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
By this grace dissolved in place.

"This grace" refers back to the wind and trees and fog, but the whole natural scene is an image of the reunion concept. Thus both nature and society are or can be means of grace.

Eliot had a vision of nature, human relations, and history giving hints of the God who controls them. But after "Marina" the vision was soon forgotten. The works of the several years following are totally without that insight. They are also totally without the joy implicit in this reunion of God and man, daughter with father. The poem is out of time and place in much the same way as Four Quartets is. The reasons may be similar, reasons which have to do with the social level of viewpoint the next chapter considers.

Footnotes

¹ According to Margolis his reception "apparently occurred sometime between 10 May and 1 July 1927." Vid. John D. Margolis, T. S. Eliot's Intellectual Development, 1922-1939 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 104 fn.

² Eliot, "Dante" (1929: the same year as "Animula") in Selected Essays, p. 220-21.

³ Eph. 5:15-16 (KJV).

⁴ Col. 4:5 (KJV).

CHAPTER XI

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The Rock (1933-34)

Almost all Eliot's poetic work after 1930 was given over to the stage. The one major exception was Four Quartets. Even there there are stage influences. "Burnt Norton" was composed of sections excised from Murder in the Cathedral. And Eliot once stated that the other three quartets never would have been written if the war had not made stage work difficult.

The plays and Four Quartets are long works. Their length will make it impossible to touch any but the high points of Eliot's religious development in his later life. Length presents one other problem. It is ~~far~~ harder to trace the process of development in infrequent works of length than in frequent short pieces. The new stance itself may be more obvious in a long play or poem, but how the poet arrived at that position is less clear.

That is especially true of Eliot for the period between Ash-Wednesday and The Rock. For years he had shown interest in drama criticism, but why did he make the leap to dramatic writing at this time? It is true enough to say that his work always had been dramatic and that the leap was not all that great. It is also reasonable to point out that the Sweeney fragments had been stage oriented, and that therefore Ash-Wednesday and the Ariel Poems are the works that need explaining. In retrospect they can

be seen as a regression to lyric of a dramatic movement already begun.

Nevertheless the problem is not explained away. The Rock is for the stage in a way no earlier work had been, and nothing within the work explains what set Eliot working in that fashion. For an explanation it is necessary to look at extrinsic information, such as the biographical fact that approaches were made to him to undertake a stage project on behalf of the Forty-Five Churches Fund. Here was the opportunity to move into stage writing. The opportunity searched him out and found him ready and waiting.

His readiness is explainable from extrinsic information, this time his essays. They show an increasing didactic interest and a growing conviction that the stage is the best medium for teaching. The style and content of The Rock alone could not produce such a theory, but they do supply enough evidence to confirm it. The following paragraphs will outline Eliot's changing interests in the period leading up to the pageant. It will be information garnered from his essays. Later, support will be offered from The Rock itself.

In the same year that Eliot wrote Ash-Wednesday he said,

No art, and particularly and especially no literary art, can exist in a vacuum.¹

His new religious poetry was making it obvious that Christianity was what he intended to bring into his own writing. Ash-Wednesday and the Ariel Poems, though, were not propaganda. They were expressions of a reality that had touched Eliot deeply and were now even more a part of his life than his distress at isolation and fragmentation.

In the months and years to follow, his efforts turned from a quest for meaning to an exploration of the dedication his beliefs implied.

His theological and metaphysical viewpoints changed little in succeeding years, but what he had to discover was holy living: how in the light of belief a man is to relate himself to other men, to history, and to nature.

His critical writings turned more and more to religious and social issues,

In 1934 he stated,

I am not very much interested in the only subject which I am supposed to be qualified to write about: that is, one kind of literary criticism. I am not very much interested in literature, except dramatic literature; and I am largely interested in subjects which I do not yet know very much about: theology, politics, economics, and education.²

Perusal of his lectures and articles of the period would show that his interests were theology in politics, theology in economics, and theology in education.

As early as 1931 his essays were forthrightly stating his priorities:

I am sure in my own mind that I have not adopted my faith in order to defend my views of conduct, but have modified my views of conduct to conform with what seem to me the implications of my beliefs. The real conflict is not between one set of moral prejudices and another, but between the theistic and the atheistic faith.³

The quotation does more than show sacramental leanings. It introduces the idea of "conflict," the sides of which he defined more closely a year later:

There are two and only two finally tenable hypotheses about life: the Catholic and the materialistic.⁴

The battle was something he felt obliged to enter, but was there some way he could use his creative literary talents, his gifts as a poet rather than an essayist?

He had by 1933 formed some opinions on how his talents could be put to use:

The ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social "usefulness" for poetry, is the theatre.⁵

The idea of usefulness in literature shows how much he had come to accept the idea of art as a missionary medium.

In the summer or fall of 1933 Eliot accepted a commission to prepare a pageant on behalf of the Forty-Five Churches Fund. It was his first opportunity to employ art as a "useful" medium. Throughout his stage years evangelism was to be his intent and propagation of the faith his content.

Half a year after The Rock Eliot commented on the risk an artist runs in putting his art at the disposal of a social or political cause:

The cause may not be big enough, or profound and permanent enough, not to become somewhat ridiculous under such treatment....Distorted or incomplete values may easily turn the sublime into the ridiculous....I question whether any of the social causes agitated in our time is complete enough to provide much food for poetry.⁶

By then Eliot was already working on his second religious production, Murder in the Cathedral. His opinion must have been that his cause was no incomplete or distorted system, and that he could subject his art to his cause without harming either. He hoped, in fact, that the results would be positive rather than merely innocuous. "Religion and Literature," a 1935 essay, makes that clear. There Eliot addresses the reader of imaginative literature and says, "We are affected by it, as human beings, whether we intend to be or not."⁷ As a writer of imaginative literature Eliot would hope to produce what he would consider positive influences and effects.

Does The Rock fit the evangelistic pattern Eliot's criticism shows him to have developed? Care must be taken in selecting the evidence.

Eliot's was not the sole hand responsible for the production. E. Martin Browne played a large part in the scenario and gave constructive criticism even of Eliot's choruses and dialogues. Apparently many were rewritten at Browne's behest. Eliot himself concluded,

Of only one scene am I literally the author:
for this scene and of course for the sentiments
expressed in the choruses I must assume the
responsibility.⁸

Yet even if evidence is selected from those portions only, it is obvious that Eliot is following the pattern his criticism reveals.

In the first place a standard of excellence is set forth from the opening scene and held without change to the end. The social side of this standard is "...to be really useful," with real usefulness meaning these three things:

...resigning
The things that men count for happiness, seeking
The good deeds that lead to obscurity, accepting
With equal face those that bring ignominy,
The applause of all or the love of none.⁹

In the second place there is the conviction of things not well done. The following speech is by the Rock, who later becomes St. Peter and who represents the church. He is addressing the chorus, but the second person pronoun is also meant for the audience:

Forgetful, you neglect your shrines and churches...
Second, you neglect and belittle the desert.
The desert is not remote in southern tropics,
The desert is not only around the corner,
The desert is squeezed into the tube-train next
to you,
The desert is in the heart of your brother.¹⁰

The pageant, though, does more than give information about standards and failures to meet the standards. It has, in the third place, a hortative purpose, and the advice is given in hopes of producing change:

I will show you the things that are now being done,
 And some of the things that were long ago done,
 That you may take heart. Make perfect your will,
 Let me show you the work of the humble. Listen.¹¹

The pageant was written to raise money for a church building program, and the work the humble workmen produce over the following scenes is a church. The sanctuary is completed by the end of The Rock, but the moral of the play is stated directly: the one building is not enough.

It is now a visible church, one more light set on
 a hill
 In a world confused and dark and disturbed by
 portents of fear.
 And what shall we say of the future? Is one church
 all we can build?
 Or shall the Visible Church go on to conquer the World?¹²

Many more passages could be quoted to show that Eliot has placed his art at the disposal of his beliefs. But more proof is hardly necessary. Throughout the piece good deeds are exemplary, bad deeds lead to destruction. Morals are drawn, lessons are preached, and the whole tone is that of a staid but convinced propagandist interrupted by visual illustrations and occasional comic relief.

Murder in the Cathedral (1934-35)

Eliot had been encouraged by the reception that The Rock had been given, encouraged enough to go on writing for the stage. That his Christian teaching was a continuing interest follows naturally from this 1935 statement:

What I do wish to affirm is that the whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I call Secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life: of something which I assume to be our primary concern.¹³

Nevertheless in some ways he was dissatisfied with that first production. In the first place, it lacked dramatic development. Helen

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Gardner has said, "The Life of drama is change." The Rock did not develop in any dramatic way. Opinions were stated at the beginning and were unchanged by the end. True, a building grew during the program, but that involved no tension ("Something must happen") nor catharsis ("Something has happened; everything is now different"). Eliot realized it even before the work was complete. For that reason he kept referring to The Rock as a pageant rather than a play. When he did call it a play he put the word in quotation marks to show that he realized full well it was not a genuine drama.

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The second fault Eliot seems to have found was that it had been too didactic. When it had drawn its lessons it had been painfully precise, almost an affront to the intelligence. It was not that his cause had been too small, the fault he saw in mere social critics. He considered his cause the largest possible and was bent on religious content and the edification of his audience. It had been the presentation that had seemed unsatisfactory. Matthiessen's judgment that--

The Rock hardly meets Eliot's test for a religious play, "that it should be able to hold the interest, to arouse the excitement, of people who are not religious"16--

is perfectly just. The moral of a stage production must not detract from the enjoyment. It is the "popular" novelist and the "popular" playwright who are read and seen. Eliot needed to concentrate more on dramatic writing and prevent the moral from taking solo flights if he was to reach people and thereby satisfy his developing social consciousness and concern.

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These lessons are implicit in Murder in the Cathedral. The three most obvious features of the play are that Eliot's religious interests have continued, that his dramatic action is much improved, and that his message complements rather than detracts from the action. These are the three

necessities in the centuries old definition of art as "delightful teaching": a sound content, an interesting form, and no conflict between them. New Critics have often accused Eliot of selling out on them. His interest in content in the 1934, 1935 plays, and even in his 1930 poetry makes it appear that way, but no sell-out is involved. From the first, as this thesis has shown, Eliot had been interested in content. His work had always been a quest for a "truth" if not a presentation of it. Form was important, but his poetic writings show no interest in random subjects. He was always a Moral Critic even before he found his religion.

As for Murder in the Cathedral, Eliot's Christian interests show in a variety of ways. Within a few months of undertaking his first Christian production he was working on the second "sponsored" production, this time for the Festival of the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral. Again, then, from its very inception the play had Christian ties. The scene is the Archbishop's Hall at Canterbury, the protagonist is Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. The development is double-edged. On the one hand it concerns martyrdom, a theme with obvious Christian implications, and one based on the conflict between spiritual and secular powers. On the other hand it involves a chorus of women in the action and shows both the growth of their Christian understanding and the mediatory value of a saint's blood in the lives of ordinary people. Christian terms are used repeatedly. Phrases and rhythms are taken from the liturgy of the church. Prayers are offered. Even when no obvious reference is being made to God or supranatural realms, the audience is made aware of metaphysical and theological dimensions beyond the natural: such as when the chorus of women analyse their past and for a moment allow the truth to appear:

...We have gone on living,
Living and partly living.¹⁸

The form of the play has changed for the better. Characters have become more individualized. The Rock had been a solo ~~speaker~~, one of the few in the earlier work. Thomas is the Rock of the new play, but one with personality and character development. Even should an audience dislike the personality, it would be involved by Thomas' wrestle with situation, a struggle clearly missing in The Rock. Even the various groups within Murder in the Cathedral have been individualized to some extent. The Rock had blackshirts and redshirts speaking en masse, whereas this second production has priests, tempters, knights, all with differing speech patterns that set them apart from each other. For example, the First Tempter has a lilting manner and speech to match the temptations he offers. The Second is measured and direct in syntax and meaning. His rhymes give upper-class elegance, whereas the Third is a rhymeless "countryman" with great deviousness of manner and meaning. None has the subtleness of the Fourth Tempter. The only chorus that is not individualized is the women of Canterbury. Even there the use of chorus has changed from the constant reiteration of message to an intermittent intensification of emotion. The women are watching the action of the central characters and are reacting to the action. Their reaction is a heightened audience reaction, and since they as well as the central actors are being watched by the audience the women act as a projected correlative of the on-stage emotion. Character and chorus are not the only improvements. The line of action is constructed with elements of surprise and horror. Moreover the pace is improved. Beside this play, The Rock is loose and uninteresting. Murder in the Cathedral is a dramatic object capable of interesting even those untouched by its subject.

The audience finds no clash between action and message. The play is not "preachy," or when it becomes so the message seems aimed at the chorus rather than the audience. In the first act, Thomas, who as protagonist

is the logical spokesman for the message, is too busy struggling with his own beliefs to try to impose them on the audience. In the second act he is too involved in action and suffering; and the chorus is now in the position of coming to understanding and occupied with things other than teaching. Moreover Thomas' involvement throughout can be seen as a struggle with pride. The word is used over and over by priest, messenger, tempter, and knight. Members of the audience would not see pride as factious or controversial. If the action is seen only at this level no anti-religious reaction will form. Even should Thomas' religious answer for pride be obvious to a secular member of the audience, Eliot's handling does not induce distaste; for character, situation, and solution all blend and follow from one another as natural consequences. There is therefore no resentment against the author for having pulled a fast one nor against the religious beliefs as having come from nowhere. Anyone coming to a play where the word "Cathedral" is used four times in the opening eight-line paragraph cannot plead that religion is an intrusion. If religious matters were totally distasteful to someone he would not show his face in the theatre. If he were to come with an open mind it is unlikely he would be offended even though the play has a firm point of view.

The Family Reunion (1935-39)

About the time Murder in the Cathedral was nearing completion Eliot's thoughts were drifting towards a next effort. Already one mistake was clear to him. Three months before the first performance of his Canterbury play he published these words:

The last thing I would wish for would be the existence of two literatures, one for Christian consumption and the other for the pagan world.¹⁹

From where he viewed the world there actually seemed to be three

choices facing him. He could write the kind of works that would appeal to the "pagan world," works that would be theologically neutral and therefore activate no antagonisms. Or he could write the kind of literature only Christians would read. It would be theologically based and probably aimed at delightful teaching. Or he could evangelize.

The first alternative describes the kind of poetry he was writing up to approximately 1927. The Waste Land, for example, took no single firm position because Eliot was yet to establish one. Even in its more Christian passages it offended no one as being too Christian. In fact some Christian readers dismissed the poem for having no firm foundations. It did have a limited audience, then, one limited to the secular portion of society. The fact that it was the small "poetic elite" that read it was even more restricting but does not affect the matter. There it was the difficulty and novelty that limited rather than the theology. Yet with his beliefs so well established Eliot could not return to the old way. He had left it in the mid-twenties, never to return.

Most of his work from Ash-Wednesday on through Murder in the Cathedral was of the second variety. In those poems and plays Eliot chose themes and settings that were distinctly Christian. The risk he ran, as the 1935 quotation indicates he understood, was that his work would lose his original secular audience if he persisted in Christian teaching. With that kind of writing he was actually solidifying the barrier between the two parts of society by reinforcing their secular or sacramental prejudices.

Only a third choice could appeal to him now, one that would allow him to write about what he considered important and yet one that would be read by all. By 1937 he had turned his back on "Christian consumption," for it limited the audience he could reach. His duty lay elsewhere:

Merely to conduct our own life among ourselves, as we think right, and to abandon the task of evangelism, would be abnegation of an essential duty.²⁰

The question remained as to how he could retain his Christian ideas and still attract a universal audience. He had to retain both message and secular audience if he was to "evangelize" among them.

It has been noted that Eliot had grown deeply interested in social, economic and political matters. In March, 1939, the same month The Family Reunion was published, he was delivering a series of lectures at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, on the idea of a Christian Society. In his opinion,

We have to-day a culture which is mainly negative, but which, so far as it is positive, is still Christian.²¹

Eliot had used Christian terms in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" without raising eyebrows. The reason seemed obvious: Society had sprung from Christian roots whose form was still there even though the sap no longer flowed. Society's Christian tradition as understood in the present might be devoid of sacramental content, but the terms were still there even though thoroughly secularized. Perhaps Eliot could dress his play in secular appearance to gain and hold an audience, point to the terms of the heritage, and then restore the sacramental meanings. In the process the audience might become convinced that the sacramentalism they had neglected was real and that the Christianity they had misunderstood and belittled was in fact the all-important truth. However, for that kind of evangelism to be effective it must do more than make its point. Since society tends to react negatively to Christianity, the message must be hidden until the audience is ready for it. For Eliot, then, this kind of evangelism rests on deception.

The Family Reunion has a contemporary secular setting. By opening the play in "a drawing room, after tea," Eliot has moved as far away from a religious context as he could get.²² All seems natural; but gradually by means of his poetry, the interpersonal relations portrayed, and words and phrases latently sacramental he instills awareness of metaphysical and theological dimensions far beyond the natural.

His use of poetry to create the effect involves analogy. He attempts to indicate the supranatural by heightening the intensity of the poetry. Man's feelings before God would have a similar tension. Arrowsmith quarrels with this use of poetry.²³ If one heightens the poetry to increase awareness of the supranatural and lessens it to diminish the awareness, he will be writing poor verse in places. But verse need not be intense to be good poetry. Epics do not rely on constant tension.

Interpersonal relationships also depend on analogy to point to the supranatural. Through the love of one person for another, or the guidance of one person by another, the higher relation with God is indicated. There is something of this in the scene where Agatha reveals Harry's family history to him. Eliot draws attention to Agatha's analogical role by making the other characters aware of her importance. Amy says,

Only Agatha seems to discover some meaning in death
Which I cannot find,²⁴

and Violet feels that "Agatha's remarks are invariably pointed."²⁵ The same kind of analogy to God is a possibility in the Harry-Mary scene, but one that is left undeveloped. Harry, in fact, ends the play in almost total isolation. If Arrowsmith wished to criticize Eliot's analogical technique, here was where Eliot deserved it.

Eliot's relationships sometimes emphasize and caricature the

secular. The chorus of aunts and uncles are visionless, and their insipidity is meant to belittle the merely secular and thereby establish the importance of higher vision.

It is upon latently sacramental words and phrases that Eliot depends most heavily in pointing out his metaphysical and theological outlook. In early parts of the play, Christian counters are used in a way that totally lacks sacramental content: "Lady Day;"²⁶ and "providential."²⁷ But the "apprehension" grows. Agatha plays a large part in the change. It is her comment that the return to Wishwood will be painful for Harry that raises the first signs of anxiety in the family. She states her reasons:

...Because everything is irrevocable,
Because the past is irremediable,
Because the future can only be built
Upon the real past.²⁸

The audience might interpret that at a natural level, and therefore Agatha renews her attack in the next speech by referring to a "jolly corner."

The Henry James short story of that name concerns a man meeting his own ghost in the place where--

When the loop in time comes...
The hidden is revealed; and the spectres show
themselves.²⁹

The language and allusion open doors beyond the natural. As the scenes pass it becomes more and more clear that the spectres belong to--

...Powers beyond us
Which now and then emerge.³⁰

By the end of the play words like "sin," "expiation," "intercession," "pilgrimage," and "redemption" have become common and have pinned down the metaphysical and theological contours in Eliot's mind when he speaks of a "nether world."

Much more could be written about Eliot's content and his techniques of producing the desired effects, but there has been enough evidence presented to show him using indirection, using what one could call deception to carry out evangelism. The play began at a natural level but has moved gradually to supranatural implications through the use of a variety of tools. If his ploy has gone well his secular audience should now be aware of and appreciate the importance of the supranatural.

Very few of Eliot's audience, in spite of everything, underwent conversion. The Family Reunion was not well received and did not do all that Eliot had hoped. More will be said about the theory and practice of indirection when the later plays are discussed.

Caste in the Early Plays

What was Eliot's concept of society in the three early plays? The second section of Chapter VIII quoted a few sentences from The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1932). Eliot was saying there that when he wrote Sweeney Agonistes he had designed one character with high spiritual sensitivity. It was the purpose of that character to communicate with a "small number of the audience" who were similarly sensitive. The rest of the characters were to be spiritually insensitive: "material, literal-minded and visionless" like the majority of the audience.³¹ Whether or not such an idea was in Eliot's mind in the mid-twenties, it was by 1932. Ingroups and outgroups play a large part in the three early plays, and even after that.

In The Rock the ideal of sensitivity is portrayed by the Rock and his various historical builders. They have the sacramental viewpoint and can see beyond mere natural cause and effect. They are therefore capable of judging the true worth of an action. They know that man in the

natural state is afflicted with Original Sin:

Men! polish your teeth on rising and retiring;
 Women! polish your fingernails:
 You polish the tooth of the dog and the talon
 of the cat.³²

Therefore there are no "systems so perfect that no one will need to be
 good."³³ Secular man is actually dangerous:

O Lord, deliver me from the man of excellent
 intention and impure heart: for the heart
 is deceitful above all things, and desperately
 wicked.³⁴

It must be remembered that The Rock was aimed at a church audience. Little is said about the insensitive man, though he appears occasionally as an object lesson. The dialogue is directed to characters and to an audience that are presumably sensitive, but whose sensitivity is not fully developed. The aim is to awaken their sensitivity, to bring them to full consciousness. Whereas sensitivity could be defined as the inherent ability of a man to detect the supranatural, consciousness measures his actual awareness. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," says Eliot in this pageant.

He has nothing to say to those without ears, the redshirts, blackshirts, and assorted materialists, but only to those who act as if they were ear-less when they do have ears. They are imitating those who are less than animals:

A colony of covies or a horde of active marmots
 Build better than they that build without the
 LORD.³⁵

Secular knowledge has no ultimate answers and may even hinder true wisdom:

The endless cycle of idea and action,
 Endless invention, endless experiment
 Brings...
 Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word....
 Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
 The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
 Brings us further from GOD and nearer to the Dust.³⁶

Murder in the Cathedral was also aimed at a church audience and is therefore primarily for and about sensitive people. Insensitives again enter as object lessons. The knights reason in secular terms, but by then the audience is supposed to be conscious enough to detect their folly.

Thomas is the man of high sensitivity who during the play is brought to full consciousness through the agency of the Fourth Tempter. Temptation as a means of grace is an interesting thought in itself but also one relevant to caste distinction. It is by grace in the form of temptation that Thomas becomes fully conscious. Without it there could have been no hope and he never would have come to an understanding that God's will was not already in him. Once the understanding is given it is he who proceeds to make perfect his will. In both moments, grace and perfecting, Thomas is independent of other men. The relevant matter is that Thomas himself is a means of grace to the chorus of Canterbury women. That he grows spiritually to great heights but also causes growth sets him apart from the other characters and chorus who seem able only to react. It is as if their sensitivity is of a second order, as if God had no purpose for them other than a little enlightenment. Members of the chorus are sheep that must be shepherded, not children in the faith capable of maturing and in turn helping others. Some people, according to Eliot's aristocratic ideas, cannot approach God fully, cannot approach at all without human mediation. Eliot had a High Church view of the Keys to the Kingdom.

Not all sensitive or semi-sensitive people are in churches. Eliot's foray into contemporary drama with The Family Reunion was an attempt to pillage a larger audience of unconscious sensitives, those who have been--

Neglecting all the admonitions
From the world around the corner. 37

The function of Thomas in the earlier play is divided between Agatha and Harry. Harry comes to full consciousness during the play, and Agatha, already fully conscious when the play begins, acts as human mediator. There are strong indications that Agatha (and Mary with her) is on a lower plane of sensitivity than Harry. She says to Mary,

...Harry has crossed the frontier...
And he cannot return....
We must all go, each in his own direction,
You, and I, and Harry. You and I,
My dear, may very likely meet again
In our wanderings in the neutral territory
Between two worlds.³⁸

Her function as enabler is assumed because she is unable herself to cross the border into the far world.

The insensitives are given much fuller treatment than in earlier works. The first thing to notice is that they, the uncles and aunts, are not totally insensitive. In the presence of the supranatural they feel³⁹ "embarrassed, impatient, fretful, ill at ease." They do detect something, but only out of the corner of the eye. As Harry says,

They don't understand what it is to be awake,
To be living on several planes at once.⁴⁰

All their explanations must therefore be material:

I've met with missionaries, often enough--
Some of them very decent fellows. A maligned
profession.
They're sometimes very useful, knowing the natives,
Though occasionally troublesome.⁴¹

When secular solutions do not suffice they are left in mystification: "We⁴² have lost our way in the dark;" or else fear:

...I am afraid....
I am used to tangible danger, but only to
what I can understand.⁴³

They try to produce their own detective drama (guilt) to account for Harry's illness (sin). But since they cannot read the clues they cannot solve the

mystery.

There are indications during the play that the insensitives are not all hopelessly so. It is true that Agatha spends her time and effort on the more sensitive, like Harry and Mary, and has little to say to the others. In fact, there are indications that this material world is all that those less sensitive can ever have. Agatha says of them,

For those who live in this world, this world only,
Do you think that I would take the responsibility
Of tempting them over the border? No one could,
no one who knows.⁴⁴

Yet by the end of the play the chorus has been given some individuality.

Charles seems the most hopeful:

...I am beginning to feel, just beginning to feel
That there is something I could understand, if I
were told it.
But I'm not sure that I want to know.⁴⁵

The mother has also shown some hope:

At my age, I only just begin to apprehend the truth
About things too late to mend....
Nevertheless, I am glad if I can come to know them.⁴⁶

It seems, though, that she dies without the knowledge. Gerald is the most insensitive. Amy calls him "the stupidest person in this room."⁴⁷ He sees nothing of sacramentalism. Violet and Ivy are barely ahead of him. Violet says,

You do not know what has been going on, Ivy.
And if you did, you would not understand it.
I do not understand, so how could you?⁴⁸

Ivy's reply is:

...Can't you explain?
Why do you all look so peculiar? I think I
might be allowed
To know what has happened.⁴⁹

The social implications of what has been said are clear. Eliot, judging by the three plays, believes in a spiritual hierarchy. Some men are

of the elite and some less so. While they may be brought to greater consciousness they can never surpass their spiritual limitations. The elite are the saints who, on becoming fully conscious, wend their lonely way to martyrdom or pilgrimage in the desert. Their exact function will come up later. Others are enablers, or in the language of a later drama: the Guardians. They help individuals to make the crossing. Then there are the untouchables, those with little or no sensitivity. Eliot's caricature of their lot deserves and has received considerable resentment. Unfortunately for much of his later work it was not a lesson he learned easily.

Isolation in the Early Plays

Any discussion of social responsibility and social intercourse would be incomplete without examining the status of and cure for isolation. Eliot had first incorporated the problem into his earliest poetry and had been searching for solutions for some twenty-five or thirty years. What changes are there in the early plays that might be the result of his more settled beliefs?

The Rock offers some hopeful signs. The second chorus implies there is such a thing as interpersonal communication when it says,

There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of GOD.⁵⁰

It would seem that community or true communication with another is a by-product rather than an end in itself:

You, have you built well, have you forgotten
the cornerstone?
Talking of right relations of men, but not of
relations of men to GOD.⁵¹

The play makes no bones about its belief that the opposite of right relations with God is social desolation:

In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
 The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,
 The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,
 And the wind shall say: "Here were decent
 godless people:
 Their only monument the asphalt road
 And a thousand lost golf balls."⁵²

The Rock does little to substantiate its claim that only right relation with God can be accompanied by interpersonal communication. The Rock is a pageant, and interpersonal relations are not its strong point. Its best relations are in the portions where Eliot's influence is probably weakest. The choruses do deal in communication, it is true; but their relation is with the audience, and in a lecturing, even hectoring, manner at that. They are not at all interpersonal or "I-Thou."

Murder in the Cathedral is not an improvement. Thomas is actually separated from others by his spiritual knowledge. His struggle to consciousness is a lonely one, and he is counselor and teacher rather than friend to priest and chorus alike. The Second Tempter offers him rule over men, to which Thomas replies: "To the man of God what gladness?" The tempter's reply hits nearer home than he or Thomas realize:

...Sadness
 Only to those giving love to God alone.⁵³

Though the protagonist can feel concern for the chorus and his priests, there is doubt that he has ever felt love towards another person. The First Tempter had hoped otherwise. Among his temptations of sensuous beauty there were the ties of friendship:

Your Lordship won't forget that evening on
 the river
 When the King and you and I were all friends
 together?
 Friendship should be more than biting Time
 can sever.⁵⁴

Thomas' response is discouraging:

You talk of seasons that are past. I remember:
Not worth forgetting.⁵⁵

Perhaps it is his caste feelings that have led him to isolation. He is certainly pictured as the strong hero struggling alone in spiritual sensitivity. But whether Thomas could have found friendship if there had been another character of equal sensitivity is idle speculation.

The Family Reunion does offer Harry characters more equal to him, though not yet on his own level. Moreover, one of those characters shows him and the audience that interpersonal communication is a goal not to be abandoned:

...We cannot rest in being
The impatient spectators of malice or stupidity.
We must try to penetrate the other private worlds
Of make-believe and fear.⁵⁶

That Harry and the other characters should be living in worlds of make-believe and fear recalls the barriers to communication Prufrock discovered. Two of them appear again here. Harry is in a state of self-deception at the start of the play. He is hiding who he is from himself: he suffers the "degradation of being parted from myself,"⁵⁷ and knows he is not alone in this: "I not a person, in a world not of persons."⁵⁸ It is Agatha's duty to help him find himself.

The more important barrier for the sub-plot of crime and detection that the uncles and aunts are creating is role-imposition. They hope to force Harry and events into a pattern of their own pleasing: that nothing is changed and the son can begin again where he left off almost a decade before. Harry soon comes to see that. When he left home he had left "family affection" and had moved into a different role-imposition. When he returns he is facing a third:

...Family affection
 Was a kind of formal obligation, a duty.
 Only noticed by its neglect. One had that
 part to play.
 After such training, I could endure, these
 ten years,
 Playing a part that had been imposed upon me;
 And I returned to find another one made ready--
 The book laid out, lines underscored, and the
 costume
 Ready to be put on.⁵⁹

Harry denies his mother's projections, finds himself, and becomes a person in the process. But what are his relations? Does his own integration allow him to meet others? His closest contact is Agatha, but by the end of the play he has surpassed her. They shall not "meet" again since--

...Meeting is for strangers.
 Meeting is for those who do not know each other.⁶⁰

Agatha sanctions the separation between Harry and his family:

...Love compels cruelty
 To those who do not understand love.
 What you have wished to know, what you have learned
 Mean the end of a relation, make it impossible.⁶¹

So Harry departs from Wishwood dragging his cross across his mother's face,⁶²
 and in the process denying Mary her hope of escaping spinsterhood. Harry is as isolated in the final scene as he was in the beginning. Now the reasons are different. He goes out a happy man, but that only emphasizes that for Eliot happiness is not interpersonal communication but rather
 seeing "a different vision."⁶³

All three plays show all characters in isolation. It is therefore necessary to conclude that Eliot's idea of social responsibility comes somewhat short of brotherhood and love in their usual meanings. If "love compels cruelty," love requires self-containment in order to endure the cruelty to a loved one. Brotherhood or sonhood may require desertion of

family in the quest for social expiation.

The Individual and Society in the Matter of Expiation

Thomas and Harry come to full consciousness during their plays and depart in a state of salvation. For Eliot salvation would appear to be an individual matter of coming to terms with certain beliefs and then incorporating them into one's living, all with the help of grace in one form or another.

There are passages, however, that indicate Eliot has some concept of social expiation. The Rock may be a poor example since it was written to raise money for church construction, but its central thesis is that where there is no church there is no community and where there is a church there is social benefit. Such implications lie behind these and similar lines:

Do you need to be told that even such modest
attainments
As you can boast in the way of polite society
Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe
their significance?⁶⁴

Thomas' martyrdom is for the women of Canterbury. It is difficult to call it social expiation since his actions change their faith directly and open their eyes to spiritual dimensions. Yet their words in the final chorus indicate that his death may promise more than changed hearts:

...The blood of Thy martyrs and saints
Shall enrich the earth, shall create the
holy places.
For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever
a martyr has given his blood for the blood of Christ,
There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not
depart from it....
From where the western seas gnaw at the coast of Iona,
To the death in the desert, the prayer in forgotten
places by the broken imperial column,
From such ground springs that which forever renews
the earth
Though it is forever denied.⁶⁵

In The Family Reunion social expiation rises to the surface.

Agatha says to Harry towards the end of the drama,

...It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.
~~Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,~~
Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen
To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.⁶⁶

The family curse is Eliot's correlative of Original Sin. It may distort more than it enlightens, but that is beside the point. Harry, as a member of the human family, shares their Original Sin. With his personality and separated as he is from others, he cannot minister to their redemption in any way other than by disappearing into the wilderness and seeking their common expiation through solitary deeds. Again, this is a High Church concept not readily understood by outsiders. Therefore Eliot has trouble explaining Harry's thoughts to his mother:

...I cannot explain that to you now. Only be sure
That I know what I am doing, and what I must do,
And that it is the best thing for everybody.⁶⁷

Eliot's three dramatic works make it clear how little Eliot knew about deep interpersonal relations. It would be incorrect to blame it on his beliefs. His poetry from the very beginning was drenched in isolation. Belief, though, has not solved the matter.

Belief has made differences. We may suspect his early work of class consciousness: Sweeney, Bleistein, and Grishkin on the one hand; and Prufrock, Burbank, and even Gerontion on the other. Caste remains in the three plays, but its basis has changed from artistic to supernatural sensitivity.

The major difference belief has made in so far as his view of society is concerned, is in the realm of social responsibility. St. Narcissus' ascetic withdrawal was self-salvation. Prufrock's masks were for self-

protection. Gerontion's decision was self-preservation. Ash-Wednesday seems to have found satisfaction in the personal area, and that has enabled him to turn his thoughts to others. Belief has given Eliot a new interest in others as something more than reflections of his own horrible situation.

Belief, however, has not taught Eliot how to touch others. How to reach others and fulfil one's sense of responsibility is a problem for a man whose social appendages have been chewed off at the borders of his own person. Eliot attempted some solutions. In the first place, even though we dwell in isolation and can never touch another being, a teacher-student relation is possible. Thomas was this for the chorus, and Agatha for Harry and Mary. Such a relation is not contact, not interpersonal. When Eliot finds it threatening to become so, as with Harry and Agatha, he takes fright and cuts it away. Ideally for the poet, guardianship would seem to be a matter of imparting the right information at the right moment, and that can be done at a chaste social distance.

Whether Eliot realized that such a relation was over-chaste or whether he felt that some people, as caste inferiors, were incapable of absorbing information, the plays show a second solution to social responsibility developing. Like St. Narcissus, Harry withdraws into the desert. This time, though, it is more than a matter of personal salvation. He is to be the expiation of the family curse: for those who understand nothing of the curse as well as for those who do. Thomas fulfils the same function in Murder in the Cathedral, and there is a strong probability that the church acts in the same way for society in The Rock.

Such a view of the church and the individual Christian's "social action" is definitely sacramental. But to even the most ardent believers of those very articles of faith they were not sufficient. His characters.

remained in total isolation, and until that could be cured no end to his religious quest was in sight.

Footnotes

¹ T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Propaganda," Bookman, LXX.6 (February 1930), 598.

² T. S. Eliot, "The Problem of Education," Harvard Advocate Centennial Anthology, ed. Jonathan D. Culler (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1966), p. 69.

³ T. S. Eliot, "Thoughts after Lambeth" (1931), Selected Essays, p. 324.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, "Modern Education and the Classics" (1932), Selected Essays, p. 458.

⁵ T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 153. First published in 1933.

⁶ T. S. Eliot, "Notes on the Way," Time and Tide, XVI (January 5, 1935), 6-[7].

⁷ "Religion and Literature" (1935), Selected Essays, (New York, 1960), p. 348.

⁸ T. S. Eliot, The Rock (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), p. 5.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 84.

¹³ "Religion and Literature" (1935), Selected Essays, p. 398.

¹⁴ Gardner, p. 131.

¹⁵ See The Rock, p. 5: "I cannot consider myself the author of the 'play.'..."

¹⁶ Matthiessen, p. 162,

¹⁷ Eliot's adjective. See "Religion and Literature" (1935), Selected Essays, p. 350.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 10 and 31.

¹⁹ "Religion and Literature" (March, 1935), Selected Essays, p. 399.

²⁰ T. S. Eliot, "Religious Drama: Mediaeval and Modern" The University of Edinburgh Journal, IX, 1 (Autumn, 1937), 13.

²¹ T. S. Eliot, The Idea of a Christian Society (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 13.

²² A lower-class boarding house or a brothel such as was the setting of Sweeney Agonistes would not be further away in Eliot's view: "It is better...to do evil than to do nothing." ("Baudelaire" 1930).

²³ William Arrowsmith, "Transfiguration in Eliot and Euripides," Sewanee Review, LXIII (Summer, 1955), 439-40.

²⁴ J. S. Eliot, The Family Reunion (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 15.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 47.

³¹ See The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 153.

³² The Rock, pp. 41-42.

³³ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁷ The Family Reunion, p. 21.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 112-13.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 115.

⁴² Ibid., p. 123.

- 43 Ibid., p. 64.
- 44 Ibid., p. 112.
- 45 Ibid., p. 118.
- 46 Ibid., p. 117.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid., p. 121.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 The Rock, p. 21.
- 51 Ibid., p. 20.
- 52 Ibid., p. 30.
- 53 Murder in the Cathedral, p. 17.
- 54 Ibid., p. 14.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 The Family Reunion, pp. 86-87.
- 57 Ibid., p. 93.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid., p. 99.
- 60 Ibid., p. 103.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Gerald Weales; "The Latest Eliot," The Kenyon Review, XXI.3 (Summer, 1959), 477.
- 63 The Family Reunion, p. 98.
- 64 The Rock, p. 41.
- 65 Murder in the Cathedral, p. 71.
- 66 The Family Reunion, p. 98.
- 67 Ibid., p. 105.

CHAPTER XII

FOUR QUARTETS (1935-42)

Religious Experience

Four Quartets is a monumental work. It has raised as many questions about art and as many questions about life as did The Waste Land two decades before. A good case could be made for Four Quartets being the more structured of the two pieces; but while The Waste Land had been built quite obviously around a mythic theme, it is less clear what the structural basis of Four Quartets is. A variety of temporal, musical, and psychological forms have been advanced as organizing principles, all valid and all useful in furthering understanding of the poem. One thought, though, has not received sufficient investigation: that Four Quartets is the description of a religious experience and an introspective study of the rethinking such an experience entails.

There are a number of dangers involved in the hypothesis. In the first place, the rose-garden scene may not be a description of a religious experience at all. Critics have seen it as a description of lost childhood, an experience of first love with the hyacinth girl of The Waste Land and "Dans le Restaurant," or an instance of memory as a means of grace. In the second place, even if it can be taken as a religious experience it may not be Eliot's. Nothing in his essays nor in his discussions of religious questions indicates that he

underwent such an experience.

In defence against the second objection it should be noted that Eliot was extremely reticent in giving details of his life history. Much of what critics have uncovered has come from either documents and private letters or the anecdotes of friends. A religious experience is not the sort of event a companion can describe on one's behalf, nor is it the sort a reticent man will freely discuss. It is as likely to appear in his poetry as anywhere, for there the reader will take it as the experience of the character and not necessarily autobiographical. In point of fact there is a small bit of documentation relating to the matter. While it is far too slight to confirm the hypothesis, it does not at all contradict it. Burnt Norton was a deserted manor in the Cotswolds where Eliot visited in the summer of 1934,¹ a year and a half before the quartet of the same name was published. No record exists as to what happened there. There is only the bare fact of the visit and then a few months later the poem with its conjunction of place name and peculiar description.

That the rose-garden is a religious experience is more susceptible to investigation than might appear possible. If it were so, one might expect a three-fold division in the poem. There would be a section to describe the persona before the experience, one to describe the experience itself, and one for the aftermath. The first of these divisions need not be long. The second would be difficult to sustain. The third would probably receive the most attention, though that would depend on the emphasis the poet desired.

When the poem is examined, it seems to conform to the

hypothesized form. The opening paragraph is the psychological outlook of the persona before the event, what the Pauline epistles would call the "old man." The content is deeply philosophical: a discourse on time that resembles determinism. The propositional statements are not so important as the accompanying emotional flavour. Matthiessen has remarked of the poet,

Eliot wants to suggest in the rhythms of his verse the movement of thought in a living mind, and thus to communicate the exact pattern of his meaning not so much by logical structure as by emotional suggestion.²

The rhythm is inhibited and the lines well sprinkled with feminine endings. The abstract content thus becomes more than objective reasoning. The picture builds of a man mildly depressed by his findings that "All time is unredeemable." Though "what might have been" is thereby made into idle "speculation" in which the persona can see no purpose, he is still attracted by it. His mood seems to be that of a man who wishes for hope which he does not believe in. "Hopeless" does not describe his condition, for the word implies despair. He is rather in the state of mild dissatisfaction. What he would hope for if he thought it possible would be change in his present condition through changes in past decisions. His actual state is not miserable. There are the compensations of a strong reasoning faculty and the leisure to employ it. But such does not make it the best of all possible worlds, and he would that he could have it over: not only his own life but, it is hinted, the whole experience of man from the First Garden.

There are three things that should be said about the rose-garden scene itself. The first concerns admission to the garden. It

seems to be a gift of grace, for the bird that summons the persona is an Eliot symbol with that meaning. Certainly entrance is beyond the reach of logic. In fact, the yearning for such an experience must be strong enough to overcome reason, for reason sees it as a "deception." Yet a choice is possible. One can follow or not follow the thrush. That is implied in the question, "Shall we follow...?" In the phrase "Into our first world," the "into" should be interpreted in the same manner as "en avant!" or "forward!" rather than as a scene-setting for or will-less motion toward what follows.

The second thing to be said concerns the quality of the experience. Rajan describes it well:

Even the flowers in this universe are unnatural... We grasp eagerly at what we think are facts—"Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown-edged." But even this is denied us—"The pool is filled with water out of sunlight." The effect of this dissociation, this remoteness, is to emphasize the superior reality of the pattern.... Mr. Eliot has succeeded brilliantly in his main preoccupation which is to make philosophical terms more solid and tangible than objects.³

The persona has a number of feelings during the experience and afterwards as he attempts to sort his impressions. First, he feels it is real, more real than what till now he had taken as reality. Secondly, it is immensely attractive. Compare the rhythms of the first and third paragraphs of the section. Compare the adjectives for texture and vividness. The poetic intensity of the rose-garden scene rises to a pitch Eliot seldom before attempted. In the third place, the experience is a shock to the persona. For sixteen lines he has been entranced, fascinated, enchanted. Then a cloud passes and the spell is over, though not the memory of its almost painful intensity. A further point

is the confusion brought on by the experience. Not only the way into it, but the whole duration of it is beyond the persona's understanding. The pool is waterless yet filled with water, the music unheard, the air vibrant, and the people sensed though they are invisible. Finally, the experience is redirecting. The last three lines of the section repeat the ideas and even the words of the opening paragraph. But--

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been--

are no longer so easily distinguishable. The end to which they point and which is always present is what now must be discovered.

The third thing to be done with the experience is to ask if it has parallels in earlier Eliot efforts. It has, though they do not match in every detail. Thomas' encounter with the Fourth Tempter is an example. The encounter is offered by grace rather than sought by reason. It is a presentation of a vivid reality where no such pattern was even considered. It comes as a shock, produces confusion, and induces the persona to move off in a totally new direction. The Ash-Wednesday experience at the first turning of the third stair is exactly the same as Thomas' encounter. And the Eumenides' appearance to Harry three years after "Burnt Norton" is similar. Most interesting is the last line of "Conversation Galante." The hero of the piece suffers the shock of discovering a reality which is a horrible parody of the one he had been living with. If an identity is allowed between Eliot and his persona, it could be said that the shock produces redirection. Eliot left the poem committed to a search for meaning, unity, and communion. All these other episodes resemble the religious experience in that they cause their personae's lives to be redirected.

None, though, has the attractiveness of the "Burnt Norton" garden.

Critics have made comparisons between the attractiveness of "Burnt Norton" I and that of the hyacinth girl of The Waste Land, "La Figlia che Piange," or even the smell of hyacinths in "Portrait of a Lady," and the childhood experience of Dans le Restaurant. Attractive though they may be, usually in a sensual way which is not the "Burnt Norton" attraction, they do not invoke a powerful sense of another reality impinging on this one, nor do they go very far in shocking or confusing. Most important, they do not at all redirect the hero's footsteps into previously unconsidered byways. They are mere aesthetic memories, while the rose-garden is much, much more.

Most of Four Quartets is not a description of the "old man" nor of the religious experience that initiates the change to something new. The experience has left the persona with two visions of reality. They are confused and at cross-purposes with each other. While he has no doubt as to which he prefers, he has doubts concerning the accessibility of the new and also concerning the status of the old. It is upon those two matters that Eliot chooses to dwell at length in the poetry that follows "Burnt Norton" I. The garden scene was infinitely attractive, a taste of beatitude of which he desires more. How can he get it? The poem is first of all a movement towards that condition. It is also a re-examination of the old in the light of the new experience and a slow and sometimes difficult re-evaluation of all around him. The movement and reassessment will be the subjects of the succeeding sections.

The Condition of Simplicity

William James has examined the varieties of religious experience in an attempt to find their common features. Two of the characteristics of what he calls the "state of assurance" are these:

The central one is the loss of all worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the willingness to be, even though the outer conditions should remain the same. The certainty of God's "grace," of "justification," "salvation," is an objective belief that usually accompanies the change in Christians; but this may be entirely lacking.... The second feature is the sense of perceiving truths not known before. The mysteries of life become lucid...and often, nay usually, the solution is more or less unutterable in words.⁴

If Four Quartets begins with a religious experience, the persona's state of assurance should exhibit a "loss of all worry" and a perception of "truths not known before." According to James, those factors do not make the poem or the experience Christian. Therefore it will be necessary after investigating for the presence of those two characteristics in the poem to check for accompanying Christian features. These three steps will be covered in this section.

Peace

The persona's worry while still in the "old man" condition of the first paragraph is the unredeemability of time. The past is closed and unalterable, the present imperfect since built on the mistakes of the past, and the future is bound to be similarly determined. These facts he can live with, but they fill him with constant though mild discontent.

Section II of "Burnt Norton" shows the persona immediately

after the garden experience. There are no indications of physical changes in his condition or surroundings that might lead to a changed attitude. Even clearer than before is the clash of opposites in both microcosm and macrocosm. Everything is in flux. And yet his attitude has changed completely. The last three lines of the lyric sum up this change of heart in the midst of unaltered motion:

...The boarhound and the boar
Pursue their pattern as before
But reconciled among the stars. ("Burnt Norton" II)

The persona is convinced that in the midst of change is order. There is a still point around which all revolves. That changes the apparent flux into pattern. He uses the image of the dance to explain it. A dance is motion patterned by design. He is convinced, then, of underlying harmony, and all his actions in the following sections are based on that assurance. He can, for example, "risk" a descent into darkness in order to gain the light and do it without real risk for it is an action--or passive response--made in confidence that all is ultimately well with him. In his attempt to describe the condition he uses the word "release":

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

"East Coker" is a descent into darkness for reasons that will arise in the following sub-section. The persona's sense of assurance does not desert him though he does find himself facing a great number of discouraging facts. The keenness of the oppression he knows yet does not know is evident in the beat of the lines of the first section's

middle paragraph, which ends in--

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

Unlike the lyric movement of "Burnt Norton" II, the "East Coker" lyric does not end in reconciliation but in destruction. "East Coker" III considers death and, worse still, empty lives that end in "Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury." Even in the face of emptiness his "loss of worry" has not become unsettled:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait
without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there
is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all
in the waiting.

It should be noted how the grammatical structure alters with "faith" and reaffirms it. The persona is still in the state of assurance. Moreover, the lines immediately following the above quotation offer strong reassurance. It is an echo of the garden ecstasy that shows itself to be--

Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
Of death and birth. ("East Coker" III)

Truth

Why should the ecstasy be "requiring"? Why would a man with the "willingness to be" risk his complacency by descending into the negative way? This brings us to a discussion of James' second point: perception of truths not known before.

"Burnt Norton" defines the truths that are known through religious experience:

...Both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror.
 ("Burnt Norton" II)

The passage mentions the partial or incomplete nature of the "old man's" viewpoint, but it should be stressed that the new knowledge is incomplete also. When he attempts to define his knowledge for himself soon after the experience he is at a loss for words:

I can only say, there we have been: but I
 cannot say where.
 And I cannot say, how long, for that is to
 place it in time. ("Burnt Norton" II)

It is as if he has seen a great truth in the middle of the night, but on awakening in the morning the detail is gone. Very little more than the assurance that there is a truth remains.

The hiddenness of the knowledge is a result of human nature and is not altogether a bad thing:

...The enchainment of past and future
 Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
 Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
 Which flesh cannot endure.
 Time past and time future
 Allow but little consciousness. ("Burnt Norton" II)

His first stirrings of consciousness, however, have brought a great hunger for more. It is this that leads him to take risks with the assurance he has. Though he cannot surpass the limits of his personal human sensitivity he longs for a greater clarity in the truth of which he is now aware. It is by a return to the experience that he will gain this clarity, and he knows that to gain consciousness he must operate within time despite the timelessness of his goal:

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. ("Burnt
 Norton" II)

He will therefore welcome darkness so that he may live closer to the experience he has had.

The rest of the poem shows him taking a new stance towards what he calls "time" or the "old world." He does so in order to make it and the "new world" more explicit:

We must be still and still moving
 Into another intensity
 For a further union, a deeper communion
 Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.
 ("East Coker" V)

Sprinkled throughout the poem are recollections or perhaps re-experiences of the rose-garden event. They are hints and guesses leading him to greater perception of the truths he knew in the garden but cannot quite identify:

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
 And approach to the meaning restores the
 experience
 In a different form, beyond any meaning
 We can assign to happiness. ("The Dry Salvages" II)

He realizes by the end of "East Coker" that what he knows is not a single event standing by itself but an eternal moment that takes up into itself all of time, including a man's "before" of youthful frolic and his "after" of quiet recreation:

...Not the intense moment
 Isolated, with no before and after,
 But a lifetime burning in every moment

And not the lifetime of one man only
 But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.
 There is a time for the evening under star-
 light,
 A time for the evening under lamplight.
 ("East Coker" V)

By the end of "The Dry Salvages" he has found the limits of his own sensitivity:

...To apprehend
 The point of intersection of the timeless
 With time, is an occupation for the saint....
 For most of us, there is only the unattended
 Moment, the moment in and out of time,
 The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of
 sunlight,
 The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
 Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
 That it is not heard at all, but you are the
 music
 While the music lasts. These are only hints
 and guesses,
 Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
 Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought
 and action. ("The Dry Salvages" V)

By the end of "Little Gidding" the perceived truth the religious experience has brought him has not been very well defined in terms that are linguistically analysable. Never in the poem does he list and itemize his knowledge. Nevertheless the last quartet presents throughout its total length an assurance and contentment that comes from satisfaction. There can be no mistaking the mood. Yet at the same time he specifically indicates that fulfilment is still in the future tense, for he says:

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

Definable truth is still in the future. For now it is more

or less hints and guesses, though well enough known to produce calm certitude that "all is ultimately well" with him and that all things are unified in "A condition of complete simplicity" ("Little Gidding" V). Moreover, the truth is irrevocably linked with two things: the rose-garden experience, and Christianity.

Christianity

The poem displays a loss of all worry and a perception of truths not known before, but are there accompanying Christian features? When "Burnt Norton" stood alone in 1936 at the end of Eliot's collected poems, it did not seem overtly Christian. It lacked the usual Christian vocabulary. Since the persona's religious experience is in "Burnt Norton," a case could be made for the rose-garden event not being distinctively Christian. Subsequent quartets became more and more explicit in their vocabulary and theology, but it could be argued still that the "state of assurance," as James called it, only developed into a distinctly Christian experience in the light of the tradition the persona turned to in his attempts to come to terms with what had happened. If Christianity were an appendix explaining the experience rather than an inherent part of the experience per se, it would be natural to find in the poem, as Richard Lea does, "less Christianity" than there had been in Murder in the Cathedral:

Is it possible that the level reached here is
beyond Christianity? A non-Christian mystic
can feel just as much at home here as a
Christian.⁵

William James certainly feels that the attributes of the experience itself are denominationally neutral. The experience can exist without distinctively Christian features though they may also accompany it.

"The Dry Salvages" presumably describes events quite some time after the rose-garden and it may not be a trustworthy measure of the earlier period. There the person does deny that his experience can be explained in non-sacramental terms. His "moments of happiness" are:

...Not the sense of well-being,
Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,
Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden
illumination. ("The Dry Salvages" II)

Later still he speaks of what the "sudden illumination" is:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood,
is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual. ("The Dry
Salvages" V)

"Burnt Norton" does not tell very much about what religious experiences are. The second section calls them a "grace" from outside, and towards the end of the quartet they are vaguely linked to "The Word in the desert," an obvious reference to Christ's forty days of temptation in the wilderness. Perhaps the connection between the experience and the temptation scene is the same as between the experience and the "figure of the ten stairs." A source of assurance may have been necessary for Jesus and for St. John of the Cross as he faced the negative way in hopes of being drawn to Love, the Unmoved Mover.

"East Coker" speaks of foolish old men fearing to belong to God. Then the persona adds,

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.
("East Coker" II)

Those lines, coming between two uses of the word "God," must be taken as sacramental. Then in Section III comes the "faith, hope, and love"

passage already quoted, an unmistakable reference to I Corinthians. Then the persona quotes a passage from St. John of the Cross, again describing the negative way. The tradition the person has in mind is becoming more and more closely defined. The lyric fourth section introduces a version of atonement. The Great Physician with "dripping blood" and "bloody flesh" can be none other than Jesus Christ. Before the poem is half over there can be no doubt about the poem's Christian roots.

None of these quotations proves the rose-garden event to be distinctly Christian. It is the initiating experience, and though it is open to debate whether it is Christian or pre-Christian all subsequent "hints and guesses" are considered by the persona to be sought for and found within the Christian context.

The fact that no necessary connection (whether logical implication or temporal succession) can be instanced in the poem to link the rose-garden scene itself with Christ or the Holy Spirit should not surprise the critic. It must be remembered that all four quartets came after Eliot's evangelical methods had adopted the technique of indirection. If in The Family Reunion secular dress was a means of keeping the audience unaware while they were receiving a partisan inoculation, perhaps in Four Quartets the Christian aspects are suppressed during the early pages as part of a flanking movement. Certainly in the light of the Christian viewpoint the rose-garden is full of Christian innuendo. The bird stands for the Holy Spirit, the first world Eden, the water in the pool the water of life, and the unseen eyebeam God himself walking in the garden.

All Manner of Things Shall Be Well

James has stated yet a third characteristic of the state of assurance:

The third peculiarity of the assurance state is the objective change which the world often appears to undergo. "An appearance of newness beautifies every object."⁶

There are three parts of the world that need investigation in this section: time and history, society, and nature. All three have previously suffered at Eliot's hand. Does the aftermath of religious experience show a change in his attitude?

History and Time

Four Quartets is a long and complex piece. Most studies have worked their way into the poem by concentrating on some single theme or technique. A few important points may be overlooked in the process, but it offers a means of organizing a vast store of impressions. One of the most commonly used themes in attacking the poem is the relations between time and timelessness, history and eternity. The poem has a great deal to say on the subject. For this thesis, which has taken religious experience as its way into the poem, the theme is important not only for its own sake but also because it illustrates James' third peculiarity of the state of assurance.

Eliot had been interested in history even in his earliest works. In 1920 he wrote:

By losing tradition, we lose our hold on the present.

Even as far back as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1911), he was alluding frequently. Allusion performs many functions, but one

is that it brings to mind an earlier age and sets it side by side with a new context. The quotation when used in that manner will call to mind the connection between time past and time present, a continuation that technology so often hides from view. The allusion also contrasts the past and present, usually to the detriment of the latter. It must not be assumed from that, though, that Eliot holds the historic past in high honour. To begin with, it is seldom the real past that he uses, but rather a literary construct out of past ages which his own mind has converted into an ideal. In the second place, there are times when the past fares no better than the present in the comparison. In the third place allusion to the past is usually more a matter of verbal economy than honouring dead masters. It is the sour aptness that comes across rather than high standards.

The first paragraph of "Burnt Norton" shows a similar distrust of time and history. The persona is unlike the early Eliot in his philosophic attitude and complete lack of biting wit. There is no doubt, though, that he is painting a bleak picture. Past mistakes have shaped the present, which in its turn will become a misshapen future. There is no redemption from this process except in the realm of idle speculation.

The persona's thoughts after leaving the garden are that time, as opposed to the eternity he has touched, allows but little consciousness. If that is a "protection" as "Burnt Norton" II says, it is also an "enchainment." Yet the temporal realm is where the struggle to rise above time must be made. Further thought brings the image of "the still point of the turning world" ("Burnt Norton" IV)

and the conviction that though time has buried the day, the point or the light is still there. By musical and verbal analogies he explains to himself his new view of the relation of time and eternity. In some way that excels memory and meaning, "All is always now."

"Burnt Norton" ends with the lines:

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after.

How that is to be interpreted is a problem. There is condescension as if the spaces of time between religious experiences do not really matter. That is hardly the sweet attitude towards the world one might wish to see flowing from religious experience. But it is also not the bitter attitude towards time one might have expected from an earlier Eliot. Instead the persona is talking of time as he would a well-loved dog too stupid to master the art of rolling over.

"East Coker" considers generation and decay, the cycle of time. Eliot quotes one of his own ancestors, Sir Thomas Elyot, and invokes the idea of natural man. In hypnotic metres he draws the reader into looking at man "keeping time," either in the rhythm of the dance or the living of the seasons. But by himself man is nothing and the scene decays into "Dung and death." Time cannot be kept. It inevitably points to another day. Therefore temporal knowledge, the wisdom of old men, is of no avail, and each man is left in the position of rediscovering what has been gained and lost times without number. As the closing section says, life under the sway of time is an endless "fight to recover what has been lost."

Again that is hardly the "appearance of newness that beautifies"

everything. It is a picture of hard labour. Yet even here there is no bitterness against time and the imperfections of history.

The closing section of "East Coker" begins a rehabilitation of the persona's attitudes. Though time continues to cover man's discoveries it is--

...Perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The
rest is not our business.

The sentiment may seem negative, but his tone is pensive rather than discouraged. He continues this thought by saying:

Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter.

This very much resembles the denigration of time and nature and society found in the Ash-Wednesday period.

"The Dry Salvages" goes a long way towards restoring the worth of time. The first section presents images of river and sea which are meant to show that the God who "is and was from the beginning" is in time. The second section places personal hope in the prayer of the one Annunciation:

Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me according to your word.⁸

Then towards the end of the quartet there is thrown in with a crash the one word, Incarnation. Incarnation is the moment in time when eternity enters. By it, as the poem declares, the impossible is made actual, and past and future are conquered and reconciled. Then even in death there is no despair, for our bodies will nourish "the life of significant soil."

"Little Gidding" has much to say on the acceptance of time, but it is only necessary to point out that from beginning to end the quartet pictures history as beautiful. The first section ends with the words,

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

If those words tend to stress that no one particular place or time is excluded from the intersection, these words from the final section stress the necessity of having a place and moment:

...A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is
a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light
fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

Time and history, in the light of the religious experience and the re-examination and redirection that follow, have taken on a strong and vibrant newness.

Society

Eliot's attitude to society, or at least his persona's attitude, undergoes changes resembling those of the previous section. If some dissatisfaction remains it is because there is no interpersonal contact. Society is respected from a distance, but people in ones and twos are avoided. In this section the greater space will be given to the positive changes in order to show that the garden scene has had influence. But first a few lines should be used to illustrate isolation of the personal level.

The whole of Four Quartets is written in a style that more

resembles meditation than communication. That builds a bias towards isolation. The passage of the poem that most resembles dialogue is the air-raid scene in "Little Gidding" II, and even there there is a sense of isolation. The passage, like the rest of the poem, completely lacks the sense of touch. Both the persona and the "first-met stranger" are wrapped in an aura of reserve. When commanded to speak, the stranger is "not eager" to do so. His reasons for reserve are these:

...Last season's fruit is eaten
And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty
pail.
For last year's words belong to last year's
language
And next year's words await another voice.

He seems to mean that because of constant change in people men can never know each other. They have changed since their parting and must meet as strangers. One treats them as they were, but that is social convention. "The Dry Salvages" III makes the same statement in different words:

...Time is no healer: the patient is no
longer here.
When the train starts...
You are not the same people who left that
station.
Or who will arrive at any terminus....
"Fare forward," you who think that you are
voyaging;
You are not those who saw the harbour
Receding, or those who will disembark.

There is just one other place in Four Quartets where a person to person encounter may be implied. That is the garden scene where "we" enter. If, as some critics argue, this is an allusion to a love occasion in Eliot's youth, it is a lost opportunity and shows no real communication.

Usually the persona's relations are with people in general. "East Coker" shows general man in a primitive festival, and the persona warns that we must not approach too close. The subway scene in "Burnt Norton" III sees men in the mass, and again there is no relation. They are no better than bits of paper whirled by the cold wind, and instead of meeting them the persona decides to--

Descend lower, descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude.

"The Dry Salvages" II has a passage that may be a beginning of fellow-feeling, though it falls far short of communion. The persona thinks of a cargo of dead negroes and is reminded of Adam's sin. Or he gains a sense of his own lostness in viewing the fishermen forever bailing. The lyric fourth section takes up the fishermen again and prays for "them": a characteristic and revealing third person pronoun.

One reason for the shyness the character shows towards society may be disgust at its imperfections. Does sanctification entail withdrawal from society? There is much in Four Quartets that would seem to say that.

"Burnt Norton" describes society as a "place of disaffection," a world turning in "appetency." In "East Coker" its vanity is illustrated by the field-mouse trotting across the sad remains of man's monuments. The third section goes down the social register and then declares society "cold" dead and without "motive of action." "The Dry Salvages" has its picture of anxious worried women trying to piece together a past which is "all deception" and a future which is "futureless."

There are, however, qualities shown in the latter half of the poem that would seem to indicate society is not beyond redemption. The end of "East Coker" concedes the worth of evening get-togethers over the photograph album. Moreover, as the pages pass the physical and metaphysical are more and more seen together. For example, the work of the fisherman in society is meaningless until it is seen in the light of Annunciation.

The two worlds coming together in "Little Gidding" II are society and purgatory. That implies not a damned society but one which, if it will accept the fire like Arnaut Daniel, can be purified. The concluding sections of the poem draw the conclusions purification implies: even though historically factioned and composed of incompatible ideas and people, society will still be united into a single party. Then, as with history,

...All shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well.
("Little Gidding" III)

Smidt's conclusions are these:

There is, then, a development in Eliot's poetry, as in his prose, from individualism by way of Christianity to a search for social unity and an acceptance of social obligations. But from an irreligious point of view he possibly appears to be as individualistic as ever. He tends to make Christianity a religion of spiritual discipline, and the social benefits which accrue from perfecting the individual in a life of disciplined devotion would obviously be doubted by the irreligious.

Such comments are hard to fault. The poem's quest for meaning in its earliest stages was away from society. The end, though, is an acceptance of society and its obligations. But with Eliot's inhibitions and

isolation his social conclusions may seem more a matter of intention than concrete reality. The state of assurance has led to a new vision of society though one not yet actualized in the persona's daily living.

Nature

When one stands back and takes a long, hard look at the poem, he must admit there is still much evidence of an imperfect world: There are still the various natural symbols of sterility that were in The Waste Land and still the reaching for the supranatural that was apparent in Ash-Wednesday.

We have already noted Rajan's remark that Eliot has made philosophic terms more solid than objects. The rose-garden scene is somehow unreal, and the subsequent lyric worse. When we come to the "still point" passage, which Rajan calls "the most concrete thing the poetry has produced,"¹⁰ the persona tells us the point is not of this world.

A number of innuendoes imply that material things are evil or at least inferior. Garlic and sapphires "clot" movement in the wheel. Compared with the freedom of the mystic moment is the physical--

Enchainment of past and future
Woven in the weakness of the changing
body. ("Burnt Norton" II)

The next section sees the hero declaring that the world moves in "appetency" and then abandoning the world for the negative way.

"East Coker" presents much the same picture. It confirms that the negative way is a way through disgust with the world to vacancy. Nature is seen in the rustic dance, at first as enchanting, later as

dung and death. Section III offers various images of the world, but all are transitory: the world is like stage scenery being rolled away; or like the nothingness of stopped conversation on a train.

"The Dry Salvages" also speaks of bondage, and "Little Gidding" tells us that to find midwinter spring we--

...Have to put off
Sense and notion. ("Little Gidding" I)

The first-met stranger speaks of "expiring sense" and "tastelessness."

All those and many other passages could be used as evidence that the persona of Four Quartets considers the world a poor place. But before concluding that his state of assurance has left nature untouched it is wise to look at further evidence.

In the first place, there are indications that it is not always the world in itself that is disliked but the social world when it is without God. And it has already been shown that the persona considers society recoverable.

In the second place, there are indications that at least some of the denigration is not disgust with nature but nature used to reflect self-chastisement over sin.

Thirdly, nature has been given many positive aspects in the poem. If one points out that "East Coker" II sees nature, the seasons, and the stars all pointing to a final destruction, he must remember also that "Burnt Norton" II has a final reconciliation among the stars. If the field-mouse trotting through the ruins shows reversion, it is also the kingfisher's wing that answers light to light and reveals

the numinous. In fact, wherever there is a numinal moment there is a connection with nature.

It must be admitted that many of the natural symbols in Four Quartets are no longer natural when they carry the supranatural. That is true of the bird in the garden, the garden itself, and also midwinter spring. At the touch of the supranatural nature tends to become phantasmagorical.

The truth of the matter probably is that the persona at the start of the poem had a tendency to despise and reject the world. But in this area also the poem shows development. There is a decreasing number of ~~slurs~~ against nature through the pages. "Burnt Norton" has many, "East Coker" quite a few. Thereafter the world takes on more and more positive qualities until in the end the fire and the rose are one. Gardner says of "The Dry Salvages",

For the first time in the Quartets, the natural imagery is used boldly and beautifully, and, as it were, for its own sake.

There are still indications that Eliot's opinions about nature are not all that they should be, but there is enough change from beginning to end to lead one to inferences about a strong cause. The cause is his experience. Because of it history, society, and nature--all manner of things--shall be made well.

Footnotes

¹ Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot (New York: McDowell Obolensky, 1959), p. 289.

² Matthiessen, p. 16.

³ B. Rajan, "The Unity of the Quartets," T. S. Eliot, The Study of His Writings by Several Hands, ed. B. Rajan (London: Dennis Dobson, Ltd., 1947), p. 82.

⁴ William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Longman's, Green, and Co., 1908), p. 248.

⁵ Richard Lea, Review of Four Quartets, by T. S. Eliot, in Adelphi, XXI (July/September, 1945), 187.

⁶ James, p. 248.

⁷ T. S. Eliot, "The Possibility of Poetic Drama," The Sacred Wood, p. 62.

⁸ Luke 1:38 (RSV).

⁹ Kristian Smidt, Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 209-10.

¹⁰ Rajan, p. 82.

¹¹ Gardner, p. 170.

CHAPTER XIII

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Indirection (1945-54)

The previous chapters have traced the evolution of Eliot's thought from the establishment of belief on through the implications of commitment. Ash-Wednesday brought its persona from wilfulness to humility and peace, but moved him in total isolation from his peers and looked askance at nature. Eliot's quarrel with nature seemed mended by 1933 when he began to write his "Landscapes," though flickers of unease continued through "Burnt Norton" (1936) and "East Coker" (1940). However, "The Dry Salvages" (1941) produced beautiful natural imagery, "for its own sake" as Gardner says; and "Little Gidding" confirmed the persona's acceptance of nature under God.

Temporal and historical aspersions were not pronounced in Ash-Wednesday, nor in any piece up to "Burnt Norton." Nevertheless, Murder in the Cathedral showed that Eliot was producing thoughts about their redemption. If history looked bleak, full of the murders of saints and oppression of godliness by secular powers, there was a second pattern present, a doubleness in the action by which history and time were bought and paid for at great price. Four Quartets was a deeper and broader exploration of the same problem. There the persona's conclusions showed complete acceptance of his temporal and historical being.

By the end of Four Quartets, then, the fragmentation problem

Eliot had been grappling with for over thirty years was well resolved, at least to his own satisfaction. But what of isolation? There is evidence that Eliot did not satisfy himself with any answer until his last work, The Elder Statesman.

It was shown in the previous chapter that Eliot's social resolutions up to the end of the Second World War were not as satisfactory as his temporal and natural integrations. There is evidence that Eliot at a very early stage believed that society could be redeemed. The question was, by what process? Both Murder in the Cathedral and The Family Reunion had shown a means of producing that redemption: the self-sacrifice of the saint on behalf of society and all mankind. Four Quartets produced the idea that society could be active as well as passive in the matter of its own salvation and could seek redemption in the fires of its purgatory.

Nevertheless the persona throughout the period remained distanced from society. Social integration was still lacking as Eliot began to write his last three plays, The Cocktail Party (1949), The Confidential Clerk (1954), and The Elder Statesman (1958). The social separation or integration they reveal will be the subject of this chapter. Indirection, caste, and isolation will be the topics examined before moving to any final resolution.

The Family Reunion in 1939 showed Eliot adopting the method of indirection in his evangelism. He tried to dress himself in secular fleece to infiltrate his unsuspecting audience and put the Christian bite on them. Though the idea did not succeed in that first contemporary play, it had not discouraged Eliot. He was to use the idea in succeeding plays.

The Cocktail Party is in the form of a comedy. The scene opens in a well-furnished drawing-room where a cocktail party is in progress.

Immediately the audience settles in for a light evening. Indeed, the tone can be interpreted as light all the way through except for the scene where Celia's death is announced. The treatment of Edward and Lavinia is in the form of high comedy, and there is subtle humour in the love quadrangle revealed in the psychiatrist's office. Even the doctor himself is an agent of comedy through his actions and choruses. All the cast, in fact, lead us to expect comedy. The setting adds to that conviction and to the audience's approbation, for it is familiar and homey, a far cry from the streets of Jerusalem or Thomas' Canterbury; and the psychiatrist's office has an association acceptable to their everyday outlook on life. The same can be said for the family life of Edward and Lavinia, and for the information given about the family and social lives of all the cast. All is natural, familiar, and realistic--up to a point. Even when that point is passed, the audience is sufficiently settled to consider the excess a part of the comedy. Thus Julia, Alex, and Reilly can take on seemingly superhuman insight and still be thought of as silly, the party bore, and the uninhibited head-shrinker. The audience is capable of putting off viewing the supranatural and sees only the natural until Eliot is ready to wrap the net of Christianity around them.

Professor Wimsatt accuses Eliot of being unnecessarily gruesome in presenting the idea of Celia being crucified near an ant-hill. His accusation rests upon the, for Eliot, false premise that the play was meant to be a comedy of manners throughout. Comedy in The Cocktail Party is not an end in itself but is rather a means of keeping the audience occupied while it is being fed large quantities of spiritual food. With the end of the play in sight it is possible that some spectators are still conscious of the natural level only, and Eliot is using the crucifixion sensationalism to assure himself that no one could rest content seeing only the comedy. He purposely

destroys the comedy to enhance the play's supranatural level. Whether he was wise to do so is rather doubtful.

There were changes made in the technique of indirection between 1939 and 1949. That would be expected from a comment Eliot made shortly after The Cocktail Party opened:

Everything should be an experiment to the extent that it should not be a repetition of what one has done before, and that it should give one hints on what to attempt and what to avoid in the future.²

The novelty of the 1949 play is the double level in the indirection. The playwright is practicing indirection on the audience, and the actors are using it as a means of evangelizing each other. All three Guardians wear disguises and are, in effect, little Eliots running around their stage world applying the method. To the rest of the cast Julia appears to be a nosey old woman, Alex is the party bore, and Reilly is first the gin-swilling stranger and later the odd doctor. There are hints given quite early that the threesome are not as innocent as they appear. There is the episode with the telegrams, Peter's description of Alex knowing everyone everywhere and of Julia: "You never miss anything."³ The other characters intuit that the Guardians are in disguise but feel that the undercurrents are diabolic. Three times Celia calls Reilly "the Devil," and Lavinia agrees. Edward asks,

What devil left the door on the latch
For these doubts to enter? (p. 102)

and the audience recalls that it was Reilly who arranged Lavinia's return. Lavinia calls Julia a devil; and Edward, hearing a noise in the kitchen, asks, "What the devil's that?"--only to find it is Julia. Reilly plays the devil's advocate, tempting Edward to forget his wife, and Edward's reply is, "Get behind me, Satan." Moreover, Reilly drinks gin, the devil's

drink. The audience is soon allowed behind the disguises of the Guardians and spends the rest of the play on the "inside" of the situation. It laughs at the various characters being manipulated by the Guardians while all the time the audience is being manipulated by the playwright in a similar manner.

Is indirection a valid tool for a Christian writer? It does involve deception. There are a number of places in the Bible where deception is used to gain desired ends. ⁴ In I Samuel 27, David, a refugee in Philistia, deceived his patron, king Achish. He pretended to attack Israel while all the time raiding Achish's allies. The spoils he presented to the king:

And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself utterly abhorred by his people Israel; therefore he shall be my servant always."

There are a large number of deception stories in the Old Testament, but some in the New also. Jesus had met threatening opposition in Judea and retreated to the safety of Galilee. But a religious feast was approaching and his brothers urged him to go up to Jerusalem in Judea:

"...For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly...." Jesus said to them, "...Go up to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to the feast, for my time has not yet fully come." So saying, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.

(John 7:4-10. RSV)

The argument seems to be that when the purpose can be defined as godly the end justifies the means. Particularly when the godly side is weaker deception is justifiable. The Scottish reformers used that kind of reasoning against the pope and the English kings, and the English Puritans used it as they removed the head of Charles I and sent James II packing.

To a man of catholic and royalist leanings like Eliot, history should have made him doubtful. The justification of indirection implies the arrogant assumption of standing with the angels and the doubtful moral judgment that right ends make means right.

Indirection is questionable for a second reason. It is obvious to the audience that the Guardians are leading the other characters by the nose. Those characters are belittled in the process. They seem sub-human because they are used and are not allowed to exercise free choice. A mature observer will see that the playwright is doing the same thing to the audience and, even should it be skilfully handled (which it is not), that observer would resent being treated in such a manner. A writer cannot afford to slight his audience.

Eliot may have had doubts about the effectiveness or else about the intrinsic worth of his technique, for in The Confidential Clerk it is far less prominent. In the first place, the Christian "moral" does not compel him to destroy the comedy the way he had five years previously. In the second place, the play does not demand a Christian interpretation with the power one would expect of indirection. Whether these two modifications affect the evangelistic qualities adversely is another question.

The characters are still using devious means on each other. The conscious Christian, Eggerston, goes along with Sir Claude's deceptions but does not initiate the indirection. The end of the play brings all deceptions into the open and, it could be said, punishes the deceivers. That is a great change from The Cocktail Party where the Chamberlaynes, victims of deception, moved into the future as deceivers.

Caste (1945-54)

Chapter XI began a discussion of caste in Eliot's later work. The matter did not arise in Four Quartets except to one reference to saints on the one hand and "most of us" on the other. There, whatever Eliot's opinions of saintly duties might be, he was placing himself in the other category. The three-fold division of characters into sensitive, semi-sensitive, and insensitive disappeared after The Family Reunion, and The Cocktail Party follows Four Quartets into a division between saints and "most of us."

Celia is on the highest plane of sensitivity. She is brought to the point of awareness of isolation and sin through the crash of her hopes and she is brought to full consciousness through the guidance of the Guardians. Eliot does little more than in The Family Reunion to describe the path of sainthood. A few facts are offered: a nursing order, a very austere one, in Kinkanja with a handful of natives, where she is crucified near an ant-hill. But the real facts are hidden:

...Such experience can only be hinted at
In myths and images. To speak about it
We talk of darkness, labyrinths, Minotaur terrors.
(p. 180)

So it had been with Harry also.

The effects of sanctity are a second matter. Thomas' death seemed to have two purposes: expiatory and exemplificatory. Harry set no examples, changed no minds, but did go off to expiate his family's curse. Celia's death seems to have led mainly to guilt feelings though there is indication of something more. News of her death has made the others aware of their past in a new way and, as Reilly says,

...Only by acceptance
Of the past will you alter its meaning. (p. 182)

It is soon after that lesson that the group disperses for their various

evangelistic assignments.

There is still a spiritual gap between the elite and the commoner. The Guardians are semi-sensitive and possess only half sight despite the mystery that cloaks them. Julia cannot see without her glasses, and one lens is missing. Reilly is similarly afflicted if he is singing about himself in the "One Eyed Reilly." They talk of accepting their own limitations and confess that they do not know--

...The process by which the human is
Transhumanised: what do we know
Of the kind of suffering they must undergo
On the way to illumination? (p. 147)

They are the Guardians who have taken on Agatha's job of raising others to consciousness, but their shortcomings are more evident.

It would seem that Edward and Lavinia are much more than the chorus of uncles and aunts in The Family Reunion. Though they begin in total unconsciousness, by the end of the play their role seems to be that of newly initiated Guardians. Reilly, though, has doubts about the worth of their "most-of-us" Christian semi-sensitivity. He says of the Chamberlaynes,

...What have they to go back to?
To the stale food mouldering in the larder,
The stale thoughts mouldering in their minds.
Each unable to disguise his own meanness
From himself, because it is known to the other.
(p. 145)

Mouldy food is a long descent from the garden scene of "Burnt Norton."

Nevertheless the Chamberlaynes lack not only that experience but interpersonal relations, for Reilly sees them as--

Two people who know they do not understand
each other,
Breeding children whom they do not understand
And who will never understand them. (p. 139)

Perhaps with both the experience in the garden and the experience of human

relationship it is not so much lack he is describing as faded vision:

...They may remember
The vision they have had, but they cease
to regret it,
Maintain themselves by the common routine,
Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
Become tolerant of themselves and others,
Giving and taking, in the usual actions
What there is to give and take. (p. 139)

Reilly calls it a "good life," but the description fills no one with ecstasy.

The barriers between Celia's way and the other way are as strong as ever.

Colby is the sensitive hero in The Confidential Clerk. His isolation is little different than that of his predecessors. There are a few indications that his is imposed by circumstances rather than by his calling. Colby's fertilization of the lives of others through his saintliness is left completely vague.

The distance between semi-sensitives and sensitives is greatly diminished in this play. The semi-sensitives are much more aware. If Eggerson and Colby have "secret gardens," so has Sir Claude in his pottery. Sir Claude may be comparing full and semi-sensitivity when he says, concerning the garden and the world,

I dare say truly religious people--
I've never known any--can find some unity....
There are others, it seems to me, who have at
best to live
In two worlds--each a kind of make-believe.
That's you and me.

If Sir Claude is representative, it may be that semi-sensitives are really sensitives who have resisted growth and thereby blighted themselves. Sir Claude turned his back on his pottery in favour of high finance. His situation would seem to be Eliot's image for giving part of life to God and part to the world. Colby says of the idea,

...Something in me
Rebels against accepting such conditions. (p. 42)

He will not thwart his religious drives and will proceed to full sensitivity even though it may mean a position as second-grade organist in a backward parish. Compared with earlier heroes his destiny is extremely deflated.

The result of the saint's diminished destiny and the raised status of semi-sensitivity is that it is difficult to tell them apart. Eggerson could be either. It would seem, then, that by 1954 caste was a dying concept in Eliot.

Isolation (1945-54)

It would be difficult to point out one theme dominant for all Eliot's work, but isolation would rank as a likely choice. He attempted to solve it from time to time, but as often he treated it as an immovable object in the path of life. The Cocktail Party gives as full a picture of his views on isolation as any work he attempted. It is particularly clear in its descriptions of the barriers to communication.

When "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was discussed in an earlier chapter, five barriers to communication were mentioned. Some seemed to be Prufrock's own idiosyncrasies written overly large, but all could apply to everyman.

Prufrock's indirection was a defence mechanism established to avoid pain. It left him unable to face anybody squarely. Eliot himself in the contemporary plays and even his characters in The Cocktail Party have adopted indirection as a technique of evangelism. It amounts to consciously hiding one's purposes and adopting devious means of reaching them. If the purpose does become known in the end, it is doubtful that the method aids communication between people. In the first place, it keeps

the agent's aims and desires under wraps for a time, hardly a good means of interpersonal communication; and in the second place it subjects the agent and recipient to the message: whether one is known by another is secondary to whether the message is accepted. The theological difficulty here is that according to Christianity a person is the message.

Self-image was the second barrier in Prufrock. He was both self-conscious and afraid of ending in a worse position. Therefore he acted with cautious conservatism if he acted at all. His view of himself decreed that he was not worth knowing, and his view of the world showed he was threatened. By 1949 Eliot had redefined the boundaries of this problem and was more interested in "self-deception":

My patients such as you are the self-deceivers
Taking infinite pains, exhausting their energy,
Yet never quite successful. (p. 119)

Edward imagines himself in love with Celia, as does Lavinia with Peter. Peter imagines himself capable of renovating the theatre and believes he has a common understanding with Celia. Not one is dealing with reality. For example, Celia has created an image of Edward that explains his fear of breaking with Lavinia. Her "projection" is that either he is avoiding the unpleasant, or surrendering to fatigue, or it is a question of vanity. But her images are not the real Edward. She is deceiving herself, has a solution for all the projections, but can do nothing about the real thing. When nothing works she decides he must be mad: yet another projection.

Prufrock's indecisiveness was part of the larger problem of change. If Prufrock could not make up his mind because he never knew it, how much less can he know or be known by another, especially in the light of the fact that both are always changing. By the time one's eyes are focused on another, he has moved again. In Reilly's words,

...We die to each other daily.
 What we know of other people
 Is only our memory of the moments
 During which we knew them. And they have
 changed since then.
 To pretend that they and we are the same
 Is a useful and convenient social convention
 Which must sometimes be broken. We must also
 remember
 That at every meeting we are meeting a stranger.
 (pp. 72-73)

The fourth barrier is masking. It played a part in Prufrock when he put on a face to meet the other faces. Indirection is the utilitarian twist Eliot has given the barrier in The Cocktail Party; Reilly, Alex, and Julia are masked in the presence of the other personae in order to carry on their work of psycho-evangelism.

The final barrier in the 1911 poem was role imposition. This barrier resembles self-deception in that an image is projected on others, but it differs in that the action is imposed, so that the projection becomes the real and the other person loses his independence. Prufrock's self was weak, and he conformed easily to the demands of society. In The Cocktail Party the only roles successfully imposed are by the Guardians. Reilly says of Celia,

When I first met Miss Coplestone, in this room,
 I saw the image, standing behind her chair,
 Of a Celia Coplestone whose face showed the
 astonishment
 Of the first five minutes after a violent
 death....
 ...So all that I could do
 Was to direct her in the way of preparation. (p. 179)

The unconscious characters on several occasions attempt role imposition, but always without success:

Edward, if I go now,
 Will you assure me that everything is right,
 That you do not mean to have Lavinia back
 And that you do mean to gain your freedom,
 And that everything is all right between us? (p. 62)

Edward will not give the assurance though he is "very grateful."

These barriers can teach several things about Eliot's 1949 opinions of personal relations. In the first place, it is Reilly who speaks of constant change in people as a barrier to communication. He is the most authoritative persona in the play and is probably speaking for Eliot at that point. It is a pessimistic view of the possibilities of an I-Thou relationship.

The tool of indirection that Eliot uses implies a resignation to lack of communication. Accept the situation, he seems to say, and use the barrier if you can. Yet that may be an oversimplification. His use of indirection may be the result of undervaluation of personal communication. The Guardians do seem able to remove their masks. At such times they are no longer self-assured and mysterious forces, but very unsure people in need of mutual support.

If we add to the fact that indirection and masking may be put off, apparently at will, the fact that role imposition can be overcome, it would seem that communication should be more possible in Eliot's 1949 view than it had been decades earlier.

Yet the interpersonal relationships of the play do not have a fairytale ending. Edward and Lavinia must "make the best of a bad job," and Reilly states:

The best of a bad job is all any of us make of it--
Except of course, the saints. (p. 126)

But the saints die lonely too. Like Prufrock, the Chamberlaynes and Celia have had some sort of vision. Celia accepts the vision and its apparently necessary isolation, whereas the others have resolved the problem the vision presents by giving it up and returning to the "real" world's isolation.

Perhaps masking is more comfortable than baring one's soul, or perhaps it is less difficult. Certainly the play shows that when a character is undeceived of one self-deception he tends to project another. The Cocktail Party, in summary, seems to see two sides of communication. There is the physical difficulty in reaching it, but there is also the belief that it is not a very high good, that it is something to be used or abandoned in the interests of a sanctified goal or a "Christian conspiracy."

In The Cocktail Party the emphasis was on the difficulties of contact. In The Confidential Clerk the emphasis is on the need to try. By constant effort interpersonal relations can be established and maintained.

For such to happen the self-created barriers must fall. Indirection is not a prominent theme in the 1954 play, though Sir Claude does practice it on his wife. By the end of the play its presence in the characters has completely disappeared.

Masking, another self-created barrier, is revealed in the Colby-Lucasta scene:

The first time we met
 You were trying very hard to give
 a false impression....
 ...For some reason,
 You thought I'd get a false impression anyway.
 You preferred it to be one of your own
 creation
 Rather than wait to see what happened. (p. 49)

Slowly Lucasta's mask slips away and she reveals her soul, only to be hurt because Colby cannot yet reveal himself to her. At the end of the play a similar unmasking occurs between the Mulhammers, but this one is mutual, successful, and communion is established.

Lady Elizabeth is accused of role imposition, the third self-inflicted or at least self-remedied barrier. Lucasta tells her,

B. knows you think him common. And so he pretends
 To be very common, because he knows you think so.
You gave us our parts. And we've shown that we can
 play them. (p. 100)

Colby has lived under role imposition too. He willingly follows Sir Claude as long as he thinks him his father. Once the truth is learned he throws off the role and follows his true Father.

In order for complete communion to be possible more than honesty is required. The physical barriers raised by the earlier play would have to crumble. Movement would have to be from projection to reality rather than to a new projection, and constant change must somehow be thwarted.

Constant change in people has taken on a new dress in this play:

...There's no end to understanding a person.
 All one can do is to understand them better,
 To keep up with them; so that as the other changes
 You can understand the change as soon as it happens,
 Though you couldn't have predicted it. (p. 55)

This seems to deny Eliot's earlier stands. By this statement, communication is possible if one works at it.

Self-deception also crumbles. At the start of the play Lady Elizabeth is in a state of self-deception: "She has always lived in a world of make-believe" (p. 36), which has in it such things as mind control, health cures, and dervish dancing. Toward the end of the play she has turned about:

Dervish dancing!
 Really, Claude, how absurd you are! (p. 90)

Sir Claude and Colby have also thrown off self-deception, for Colby says,

You've become a man without illusions
 About himself, and without ambitions.
 Now that I've abandoned my illusions and
 ambitions
 All that's left is love. (pp. 130-31)

Colby's speech would be much more satisfying to the audience if it were convinced that there is love in the play. All five barriers may

hypothetically have fallen and the condition of love let in, but there is something cold and impersonal about the whole play. Colby, the hero, is the worst of all. With a great deal of truth he is told,

...You're either above caring,
Or else you're insensible--I don't
mean insensitive!
But you're terribly cold. Or else
you've some fire
To warm you, that isn't the same kind
of fire
That warms other people. You're either
an egotist
Or something so different from the rest
of us
That we can't judge you. (p. 102)

When characters discuss him among themselves it is the same thing:

...He's undependable. He has his own world,
And he might vanish into it at any moment--
At just the moment when you needed him most!
And he doesn't depend upon other people, either. (p. 99)

It is not hard to detect the lingering signs of both indirection and caste in that speech, but also easy to see Colby's solitary nature.

For Colby to be the most isolated persona, and the most repulsive in the process, is interesting. In Eliot's indirection concept, which he first adopted when he came to write contemporary drama, Colby would be the sensitive hero whom the audience is to emulate. What becomes evident to the audience during this play is not a new warm and attractive vision of Christianity but the same cold vision that has repulsed them from childhood. As evangelism the play is a dead loss, even worse than The Cocktail Party. Eliot, like all the characters here, may have a heart of gold and good intentions, but he cannot describe an interpersonal communication.

The Elder Statesman (1958)

By the time Eliot came to write his last play he had been on a fifty year quest to solve a number of personal problems. Most he had solved

to his own satisfaction, but one seems to have been harder to solve than the others: his isolation. Sean Lucy puts it this way:

His poetry is the poetry of isolation of the single soul, and very rarely do personal human relationships figure in it. It is a poetry which is almost always remote from the more ordinary human emotions, and such emotions, when they are treated of, are viewed by someone standing apart from the action and viewing it coolly.

There is evidence in all four contemporary plays up to 1954 that isolation was linked to Eliot's religious convictions. In The Family Reunion the meeting of soul and soul was denied (with the possible exception of the Harry-Agatha scene), and the loneliness that lack of communion involved was presumably soothed by communion with God. The Cocktail Party showed all human relationships to be pseudo-personal and again that led to supranatural satisfaction. In The Confidential Clerk there was a change. There there were interpersonal relationships though they were difficult to achieve and maintain. What little of it Eliot was able to demonstrate was to act as model in the social world for the better communion with God. Still, Colby goes his lonely way. If the audience could not grasp the better way and could not see Colby's happy ending it was because they were not given much more than a glimpse of a higher way.

The four plays showed a constant improvement in interpersonal relationships and, a steady regression in the mechanics of indirection. The characters came closer together but the supranatural level became more and more hidden. Perhaps the two movements are involved.

As Eliot's final play, The Elder Statesman, opens the audience is introduced to Charles and Monica, an almost engaged couple whose interpersonal relations have, to some extent, barriers separating them. The first barrier is masking. Charles is afraid to reveal himself for fear of being rejected.

While he would gain something valuable in communion with Monica, he might also be left in the same position as Lucasta had been in the previous play. Unwilling to admit to himself the real reason for not attempting communication he makes excuses: "How can one talk on a shopping expedition?"⁸ Thus there is self-deception present. A third barrier exists:

...Your father simply can't bear it
That any man but he should have you to
himself. (p. 11)

The elder statesman, Monica's father, is imposing the role of loyal daughter on Monica. Until that role imposition is destroyed there will be a barrier keeping her away from Charles. The ceaseless change in people that prevents communion is almost entirely missing in this play.

As the scene unfolds the barriers begin to fall. Charles finally gains the courage to speak and Monica senses the difference:

How did this come, Charles? It crept so softly
On silent feet, and stood behind my back
Quietly, a long time, a long long time
Before I felt its presence. (p. 13)

Encounter has become a reality, and the words "I and you...are different." Along with the masking, the self-deception has departed.

The other barrier remains beyond the opening scene. Monica's father still stands in the way. It is the resolution of that final barrier and the felling of the walls with which the old man surrounds himself that makes up the dramatic action at its most obvious level. Yet when the resolution finally comes, Charles and Monica and even her father are in close communion. Since in The Confidential Clerk it was the drabness of interpersonal relations that caused the audience to look to the sacramental, the change is remarkable. Human contact here is neither non-existent nor drab, but strong and beautiful and complete in itself.

The completeness of the vision says a great deal about indirection.

Unlike the earlier plays there is no lack to draw the mind to a higher completion. There are no hidden triggers to fling the observer into the supranatural. It is as if for the first time Eliot could bring himself to trust God's messages to take care of themselves.

That is not to say Christian content is absent. There are references like "piece of silver" and "liturgy," a quotation from Mark 9:44, and a number of overtones especially in Lord Claverton's speeches. This speech by Monica seems an explicit link between the human love she has experienced and divine love:

...There's no vocabulary.
For love within a family, love that's
lived in
But not looked at, love within the light
of which
All else is seen, the love within which
All other love finds speech. (pp. 71-72)

The parallels are still clearer here:

Age and decrepitude can have no terrors for me,
Loss and vicissitude cannot appal me,
Not even death can dismay or amaze me.
Fixed in the certainty of love unchanging. (p. 108)

Christian references are present, but they do not push or trap or hound.

Until The Elder Statesman Eliot's approach had been to point to the imperfections of the world, the lack of communication and the isolation. When he had established the misery he presented the alternative: God. That approach implied total disjunction between God and the world. There seemed nothing left of the image of God in man. If the world were fair and if men were not in isolation the approach would be suspect, but if the approach were correct it would be necessary to turn one's back on society and walk off into the desert. That Eliot's personae did with great consistency, and sometimes they forgot their neighbour in their rush to get away.

The Elder Statesman brings the Eliot reader into the world. Soul meets soul there, and people live happy lives. It would seem that Eliot's emotional centre had shifted from desires of escape to thanksgiving. His characters rejoice in creation, help others who need help, and bring them to share their joy. Monica and Charles will marry. No other Eliot character with full or acceptable sensitivity has. And they will work and hope for Michael's return home. Eliot has discovered that the good of the world can bring man to God just as easily as the misshapen can.

It was a long journey for Eliot to this final ending. From his first mature poem to this last play was fifty years, and the whole time he spent searching. Fifty years is a long time to write a resolution, but the collected works of few authors can claim a more satisfying ending. That it is, in relation to the movement of the collected poems and plays, poetically appropriate is true. Through The Elder Statesman his works make "A complete consort dancing together."

But secondly, it is even more obvious that the mind which was searching has found its answers. The play is more than a successful resolution, as the dedication to his wife shows. It is a happy ending.

Where would Eliot have gone had he written more? The Elder Statesman marks a climax in his personal quest and brings his art to a resolution. But it also implies a whole new venture; for it leaves unstudied the implications, artistic more than personal, of his love discovery. The end of the play leaves him in a position analogous to that of 1930. Eliot's belief, so obvious in Ash-Wednesday, had to percolate through his whole life and affect the natural, social, and historical levels of his viewpoint. Similarly, the artistic implications of his realization of human love need exploration. All his Christian works up to this last play had stressed

St. John's negative way. Now that play asserts the positive. What doors that closes and what possibilities it offers are still unknown quantities, but his stress on human love seems to have produced two fundamental changes. The first is in the intellectual content. Allusion, myth, and indirection made Eliot's work intellectually powerful. But these tools are well buried in The Elder Statesman; so the intellectual stimulus they provide is not there. That means the audience interest is thrown more onto the plane of physical drama. And there is the second change: the action is slight. The play lacks the dramatic interest of his earlier works. Whether such things as intellect and dramatic complication are redeemable in the light of love's simplicity and honesty is beyond the play in the same way as the possibility of rain lay beyond the close of The Waste Land.

Footnotes

¹ W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., "Arts and Letters: Eliot's Comedy," The Sewanee Review, LVIII (Autumn, 1950), 667.

² T. S. Eliot and Iain Hamilton, "Comments on T. S. Eliot's New Play, The Cocktail Party," World Review, IX (November, 1949), 21.

³ T. S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1958), p. 11. Subsequent references will be to that edition.

⁴ I am indebted to Professor Robert Culley and Dean George Johnston for much of what follows. Professor Culley, on January 24, 1974, presented a paper, "Structural Analysis of Biblical Narrative: An Example," to the Doktorclub of McGill University's Faculty of Religious Studies. He analysed the structure of a group of six "deception stories" from the Old Testament. In the discussion that followed, the dean suggested the New Testament parallel and raised the ethical and historical questions behind such deception.

⁵ T. S. Eliot, The Confidential Clerk (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 42. Subsequent references will be to that edition.

⁶ David E. Jones, The Plays of T. S. Eliot (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 152.

⁷ Sean Lucy, T. S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition (London: Cohen and West, 1960), p. 143.

⁸ T. S. Eliot, The Elder Statesman (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 11. All subsequent references will be to that edition.

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