Durham University

Durham E-Theses

Christian doctrine in the poetry of T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden: an investigation of the religious ideas of these writers in relation to modern sensibility

B. L. Horne

How to cite:

Horne, B. L. (1967) Christian doctrine in the poetry of T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden: an investigation of the religious ideas of these writers in relation to modern sensibility. Masters thesis, Durham University.

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/10040/ is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the full Durham E-Theses policy for further details.

Academic Support Office, The Palatine Centre, Durham University, Stockton Road, Durham, DH1 3LE
e-mail: e-theses.admin@durham.ac.uk Tel: +44 0191 334 6107
https://etheses.durham.ac.uk

U N I V E R S I T Y O F D U R H A M

Christian Doctrine in the poetry of T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden.

An investigation of the religious ideas of these writers in relation to modern sensibility.

A thesis submitted by

BRIAN LAWRENCE HORNE

for the Degree of

MASTER OF LETTERS

JULY 1967

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis investigates the differing ways in which the Christian religion finds expression in the poetry of two modern, avowedly Christian, poets. The discussion centres upon the ways in which the two cardinal Christian doctrines - Incarnation and Atonement - are apprehended, and examines the distinctive relation each poet bears to the religious sensibility of the twentieth century. Auden's understanding of the Christian vision of life and his grasp on the essential connection between the fundamental doctrines prove, on close comparative examination, to be fuller and surer than Eliot's.

The first two chapters deal with the relation between religious and artistic values - primarily in the nineteenth century: the background against which the theological and poetic developments of the present century must be understood. The following three chapters trace in Eliot's poetry his changing attitudes to man's condition and his destiny. Because of a distinctive preoccupation with metaphysical problems of Time and Reality, the Christian beliefs of the later poetry revolve around the single doctrine of the Incarnation by which Eternal and Temporal, Supernatural and Natural are

united. Chapter Six briefly examines the plays, in which a largely unsuccessful attempt is made at conveying the meaning of sin and atonement.

By contrast, Auden's work, even in its early stages, shows a concern with the immediate human experience of self-contradiction and guilt, conflict and suffering. Consequently his Christian faith is characterised by an emphasis on the transformation of this condition by the sacrificial act known as the Atonement. Nonetheless, the absolute interdependence of Atonement and Incarnation is clearly expressed, so that Auden's work, though frequently inferior, poetically, to Eliot's, at times embodies the Christian vision with a fullness that Eliot's never achieved.

The concluding chapter outlines current theological trends and the ways in which the two poets reflect the distinctive sensibility of the present century.

CONTENTS

		Page
ABSTRACT OF THESIS		2
INTRODUCTION	A note on 'sensibility'	6
CHAPTER I	Significant aspects of the theological and literary background of the nineteenth century	11
CHAPTER II	T. S. Eliot. The American Background	38
CHAPTER III	T. S. Eliot and the philosophical attitudes of T. E. Hulme	51
CHAPTER IV	Eliot's Poetry. (1) *1909 - 1917*, *Poems 1920*	68
CHAPTER V	Eliot's Poetry. (2) *Fragments of an Agon*	102
CHAPTER VI	Eliot's Poetry. (3) *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*	118
CHAPTER VII	Eliot's Poetic Drama	163
CHAPTER VIII	Introduction to the work of W. H. Auden	209

		Page
CHAPTER IX	Auden's Poetry. (1) From Poems 1930 to Another Time	218
CHAPTER X	Auden's Poetry. (2) New Year Letter and For the Time Being	259
CHAPTER XI	Auden's Poetry. (3) From The Age of Anxiety to About the House	293
CHAPTER XII	The character of twentieth century theology and the relation of Eliot's and Auden's work to this pattern of religious sensibility	347
BIBLIOGRAPHY		389

INTRODUCTION

A note on 'sensibility'

Before the attempt at examining the religious ideas of Eliot and Auden is made, it will be necessary to give a clear indication of what the word 'sensibility' is intended to convey throughout this study. It has become a difficult word to use, not merely because it has largely passed out of common speech, but because of the numerous and diverse associations with which it has become encrusted. Most standard English dictionaries allow for at least four interpretations, but only two will be employed here. These are the literal and obvious meaning: 'power of sensation or perception' and the more literary and subtle: 'emotional consciousness'[1]. No use of 'sensibility' which disregarded the literal sense could be accepted as legitimate, but it is the second definition that, with slight modifications, will receive the stronger emphasis. Modification is required because the phrase 'emotional consciousness' suggests primarily the

---

(1) The Oxford English Dictionary. Vol. 22 (1933)

state of a single individual human being. Throughout this study the word's application will be extended to cover the feelings and perceptions of a whole collection of individuals - as in the expression 'modern sensibility'[1]. That such a thing as a 'modern' sensibility, particularly in religious matters, actually exists has yet to be established, the concern at the moment is with grammatical legitimacy. This can hardly be denied as long as similar analogical extensions ('belief', 'feeling', 'outlook' - all words with an initially personal and individual frame of reference) can be allowed.

Consequently 'sensibility' will be used to denote not merely the power or ability to feel and perceive, but already-constituted structures of feeling and perception. It will have two closely-connected levels of meaning and will operate in much the same way as the word 'conscience' operates. In the case of 'conscience' the commonly-accepted modern definition as 'the faculty or principle which pronounces upon the moral quality of ones motives or actions'[2] barely hints at an ambivalence which is taken

---

(1) This is not an idiosyncratic use. T.S. Eliot makes use of a similar 'extension' in his essay Culture Forces in the Human Order. See Prospect for Christendom edited by Maurice B. Reckitt.

(2) A New English Dictionary. Vol. VIII (1914)

for granted. Moral theologians discern two elements in every activity which involves conscience. There is, first, the possession of a whole system of beliefs and principles without which no moral judgment can be made, (SYNDERESIS) and, secondly, the power to make decisions by applying general principles in particular cases (CONSCIENTIA). Similarly 'sensibility' can be seen to consist of both the structures of thought and feeling and the ability to think and feel and perceive. The constant interaction between the two levels is taken for granted.

Perhaps the implications will become clearer by example than by definition. When, in a somewhat ungrammatical footnote to his essay Religion and the Muses, David Jones writes that

> A painting by someone of the English Pre-Raphaelites has not the same 'look' as a painting by those Italians before Raphael which the Pre-Raphaelites sought to emulate[1]

he is remarking on a change in cultural 'sensibility'. No amount of technical imitation on the part of Rosetti or Holman Hunt could produce the same effect as paintings by Ghirlandaio or Perugino because the artists could not escape the ways of thinking and feeling peculiar to their own ages. Whatever the Victorian may have believed about the Middle Ages, the fact remains that fifteenth century

---

(1) Epoch and Artist, p. 104 n.

Italy was a far cry from nineteenth century England, and the religion of the Victorian world was utterly different, and, in some respects, opposed to that of pre-Reformation Europe. In this particular case, it is in the expression of a specifically religious sensibility that the pre-Raphaelites differ radically from the late Medieval painters whose style they so much admired.

The most celebrated use of the word 'sensibility' in the twentieth century is probably to be found in T.S. Eliot's phrase 'dissociation of sensibility'[1]. It might be argued that Eliot is referring to the simple 'power of perception', but an earlier phrase in the same essay makes it clear that he is not.

> a thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility[2].

The 'modification' of the sensibility is analogous to the 'education' of the conscience in which the existing body of beliefs is altered. Eliot is thus referring not merely to Donne's capacity to feel and think: to an organ or faculty, but also to his 'outlook': the structure of his thoughts and feelings. When he wishes to denote the former he uses the phrase 'mechanism of sensibility'[3].

---

(1) 'The Metaphysical Poets'. Selected Essays, p. 288.

(2) Ibid., p. 287.

(3) Ibid., p. 287.

Modern religious sensibility is then to be understood as a phrase which refers to the peculiar structures of thought and feeling which govern the religious attitudes, of men primarily in the twentieth century. And it is to these structures whose outlines have been formed by the complicated interaction of the continuing life and teaching of the Christian Church and the particular historical circumstances of the century, that the dominant Christian themes in the poetry of Eliot and Auden will be related.

CHAPTER I

Significant aspects of the theological and literary background of the nineteenth century.

In the symposium produced in 1948 to honour T. S. Eliot on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday[1], the contributors are unanimous in claiming for him the distinction of a man whose work revitalised the poetic tradition and changed the course of English literature. Even Lawrence Durrell, in his evasive and ironical little poem Anniversary, pays tribute to Eliot's unique gifts in the handling of the English language

> Poetry, science of intimacies,
> In you his early roots drove through
> The barbarian compost of our English
> To sound new veins and marbled all his views
> Through and through like an old black ledger[2].

The contributors to the symposium are, almost without exception, laudatory, but despite this fact, when it comes to evaluating Eliot's technical accomplishments and the achievements of his early years, they still reflect general critical opinion. Even those critics hostile to the poet seldom deny the profound effect he has had on

---

(1) T.S. Eliot: A Symposium. (1948) compiled by R. March and Tambimuttu

(2) Symposium, p. 88.

English poetry by his virtual 're-working' of poetic diction. No other modern poet writing in English has discovered modes of expression which can claim the double distinction of being both so perfectly fitted to the expression of his own attitudes and so far-reaching in their effect on the writings of his younger contemporaries[1].

In praising Eliot for accomplishing a technical revolution these critics are doing little more than echo the judgments of F. R. Leavis and Edmund Wilson whose books New Bearings in English Poetry (1932) and Axel's Castle (1931) first brought this revolution to the recognition of the public. Though many might deplore the nature of the achievement, none can deny that it took place, and however much Leavis's comments on the 'debilitated' tradition of the nineteenth century may be disliked, the remarks he made about the poetry of Poems 1909-1925 still have validity after over thirty years

> .... Prufrock, the earliest section, which is dated 1917, itself constitutes an important event in the history of English poetry. The title poem, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, which is presented at the beginning of Poems 1909-1925, represents a complete break with the nineteenth century tradition, and a new start[2].

---

(1) cf. Norman Nicholson's remarks in the same volume "The result was that in these earlier poems he did not so much create a poetic diction as make it possible for other poets to create theirs." (p. 233)

(2) New Bearings in English Poetry, p. 75.

Eliot himself has described the way in which he reacted to the poetic diction in the nineteenth century, and in the course of his essay on Swinburne in 1920, made certain remarks about diction which give a clear indication of what he imagined himself to be doing in the early poems

> Language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified.
>
> They are identified in the verse of Swinburne solely because the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment[1].

What Eliot saw as important was a language which '... is struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects ....'[2]. Before poetry could become significant in the lives of men, poets would have to create a diction which would have some real and inevitable connection with the world of 'objects' as it is experienced. The poet's task was not one of providing man with a new world made out of words, but one of providing them with words by which they could identify the 'objects' of the world which they had already experienced, but only half-understood. Poetry was to be not so much a 'criticism of life' as a means

---

(1) Swinburne as Poet. Selected Essays, p. 327.

(2) Ibid.

of identification. It seemed to Eliot that the literary tradition of the nineteenth century to which he was heir had lost sight of this and so he turned for instruction to the poetry of earlier centuries and other languages. In the introduction to the Selected Poems Ezra Pound he tells us that the 'forms' in which he chose to write at the time of the composition of Prufrock, were '.... drawn directly from the study of Laforgue together with later Elizabethan drama'[1].

But it would be entirely mistaken to imagine that Eliot's reaction to his immediate literary forbears can be discussed only at the level of technique, and indeed Eliot's technical achievements are only of interest in this study in so far as they are symptomatic of the 'revolutionary' attitudes and beliefs which informed his work in the first two decades of this century. No distinction between 'form' and 'contact' in his poetry is ever satisfactory, and his essays on Swinburne and Tennyson[2], though not directly related to his own poetry, make it obvious that he rejected the diction provided by the Victorians, not because he considered his predecessors to be bad technicians, but because it was impossible to

(1) Ezra Pound: Selected Poems, p. 8.

(2) Swinburne as Poet. Selected Essays, pp. 323-327. In Memoriam. Selected Essays, pp. 328-338.

pour new wine into old bottles. He came thus to adopt symbolist and late-Elizabethan techniques, not for the purpose of displaying technical dexterity, but for the purpose of discovering new forms which could give adequate expression to the new content. The reaction was thus not merely the reaction of a man who had different ideas from those of his predecessors about the details of composition but the reaction of one who possessed different spiritual values. The sensibility of T.S. Eliot was obviously different from that of the Victorians and the Aesthetes and, more significantly, the sensibility of the world in and for which he was writing had itself changed radically since the close of the century. The alteration of the poetic tradition consisted of much more than the production of a new and startling style, it involved the embodiment of a new sensibility.

This was recognised as early as 1917 by E.M. Forster, who writing in 1928 of his initial acquaintance with Eliot's work said

> Here was a protest, and a feeble one, and the more congenial for being feeble. For what, in that world of gigantic horror, was tolerable except the slighter gestures of dissent? ..... He is difficult because he has seen something terrible [my italics], and (underestimating, I think, the general decency of his audience) has declined to say so plainly[1].

(1) Abinger Harvest, pp. 107 and 113.

In spite of the indirect and elliptical style, Eliot had given Forster at least, a clear apprehension of what lay at the heart of his creative activity. The vision which caused his spiritual rebellion and poetic revolution was the 'sight of something terrible'; a quasi-apocalyptic vision: 'Armadillo-Armagedden'.

None of these observations is new. Every commentator on Eliot's poems readily acknowledges that new values and attitudes go hand in hand with new techniques and the use of religious terminology has become common-place in any criticism of his work:

> The shallow progressive philosophies both religious and secular of our parents' generation, sought to eliminate evil from the world. Mr. Eliot's vision of hell restored a necessary dimension to our universe[1].

What is seldom recognised is the fact that in the field of technical theology the same 'necessary dimension' was being restored at precisely the same time, and that the change Eliot wrought in the poetic tradition not merely parallels, but is linked ideologically, with the change in the religious sensibility of much of the Western world. He was wont to characterise his beliefs and practises as a reaction to Romanticism and Liberalism, and, freely employed the theological terms 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy'

---

(1) Kathleen Raine. 'The Poet of Our Time'. Symposium p. 79.

in literary debate. Similarly the ideas of the greatest and most influential Protestant theologians of this century arose out of a profound dissatisfaction with, what is technically known as 'theological liberalism', and earned for themselves the title of 'neo-orthodox' theologians. At the centre of the change in theological outlook lies a re-thinking of the Christian doctrine of man, and long before his baptism into the Christian Church[1] we find Eliot's dissatisfactions with the popular spiritual values of the nineteenth century revolving around the pivotal point of belief about the true nature of man.

Liberalism, like romanticism, is a word with so many connotations that no single definition could ever satisfy more than a handful of people, and Eliot has been accused of using both of these words in an idiosyncratic way. But however unsatisfactory his prose definitions may be, it can hardly be denied that the beliefs which inform nearly all of his poems can justifiably be described as intellectual and emotional reactions to ideas and beliefs of the nineteenth century which, with more than mere historical accuracy, can be called romantic and liberal.

In the introduction to his book <u>Axel's Castle</u>, Edmund Wilson echoes faintly the remarks of T.E. Hulme by

---

(1) In 1927.

calling Romanticism 'a revolt of the individual'[1], and quotes A.N. Whitehead as saying that Romanticism grew in reaction to the mechanistic ideas of the eighteenth century. Wilson, consequently, places William Blake among the first Romantics and this 'placing' of Blake has never seriously been challenged. Within the framework of an historical review of literature this is unexceptionable, but it is important to see, in a larger perspective that Romanticism and the Romantic Movement can also be regarded as the late and final flowering of ideas and beliefs that were being heralded four hundred years earlier in a series of interconnected artistic and intellectual phenomena which are lumped together under the heading the Renaissance, and that the theological and literary reaction to Romanticism involves, in certain aspects, a return to the consideration of issues common in the Medieval world.

It is easy to exaggerate the suddenness of the Renaissance, but an unwillingness to paint the historical scene in sharp colours should not prevent us from recognising the importance of the change which came over European sensibility in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In many ways the thought of the Christian Church for the first fourteen centuries of its existence

---

(1) Axel's Castle, pp. 9-10.

shows a greater affinity with that of the ancient classical world than it does with the modern era. Despite the fact that it proclaimed the Incarnation of the Creator of the Universe and a gospel whereby man was redeemed from sin and given the promise of eternal life, it took for granted the validity of thought-forms inherited from the ancient world and never seriously questioned them until the scientific and humanistic attitudes of the fifteenth century presented their challenge. The extent to which Thomas Aquinas was able to use, and build upon, the philosophical categories of Aristotle is only a small indication of the organic link which existed between classical and medieval thought[1]. St. Thomas makes it perfectly clear that a great deal more is involved in the notion of the Christian God than the Aristotelean concept of the 'unmoved mover', but he employs the ancient philosopher's principle of 'movement' extensively, and throughout his work a fundamentally classical, though thoroughly re-interpreted concept of the order of creation is emphasised. The cosmos, in Medieval thought, is essentially static - a series of concentric circles beyond

---

(1) cf. Etienne Gilson. <u>The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages</u>
Even in his theology, which he could not borrow from Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas had accepted the general notion of science, the empiricism and the intellectualism of the Philosopher. (pp. 381-382)

which stretched the unbounded Empyreum which was the dwelling place of God. The Universe was divided into various orders and each order occupied its appointed place. At the summit of the natural order stood man, but beyond him, and between him and God, stretched the complicated hierarchy of the angelic host[1]. The actual 'geography' of this conception of creation was of comparatively little importance. What was of importance, was the theology it expressed; that however visualised, it should symbolise the belief in the order and security of a life lived under the ultimate dominion of God. The visions of Dante in The Divine Comedy and Giotto in his paintings might exhibit 'geographical' peculiarities of their own, but both embody their adherence to a belief in the divine harmony and order of all created life founded upon the transcendental sublimity of the uncreated God

> Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly, free from jars
> My will and my desire were turned by love,
> The love that moves the sun and the other stars[2].

When this particular relation between classical and Medieval attitudes is grasped, it becomes apparent why Eliot is able to call himself both Classical and Catholic

---

(1) cf. Summa Contra Gentiles, Bk. III, Ch. XXI-XXII

(2) The Divine Comedy. Paradise, Canto XXXIII

without self-contradiction. Dismayed by the disorder and chaos of the contemporary world, he returns to the search for pattern and order again and again, not only in his poetry, but in the critical prose, and, more obviously still, in his plays. The figure of a Medieval Archbishop was found to be a singularly appropriate peg upon which to hang his reflections on his own attempts at discovering a key to the apparently disorganised series of events which constituted personal life and human history. For W.H. Auden, by contrast, this problem is a peripheral one. Philosophically speaking, Auden virtually leaps over the ten medieval centuries stretching between St. Augustine and Montaigne, and is far more concerned with the psychological problems involved in individual human choices and actions than with the pattern into which such choices and actions ultimately fit.

In the Medieval scheme of things, man occupied his proper place in the divine order of creation - a relatively lowly one. Though standing at the peak of the natural world, he was limited in his capacities and bound by his sin, destined for perfection and glory only by the loving grace of God operative in the sacrifice of Christ. His world was one of quasi-platonic forms and symbols pointing to the Divine rather than one of vital energy and constant change. Against beliefs such as these

the men of the Renaissance began a rebellion which blossomed into Romanticism and faded into Liberalism. It did not begin as, or was ever consciously, a rebellion against the Christian faith but it had as its base an unspoken assumption about the nature of man that led to conflict with the Church and the setting-up of rival religions.

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the way in which belief about man's nature and abilities developed in the period between the first movements of the Renaissance and the nineteenth century, but it is possible to see that the 'apollonian' works of Michelangelo in which, as Kenneth Clark remarks, despite the devout personal orthodoxy of the artist, man desires to become more than man and aspires to be a God[1], stand at the inception of a process which, having shed the grace and dignity of true humanism, culminates in the Superman of Friederich Nietzsche and the optimistic anthropocentrism of theological liberalism. Belief in Original Sin is necessarily abandoned along the line, and, as T.E. Hulme tirelessly emphasised, the order of the world is turned upside down, for perfectibility is placed where it ought not to be - on the human level. Against attitudes like

(1) cf. Kenneth Clark, 'The Young Michelangelo'. <u>Penguin Book of the Renaissance</u>, p. 105.

these Eliot, Hulme and the neo-orthodox theologians were to set their faces in the second and third decades of the present century.

The Church, as an infallible institution and the last court of appeal in religious controversy, had been abandoned by the Protestant Reformers in the sixteenth century. In doing so, they unwittingly planted the seeds of a growth they would hardly have approved of had they been able to witness it - Liberal Protestantism. Infallible Scriptures, in their scheme, replaced the Church, but, in practice, these do not work nearly so well as authoritative instruments. The written word can always admit of the widest possible interpretation, and as the centuries passed and divergences multiplied the Bible, as such, became less and less important as the inviolable channel of God's Truth and Revelation. Though lip service was always paid to Scripture, the last court of appeal came to rest, naturally, in the individual interpreter.

Liberalism, as a movement in theology, begins to separate itself from its predecessors of the eighteenth century, Deism, Latitudinarianism and Puritanism, in the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher in Germany. Taking up the anti-dogmatic attitudes of his eighteenth-century forbears he not only inveighs against the rigid

formulations of belief, but replaces Reason with <u>Gefühl</u> as the arbitor in all matters of religion. (There is no exact English equivalent of this word - its meaning lies somewhere between 'experience' and 'feeling'). The parallels with Romantic literature are obvious. The Christian revelation far from being something given, becomes little more than the symbol of collective man's aspirations. Creeds, formularies, and the Bible itself are misleading. What is of supreme importance is the individual's personal experience and eventual self-realisation.

> Orthodox Christian dogmatists had held that the content of the Christian faith is a doctrine given in revelation. Schleiermacher held that it is a consciousness inspired primarily by the personality of Jesus[1].

Though he uses the categories of sin, grace, and redemption in discussion, it is clear that religion is something rooted in the perceptibility of the individual; a man-centred thing, and that the moral identification of the individual Christian with the man Jesus Christ is of the essence of salvation. It is perhaps in his Christology that Schleiermacher's presuppositions become most evident. Christ is not seen as the Divine Logos, the Incarnate Second Person of the Trinity, (the doctrine of

---

(1) Edward C. Moore. <u>History of Christian Thought since Kant</u>, p. 81.

the Trinity is given a rather perfunctory glance in a chapter at the end of his book, Der Christliche Glaube) but as the perfect Man, the moral and spiritual ideal, the one in whom complete God-consciousness is finally attained. He is the revelation of the Father, not because He is the Incarnate Son, but because His apprehension of the Father's will is perfect. Grace becomes, in consequence, not so much the loving act of the Creator to sinful creatures in distress, as the name which is used to describe the psychological effect resulting from the free identification of those creatures with the embodiment (Jesus Christ) of their highest human aspirations.

It has been necessary to pause briefly on the ideas of Schleiermacher because his influence on the religious sensibility of Protestant Europe (and England must be included in this generalisation) is a formative one and extends far beyond the years of his own life and into the twentieth century. His treatment of the Person of Christ, his opposition to dogmatic formulation, his soft-pedalling of the doctrine of Original Sin, and his anti-supernaturalism accorded very well with the Romantic spirit and the feelings of human self-sufficiency engendered by increasing material prosperity and considerable technological advance.

The underlying assumptions of Schleiermacher's attitude were brought to the surface and made explicit in the work of his younger contemporary and fellow-countryman Albrecht Ritschl. Ritschl's subjectivism surpasses anything that Schleiermacher advocated. In his thought, God, as an object of devotion and love is practically excluded[1], and statements about God become value-judgements about the state of the individual's relation with the world. Original Sin is discounted, mystical apprehension denounced, and supreme value is placed on ethical conduct. Kenneth Scott Latourette has said of Ritschl:

> He both helped to shape and represented much of the mind of what might be called liberal or progressive Protestantism, not only in Germany but also outside Germany. It was a practical mind, empirical, on the whole hopeful, <u>intent on realising the Kingdom of God on earth</u>. It was in accord with the optimism and confidence in progress which characterised the Western world in the nineteenth century, especially as that century moved on to its abrupt close in the tragic summer of 1914[2].

The attempt at the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth - a persistent note in Liberal-Protestant

---

(1) It is interesting to contrast with these beliefs Eliot's own attitude to those who were vague about the objects of their belief. cf. The sermon preached by V.A. Demant at the Requiem High Mass for T.S. Eliot at St. Stephen's Church, Gloucester Road. Reprinted in <u>Frontier</u>, July 1965.

(2) <u>Christianity in a Revolutionary Age</u>. Vol. II. pp. 26-27.

religion - can be regarded as the theological counterpart of the secular belief in Progress. Both spring out of the Romantic conception of the infinite possibilities of human improvement and place ultimate perfection on the natural level. Aided by refined techniques of archaeological investigation and textual scrutiny, the scholars gradually eliminated the awkward transcendental and apocalyptic elements of the Christian gospel, and a radical demonstration of the Romantic 'intoxication with the inner life' can be found in the field of Biblical theology. The conjunction of the Higher Critical attitude towards the Scriptures and the Romantic idealisation of man produced the figure of the Historical Jesus.

In 1835, David Strauss, a disciple of both Hegel and Schleiermacher, published his book Das Leben Jesu. All supernatural aspects of the Divine Person are discarded as inauthentic and unnecessary. The book is a biography and Christ is first and foremost the historical person from Nazareth who lived the ideal human life. It is the re-creation of a hero, not an incarnate God. Strauss's book was followed by Joseph Ernest Renan's picture of the charming Galilean preacher in Vie de Jesus (1862). George Eliot was profoundly moved by these studies in the life of Jesus and translated them into English. Between them these two books set the pattern for the thousands of more

popular and less scholarly accounts of the life of the founder of the Christian religion which appeared in the half-century that followed. All were attempts at reconstructing the events of the historical existence on the belief that, as a man, Jesus Christ embodied all that was noblest and best in human nature, and that He provided the model for all social and moral behaviour.

These studies went a long way to form the religious sensibility of the second half of the nineteenth century and Swinburne's famous lines from Hymn to Proserpine

> Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean;
> The world has grown grey with thy breath

express a revulsion from the kind of Christ who made his appearance in the immensely popular painting by Holman Hunt The Light of The World.

But it was not until the turn of the century that the 'gentle Jesus' image began to lose power. The forceful scholarly reaction was characterised by Albert Schweitzer in 1901:

> Read through the 'lives of Jesus' since the sixties and behold what they have made of the imperial words of Our Lord, what a weak and ambiguous sense they have put upon his peremptory, other-worldly requisitions, in order that he might not clash with our ideals of civilisation and his other-worldliness might be brought to terms with our this-worldliness. Many of his greatest words one finds lying in a corner, a heap of discharged spring-bolts.

> We make Jesus speak with our time another language than that which passed his lips[1].

Heinz Zahrnt in his critique of the whole movement makes the fundamental connection between the Romantic and pseudo-Romantic ideas and the quest for the Historical Jesus clear when he says

> The image of the Historical Jesus which was now being developed was not in fact simply drawn from the historical sources. It was largely governed by the presuppositions entertained by the writers themselves ..... The inevitable consequence was the development of a vast number of different pictures of Jesus, almost all of which at closer inspection prove to be determined by the neo-humanist myth of the nineteenth century ...... Hence in liberal theology Jesus became a moral exemplar and a religious teacher, and the Kingdom of God which he proclaimed became an inner kingdom of values, of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, a timeless ideal[2].

This 'inner kingdom of values' is, significantly, precisely the 'kingdom' which Matthew Arnold proclaimed in his book Literature and Dogma when it appeared fourteen years after La Vie de Jesus. Matthew Arnold severs religion's connection with propositions about the Godhead of the Eternal Son[3], and places it firmly in the realm of ethical behaviour. It is described as 'a binding to righteousness' and a little later as 'morality touched by

---

(1) The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, transl. Walter Lowrie, p. 31.

(2) The Historical Jesus, transl. J.S. Bowden, pp. 48-49.

(3) Literature and Dogma, p. 20.

emotion'[1]. As in the works of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Strauss and Renan (in his book on Arnold, Trilling mentions the connection between Scheiermacher and Arnold but only briefly), Jesus becomes the epitome of all the author believes to be good and beautiful in human life. So Arnold, like the others, tends to create a God in his own image - one who represents the combination of his own individual religious sensibility and that of Victorian England.

> And the infinite of the religion of Jesus - its immense capacity for ceaseless progress and farther development, lies principally, perhaps, in the line of extricating more and more his sweet reasonableness, and applying it to his method and secret[2].

Arnold might perceive and lament the poverty and ugliness of contemporary life, as in The Scholar Gypsy, and also express a sense of despair and desolation, as in Dover Beach, but it is clear that he is typical of his age in offering a solution which is 'aesthetic' rather than 'religious'. Sweetness and light for him are the products of moral behaviour rather than religious belief. God is postulated, in Arnold's 'system' not because He is a metaphysical necessity, but because He acts as an absolute guarantee of the aesthetic life[3].

---

(1) Literature and Dogma, pp. 20-21.

(2) Ibid., p. 395.

(3) cf. Lionel Trilling; Matthew Arnold. Ch. XI.

It is unfair, of course, to take Matthew Arnold as the altogether typical representative of the Victorian religious sensibility - he cannot be called a convinced churchman, and evinces little of the gloom and harshness which characterised a great deal of Evangelical piety - but he does display certain typical aspects of it. The emphasis upon morality, the belief in Christ as a supreme moral and spiritual example, the rejection of dogma, and the belief in a progression towards the good life: all these are characteristic attitudes in nineteenth century English religion. Supernaturalism is excluded (in catechetical classes of the period, the miracle-stories of the Gospels were invariably explained away) and the emphasis falls heavily upon the attainment of moral perfection. In his essay on Arnold and Pater, T.S. Eliot remarks that the former is '.... at least a forerunner of what is now called Humanism'[1]. The deification of man turned within a century into a process of the humanisation, and finally in consequence, the elimination, of God.

There can be little doubt that in England and America, in the latter half of the nineteenth-century - the immediate background to the work of T.S. Eliot, anthropocentrism reached its climax. In 1861, J.S. Mill produced

---

(1) Selected Essays, p. 434.

his most influential book Utilitarianism which placed the satisfaction of human desires on the human and natural level[1]. In 1867 the biological-social theories of Karl Marx appeared in the first volume of Das Kapital, and earlier in 1859, Charles Darwin had written on the last page of his Origin of the Species

> Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of great length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection[2].

Whether or not men actually understood what Darwin and other evolutionists were propounding, or whether they believed in a process of 'natural selection', is difficult to judge. What was communicated was a spirit of optimism and even complacency about the movements of the universe and the state of human affairs. And it is in this period that the 'shallow, progressive philosophies' of which Kathleen Raine speaks, set in. They are shallow because they possess a mechanical, unimaginative dimension which is foreign to the spirit of Romanticism. The belief in the perfectibility of man is still in evidence, but it is no longer expressed with the vitality and excitement of

---

(1) Compare the 'pleasure principle' of J.S. Mill with Thomas Aquinas' assertion that happiness is the result of the contemplation of God. Summa Contra Gentiles. Bk. III. Ch. XXXVII.

(2) Origin of the Species, p. 462.

the Romantics - it has become mundane, almost a truism. No longer is there the sense of man's boundless potentialities; of his capacity for touching 'the infinite'[1]. He has become, under the illuminations of scientific discovery and technological advance, little more than a part of the world which the Romantics saw him transcending. In a world which has generally given itself over to a belief in material progress, the religious dimension in English poetry, completely vanishes, and the Romantic spirit is dissipated into a heartiness and self-satisfaction. Formal religious affirmations are of course still made, but they are either echoes of an outworn poetical tradition or, if orthodox, little deferential bows to a not altogether-unagreeable historical survival.

Tennyson provides an admirable example of the refined Victorian religious sensibility. At his best he is never as trite in his writings, or as superficial as his minor contemporaries, and in <u>In Memoriam</u> he tries to face the problem of suffering and the personal knowledge of despair. But the moods of resentment and bitterness are quickly brushed aside to make room for the traditional appearances of confidence and security. In the sequence beginning

---

(1) cf. James Benziger, <u>Images of Eternity</u>, p. 41.

Ring out wild bells there is a reference to Christ in the final stanza but the image was little to do with the real meaning of the Incarnation. The subject of Tennyson's contemplation is the Liberal Protestant concept of the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth and Christ provides a convenient symbol for the Victorian ideal of the improved man. Although the poem appeared nine years before The Origin of the Species, it is clear that evolutionary theories had reached Tennyson and interested him, for he places the human race in the evolutionary pattern and sees him destined for still higher development of a spiritual and moral kind[1], and his perception of a Nature 'red in tooth and claw' can hardly be interpreted as a poetic understanding of the Christian doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin.

In the fifth volume of his work Religious Trends in English Poetry, H.N. Fairchild paints a dreary picture of Victorian religion[2] and proceeds to demonstrate some of the ways in which it was reflected in the poetry of the period. (It is interesting to note, in passing, that certain aspects like the harsh application of rigid moral precepts, the uncompromising Sabbatarianism and the atmosphere of gloomy oppressiveness which pervaded most

---

(1) In Memoriam, CXIX.

(2) Religious Trends in English Poetry, Vol. V, p. 6.

Evangelical and some Catholic religion, make hardly any appearance in the poetry of the age. This picture is left to the novelists to draw). Even if we find Fairchild's attitude to the nineteenth century unsatisfactory, it can hardly be denied that the Victorian scene does present a religious sensibility in an advanced state of decay. The Tractarian revival of Catholic doctrine and practice had not extended beyond the limits of a few ecclesiastics and their followers by the last decade of the century and Wordsworth provides an admirable example of the extent to which even men of great sensitivity can remain oblivious of the important religious issues over which men of their closest acquaintance were struggling[1].

Those who did attempt overt orthodox expression of the Christian faith generally produced verse which lacked both emotional conviction and spiritual vitality. The single exception is Gerard Manley Hopkins whose case is so unusual that it requires a detailed examination impossible in a survey as general as this. The religious poetry of the period, even in the work of major authors like Tennyson and Browning, shows either a tendency to quasi-pantheistic humanism, or a tendency to string together well-worn cliches - conceptual and devotional

---

(1) His closest associates were members of the Hackney Phalanx - a reforming party of High Churchmen in the first half of the nineteenth century.

statements verified and organised in arbitrary ways (J.H. Newman, John Keble, J.M. Neale) and draped in imagery which has little or no organic connection with the beliefs which form the intellectual or emotional substance of the poem (Tennyson, Christina Rosetti, Francis Thompson).

W.H. Auden and N.H. Pearson remark of the period

> The poets preach a religion in which the values and even the cult are to remain Christian but the Christian dogmas are to be regarded as myth, that is, poetic truth[1].

The cult certainly remained but it is doubtful whether the poets 'preached' values which can be called Christian. Nor were the poets the only artists who 'preached' this kind of religion, and the paintings of the pre-Raphaelites provide an interesting parallel. The conscious and deliberate attempts to escape the dingy products of nineteenth-century religious art resulted, not in a vigorous expression of new spiritual values and insights, but in an obvious retreat into a world of superficial prettiness in which the religious sensibility of the age is all too obvious. The traditional trappings of Christianity (the cult) are much in evidence but through the conventional symbolism and the bright definition there emerges, more obviously than ever before, the picture of a distinctly human, sweetly reasonable, Christ - the deified man.

---

(1) Poets of the English Language, Vol. V, p. XX.

It could not have been apparent at the time, but it is clear to us, a hundred years later, that the extent to which the poetry and art of the period reflected the state of Victorian religion was far-reaching. Beneath the outward show of doctrinal orthodoxy and traditional symbolism, the age seems largely to have abandoned the essential dogmatic assertions of the historic faith in favour of a belief in the maintenance of social and moral standards with an eye to the improvement and possible perfection of the human race.

And this attitude proved to be extraordinarily tenacious, for it was not until the onset of the First World War that the progressive philosophies began to crumble and the religious sensibility to change. Notes of disaffection and disillusion had been sounded in poetical and theological writing long before 1914, but it was a few years later, that, two volumes were published which struck fatal blows at nineteenth-century humanism and liberalism. T.S. Eliot's Prufrock and Other Observations, and Karl Barth's commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans published in 1917 and 1918 respectively. Each in its own way denounced the 'shallow progressive philosophies' of the preceding decades, and each had a vision of hell and damnation which restored the 'necessary dimension to our universe'.

CHAPTER II

T.S. Eliot. The American Background

What has been outlined so far, is the religious and cultural temper of nineteenth century England with brief mention of the ways in which Continental Protestant theology influenced the religious sensibility. But Eliot was born and brought up in the United States of America, and, although deeply aware of and affected by the English and European cultural situation, he was heir to ways of thinking, feeling and believing that show marked differences from both the English and European Protestant sensibility.

The strict Calvinism of the original New England theocracies gradually gave way under the political and intellectual pressures of the eighteenth century, and although Puritanism continued to exercise an influence on the manners and morals of the American people, traditional theological attitudes underwent radical changes in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Edward Moore maintains that theology altered along 'the same general lines as we have seen in Schleiermacher and

Campbell'[1], but this is only half-true. The similarities are obvious but there are numerous and important ways in which the religious sensibility of the United States is unique. The combination of eighteenth century deism and the vital upsurge of the Romantic spirit combined to produce, not Liberal Protestantism, but, first Unitarianism and, soon after, its off-spring Transcendentalism.

American Unitarianism dates from the schism of the New England Congregational Churches in 1819, during which William Ellery Channing allied himself with the anti-Calvinists and preached openly doctrines that were to form the basic tenets of the sect. Edmund Wilson and D.E.S. Maxwell, among others, have emphasised, and set great store by, the Calvinist and Puritan strains in T.S. Eliot's heritage, but in fact it was in the heavily intellectual atmosphere of Unitarianism that the poet was brought up (his Grandfather William Greenleaf Eliot had been a Unitarian minister and Chancellor of Washington University), and American Unitarianism presented an interesting spectacle in the nineteenth century. Intellectually and socially fastidious, it retained the manners and moral standards of Puritanism, but rejected unambiguously the theological concepts which had originally

---

(1) History of Christian Thought Since Kant, p. 206.

informed the ethical actions of the Puritans. Channing and his followers turned their backs on the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, the Atonement and Original Sin, and there is an undisguised Romanticism in their assertions about the perfectibility of man. As regards the person of Jesus Christ, the familiar Liberal Protestant strain, with its emphasis upon perfect humanity and moral excellence, makes its appearance here too. Man's happiness does not ultimately depend upon the self-oblation of Christ, but the extent to which each individual emulates the example set by Christ and lives a life of self-controlled integrity.

It was not long, however, before Unitarianism produced a child of its own - and one which eventually had a deeper effect on the intellectual and cultural life of America - Transcendentalism. In 1832, Ralph Waldo Emerson, chafing even under the flexible framework of Unitarianism, resigned his ministerial duties in Boston, and in 1835, delivered his famous lecture The Defects of Historical Christianity. It marked - in so far as any isolated event does mark the beginning of a 'movement' - the beginning of Transcendentalism in New England. Emerson and his associates came to be both more vigorous in their repudiation of the claim of church and dogma and more

ambitious in their own claims for the potentialities of human nature, than any of their Unitarian forbears. Though centred on a somewhat 'academic' little gathering in Boston, the ideas spread quickly, and in the introduction to his selected edition of Emerson's writings, F.J. Carpenter offers a partial explanation by calling the progression from Calvinism to Transcendentalism a steady development from the 'theological' to the 'practical'.

> Calvinism, which dominated New England until late in the eighteenth century, worshiped "God in three persons", conceiving of God somewhat anthropomorphically, and of Jesus as divine. Unitarianism, according to whose tenets Emerson was brought up, broke away from this conception of God, contending that there could be but one God, and that Jesus had not been divine, but rather the perfect "Son of Man". Transcendentalism carried the process to its logical conclusion, and denied the "personality" of God altogether, speaking of God as an impersonal force, which operated by means of "the moral law"[1].

Carpenter is content to represent the development from Calvinism to Transcendentalism in terms of "changing conceptions of God", but Perry Miller suggests a different way of viewing the phenomenon

> More accurately, then, they may be defined in a somewhat wider perspective as children of the Puritan past who, having been emancipated

---

(1) Ralph Waldo Emerson. Representative Selections. pp. XXIV-XXV.

> by Unitarianism from New England's original Calvinism, found a new religious expression in forms derived from romantic literature and from the philosophical idealism of Germany[1].

F.O. Matthiessen also emphasises the links with Romanticism and Idealism[2], and it is important to take note of them, for it is evident that, despite their genuine religiosity, the American Transcendentalists' main concern was not the nature of God, but the nature of man and his relationship with his immediate physical environment. The repudiation of the doctrine of Original Sin was not a step in the direction of a clearer definition of God, but an attempt to liberate man from a sense of guilt and the shackles of dogmatic religion, and to give a freedom to develop to the utmost his own basically good potentialities. This is the root of Transcendentalism (certainly of Emerson's) and holds much in common with Romanticism; it branched afterwards into a new conception of God as the impersonal force, no longer transcendant but entirely immanent in the 'created' world.

The American cultural scene in the middle of the nineteenth century, however, contrasts strangely with the English because, at a time when, in Europe, the visionary Romantic spirit was faltering and beginning to settle down

---

(1) <u>The American Transcendentalists</u>. p. IX.

(2) <u>American Renaissance</u>.

into a mundane confidence about 'Progress', 'the American counterpart to the ebullient Romanticism of Europe'[1] continued to express itself with real vigour, and in the exalted manner of a new religion; a religion which proclaimed the natural divinity of every man. In the explicit pantheism of Emerson and, later, Walt Whitman, this process of divinisation reaches completion.

> We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE[2]
>
> Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet for ever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable[3].

Man is finally and completely released from church and dogma. The distinction between God and man is obliterated and consequently the concept of God becomes meaningless. Man is left to his own resources. In the scholar and pragmatist, Emerson, the elimination of the object of worship resulted in the enunciation of a doctrine of Self-Reliance[4]. But in others the religious instinct was

---

(1) Perry Miller. p. X.
(2) The Over-Soul. Essays. 1st Series. p. 214.
(3) Ibid., p. 232.
(4) Representative Selections. pp. 89-113.

not so easily quelled or diverted, and in Whitman, whose abandonment of church and dogma was even more thorough than Emerson's, we find a deep-seated religious fervour, even in a poem as ego-centric as Song of Myself.

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
>
> ....
>
> I do not despise you priests, all time, the world over
> My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
> Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern[1],

Emerson's ideas seem to foreshadow a great many of the thoughts and attitudes of modern liberal America, and the influence of their passionate opposition to dogmatism, their pantheism and pseudo-religious humanism can hardly be over-estimated. It is only necessary to recall the laudatory phrases used by Matthew Arnold in his Discourses in America in 1885 to see how strong was Emerson's attraction - even for the most cultivated and fastidious minds of his own age[2]. In his book American Renaissance, F.O. Matthiesson goes so far as to trace a direct line, through Whitman, from Emerson to the German philosopher

---

(1) Complete Poetry. pp. 26 and 74.

(2) 'You cannot prize him too much or heed him too diligently.' Discourses in America. p. 206.

Friedrich Nietzsche[1].

But the doctrines of the Transcendentalists are vague, and because of their abhorrence of dogmatism and precise definition, it is often difficult to see where the movement begins and where it ends, and who it can legitimately be said to include - a position which, doubtless, would have pleased Emerson and his followers. It is true that cultural historians and literary critics are all too prone to make easy generalisations and to attach misleading labels to apparently disparate sets of phenomena - and Transcendentalism has suffered in this way - but it is nonetheless possible to speak of Transcendentalism as a movement and estimate its influence. Despite the steady refusal of the Transcendentalists to become another religious sect they could not avoid projecting a collection of attitudes and ideas that formed a coherent critique of human existence which came to be widely accepted both in New England and in the expanding mid-West. Besides those men and women who met regularly in Boston - Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley - the outstanding literary figures of Hawthorne, Longfellow and Thoreau had close ties with Emerson and his group, and many who had no direct connection with the

(1) American Renaissance. p. 546.

Transcendentalist Club found themselves in sympathy and agreement with the beliefs that it was expressing. Walt Whitman was one of these latter. Perry Miller refers to him as the 'arch-Transcendentalist of New York'[1], and it must be remembered that Emerson was one of the first to recognise the quality of Whitman's poetry and give his enthusiastic approval of it.

Although it permeated the whole cultural life of New England, the Transcendentalist philosophy, like the Unitarian, was one which established itself most easily in academic and intellectual circles, so that T.S. Eliot, brought up when and as he was, could not have escaped its influence. The atmosphere of his home in St. Louis must have been a strange, but not unusual, blend of Puritanism and Transcendental/Unitarianism. The social habits and manners of the Eliot family seem to have been those brought from the East when it was still Puritan, but the religious beliefs were undoubtedly those of the New England Unitarians with a strong admixture of the more liberal and progressive attitudes of the Transcendentalists. Later at Harvard, Thomas Stearns must have come into contact with men who had been familiar, not merely with the ideas of the Transcendentalists, but with some of the progenitors

---

(1) The American Transcendentalists, p. XI.

of the ideas themselves. And Eliot's work shows an awareness of these prominent strains in his inheritance. Emerson occasionally becomes the focus of his attention, and in the poem Sweeney Erect we find the poet permitting himself an ironical sneer at the philosopher, deliberately misquoting him and actually mentioning him by name[1].

By the middle of the nineteenth century America had developed a cultural tradition and a religious sensibility which was entirely separate from, though intimately connected with, and in many ways similar to that of England, and Eliot's work reflects the dilemma of a man who is deeply conscious of the debt he owes to both traditions. The authors of critical studies on Eliot, while paying lip-service in potted biographies to his American heritage, are curiously reticent about the question of his relation to the nineteenth century background of America[2]. They tend to speak of his opposition to liberalism and humanism and the 'revolution' he effected in poetry almost entirely in terms of a reaction to the English cultural scene. It is true, of course, that his essays, with very few exceptions[3], deal

---

(1) Collected Poems. 1909-1935. p. 43.

(2) cf. Books by D.E.S. Maxwell, G.A. George, Helen Gardner, C. Grover Smith and the Symposiums produced for his sixtieth and seventieth birthdays.

(3) e.g. The essays on Irving Babbitt and Norman Foerster. Selected Essays, pp. 433-553.

with liberalism and humanism in their English manifestations, and with problems arising out of specifically English literature. It is true also that his early poetry represents a determination to break down prevalent contemporary patterns of reading and writing English poetry; to escape the empty rhetoric of the Victorians and the trite flaccidity of the Georgians and break away from the shallow optimism that was its substance, but it must be remembered that the most decisive break with prevailing philosophical and poetical trends was made three years before he came into 'physical' contact with the cultural scene in England: in 1909 with The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.

It would be silly to argue that Eliot can be understood only in relation to his American background and that the determining factor in all his work is his reaction to it - the poetry and essays give abundant evidence of his concern about the state of life and literature on both sides of the Atlantic and his constant consciousness of himself in the context of a whole European tradition - but clearly he was deeply aware of this, his own immediate 'physical' background, was affected by it, and did react to it, in ways that help to explain why certain religious themes are played over and over again and why certain Christian doctrines and attitudes receive far greater

emphasis than others, and, furthermore, why the religious sensibility of Eliot's work differs, in some ways profoundly, from that of his younger contempory and fellow Christian W.H. Auden. It is common to find Eliot and Auden, together with a few other Christian writers identified in their attitudes and criticised in the same way. M.M. Ross, for example, in Poetry and Dogma writes

> Clearly, poets like T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, and novelists like Mauriac, Bernanos and Graham Greene - to mention only a few of the better known names - constitute a unique constellation, a constellation which took shape slowly and is only now being observed for what it is. Those writers are Christian writers, in the exact sense. They are not merely Christians who happen to write. Their art is consciously dedicated to the realization of a specifically Christian vision of reality[1].

It is my intention to question the validity of this statement. Eliot, however, deeply committed to the Christian Church, is not a Christian writer in the exact sense in which Ross would have us believe. His art is, certainly, 'dedicated' to his vision of reality, but there are occasions when that vision bears little resemblance to the Christian understanding of the world, man and God, and that by comparison, the poetry of W.H. Auden, though in most cases artistically inferior, certains more truly the Christian apprehension. It is both fascinating and perplexing that two men so close to each other in time and in commitment to a small, rather

---

(1) p. 243.

eclectic, branch of the Catholic Church, should display such differences.

CHAPTER III

T.S. Eliot and the philosophical attitudes of T.E. Hulme

Shortly before starting work on his poem *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot said of the American Transcendentalists that

> Neither Emerson nor any of the others was a real observer of the moral life, Hawthorne was, and was a realist .... the essays of Emerson are already an encumbrance. The work of Hawthorne is truly a criticism ..... of the Puritan morality, of the Transcendentalist morality, and of the world which Hawthorne knew[1].

It seems that Eliot discovered in Hawthorne something of what he had found also in the works of Baudelaire and some of the French symbolists: an artistic apprehension that shunned the literary and philosophical 'word-worlds' of the nineteenth century and pierced beneath the superficial beauty and ugliness of human existence to a knowledge of 'the boredom, and the horror, and the glory'. But what characterises Hawthorne's work and makes it distinctive is his firm belief in the notion of sin. At the root of his vision of life is a Calvinistic theology inherited from his Puritan forefathers. There is a stern

---

(1) Quoted by F.O. Matthiessen in *American Renaissance*, p. 193.

opposition to the optimism and the self-reliant doctrines of Emerson which had become so popular. Evil is seen as a real force, pride and lust are known and recognised as sins. Retribution and isolation are common experiences in human life. D.H. Lawrence calls The Scarlet Letter 'a sort of parable, an earthly story with a hellish meaning'[1]. This is a serious and valid criticism of the book - its gothic trappings do little to hinder Hawthorne's apprehension of damnation and hell.

It is impossible not to be reminded, at this juncture, of the number of times in which these words 'evil', 'hell', and 'damnation' make their appearance in criticism of Eliot's work too, and F.O. Matthiesson, citing Eliot's remarks about Hawthorne, comments that the 'dark strain of Hawthorne is more visible [in Eliot] than in the work of any other writer of the present'[2]. This is not a large claim, admittably, and the similarities between Hawthorne and Eliot cannot be pressed very far. Eliot's commendation of the novelist as a realist does not involve him in philosophical or theological agreement, and the lines of his own reaction to Puritanism and Transcendentalism

(1) 'Nathaniel Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter'. Selected Literary Criticism. ed. Anthony Beal, p. 347.
(2) American Renaissance, p. 193.

do not follow those laid down by Hawthorne. Where Nathaniel Hawthorne adopted the religious sensibility of his ancestors; T.S. Eliot adopted their social sensibility. From William Hathorne and succeeding generations Nathaniel learned a Calvinistic theology which entailed a particular belief about the fallenness of creation and the sinfulness of man; from Thomas Elyot and succeeding generations, Thomas Stearns learned an attitude of mind - an intellectual fastidiousness and integrity.

> How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!
> With his features of clerical cut,
> And his brow so grim
> And his mouth so prim
> And his conversation so nicely
> Restricted to What Precisely
> And If and Perhaps and But[1].

Yet the theory that Eliot's Christianity is essentially an embracing of the theological principles which caused his forefathers to leave the England of Charles I is frequently voiced by critics. In the course of his brief assessment of Eliot's poetry in 1931, Edmund Wilson made the following remarks about the poet's much publicised entry into the Anglican Church:

> ...... it seems to us less an Anglo-Catholic conversion than a re-awakening of the New Englander's conscience, of the never quite exorcised conviction of the ineradicable sinfulness of man ..... and he looks for light to the theologians who offer salvation,

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 147.

> not through economic re-adjustment, political reform, education or biological and psychological study, but solely through "grace". Eliot apparently today regards "Evil" as some sort of ultimate reality, which it is impossible either to correct or to analyse. His moral principles seem to me stronger and more authentic than his religious mysticism - and his relation to the Anglo-Catholic Church appears largely artificial ..... His religious tradition has reached him by way of Boston[1].

It must be remembered that these remarks were made over thirty years ago, some time before the full poetic formulation of Eliot's beliefs (in the plays and Four Quartets) had appeared, but Ash Wednesday was already available and there is little in the later work (apart from a theme of vicarious suffering in the plays) which is not foreshadowed in the poetry with which Wilson was concerned. Moreover he has not deemed it necessary since then, to elaborate or qualify the judgements of his original chapter in Axel's Castle[2].

To Wilson, as to Matthiessen, a debt of gratitude is owed for placing Eliot firmly against an American background, but, strangely enough, he drastically over-simplifies the religious tradition to which the poet was heir. It did indeed reach him 'by way of Boston', but,

---

(1) Axel's Castle, pp. 106-107.

(2) The fact that Wilson allowed Collins to publish the book completely unchanged, and with only a brief Foreword by the author, in the Fontana Library series in 1961, seems to indicate that Wilson's opinions have remained substantially the same.

it was a curious blend of Puritanism, Unitarianism and Transcendentalism. The Calvinist conception of 'the ineradicable sinfulness of man' had disappeared from the tradition two generations earlier; the New Englander's conscience - originally convicting the sinner of guilt - had been re-shaped into an instrument of personal progress and enlightenment in accordance with a theory of perfectibility; and 'grace' at least in its Biblical and strictly theological sense, had become a forgotten word. Eliot's revulsion from his immediate environment[1] was not a return to an earlier American tradition, it was the reaction of a man already deeply conscious of his European inheritance. In some respects he did return to the seventeenth century, but it was not the seventeenth century of the Calvinist theocracies in New England, it was the seventeenth century of the Caroline Divines in England.

If Wilson were right in saying that Eliot looks to 'theologians who offer salvation .... solely through "grace", and describes his conversion as a 're-awakening of the New Englander's conscience', we would expect the religious beliefs of the poet to have some affinity with

---

(1) cf. Herbert Howarth's account of the way in which Thomas Stearns reacted to the religious convictions of his grandfather at Harvard. Notes on Some Figures behind T.S. Eliot. p. 88.

the ideals of a theological movement in Europe that came to be known as Neo-Orthodoxy. Led by the Swiss Calvinist, Karl Barth, the Protestant theologians were concerned with recalling the churches of the Reformed tradition to the 'Biblical' faith of their sixteenth century forefathers. Barth especially, seemed intent upon destroying the Liberal Protestant theology of the nineteenth century by insisting, powerfully and relentlessly, on the necessity for believing in the corruption of the created order, the depravity of man, and his absolute dependence for salvation on the 'grace' of God.

It is true that a close parallel can be drawn between Eliot and Barth. They both accomplished a revolution in their own fields; they are both 'close to their age' responding to and shaping its sensibility; they both express the experience of men in a disintegrating society; they both embody the dissatisfaction of a generation with theological and philosophical liberalism. All the same, Eliot's religious beliefs differ radically from Barth's. Despite the fact that he depicts in his poetry 'an unregenerate society' and a conviction of 'the ineradicable sinfulness of man' he does not revert to the theological tradition of Puritanism or embrace that of Neo-Orthodoxy. With an attitude that was deliberately, even self-consciously, classical and European, his

reaction to liberalism, humanism and sentimentality took him in the totally different direction of the English philosopher and literary figure, T.E. Hulme.

Hulme, however, died in 1917, and his philosophical jottings remained unpublished until 1922, so that it is highly improbable that anything Eliot produced before The Waste Land could have been influenced by Hulme's writings. Moreover, although they had a number of mutual friends and acquaintances, there is no record of the two men ever having met. Nonetheless there is a fundamental similarity of outlook which cannot be overlooked and which has been commented on (though not extensively) by several critics. D.S. Savage, for instance, writing in 1944, said:

> Eliot's view of personality follows very closely indeed upon that of T.E. Hulme, a writer who has evidently had a great influence upon his thought[1].

Kathleen Nott in her book The Emperor's Clothes assumes throughout that there is a basic similarity, and Eliot himself quotes Hulme with some approval in his essay on Baudelaire in 1930[2]. H.N. Fairchild traces a literary and poetical influence through Ezra Pound when he writes of the essays in The Sacred Wood (1920):

---

(1) The Personal Principle, pp. 100-101.

(2) Selected Essays, p. 430.

> ..... Their basic ideas are considerably indebted to Pound, through Pound to Hulme[1].

Hulme's importance in the group of poets who came to be called the Imagists is undeniable, and it is possible that his influence extended far beyond the realms of literary theory and poetic technique, though there is little evidence for postulating its communication to Eliot through Pound. It is more likely that Eliot already equipped philosophically with certain beliefs about human nature ('view of personality') discovered in Hulme a similarity of attitude which had as its basis a strong religious conviction, and gradually formulated a religious sensibility which, in opposition to liberalism, came to be a fine blend of specifically Christian doctrine and Hulme's pseudo-Christian religious convictions.

It might seem strange that a declared member of the Church of England should be accused of possessing pseudo-Christian beliefs, especially since so much of what he says is expressed in the traditional terminology of Christianity and appears to be in agreement with the anti-liberalism of the Continental theologies. On close examination, however, the similarities between Hulme and the Protestants turn out to be entirely negative - partly because Hulme's theological bias was a Catholic one, but

(1) Religious Trends in English Poetry, Vol. V., p. 558.

largely because he lacked or at least failed to express in writing what is central to any Christian philosophy: a doctrine of the Atonement. Their attitude grew out of the same dissatisfaction with the contemporary cultural and religious situation, but while diagnosing the same complaint, they offered different cures. They are at one in denouncing Liberalism and Romanticism - religion which is based (in accordance with the principles of Schleiermacher and Ritschl) upon feeling and experience, and virulently opposed all tendencies to belief in the innate goodness of man or the idea of progress. Moreover they all begin, quite explicitly, with a strong conviction of Original Sin. Hulme says, for instance, of all philosophy since the Renaissance

> It all rests on the same conception of the nature of man, and exhibits the same inability to realise the meaning of the dogma of Original Sin[1].

But the meaning he gives to the dogma is entirely different from that understood by the neo-orthodox theologians. For Barth and for Brunner - as also for all orthodox Christian thinkers - the doctrine of Original Sin is set firmly in the context of the whole scheme of man's creation and salvation, which Hulme for all his use of technical terms, resolutely ignores. A similar deficiency,

---

(1) Speculations, p. 13.

though less extreme in form can be seen in T.S. Eliot's poetry. Here we will find that whereas the doctrine of the Incarnation is deeply apprehended and figures prominently in nearly all the poems, its complementary doctrine - that of the Atonement which claims to deal specifically with the problem of Original Sin and human sinfulness - is hardly mentioned.

Hulme never defines his concept of Original Sin but two quotations from Speculations will give his meaning quite clearly:

> While he [man] can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself be perfect ..... he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline - ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating[1].

And in a discussion of Romanticism in art:

> One can define the classical quite clearly as the exact opposite to this. Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him[2].

Apart from the arrogance of tone there is nothing that can be called specifically un-Christian about these statements, but they are obviously written from a Catholic background and consequently differ in sensibility from the formulations

---

(1) Speculations, p. 47.

(2) Ibid., p. 116.

of the continental Protestants on the same subjects. It is difficult to imagine Hulme agreeing with Barth's assertion

> So great is the ruin of the creature that less than the self-surrender of God would not suffice for its rescue[1].

It is not only the soteriological context which is unfamiliar to Hulme, but the insistence upon the depravity of man ('the ruin of the creature'). This is an insistence which is foreign to the Catholic tradition of Christianity too, and it will be noticed that on these occasions when Hulme's religious ideas are in accordance with orthodox Christian doctrines, it is on the Catholic rather than the Protestant side that his emphasis falls. Eliot's position, though somewhat complicated by his distinctively American Protestant inheritance, has a similar bias.

It is necessary, when using the terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant', to be aware of the dangers which beset the discussion. On the one hand the sharp divisions which characterise western Christendom create a tendency to treat the terms as mutually exclusive; to make rigid distinctions; to draw hard and fast doctrinal boundaries and over-simplify theological disagreement. Equally

---

(1) <u>Dogmatics in Outline</u>, p. 116.

inaccurate is the attitude which glosses over the disputes of over four centuries and refuses to acknowledge the depth of doctrinal differences inherent in the argument between Catholic and Protestant theology. In areas of disagreement like the doctrines of the Church and the Sacraments, Original Sin, Predestination and Justification it must be recognised that there are profound differences, but even here the labels 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' frequently serve only to indicate a bias or an emphasis rather than define a dogmatic position.

Hulme's main preoccupation is with the doctrine of Original Sin and in his treatment of it, the accent falls continually upon the 'lack of perfection' in man, and not upon his 'corruption'. The consequences of the Fall are viewed as a deprivation rather than as a depravation, and he speaks, consequently, of the possibility of man 'partaking of perfection', a phrase which suggests a theology of _sanctifying_ grace rather than one of _redeeming_ or _justifying_ grace. Although perfection (moral and aesthetic) is impossible on the human plane, there is place for striving to achieve things of value at this level, and he shows the traditional Catholic concern for, and interest in, contemporary society and culture. It is at this point that the divergence between Hulme's and Barth's religious ideas becomes most pronounced.

Whereas both reacted violently to Romanticism and Liberalism and the Ritschlian suggestion that the kingdom of God could be realised on earth, Hulme continued to advocate the striving for perfection by personal discipline and the submission to the institution, while Barth categorically denounced a Christian apologetic which was trying to come to terms with contemporary culture and all theology which was not built upon the atoning work of Jesus Christ alone. Redemption, which is a key-word in Barth (and all Christian theology Catholic or Protestant) never makes an appearance in Hulme's writings, and it cannot be denied that, despite his profession of Christianity and the frequency with which he embarks on a discussion of Original Sin, there is in Speculations a conspicuous lack of the Christian understanding of sin. His conception of the doctrine seems to revolve entirely around his preoccupation with the problems of human finitude and limitation. Original Sin is a term used to describe this particular condition of life and has little to do with that pattern of self-assertion and rebellion of which the Genesis myth speaks.

It must be admitted that in a writer like the Spanish philosopher Unamuno the Catholic tradition shows itself verging on a similar interpretation of the doctrine as he speaks about the 'hunger of immortality'.

> For what is specific in the Catholic religion is immortalization and not justification, in the Protestant sense[1].

It is this strain in the Catholic sensibility which has led the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr to accuse Catholicism of neglecting 'the more basic issues of Biblical religion' in phrases that, wrested from their original context and applied to the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, neatly point up basic differences of attitude.

> The issue is not the finiteness of man but his sin; not his involvement in the flux of nature but his abortive attempts to escape that flux. The issue of Biblical religion is not primarily the problem of how finite man can know God, but how sinful man is to be reconciled to God.....[2]

But Unamuno can hardly be regarded as the representative voice of the Church for despite its emphasis on the deprivation of graces and its less serious view of the consequences of the Fall, the Catholic Church has never abandoned the Biblical concept of sin as man's rebellious pride issuing in acts for which he is responsible and involving him in a pattern of corruption and separation for which the Atonement is the only solution.

Both T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot, however, represent,

---

(1) The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 67.

(2) The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I. p. 158.

in their own ways, that Catholic outlook which Niebuhr deplores. It might be argued that this kind of critical judgement is unfair to Hulme whose Speculations is not the expression of a carefully worked-out system but a posthumous collection of philosophical and critical jottings. Hulme, however, does use theological categories and must be judged by them. Moreover, despite the fragmentary nature of the work and the superficial contradictions, a fundamentally unified vision of life emerges from these apparently haphazard meditations. It is the vision of a man acutely conscious of the weaknesses of liberal and romantic attitudes and bitterly aware of the imperfection and mutability of human existence. There is nothing specifically Christian about this apprehension, nor about the value he attaches to discipline and order, nor even the belief that perfection can only be found at a level which is outside and beyond the natural world.

Eliot's position is at once, both easier and more difficult to understand. The corpus of his work is far greater and, unlike Hulme's is a consciously constructed edifice. But the poet has made particular efforts at dissociating the works from their creator, and, what is of greater importance, the work itself is that of the imaginative artist primarily concerned with communicating

the quality and intensity of particular experiences[1], not that of a philospher or a theologian expounding a system by which men might be expected to order their lives. But inevitably a 'philosophy' or 'theology' does emerge: a vision of life is communicated, and, in the later poetry especially, it is a vision that bears close resemblance to that of T.E. Hulme. In Four Quartets, which I take to be the culmination of Eliot's imaginative and intellectual efforts, we see him preoccupied, as Hulme was, with the mutability of human life, the finiteness of man's existence and his inescapable involvement in the flux.

Babette Deutsch is only one of many who claim that Eliot '.... is concerned with one theme: sin and redemption'[2]. But the attitudes which were responsible for Puritan theology have little place in Four Quartets. It has at its heart the question of knowledge, not reconciliation. It is, to use Niebuhr's distinction, the creation of an artist struggling with the problem of 'how finite man can know God' rather than with 'how sinful man can be reconciled to him'. In terms of Christian doctrine we shall discover that it turns upon the axis of the Incarnation. Its power lies in Eliot's

---

(1) cf. Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca. Selected Essays pp. 126-140.

(2) 'The Auditory Imagination'. Poetry in Our Time, p. 160.

grasp of the meaning of the doctrine 'the Word was made flesh'. The Christian vision of Four Quartets is limited, and although the poet tries to include the total Christian experience by introducing meditations on the Cross and Passion, the attempts at expressing the meaning of the Atonement are artificial and unconvincing beside his treatment of the Incarnation.

The similarity between Eliot and Hulme, though evident, must not be exaggerated, and the claim of Babette Deutsch that 'sin and redemption' are the dominant themes in all Eliot's work is not to be dismissed out of hand. They are central in the plays and are woven into much of the pattern of the early poetry, but they occur only occasionally, and in a somewhat artificial way in the poems which follow Ash Wednesday. While it is possible to argue convincingly for the 'essential unity' of Eliot's work[1] in that the later productions represent a development of and not a break from, earlier ones, there is little evidence for maintaining that the final plays develop the attitudes of Four Quartets, or that the two early plays have a real connection with the poem they appear to resemble. It is as though the strands which had been closely woven together in the early work are drawn apart in Ash Wednesday and dealt with separately in the poems and plays which followed.

---

(1) Helen Gardner. The Art of T.S. Eliot, p. 78.

CHAPTER IV

Eliots' Poetry (1). 1909 - 1917 and Poems 1920

It is an unregenerate world which Eliot depicts in his early poetry; a world he had learned to observe through the eyes of Baudelaire and the French symbolists; a world in which listless human beings act out meaningless lives in squalid surroundings. The volume entitled *Prufrock and Other Observations* is dominated by the image of the city, and in the urbane accents of poems like *The Boston Evening Transcript*, *Aunt Helen* and *Cousin Nancy* the hypocrisy and fatuousness of comfortable Edwardian society are mockingly exposed. None of these poems possesses much poetic power - *Aunt Helen* is an elaborate verse-game played with references from the *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, and the use of the quotation from Meredith's *Lucifer in Starlight* in *Cousin Nancy*, is one of the rare instances in which Eliot's irony is too obvious to be effective - but the poems leave the reader in no doubt as to the poet's own attitude to the liberalism and humanism which surrounded him. The newspaper, The Boston Evening Transcript, popular among members of the fashionable liberal circles in New England is held up to witty ridicule, and its readers are almost embryonic

'objective correlatives' for Eliot's complicated emotional reaction to those principles which he is deriding. There is no trace of pity in these poems, and were it not for their humour, the cold detachment with which the society is scorned would amount almost to cruelty.

Throughout the volume Eliot draws a picture of human life which stands in deliberate and sometimes cynical contrast to those drawn both by the Transcendentalists and by his own contempories.

In the four poems which constitute Preludes the images combine to convey not merely an atmosphere of decay and meanness, but a sense of the purposelessness of existence. The mention of 'the lighting of the lamps' at the end of the first poem is a bitterly ironic reminder of a life which has warmth and meaning. It suggests the ebb and flow of human fellowship and carries the deeper religious connotation of the ceremonial lighting of lamps at evening in Jewish, Christian and pagan household devotions[1]. But here the lamps are lit in a dismal side-street with only a cab-horse to appreciate their significance. The sharp staccato presentation of the images in these first thirteen lines suggests a life which is a series of disconnected events. The suggestion

---

(1) Gregory Dix. The Shape of the Liturgy, pp. 417-418.

is underlined later in words which demonstrate Eliot's antipathy to Emerson's statement about the divinity of the soul, and echo the philosophical tenets of F.H. Bradley.

> You dozed, and watched the night revealing
> The thousand sordid images
> Of which your soul was constituted;
> They flickered against the ceiling[1].

Far from being able to look into his own soul and rely upon his natural divinity, a man discovers that his inner reality consists of nothing but an agglomeration of disparate sentient experiences. Appearance and reality are, in the literal sense, confused. The distinction between what is perceived and the perceiver himself is destroyed. But Eliot is not a pure Bradleyan and is perfectly prepared to treat this 'confusion' ambiguously and put it to ingenious poetic use as in the second Prelude:

> With other masquerades
> That time resumes,
> One thinks of all the hands
> That are raising dingy shades
> In a thousand furnished rooms[2].

The word 'masquerades' is important here. It is not merely a decorative grimace but suggests that all life is a confusion of reality with appearance. The horror

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 22.

(2) Ibid., p. 21.

is increased by the picture of the multiplicity of the deception. All life is a play-acting, and with the blurring of the distinction between appearance and reality man no longer knows what he is. His identity symbolised by the unassailable separateness of his own soul is lost and he is dissolved in the squalid world which surrounds him[1] the world of appearance

> His soul stretched tight across the skies
> That fade behind a city block,
> Or trampled by insistent feet
> At four and five and six o'clock;[2]

The search for reality and the problematic relation between appearance and reality is a constantly-recurring theme in Eliot's poetry. It turns up again in Gerontion, The Waste Lane, Ash Wednesday, the Ariel poems and, of course Four Quartets. But it is the central theme of only one of the plays: The Confidential Clerk. It is not a particularly Christian preoccupation - it has been the concern of philosophical and theological systems since before the time of Plato. One might almost say, remembering Niebuhr's remarks about Biblical religion, that it is of little concern to Biblical Christianity. Certainly Jewish religion and the early Christian church give no evidence for supposing that the problem of the nature of

---

(1) As in Rhapsody on a Windy Night. pp. 24-26.
(2) Ibid., p. 22.

reality was ever considered, and yet Eliot chooses a specifically Christian doctrine - the Incarnation - to solve the problem in the greatest of his poetic works. Although no theological categories are used in this early volume, the world with which it deals, might well be described as unregenerate - experiencing the consequences of Original Sin, but strangely enough the picture of the redemption offered in Eliot's later work (especially Four Quartets) is one in which the cardinal Christian notion of reconciliation is blurred and indirect.

Whereas Preludes and Rhapsody on a Windy Night are slightly and intentionally melodramatic in their approach, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Portrait of a Lady are wry and ironical. They deal, however, with essentially the same situation. Both Prufrock and the young man are aware of living in the tension between appearance and reality and are both incapable of forcing the moment 'to its crisis' and resolving the tension. For both of them, appearance and unreality are bound up with the trivialities of social behaviour

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;[1]

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 12.

> Particularly I remark
> An English countess goes upon the stage.
> A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
> Another bank defaulter has confessed[1].

And in Prufrock the problem of finitude and decay - Time - makes its appearance:

> I grow old ..... I grow old.....
> I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled[2].

Even in these mocking, amused lines we have man's predicament carefully outlined. Prufrock is caught up in the process of decay and death just as he is caught up in the social trivialities of his existence, and though he is frustratedly aware of his own imprisonment, he is equally aware of his own impotence:

> But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
> Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
> brought in upon a platter,
> I am no prophet - and here's no great matter[3];

The nearest he can come to relieving the tension created by his knowledge and his impotence is either by giving voice to the ludicrous protests of

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

or by trying the self-delusion of

> ..... and here's no great matter

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 18.

(2) Ibid., p. 15.

(3) Ibid., p. 14.

We know, as he asks it, that the question which superficially, has such an important sound

> Do I dare
> Disturb the universe?

is for Prufrock, only an academic one, a sardonic reminder of his own hopelessness. The universe is incapable of being disturbed. The possibility of 'murdering' or 'creating' anything is prevented in a world where even Lazarus 'come from the dead' would be met with nothing but a petulant comment. The universe itself is ailing and only half-alive.

> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table;

and Prufrock and the young man of Portrait are inescapably part of this fragmentary, listless world. They are the anticipation of the Hollow Men, not 'lost, violent souls' but empty ones, and so offer a contrast with Sweeney whose corruption, however bestial, seems at least to offer the possibility of damnation. In these early poems Eliot is concerned with the theme of sin and redemption in an entirely negative way. Both redemption and damnation are an impossibility (or an irrelevance) in a world where there is no apprehension of sin. Prufrock does not belong to the Calvinistic hell which Ferner Nuhn[1] claims Eliot

---

(1) See T.S. Eliot A Selected Critique, ed. by L. Unger, p. 137. 'Orpheus in Hell', Ferner Nuhn. pp. 120-137.

has created. It is far more likely that he is an occupant of, what Edith Sitwell has called the 'shallow hell' which lies just below the surface of modern life. So it is only in the negative aspect of his work, his rejection of the progressive philosophical attitudes of the nineteenth century, that Eliot is linked with Calvinism in the shape of the neo-orthodox theologians. The recognition of the condition of decay and death; of the trivial and fragmentary nature of existence does not imply a sense of sin or an interest (in these poems) in the cause of the condition. That these things are, theologically speaking, the result of Original Sin is not his interest here. Unlike Auden he does not probe into the cause of the condition, he depicts it and, later, seeks a way of escape. Consequently his desire (contrary to Edmund Wilson's contention) is for knowledge of reality and, in religious terms, mystical union rather than for reconciliation and redemption. This is prefigured in Prufrock in the vision of the mermaids in the closing lines of the poem.

> 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

There is the suggestion of a visionary experience, almost a mystical fantasy in these lines. The singing is an ironic counterpoint to the conversation of 'human voices'

which drags Prufrock back to the pettiness and squalor of his real life. But again there is also the suggestion of the confusion of reality and appearance; we cannot be sure that the vision of the mermaids and their singing offers any kind of genuine perception. It is, after all, only out of a dream that we are awakened and drowned. But the singing of the mermaids is undoubtedly meant to contrast with the noise of the voices that awaken us; for the latter is connected with the futile activity of the women who

> ...... come and go
> Talking of Michelangelo.

We are reminded again of these voices all the way through Portrait of a Lady which is full of trivial conversation, and later in The Waste Land where there is the extended image of sordidness conveyed in the chatter of the public house. And later still, in Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets, there is the opposition of the noisy distraction of earthly speech to the stillness of the Word of God

> ....Shrieking voices
> Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
> Always assail them. The Word in the desert
> Is most attacked by voices of temptation[1],

If we were to trace the pattern of the development of the 'singing' symbol systematically throughout Eliot's

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 12.

poetry we should end with something that was both extremely complex and utterly unified. We should find it suggests something different every time it occurs, but that it is linked with, and even conditioned by, every other occurrence. Helen Gardiner's arguments for the 'essential unity' of Eliot's poetry are completely vindicated by an examination of the way in which the poet uses his images. Here in Prufrock the singing contrasts with the speech of the human voices, but it has the deliberate ambiguity which colours the whole of the mermaid 'episode'. The vision holds out the possibility of real perception and yet fails to produce it. It has the appearance of a 'moment out of time', and yet is not that moment. The singing is deceptive and yet suggests a possible way to the gaining of real knowledge. In Journey of the Magi, the deceptive nature of the singing is emphasised in a line which actually identifies the two images of 'voices' and 'singing'

> Sleeping in snatches,
> With the voices singing in our ears, saying
> That this was all folly[1].

But in The Hollow Men, where a similar conjunction between 'voices' and 'singing' occurs, the suggestion is that of the heavenly choirs or the unearthly and unending 'music

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 107.

of the spheres'

> There, is a tree swinging
> And voices are
> In the wind's singing
> More distant and more solemn
> Than a fading star[1].

In the final movement of <u>The Waste Land</u> the 'singing' of the dry grass is ironically compared with that of the hermit-thrush, but the introduction of the thrush's song is significant for it is the song of the woodthrush in the later poem <u>Marina</u> which accompanies the moment of recognition[2]. And finally in <u>Four Quartets</u> it is the call of the bird which accompanies the experience of the 'timeless moment' in which the whole pattern of life is glimpsed, in which reality is finally apprehended[3].

It is true to say that <u>Four Quartets</u> grows out of the poems of this first volume and that the investigation of, and solution for, the dichotomy between, and confusion of, appearance and reality is the culminating development of one of the central preoccupations of the Prufrock volume. But it is only one of the themes of <u>Prufrock</u>, and <u>Four Quartets</u> tends to sever the connection of the problem itself with the background in which it is set.

---

(1) <u>Collected Poems</u>, p. 88.

(2) 'And the woodthrust calling through the fog
My daughter.' <u>Collected Poems</u>, p. 114.

(3) 'Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.' <u>Four Quartets</u>, p. 8.

The theme becomes both more personal and more philosophical, more universal and less concrete in its presentation. Eliot's interest in the unregenerate society wanes as he approaches Four Quartets. The desire for mystical union grows stronger and the need for atonement is overlooked. But before this development took place, the unregenerateness which Eliot had painted with such ironic care in Prufrock was subjected to a more searching investigation in Poems 1920, The Waste Land and Sweeney Agonistes.

POEMS 1920.

The poetic world of the first volume is quite different from that of the second, and the characters who people these worlds demonstrate the difference forcibly. J. Alfred Prufrock who is

> Deferential, glad to be of use,
> Politic, cautious, and meticulous[1];

and the young man of Portrait whose

> ..... smile falls heavily among the bric-a-brac[2]

have given place to Sweeney

> Letting his arms hang down to laugh[3],

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 15.
(2) Ibid., p. 19.
(3) Ibid., p. 57.

And the women of the earlier volume, who

> ..... come and go
> Talking of Michelangelo[1].

are replaced by the 'ladies of the corridor'. The Princess Volupine and Rachel nee Rabinovitch have taken the place of the one who pouted and complained 'settling a pillow by her head' and the other who slowly twisted lilac stalks as she talked. The point of these differences is not merely that Eliot wishes to describe a universal disease and, by the use of different 'people' to demonstrate the same kind of sickness at various levels of society, it is that the disease itself has changed. The society is being subjected to a different kind of interpretation. Eliot's vision of man and society has shifted since the production of Prufrock.

In 1930 he published an Introduction to the Intimate Journals of Charles Baudelaire in which he remarked that the French poet's main concern was with

> ..... the real problem of good and evil. ..... In the middle of the nineteenth century, the age which (at its best) Goethe had prefigured, an age of bustle, programmes, platforms, scientific progress, humanitarianism, and revolutions which improved nothing, an age of progressive degradation, Baudelaire perceived that what really matters is Sin and Redemption ..... To a mind observant of post-Voltaire France ... the recognition of the reality of Sin is a New Life; and the possibility of damnation is so immense

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 12.

> a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reforms, and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation - of salvation from the ennui of modern life[1].

The truth or falsity of this evaluation is not of importance here, but what is of importance is the fact of the applicability of most of these remarks to Eliot himself, and it is significant that at least two of Eliot's own critics talk about his work in terms which, if not identical, are at least very reminiscent of those which the poet uses in his discussion of Baudelaire. Babette Deutsch's contention about the centrality of 'sin and redemption' has already been mentioned. In The Tightrope Walkers, Giorgio Melchiori says of Sweeney Agonistes that the fundamental feeling in the fragments is '..... the sense of sin, sin intended in its fully Christian and scriptural meaning ....' and elaborates his point by claiming that this sense of sin '.... is openly expressed for the first time in Sweeney Agonistes, though it was adumbrated in the earlier poem The Hollow Men[2]. Melchiori is probably justified in finding the 'sense of sin' expressed openly for the first time in the two fragments which constitute Sweeney Agonistes, but

---

(1) 'Baudelaire.' Selected Essays, p. 427.

(2) Melchiori, pp. 110 and 112.

mistaken, I believe, in finding it adumbrated in the earlier poem The Hollow Men. While it is true that an earlier draft of part of The Hollow Men did appear in 1924, under the title Doris's Dream Songs[1], it would be wrong to identify Doris with the character who makes an appearance in the two fragments, for the atmosphere and ideas of these songs have their origins in Prufrock and Rhapsody. Sweeney Agonistes, on the other hand, belongs stylistically and philosophically to the world of Gerontion and Sweeney Erect; to the poems of the 1920 volume in which Sweeney himself appears.

It is in regard to this second volume that we begin to see the aptness of applying Eliot's remarks about Baudelaire to the English poet himself. In Prufrock we had the cynical portrayal of the 'age of progressive degradation', the bitter depiction of 'the ennui of modern life' in which lack of knowledge prevented either sin or damnation. Here, as later in Sweeney Agonistes, he turns his attention, not always successfully, to problems which can accurately be described in Christian terms of sin and evil and the possibility of damnation. Baudelaire describes his thoughts and feelings in the terms of a personal myth which included 'demons, black

---

(1) cf. D.E.S. Maxwell. The Poetry of T.S. Eliot, pp. 213-214.

masses and romantic blasphemy'. Eliot's myth, though equally personal, belongs to the twentieth century and its terms are prostitution, seduction, betrayal and murder. According to Eliot, it was no more than an 'accident of time' which caused Baudelaire to alight upon the 'vocabulary of blasphemy' for the poetic expression of his beliefs. The same could be said of his own use of distinctively twentieth century scenes and situations. The frequent juxtapositions of ancient and modern civilisation in Eliot's work clearly demonstrates his intention of suggesting that the problems he presents are not confined to a particular period or a particular setting. The half-bitter pessimism which pervades the earlier volume and in which something closely akin to a 'Hulmean' view of man as a limited, frustrated creature is expressed, has been largely replaced in most of the poems of the later volume by an amused and amusing cynicism which cloaks, in religious terms, a deeper penetration of the human condition. With the single exception of Gerontion, every English poem follows the same pattern. The manner is deliberately light, but tightly controlled and highly, sometimes self-consciously, allusive, and is a device chosen, like that of farce in The Confidential Clerk, in order to avoid the dangers of pomposity and priggishness in

treating themes like sin and evil. If the end of most of the 'characters' in the first volume is to experience the final futility and 'turn to dust again', the end of a number in the second is to experience the final corruption and discover damnation. The characters of the early poems demand release, the characters of the later require damnation.

Gerontion, like a few poems which were to follow later, stands somewhere in between these two views of man's condition. It is obviously different, in style and feeling, from any of the other poems of the 1920 volume and Gerontion himself bears a closer resemblance to Prufrock or the young man of Portrait than he does to Sweeney or Bleistein. In some ways he resembles a Prufrock grown old, for although he is more experienced than Prufrock and has a greater degree of self-knowledge, the weary, regretful reminiscences

> I was neither at the hot gates
> Nor fought in the warm rain
> Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, ...[1]

is the logical outcome of an attitude which refused to squeeze the universe into a ball or ask the overwhelming question. The repetition of the verb 'fought' emphasises Gerontion's own preoccupation with his own failure to act. As a result he finds himself

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 37.

'an old man in a dry month .... waiting for rain'. But the vision of the life of commitment and action is theatrical and slightly absurd (knee deep in the salt marshes heaving a cutlass) so that behind the images there lies the pessimistic suggestion that Gerontion's experience is universal, and further, that no act of commitment or type of involvement can bring meaningfulness and that all human beings are condemned to lives which are essentially sterile. This comes very close to T. E. Hulme's conception of man as a hopelessly limited creature enduring a meaningless existence unless some order is imposed upon that existence from outside:

> These with a thousand small deliberations
> Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
> Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
> With pungent sauces, multiply variety
> In a wilderness of mirrors ....[1]

If no order is imposed upon the lives of human beings their end is dissolution into the elements from which they come, dust and air. We will discover in The Waste Land and Four Quartets that the purging and destroying power of water and fire is needed to prevent this final dissolution. For men whose lives have been lived without a pattern or a meaning, there is only death without a meaning or a pattern. Gerontion (in the tradition of

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 39.

Gerontius) is a poem about death and what comes after.

> .... What will the spider do
> Suspend its operations; will the weevil
> Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
> Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
> In fractured atoms. ....

But with this veiled reference to the fate of Francesca, another note is sounded, that of damnation. It is only a faint reminder however, for, while the souls who are blown about on the howling wind of Hell retain their individuality and know their own damnation, the three 'type' characters mentioned here seem merely to undergo dissolution into 'fractured atoms' - a fate which can hardly be dignified with the name 'damnation'. And yet the possibility has been just glimpsed as the scene changes to four characters more concretely imagined: Mr. Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist, and Fraulein von Kulp. T.E. Hulme described Original Sin in terms of man's limitations and imperfections, but in fact, the roots of sin are to be found in deliberately-willed actions (the kind of actions of which Prufrock and Gerontion are incapable), the corruption and distortion of what is originally good and beautiful. Paolo and Francesca, for instance, find themselves condemned to the Second Circle of Hell because they allowed the corruption of love into lust. Although Gerontion himself sees little chance of 'salvation by damnation' there is

more than a hint that in these four figures the possibility of damnation hovers in the background. They have helped to corrupt and debase both love and religion.

The connection between love and religion is brought out in an extraordinarily complicated and rather confused collection of images

> .... In the juvescence of the year
> Came Christ the tiger
>
> In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas
> To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
> Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
> With caressing hands, at Limoges
> Who walked all night in the next room;
> By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
> By Madame de Tournquist, in the dark room
> Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp
> Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door....[1]

Although there is a quotation from a Christmas sermon by Lancelot Andrewes, it is the spring festival of Easter that is emphasised here. Eliot is not introducing an Incarnation motif but a Resurrection one. The 'darkness' is the darkness of the tomb. And the connection is made (as it has often been made) between the Resuscitation of the corn-god of the pagan fertility-cults and the Resurrection of Christ. It is at a time of swarming reproduction, in the month of fertility, that Christ comes. There is a sense of danger and animal sensuality about this coming, placed as it is between 'the juvescence

---

(1) <u>Collected Poems</u>, pp. 37-38.

of the year' and 'depraved May'. The suggestion of the corruption of love and religion is increased in the images which follow: of the Blessed Sacrament being eaten and divided and drunk 'among whispers'; of the 'caressing hands' and the shifting of the candles. The lines are full of hints and nuances but nothing is 'spelled out' and Hugh Kenner's claim that 'Some rite, not innocent unites these people' is a little too assertive. Perhaps there are suggestions of a Black Mass and furtive orgies, but it is more important to understand that these people have deliberately debased good and beautiful things, (cf. Mr. Eugenides in The Waste Land) and have renounced the Christian way of salvation and distorted their own lives by their demand for self-gratification.

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign!"

Coming as it does after the presentation of debased religion and distorted human lives, the line

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

has deep theological implications. It recalls the sin of Adam, the 'type' sin of mankind and is intimately linked with knowledge. In the Genesis myth, the man and the woman desired the fruit, not of the tree of life which could confer immortality, but of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil[1]. The possibility of damnation now enters for evil is known as a positive experience

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

Salvation is needed, yet God's response to the rebellion of Adam was to forbid him and Eve access to the tree of life, to drive them from the Garden and bar the entrance[2]. For the Christian, the answer to the question 'what forgiveness?' is the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. But here in *Gerontion* we have Christianity corrupted, the Christian ἀγάπη debased and the Saviour Himself appearing ambiguously as 'the tiger'. At first it is he who is eaten, divided, and drunk, but this changes with the re-casting of the original image

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.

The means of salvation becomes the way of damnation. The penalty for corrupting what is good is final rejection, and there is the slight suggestion here of St. Paul's remarks about the Eucharist

> For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body[3].

---

(1) *Genesis*, Ch. XXX vv. 1-6.

(2) Ibid, v. 24.

(3) St. Paul, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Ch. XI, v. 29.

But though these themes of the desecration of religion and the corruption of human relationships (it was the lustful who were condemned to be blown about the Second Circle) make their appearance in Gerontion, they are not dominant motifs, and the pervading atmosphere is not one of positive evil or real sin. The speaker is the type of human nature here, and like Prufrock a forerunner of the hollow men

> Paralysed force, gesture without motion[1],
>
> I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch[2].

The view of man is that which was adumbrated in Prufrock and Portrait of a Lady. The emptiness of life (symbolised both by the dryness and the wind) and the inability to act meaningfully are emphasised. The past is of no help in discovering the meaning of the present but is seen as a mere flux of events to which there is neither pattern nor key

> ....Think now
> History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
> And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
> Guides us by vanities ....[3]

Man is irrevocably caught up in a process that is

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 87.

(2) Ibid., p. 39.

(3) Ibid., p. 38.

arbitrary and meaningless and against which he has no redress. So the poem ends with a half-whimpering, resigned submission. The key has not been found, the pattern does not exist. There is not even positive evil, so there is no question of relief by damnation or salvation.

> And an old man driven by the Trades
> To a sleepy corner.
>
> Tenants of the house
> Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

It is a difficult poem, but not difficult in the sense in which A Cooking Egg is difficult. Gerontion's difficulty is like that of Marina and Four Quartets. Language is used in a highly original and individual way, words are taken out of their conventional contexts and given new meaning and imagery works at various levels demanding a variety of responses. Moreover there are problems created by the specifically 'modern' nature of the poetry: the rapid shift from image to image and the absence of logical connections. Above all there are the subtle and complex philosophical preoccupations expressed by the sensuous medium of poetic language. Gerontion is not a treatise on the nature of man, it is an evocation of a particular human experience (an apprehension and resigned acceptance of the meaninglessness of human life); nonetheless it is impossible to escape the philosophical attitudes to life and death which cause this particular

kind of evocation.

In *Gerontion* the reader finds himself involved in the particular experience of the central character in a way in which he is not involved in the experience of any other character in this volume. Sweeney, Doris, Rachel and the rest are caricatures and the choice of a deliberately racy, cynical attitude places them beyond the reach of identification and sympathy, while, at the same time, it allows them to operate as 'types' of human behaviour. It is significant that in his first attempt at poetic drama, Eliot, rather than adapting and extending the quasi-dramatic techniques of *Prufrock* and *Portrait*, chose to emphasise the elements of caricature and impersonation which are typical of the 1920 poems. The stylised attitudes struck by the protagonists in *Sweeney Agonistes*, and the exaggerated melodrama of the second fragment underline the connection between the fragments of 1932 and the earlier poems of 1920. Like Baudelaire, Eliot often comes closest to orthodox Christian doctrine, not in works which utilise the recognisable Christian myth, but, as *Poems 1920* illustrates, in works which make no mention of it at all.

None of the Christian traditions have ever defined Original Sin in the way that T.E. Hulme does, merely as a state of imperfection, incompleteness and finitude.

These are only some of the results of an initial defiance, a wilful defacement of the image of God, a deliberate corruption of what is good and beautiful. This note of wilful corruption is only hinted at in the first volume of Eliot's poetry, but is played much more loudly in the second. If one compares the picture of Prufrock or Gerontion with the following lines from Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar:

> A saggy bending of the knees
> And elbows, with palms turned out,
> Chicago Semite Viennese[1].

the difference becomes obvious. There are at least two suggestions of depravity in the later poem. First, the reduction of the human being to the level of an animal, and secondly the reduction of the sexual act to the level of a business transaction. The animal-like behaviour of human beings, only suggested here, is described explicitly in Sweeney Erect

> Gesture of orang-outang[2]

For man to allow himself to sink to the level of the animal is a perversion of his nature, and the lustful, grasping attitude usually associated with desire for financial gain is a perversion of the creative sexual impulse[3].

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 40.

(2) Ibid., p. 42

(3) cf. The Waste Land, l. 314 and Ash Wednesday, Pt. IV.

The animal metaphor used in Burbank and Sweeney Erect occurs frequently in the rest of the volume and tends to make Poems 1920 distinct from the rest of Eliot's poetry. Unlike Auden, he shows no interest in the relationship between men and animals as such, but only mentions animals or parts of animals in order to emphasise some aspect of the human condition. The men and women of the poems are constantly and unambiguously described as animal, and, with the possible exception of the 'tiger', the images are always used to convey human degradation.

The image of the ape makes the most frequent appearance. The creature is only hinted at in Burbank and Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service, but dominates Sweeney Erect and Sweeney Among the Nightingales:

> Gesture of orang-outang
> Rises from the sheets in steam.
>
> Pushing the framework of the bed
> And clawing at the pillow slip.
>
> ...... Sweeney straddled in the sun[1]
>
> Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees
> Letting his arms hang down to laugh[2]

Furthermore, the image is not confined to Sweeney alone. In Sweeney Erect for instance there is Doris who

> Enters padding on broad feet

and in Sweeney Among the Nightingales there is

---

(1) Collected Poems, pp. 42-43.

(2) Ibid., p. 57.

The silent vertebrate in brown

and it is Rachel nee Robinovitch who

Tears at the grapes with murderous paws.

It is instructive to place these images side by side with the few instances in the earlier poems when human beings are compared to animals. In Prufrock the speaker refers to himself as

a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas

and in Portrait he says

And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression ..... dance, dance
Like a dancing bear,
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.

Even when the element of caricature and exaggeration in the Sweeney poems is taken into account, it is obvious that there is a great difference in suggestion between the chattering ape of the earlier poem and the orang-outang of Sweeney Erect. In Portrait, the speaker, conscious of his feebleness rebels, unsuccessfully and mockingly, against the pettiness of his life with a despairing imitation of animal vitality. But the ape merely chatters and the bear merely dances, and the whole situation has the atmosphere of a charade - a feverish parlour - game played to fend off feelings of futility and helplessness. The imagery of the 1920 poems however, conveys the virility of the animal world. There is no

question of the characters playing at being animals, they have been metamorphosed into animals. The theme of Original Sin is sounded very strongly here. Natural man, left to himself does not achieve a god-like freedom and dignity, but reverts to bestiality; a bestiality which has power to profane and destroy

> The epileptic on the bed
> Curves backward, clutching at her side[1]

These characters are not like Prufrock. The claws which originally scuttled across the floors of silent seas[2], have turned into those which crumple and tear and the paws which mutilate[3]. There is little suggestion of uncertainty or weakness. This is a civilisation which is depraved and corrupt rather than one which is gradually collapsing through a refined lack of energy.

> (The lengthened shadow of a man
> Is history, said Emerson
> Who had not seen the silhouette
> Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.)[4]

There is nothing uncertain or feeble about Sweeney. 'Straddled' conveys just the opposite sense. Besides being a blow at Emerson's sentimental optimism, the stanza

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 43.

(2) Ibid., p. 13.

(3) Ibid., p. 57.

(4) Ibid., p. 43.

postulates a positive force of evil, suggesting a notion of destructive power that might be a parallel with Yeats' vision of the 'rough beast its hour come round at last' slouching towards Bethlehem[1]. In Yeats' mythology the 'rough beast' is a predictable stage of the pattern of life and history, but for Eliot human bestiality represents an overturning of the natural order; a deliberate perversion of human nature which involves self-destruction.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine speaks of man's iniquity giving the lie to itself

> either by corrupting or perverting that nature which thou hast ordained, or by the immoderate use of things which though hast permitted, or towards the use of things not permitted, by a burning in lust which is contrary to nature ....[2]

St. Augustine's use of the word 'lust' entails more than the passionate demand for sexual satisfaction, but the most obvious manifestation of human lust takes place in the field of sexual activity and concupiscence has always loomed large in traditional Christian thought about sin. Consequently Eliot's choosing to speak of human corruption in the terms of sexual depravity brings him close to orthodox Christian doctrine.

---

(1) 'The Second Coming' Collected Poems, p. 211.
(2) Confessions, p. 83.

In the sixteenth century Anglican formularies, the ninth Article of Religion speaks of Original Sin as an

> ...... infection of nature which doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek φρονημα σαρκος which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh is not subject to the Law of God[1].

The Church of Rome is more liberal in speaking about lust, and draws a finer distinction between the Fall itself and its inevitable results. Concupiscence, for example, is thought to be a result of the Fall and also, strangely enough, part of man's nature. This is the decree of the Council of Trent, but individuals have expressed themselves more strongly. St. Augustine in the last book of City of God claims that

> In heaven there will be none of that sexual desire which has been the cause of our downfall[2].

This attitude is too extreme to be orthodox, and in the fifteenth book he has even said that there is

> ..... a natural and laudable shame of sexual contact with one towards whom affinity adduces a reverential modesty. Although the contact be for the purpose of procreation it is still lust, which, as we know, makes even married people blush for shame[3]

---

(1) The Book of Common Prayer. Thirty Nine Articles

(2) City of God, p. 402.

(3) The translator's footnote should be observed. St. Augustine verges on heresy in the views expressed here. City of God, p. 254.

It is possible to argue that Eliot goes a good deal further than St. Augustine in his belief about the corruption of humanity. Thoughts of procreation never enter the minds of any of Eliot's characters. The suggestion of fertility in the phrase 'Ariadne's hair' is vitiated by the obscenity of

This withered root of knots of hair[1]

And it is ludicrous to think of Sweeney or Doris, or any of the others experiencing anything akin to shame at sexual contact. It is a sterile coupling, but one cannot fail to notice the power of this bestiality

The sickle motion of the thighs

Jacknifes upwards at the knees
Then straightens out from heel to hip.

There is physical force in the picture of Sweeney jacknifing upward or standing straddled in the sun. But it is a force that is entirely destructive. The images are images of cutting and breaking. In the later poem Sweeney Among the Nightingales, Rachel too, is given this kind of blind destructive power as she

Tears at the grapes with murderous paws[2];

Because of the similarities which exist between Poems 1920 and Sweeney Agonistes it is a little strange

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 42.

(2) Ibid., p. 57.

to find Eliot employing no animal metaphors at all in the two fragments. Doris, admittedly, on one occasion does refer to Sweeney's island as a 'crocodile isle'[1], but the instance is an isolated one and of no real significance. The closest the poet comes to using the animal metaphor is in his references to a 'primitive' state, savagery and cannibalism. But the use of the explicit, sustained animal metaphor is held off for a long time, only making an appearance again fifteen years later, significantly, not in the poetry, but in the first of the plays, Murder in the Cathedral[2].

But there is, in the plays, an attempt to provide a pattern of Atonement and restoration to complement the picture of depravity. This pattern is entirely absent from Poems 1920 or Sweeney Agonistes. Nevertheless positive depravity is recognised in these works in much the same way that evil is recognised in the poetry of Baudelaire, and in a manner which parallels the reaction of the neo-orthodox theologians to the libralism and optimism of late nineteenth century modes of Christian thought. Eliot verges on a Christian concept of Original Sin which differs radically from the Hulmean conceptions which tend to dominate the later poems. The pre-

(1) Collected Poems, p. 126.

(2) Collected Plays, pp. 41-42 and 45.

occupation with the problem of Time, and man's limited capacity to find an order in personal life and human history is not the Christian doctrine of salvation expressed in different terms. Orthodox Christianity takes both a more serious view of the corruption of the world and a more confident expectation of its restoration to its real and former glory.

CHAPTER V

Eliot's Poetry (2): Fragments of an Agon

T.S. Eliot is not a philosophical poet in the same sense that Dante is, for, despite the frequent apellation 'Christian poet', it cannot be claimed of him that any of his poems (and certainly not the whole body of his poetry) rests upon a coherent philosophy in the way that Dante's work rests upon the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. There is as Helen Gardner claims, an 'essential unity' in his poetry but it is of a quite different order from that of Dante whose Divine Comedy, for example, achieves a unity almost automatically by the very fact that it is built upon the self-consistent theological system of Aquinas. Helen Gardner in discussing the 'essential unity' of Eliot's work, claims that it arises out of '..... the integrity with which he [Eliot] has explored his own vision of life'[1]. It is thus an imaginative, rathor than a philosophical or theological unity, and is not dependent upon the integrity of the vision itself. Nor would Eliot himself have regarded it

---

(1) The Art of T.S. Eliot, p. 78.

as necessary that his poetry present a coherent philosophy. His remarks on the relation between 'thought' and 'poetry' in the essay Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca are sufficient evidence of his attitude to the intellectual endeavours of creative artists[1]. The philosophical integrity of the work is of minor importance to Eliot, and philosophically inconsistent attitudes are frequently forged into a unified poetic pattern through sheer imaginative power.

By comparison, W.H. Auden, can be seen as a philosophical poet in the 'Dantean' sense. Although his poetry, taken as a whole, does not have the unity that Eliot's has, it is rare to find any single poem showing any intellectual inconsistency. When the investigation of his poetry is reached, it will be found that this greater degree of philosophical and theological consistency is often achieved at the price of imaginative integrity. Moreover the difficulty of Auden's poetry is frequently caused by the ideas themselves and his work all too often calls for an intellectual exercise rather than an imaginative response.

From the poems of Eliot published before 1922, it is possible to see two considerably different beliefs about the nature of man emerging. On the one hand man

---

(1) Selected Essays, pp. 126-140.

is seen as a limited imperfect creature, incapable of significant action, living a purposeless life in a disordered universe. And on the other, man is described as a morally depraved being, engaged positively in corrupting the world and his own nature acting in ways that can only be termed evil. Sometimes these views are expressed separately in individual poems, sometimes they are woven together as in Gerontion and Sweeney Among the Nightingales. The Waste Land and the two fragments Sweeney Agonistes are, respectively, extensions of the two earlier poems in many ways, emphasising with greater force the distinctive attitudes of their forerunners. The two works resemble each other in that the theme of death is central to both, but differ from one another in their apprehension and presentation of it. Although there are images of violence and passages suggesting corruption in The Waste Land, the prevailing temper is that set by Gerontion. Life is described in terms of its negation - a futile and helpless subsistence. Sweeney Agonistes on the other hand takes up the mood of Sweeney Among the Nightingales and emphasises the wilful distortion and cruelty of existence, and in its own flippant style posits the meaningfulness of death. Both lives lead to death, but whereas the first ends in a crumbling to dust and oblivion (the sleep of winter), the second ends in

damnation.

It has been said that the Sweeney of the two fragments bears little or no resemblance to the Sweeney of the 1920 volume[1]. The character is claimed as an entirely new creation. Instead of the 'apeneck' sensualist we are given the first of a series of dramatic studies of exceptional human beings all of whom are out of tune with their surroundings, are more perceptive than their friends and associates, and are aware of some kind of obligation to act decisively in remedying a dislocated situation accepted by others as normal. Helen Gardner tries to dispose of Sweeney Agonistes by tacking it on to The Waste Land. F.O. Matthiesson and D.E. Jones treat it only as the experimental forerunner of the plays. But the two fragments are important because they look two ways. Sweeney himself is both a crude, experimental version of Thomas Beckett, Henry Monchesney and Celia Coplestone, and a perceptive, articulate version of the original 'apeneck'.

At a superficial level the connection with Poems 1920 can be seen in the characters themselves; Sweeney's society in Sweeney Agonistes is obviously identifiable

---

(1) F.O. Matthiesson, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, p. 159 The hero is so different a character from the "apeneck Sweeney" of the poems that Eliot might better have given him a different name.

with that of Sweeney Erect and Sweeney Among the Nightingales. Dusty and Doris, despite the new environment of a flat of their own, are clearly 'the ladies of the corridor'. The broadly ironic humour of these ladies who

> Call witness to their principles
> And deprecate the lack of taste[1]

finds easy and natural articulation in the conversation

> Dusty: Well that's true.
> He's no gentleman if you can't trust him
> And if you can't trust him -
> Then you never know what he's going to do[2].

At a deeper level the fragments are connected with the earlier poems by a similar pattern of imagery. We are given frequent descriptions of death in terms of unnatural cruelty and horror. The subject of Sweeney Erect is ostensibly the sterility and bestial sensuality of sexual activity in a brothel, but this is given images of pain and violence. Sweeney himself has the appearance of someone who has been mutilated

> Slitted below and gashed with eyes,[3]

and the suggestion of the physical damage he causes with his 'sickle motion from the thighs' is re-inforced when he tests his razor on his leg, and is hammered home by

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 43.

(2) Ibid., p. 119.

(3) Ibid., p. 42.

the description of the woman on the bed. Although specifically referred to as an epileptic, this description nonetheless conveys the attitude of someone who has been injured or even killed. The idea of murder only hinted at here, is discussed at some length by Sweeney in _Fragment of an Agon_. In between _Sweeney Erect_ and _Sweeney Agonistes_ there is the important little poem, _Sweeney Among the Nightingales_.

There has been a great deal of controversy about Eliot's use of mythological material in these poems of 1920 and _Sweeney Among the Nightingales_ raises the problem in its most acute form. This is not a poem of simple contrasts and it seems more likely that the Sweeney incident should be read in the light of the classical myth than that the Agamemnon story should be reduced to the squalid proportions of the contemporary scene. The Agamemnon murder acts as a 'type' so that the Sweeney story becomes a contemporary version of the classical myth. The sense of degradation is suggested in the familiar 'Hebraic' image

> Rachel nee Rabinovitch
> Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;[1]

But instead of Clytemnaestra slaying her husband we are given the petty but vicious animal behaviour of modern

---

(1) _Collected Poems_, p. 57.

womanhood-the heroic story of retribution and damnation in the ancient world is not offered merely as a pointed contrast to the helpless triviality of contemporary life. The two situations interact. A question mark is raised against the significance of the passionate actions of Clytemnaestra and Agamemnon

> And let their liquid siftings fall
> To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud[1].

At the same time the presence of the myth does not leave the modern characters untouched. Because of this we are closer to the 'possibility of damnation' in Sweeney Among the Nightingales than in Prufrock or Gerontion. The worlds of Prufrock and the old man are self-enclosed. They act out their lives in a meaningless pattern which has no external reference. The actions of Rachel, Sweeney, the host, 'the silent man in mocha brown' seem also to be trivial and meaningless but they have the external reference of the ancient story. The contemporary scene may be a degraded version of the original situation but there is a link between them. What we await is the re-discovery of the myth - for the characters of the poem, the recognition of guilt and damnation. Sweeney Agonistes becomes thus a dramatic fragment about an abortive search for guilt and damnation and it is the

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 58.

beginning of an inconclusive struggle in Eliot to discover and express the meaning of the Christian doctrone of the Atonement; a struggle which reaches its climax in the plays.

Despite the quotations from Dante's <u>Purgatory</u> in <u>Prufrock and Other Observations</u>, Eliot's early poetry does not have as its central theme 'sin and redemption', because, apart from ambiguous hints in <u>Gerontion</u> (made more explicit in the Sweeney poems), there is little suggestion that damnation has been apprehended. In his early poetry Eliot's chief concern is the portrayal of 'the ennui of modern life'; his vision of Hell comes later. It flares briefly in short passages and occasional allusions in <u>The Waste Land</u>, then more steadily and luridly in <u>Sweeney Agonistes</u>

As has been said, <u>Sweeney Agonistes</u> is a play which has the problem of death at its centre, and at the beginning of the melodrama Eliot places two epigraphs which, obliquely, suggest the ways in which the subject is to be considered.

Northrop Frye has claimed that Eliot's

> vision of evil, however, is seldom a vision of horror or violence, except off-stage, as in the crucifixion of Celia Coplestone in <u>The Cocktail Party</u>[1].

(1) <u>T.S. Eliot</u>, p. 52.

This is a strange remark to make for Murder in the Cathedral depicts evil in precisely these terms of horror and violence[1]. Moreover the nature of Celia's death is pre-figured, albeit in half-amused melodramatic tones, in the two fragments with which we are dealing.

The first epigraph, from Aeschylus, is the appalled cry of Orestes when the Furies make their first appearance. The shedding of his mother's blood has released these spectres of guilt which hound him to his destruction[2]. The theme of blood-guiltiness and consequent retribution receives fuller and unusual expression in Eliot's later play The Family Reunion where the Furies actually make their appearance. But in The Family Reunion, the Christian doctrine of the Atonement is invoked in the figure of Harry.

There can however, be no Atonement without the possibility of damnation and it is this latter which Sweeney is seeking in his crucial speech which grotesquely alludes to the murder of Clytemnaestra

Sweeney: I knew a man once did a girl in
Any man might do a girl in
Any man has to, needs to, wants to
Once in a lifetime, do a girl in[2].

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 29.

(2) It is true that the Furies are transformed later by the gods into agents of good and evil, but that is a much later development, and the note sounded here is the note of fear on the recognition of guilt, and the sense of inescapable retribution that is to be enacted.

(3) Collected Poems, p. 130.

Orestes knew the significance of the deed he was called upon to perform and knew also the impossibility of refusing his 'vocation'. The intolerable situation in which he and Elektra found themselves could only be relieved by courting destruction at the hands of the avenging Furies. The situation of contemporary existence is equally intolerable and the man in Sweeney's story feels the same compulsion to be released by courting damnation. The world will at least end with a 'bang' and not a 'whimper'. But the parallel ends there and the story is given a bitter twist. 'Between the idea/And the reality' the shadow has fallen, for the modern Orestes kills the girl and then tries to deny his action by keeping her in a bath of lysol. He fails to release the significant powers and so the deed fails to release him, life is reduced to futility again, and the distinction between life and death - offered by the unnatural act of murder - has again been blurred

> He didn't know if he was alive
> and the girl was dead[1]

If that was where Eliot had chosen to end his melodrama there would be some justification for Helen Gardner's calling it 'a rather sterile appendix' to <u>The Waste Land</u>[2], for this 'living death' is the subject of all the

---

(1) <u>Collected Poems</u>, p. 131.

(2) <u>The Art of T.S. Eliot</u>, p. 132.

poems. It would seem then, that no advance had been made on the vision of _Gerontion_; that even the attempt at sin - described in terms of horror and violence - has failed. But the play does not end with this pessimistic identification of life and death. Instead there follows a macabre and amusing, though possibly ambiguous, vision of hell and damnation. In dealing with the final chorus it is difficult to decide whether it is intended as an exaggerated gesture mocking man's inability to do anything significant or whether there is a suggestion of real horror

> You dreamt you waked up at seven o'clock
> and it's foggy and it's damp and
> it's dawn and it's dark.
> And you wait for a knock and the turning
> of a lock for you know the hangman's waiting
> for you[1].

The image of the prison in 'the turning of a lock' echoes lines from _The Waste Land_

> .... I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison[2].

But there is an important difference in the use to which this image is put. In _The Waste Land_ the speaker's recollection of the 'key' serves only to emphasise the fact of his imprisonment and powerlessness - we are back in the self-enclosed worlds of _Prufrock_ and _Gerontion_ -

---

(1) _Collected Poems_, p. 132.

(2) Ibid., p. 77.

whereas in Fragment of an Agon the possibility of release is suggested, a strange release, a real death, even perhaps 'the possibility of damnation'[1], for this closing chorus with its image of the lock and its insistent knocking takes us back to the Porter's scene in Macbeth, with its mention of 'hell-gate' and 'the everlasting bonfire', a hideously ironic commentary on the murder of Duncan. The knocking here, however, unlike the knocking in Macbeth, indicates the presence of the messengers of Hell, the agents of retribution, the avenging Furies.

Kathleen Raine, it will be recalled, praised Eliot for restoring the dimension of Hell to our naturalistic universe. Sweeney Agonistes for all its mocking flippancy, suggests in its imagery of horror and violence that a pit of great depth and real terror may lie just below the surface of modern life. When this is realised one is close to the Christian vision of human existence, as it has been expressed, not only traditionally but particularly in the 'neo-orthodox' theology of the twentieth century.

The second epigraph to the melodrama invites the consideration of death in an entirely different way from

---

(1) cf. Essay on Baudelaire, Selected Essay, p. 429.

that indicated by the quotation from Aeschylus. Although Christianity, unlike many of the Oriental religions, is not a world-denying faith - it cannot afford to be since it believes in an incarnate God - there is nonetheless a strong tradition in its ascetical theology of a type of spirituality known as the via negativa: a way of attaining union with the Divine which involves the deliberate detachment of the soul from the love of all things that are not God. This attitude can be traced back at least as far as Dionyius the Pseudo-Areopagite, a neo-Platonic mystic of the sixth century, and reaches supreme expression, in the Western Church, in the works of St. John of the Cross:

> And thus the soul that has attachment to anything, however much virtue it possess, will not attain to the liberty of Divine union[1].

This is the first use Eliot makes of The Ascent of Mount Carmel and the reference, by way of epigraph here, differs radically from the veiled allusions of Ash Wednesday and the extended references and quotations of Four Quartets. Carol Smith has pointed out[2] that Sweeney's

---

(1) The Works of St. John of the Cross, Vol. I, Bk. V, Ch. XI, p. 51.

(2) T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice, p. 70.

murder-story is a grotesque version of St. John's injunctions about the necessity for the soul's detachment from 'created things', and an even more obvious parody is the quickfire backchat which begins Fragment of an Agon

> Well that's life on a crocodile isle,
> There's no telephones
> There's no gramophones
> There's no motor-cars[1].

The soul is stripped here of 'the world' and the love of 'created things', but the result is not divine union, merely an increased sense of boredom

> Birth, and copulation, and death.
> That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks

The futility of human life becomes even more apparent when the tawdry accoutrements of twentieth century civilisation have been removed. As in Baudelaire's vision, the human being, trapped in the sub-human round of 'birth, and copulation, and death' can only attain dignity by a recognition of good and evil and actively asserting one or the other. Sin, like Faith, offers a positive way of escape from the intolerable condition of 'ennui'. In the light of the epigraph to Sweeney Agonistes, the act of murder is ironically identified with that ultimate act of detachment from created things. In the Ascent of Mount Carmel this act would result in

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 126.

divine union; in Sweeney Agonistes the possibility of exactly the opposite state - complete severance - is suggested. But Eliot does no more than hint at the possibility and again demonstrates man's failure to make the final renunciation.

Sweeney Agonistes has many faults - the imagery is often crude, the themes are badly integrated, there are sudden jarring leaps in the dialogue, and the tone is frequently self-consciously flippant. But despite its flaws it remains an impressive work, and as a study in the poet's development towards an expression of Christian doctrine, it is more important than either The Waste Land or The Hollow Men both of which far surpass it in poetic merit. It expresses vigorously, and sometimes with startling immediacy, beliefs about the nature of man which have scarcely come to the surface before. Both The Waste Land and Sweeney Agonistes can be said to contain the seeds of religious ideas which came to fruition in the later works. They both have the recurrent motif of death and birth, and they both deal with man's failure to discover the myth which will give order and meaning to his existence, but Fragment of an Agon consciously forges a link between the ideas of birth and death and those of guilt and damnation in a way that is barely suggested by The Waste Land. The

theological problems of the plays can be regarded as extended treatments of those raised in _Sweeney Agonistes_ whereas the philosophical framework _Four Quartets_ grows out of the preoccupations _Prufrock_ and _The Waste Land_. Consequently the religious ideas of the later poetry are further away from orthodox Christian doctrine than is generally supposed. Both plays and poems are decisive rejections of the liberal sensibility of his own background and of the nineteenth century, but neither group represents a return to the Calvinist theology of his own Puritan ancestors. Eliot's repudiation of the liberal Congregationalism of his upbringing went hand in hand with the renunciation of the country of his birth and the consequent acceptance of the Catholic religious tradition in its most rigid English manifestation. Despite the emphasis on the sinfulness of man, it is the Catholic consciousness which pervades his later work, though it appears very differently in the poems and the plays.

CHAPTER VI

Eliot's Poetry (3): Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets.

Ash Wednesday was first published in 1930, though the second section of the poem, entitled Salutation, appeared in Saturday Review of Literature (December 1927) and Criterion (January 1928)[1] shortly after the poet's baptism into the Church of England. Constructed on a framework of Biblical images, Dantesque allusions, and liturgical quotations, it is justifiably regarded as Eliot's first specifically Christian poem, though the vision which it embodies is organically connected with that of The Waste Land.

Having surveyed the devastations of modern civilisation and individual human lives, Eliot begins the closing 'statement' of the The Waste Land with the half-despairing self-examination of the Fisher king

> I sat upon the shore
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
> Shall I at least set my lands in order?[2]

He begins the first section of Ash Wednesday also with an image of a king and the same half-despairing, half-weary introspective questioning tone.

---

(1) Donald Gallup. T.S. Eliot. A Bibliography, p. 94. Part I appeared in Commerce, XV, (Spring 1928), and Part III in the same periodical XXI (Autumn 1929)

(2) Collected Poems, p. 77.

(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?[1]

And the liturgical plea for peace which formally closes The Waste Land is echoed in the first section of Ash Wednesday and repeated, with greater emphasis, in the last section

Teach us to sit still[2].

Ash Wednesday may well be a poem about conversion and the discovery of faith, but its tone is tentative and perplexed; we are not provided with the picture of a man who has come upon the means of salvation and the solution to the problems of contemporary life, but with that of a man grasping for a solution which he believes to be there but unsure of the nature of that for which he is reaching. Like The Journey of the Magi with its deliberately indecisive ending[3], Ash Wednesday is a much more ambiguous poem than is usually believed. It is certainly a 'religious' poem, but the religious emotion which it expresses is of a very special order.

It is natural to suppose that the whole poem grew around the original dream-sequence of the second section and is an extension of its attitudes. The dominant

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 93.

(2) Ibid., p. 103.

(3) It is, I think a much more uncommitted poem than is usually believed. The result of the journey is the experience of doubt and dis-ease. Collected Poems, p. 108. cf. F.R. Leavis: New Bearings, p. 97.

images of this section are drawn from the latter parts of The Divine Comedy and the prophecy of Ezekiel. Here, as in the dream sequence of the fourth part, Eliot presents an abundance of allusions in a highly-involved, consciously literary style. Far from being a 'definite feature of inferiority' as Edmund Wilson suggests[1], this style expresses perfectly a religious apprehension which is known only intellectually, and not as a part of the poet's emotional life. It is not until Marina and Four Quartets that the vision itself is presented by Eliot as having been seen 'in the flesh'. Here in Ash Wednesday, the visions of Dante and Ezekiel are something which the poet can, in some measure, understand and accept as real, but has no personal experience of. The joy and expectancy which characterise the climb up the mountain of Purgatory into Paradise in The Divine Comedy have little place in the Litany of the second part of Eliot's poem and are not conveyed with any immediacy even in the High Dream sequence of the fourth which relies so heavily on the third stage of Dante's journey. The ambiguous use of the word 'ends' in the Litany is an example of the irrepressible doubt which arises about the meaning of the vision of the Rose and the Garden. And after the reference to Dante's Eucharistic Pageant

(1) Axel's Castle, p. 109.

in the fourth part - a stilted and artificial image - we are left with the reminder of death in the resignation of

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew

and the haunting liturgical phrase from the Salve Regina which faintly echoes the poem's opening quotation from Cavalcanti's Ballata

And after this our exile.

The theme of resurrection to new life which is the main point of Ezekiel's prophecy gained from his vision in the valley of the bones, seems to be dealt with almost ironically by Eliot in the second part. There is no question here of 'bone coming to his bone'; of a new breath which will give them life. They remain in the desert chirping, 'glad to be scattered' - accepting their separation in death 'We have our inheritance'. Although Helen Gardner is correct in pointing out that the 'supple, flowing rhythm' gives to the 'disenchanted scene a kind of enchantment'[1], I cannot agree that it altogether dispels the sense of an irony which is neither cynical nor bitter but merely resigned. The artificiality of the sequences remains, and needs to remain, so that the quality of the religious feeling can be truly apprehended. In the opening section the poet talked of

(1) The Art of T.S. Eliot, p. 118.

'having to construct something/upon which to rejoice'[1]. The visions of the bones and, more especially, that of the 'earthly paradise' are part of that edifice which is being erected consciously and deliberately out of the 'fragments that were shored against his ruins'. These sequences have then necessarily less poetic immediacy than the expressions of personal fumblings and bewilderment.

But the artificiality of the constructions does not make the specifically religious apprehensions any less profound. Moreover the poem is not merely deeply religious it is deeply Christian in its vision. The use of liturgical utterances are of prime importance here for they not only express the groping, uncertain attempts of the man at prayer but the nature of his conversion and the type of his religious sensibility. F.O. Matthiessen has claimed that the fourth section of the poem

> .... following directly after the tortuous ascent of the stair presents a glimpse of an earthly paradise whereby the poet evokes imagery that will express the emotions he feels in contemplating the doctrines of Grace and Redemption[2].

This is rather a bold statement and fails to convey the subtlety of the poem, but Matthiessen is correct in pointing to the presence of those aspects of the

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 93.

(2) The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, p. 118.

Christian faith which he refers to as 'Grace' and 'Redemption'. Parts of Ash Wednesday do express, as no other poem by Eliot does, a convincing exploration of the two cardinal doctrines of Christianity - the Incarnation and the Atonement[1]. In the weaving together of Biblical allusion, liturgical quotation and personal response, Eliot combines in a single vision his two fundamental attitudes to man: the time-bound, limited creature seeking release and illumination, and the corrupt, violent creature needing purification and salvation.

It is the fifth section of the poem which most immediately conveys the poet's Christian apprehension. We are referred at its opening to the so-called 'Word Christology' of the early Church Fathers and especially to the great New Testament exponent of the Incarnation, St. John the Evangelist. The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (In the beginning was the Word .....) is adumbrated and reinterpreted here by Eliot. By means of direct quotation ('and the light shone in darkness'), and verbal echoes ('the word within/the world') together with a punning play, in the manner of Launcelot Andrewes[2], on

---

(1) It is true that in several of the Choruses from The Rock Eliot attempts the expression of the meaning of the Atonement. (Collected Poems pp. 173, 175, 179) But it is merely stated and not explored.

(2) See Ninety-Six Sermons, Vol. 1, pp. 85-101.

'word', 'world' and 'whirled', he recalls vividly the theological assertions of the Evangelist whose purpose in this Prologue was the presentation of the Incarnation in the terms of Greek philosophy (σαρξ and λογος). At the climax of the Prologue comes the phrase 'and the Word was made Flesh'[1], a paradoxical pronouncement of the union, in Christ, of the divine and the human. And it is this paradox which Eliot re-asserts and re-interprets in his image (used again and again in the later poetry) of the still point and the turning wheel

> Against the World the unstilled world still whirled
> About the centre of the silent Word[2].

Interspersing the poetry at two points and closing this whole section is the liturgical phrase 'O my people, what have I done unto thee'. It is significant that Eliot's liturgical quotations are all penitential in character. The second half of the *Ave Maria* which ends the first section is a plea which recalls the sinner's helplessness. The words ending the third section are taken from the Communion devotions at the Mass and similarly express the sinner's need for grace and redemption (offered in the Blessed Sacrament). The phrase from the *Salve Regina* in the fourth section refers

---

(1) *The Gospel according to St. John*, Ch. I, v. 14.

(2) *Collected Poems*, p. 100.

us to a context which contains a specific mention of the Fall - 'To thee we cry poor exiled children of Eve', and the supplications from the *Anima Christi* in the final section repeat the already powerful note of repentance and sorrow. But of all the liturgical allusions, it is the use of the single sentence 'O my people what have I done unto thee' here in the fifth section which conveys most intimately Eliot's apprehension of the doctrine of the Atonement. The *Reproaches* (from which the sentence is taken) belongs to the Good Friday Liturgy and consists of words put, in a quasi-dramatic way, into the mouth of the crucified Lord. They are sung as the worshippers approach the unveiled crucifix to venerate, with a kiss, the figure of the Saviour, and there is probably no other ceremony in Christian worship which expresses so dramatically the sinfulness of man in their rejection of the Messiah, and the grace of God offered in the Passion and death of His Son. Although there is no graphic portrayal of the corruption of the world and the degradation of man (apart from a few lines in the third section) in *Ash Wednesday*, as there is in the Sweeney literature and *Gerontion*, a vision of Original Sin is conveyed, not only by these liturgical phrases, but also by the frequent echoes of the *Genesis* account of the Fall. Apart from specific references to Eden ('The

desert in the garden the garden in the desert') and the fruit eaten by the Adam ('the withered apple-seed'), their act of defiance is brought out in the repetition of the words 'chose' and 'oppose', and their banishment from Eden in the image of the 'children at the gate'.

There is however no suggestion of guilt or shame and Eliot chooses to represent his apprehension of Original Sin in terms of disorder, frustration and lack of knowledge. In the line

..... spitting from the mouth the withered apple seed

a sense of deep regret and bitter self-contempt is expressed, but this section of Ash Wednesday is almost entirely without the cynicism and ironical detachment which characterises so much of the earlier poetry. The personae of the earlier volumes were masks which hid the poet as much as they revealed him but here there is little doubt about the poet's identification with those 'who walk in darkness'. There is a new tenderness in the lines of the last two stanzas and a degree of direct personal expression, prevented from becoming embarrassing by the constant reference to the Christian liturgy.

.... Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray:[1]

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 101.

These lines point forward to some of the speeches of the Chorus in _Murder in the Cathedral_. The predicament is the same. Like the children of _Ash Wednesday_, the women of Canterbury can only stand around waiting, 'forced to bear witness', unable to effect any change in their own condition, desperately needing the return and martyrdom of the Archbishop, but resenting both, and recognising their need only when it is thrust upon them, as it were, from outside. In _Murder in the Cathedral_ Eliot similarly draws together into a closely-knit unity, apprehensions of both the Incarnation and the Atonement; _Ash Wednesday_, though less successful, is a pre-echo of this.

Helen Gardner says of the poem that

> The spiritual centre of these last three poems is the Incarnation, by which all time is redeemed[1].

This is undeniable but one needs to add that the poetry which explores the meaning of the doctrine in images like the figure of the woman (a combination of the Blessed Virgin, Beatrice, and the Church) is enriched, as we have seen, by penitential liturgical devotions which plead for the reconciliation accomplished by the Passion and Death of Christ.

> Suffer me not to be separated
>
> And let my cry come unto thee

It is significant that in these last three sections almost

(1) _The Art of T.S. Eliot_, p. 120.

all reminders of the Atonement come in the forms of stylised quotations and not original poetic images, but there is, nonetheless, a fullness about Eliot's Christian vision in Ash Wednesday which is absent from the later and much greater poetic achievement of Four Quartets.

Four Quartets[1].

According to Raymond Preston[2], the opening lines of Burnt Norton might well be understood as a meditation in verse on certain words from the third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes

> That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past[3].

This third chapter with its views of the cyclical movement of time is alluded to again by Eliot - much more directly and at far greater length - in the first movement of East Coker. He takes up the theme of the inevitable and, in itself, meaningless rhythm of birth, growth, decay, and death, and plays his own variations on it

> .... there is a time for building
> And a time for living and for generation
>
> ....

---

(1) No attempt will be made at a systematic artical evaluation of the poem; the discussion in the following pages will turn upon the way Eliot approaches and presents the doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement.

(2) Four Quartets Rehearsed, p. 9.

(3) Authorised Version : Ecclesiastes, Ch. III, v. 15.

> The time of milking and the time of harvest
> The time of coupling of man and woman
> And that of beasts[1].

These allusions with their echoes of the words and phrasing of the Authorised Version are easily recognised. By means of direct allusion the poet re-creates 'the Preacher's' half-bitter attitude to life, and frequently in Four Quartets the resigned impersonal tones of much earlier poems are recalled. His inverted version of the hopeful motto of Mary, Queen of Scots.

> In my beginning is my end

is a reminder of Ecclesiates' preoccupation with death and the words of the seventh chapter

> Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof[2]:

And the images of dust and decay together with the description of man's apparently unthinking participation in the purely physical life capture the spirit which lies behind a great deal of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

For the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes life is little more than a journey to nothingness; a gradual process of dying which begins at birth. The greater part of the struggle to survive is described as 'vanity' and

---

(1) Four Quartets, pp. 15-16.
(2) Ecclesiastes, Ch. VII, v. 8.

nearly all human endeavour is dismissed as 'a striving after wind'. This is known, technically, as religious pessimism.

> A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth[1].

To acknowledge the power of death and the vanity of life is to possess wisdom, and to ignore it or evade it is to be foolish. The links with Platonic thought are obvious, and at the centre of this pessimism is a theory of determinism far closer in spirit to Greek thought than to Hebrew, and a far cry from the traditional Jewish affirmations about Yahweh's providential action in the history of the world. Man is seen as a fixed and limited being, resignedly accepting his lot and completely incapable of shaping or altering the events of his own life which have been fixed in a pre-ordained pattern congruous with the cyclical rhythm of the Universe[2].

> I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it nor can anything be taken from it[3].

This deterministic attitude is hinted at in a metaphysical remark at the opening of Burnt Norton

> All time is unredeemable[4].

and is embodied in the concrete images of birth, procreation, and death of the first movement of East Coker.

---

(1) Ecclesiastes, Ch. VII, v. 1.

(2) cf. Rudolf Bultmann. Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting. pp. 153-154.

(3) A.V. Ecclesiastes, Ch. III, v. 14.

(4) Four Quartets, p. 7.

But Four Quartets taken as a whole is not a pessimistic poem: it does contain a vision of the redemption of time, thus continuing and fulfilling a process which began in Ash Wednesday.

Few of Eliot's poems show a use of Biblical material that is as subtle and extensive as the use of Ecclesiates in Four Quartets. The oblique references of Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service are peripheral matters, and the allusions in The Waste Land, though highly effective as concrete images[1], are isolated, and are left, deliberately, undeveloped. The birth narratives of The Journey of the Magi and A Song for Simeon are merely convenient pegs for the poet's private meditations, and those Choruses from The Rock which make use of Biblical material generally do little more than precis the original[2]. The closest parallel to the use of the Bible in Four Quartets is probably contained in the fifth section of Ash Wednesday, which has already been discussed. But Eliot's use of Ecclesiastes in Four Quartets is more complicated than his use of St. John's Gospel in Ash Wednesday. Not only are the references less direct and more extended, but the ideas themselves, besides being reproduced and reinterpreted, are commented upon and tested, and used

---

(1) Collected Poems : The Waste Land, ll. 20, 359, pp. 61, 75.

(2) Ibid., p. 168. cf. Authorised Version: The Book of Nehemiah, Chs. I-IV.

as a starting-point for the working-out of a more satisfactory philosophy of life. The concluding quatrain of the first movement of East Coker with its image of new life and fresh beginnings

> .... I am here
> Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning[1]

questions, for example, the religious pessimism of the preceding lines. But with its broken phrases, this questioning is only tentative, and the impression of man's imprisonment in an inexorable cycle of growth and decay and the apparently meaningless round of birth, procreation, and death, at this point of the poem, remains.

It is interesting that, in posing the central philosophical theme of Four Quartets, Eliot chooses to use material from that book of the Bible which barely touches upon the central themes of Hebrew-Christian religious thought. This is not, perhaps, so unusual when one remembers that, despite his Protestant background, Eliot is by training a philosopher and by inclination a classicist, and that the book Ecclesiastes is both the most deliberately philosophical of the books of the Old Testament and also the one which shows the greatest influence of Greek thought. Though it contains

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 16.

little trace of the influence of the Greek language itself, there can be no doubt that it is comparatively late in date and represents 'the reflection of the general mental atmosphere among cultured Jews generated by the Greek spirit'[1]. Hence its preoccupations are primarily of a philosophical nature: the relationship between Time and Eternity, Free-will and Determinism, and the meaning of finitude and death. It does not leave untouched the specifically religious problems of the relationship between Man and God; the creature and the Creator; the sinner and the all-Holy, but deals with them in a cursory, even off-hand way. Similarly Eliot, though writing quite obviously from a Christian consciousness of life, is, in Four Quartets, more concerned with the philosophical problems that troubled the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes than with the religious problems which lie at the heart of the great prophetic books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is significant too, that in his use of material from the New Testament, he confines his attention almost exclusively to the quasi-philosophical writings of St. John[2].

---

(1) Oesterley and Robinson: An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament, p. 214.

(2) cf. The long metaphysical discourses of Jesus in Chs. 14-17 of St. John's Gospel, and Eliot's employment of the Greek 'Logos' concept peculiar to St. John.

This tendency has not gone unnoticed by critics of the poem, and Kristian Smidt in his comment on the monism of Eliot's Christianity makes the following remark:

> It is a concomitant tendency [in monism] to see salvation for human beings in attaining to the divine Union, rather than a divine Atonement or forgiveness[1].

This does not mean that divine union is not a part of the Christian faith. Defined carefully it can be seen as the aim of the Christian life, but one which can only be attained by means of atonement and forgiveness. Usually, however, critics, both admirers and opponents of Eliot, tend to be rather vague about, or else avoid, the thorny problem of the poet's exact relation to Christian doctrine in Four Quartets or are content with sweeping generalisations about his orthodoxy which show either little knowledge of Christian teaching or careless reading of the poetry. R.H. Robbins in his somewhat hysterical denigration of Eliot's work describes Four Quartets in the following way:

> These last poems are deeply religious, and not only express Eliot's personal search for belief, but set out the formal doctrines of the Church[2].

Few critics are as emphatic as Robbins, but often there underlies a great deal of critical evaluation the assumption that orthodox Christian doctrine is being 'set out'

---

(1) Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot, p. 165.

(2) The T.S. Eliot Myth, pp. 33-34.

in this long poem[1]. Even Fr. Genesius Jones under-emphasises the difficulties in his eager desire to make Eliot the most orthodox of Catholic Christians. Discussing the development of themes in Eliot's poetry, he says of The Hollow Men

> The death of Mistah Kurtz, like the death of Phlebas, signifies here an emptying in preparation for a renewal: a putting off of the old man, or perhaps one should say "the Old Guy". The new man is specifically Christian[2].

And a few pages earlier he uses the same theological terminology in discussing the eventual 'transformation' of the 'old man' personified by Gerontion. Presumably the place of this transformation is Four Quartets.

But the language of Pauline theology could hardly be less appropriate in an analysis of Eliot's 'doctrine of man'. Despite the justice of many critics' claims that the poet is preoccupied with Original Sin[3], it has already been shown that Eliot's formulation of the doctrine resembles classical Christian formulations only in certain particulars. St. Paul's specific concern is the renewal

---

(1) cf. Cleanth Brooks, The Hidden God, pp. 68-97.

(2) Approach to the Purpose, p. 108.

(3) Edmund Wilson, (Axel's Castle), Babette Deutsch (Poetry in Our Time), D.E.S. Maxwell (The Poetry of T.S. Eliot) and Kristian Smidt (Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot) all mention this.

of life by justification. The 'old man' of his epistle to the Corinthians is symbolised by the figure of the sinful and rebellious Adam, the 'new man' by the obedient and resurrected Christ. St. Paul, standing in the mainstream of Hebrew theology writes about those problems which troubled the prophets of ancient Israel: unfaithfulness, rebellion and justification. Only occasionally does Eliot's apprehension and understanding of sin overlap with St. Paul's. In his appraisal of the theology of primitive Christianity, Rudolf Bultmann cites a number of instances in which the contrast with prevalent Greek attitudes can most easily be seen and claims that

> .... the New Testament doctrine of man keeps close to that of the Old Testament .... It is also diametrically opposed to the Greek views on a further point. Evil is not merely a negative thing, a defect which will be put right later. It is something positive, disobedience against God, rebellion, 'sin'[1].

Eliot, in much of his earlier poetry, and frequently in *Four Quartets* is closer to what Bultomann has called 'the Greek view' than the New Testament doctrine of man, though it must be admitted he does not express the Greek conception of becoming free from evil merely by 'education and instruction'. But he is, for the most part, concerned, like the author of *Ecclesiastes*, with the finitude of man;

---

(1) *Primitive Christianity in its contemporary setting*, p. 216.

his limitations and imperfections; his sense of the meaninglessness of his life and his desire to discover a pattern which will give life meaning; evil is seen as a negative thing[1]. St. Paul's theology rests upon his experience of Atonement wrought by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Eliot's theology has at its centre the Incarnation of the Divine. Where St. Paul sees man raised from the corruption of sinfulness and justified by Christ's vicarious suffering, Eliot sees the 'redemption of time' by the union of the human and the divine in the incarnate Word[2].

But this is, almost certainly, a crude over-simplification of the relation of Eliot's thought to Christian doctrine. He cannot be said to stand over against Christian tradition in Four Quartets, and he does not outline his thought in dogmatic statements. He incorporates certain aspects of the Christian doctrine of man into a work which is a highly-complicated pattern of reflections and beliefs expressed by means of images and rhythms. The point of the comparison with St. Paul is not that Eliot might be 'weighed in the balance' with the first theologian of the Christian Church and be found

---

(1) cf. T.E. Hulme, Speculations, p. 47.

(2) This should not be read in terms of a choice between two theological alternatives, one provided by St. John, the other by St. Paul. The two apostles do not stand in opposition to each other, and for all St. John's emphasis upon the Incarnation, the central event in Christ's redeeming work remains the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Cross itself is described in terms of glory.

'wanting', but that the sharp contrast will help to illuminate these particular emphases in Eliot's concept of man which characterise <u>Four Quartets</u>, but we must not be surprised if, as D.S. Savage said in 1944, we find Eliot's beliefs about man are closer to T.E. Hulme's 'theory of personality' than they are to classical Christian doctrine.

Although the dominant theme of the poem is the union of the flux of time with the stillness of eternity: the discovery of the 'timeless moment' which gives meaning to all other moments (in Christian terms - the Incarnation), those aspects of human life which the plays struggle to express, are not entirely ignored here. Of all the Quartets, <u>East Coker</u> is the one which approximates most closely to a poetic exploration of the Christian vision of life, and the fourth movement is an unambiguous meditation on the doctrine of the Atonement. Here in the extended metaphor of disease and cure, the knowledge of guilt and sin - the individual problems of Henry Monchesney and Celia Coplestone - are presented as universal human conditions. This particular metaphor is, of course, one of the commonest ways of describing men's consciousness of sin and the wrath of God, and has been in constant use from the time of the pre-Exilic Psalmist to the nineteenth

century Kierkegaard[1]. East Coker does not fail because of the conventional image Eliot has chosen but because of the way he handles it.

Sickness and disease are by no means new in his poetry, but the metaphors have usually appeared with more contextual relevance than we find here. In an inexplicable way, for example, these images in the early poems are governed by, and subsumed into, the figure of the Fisher King in The Waste Land. Commenting on James Joyce's method of writing Ulysses. Eliot said in 1923 that the use of myth was a way of

> giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history[2].

In The Waste Land Eliot employs a method similar to that of Joyce and achieves a similar result. By extension, it is possible to see the figure of the Fisher King - a symbol of the wasted order of modern civilisation - acting as a 'mythological' image for the poetry itself; giving a shape and significance to those images of

---

(1) The fifty-first psalm contains words which are echoed throughout the psalter:
'Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness: that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.'
Kierkegaard refers to that 'despair', which is the lot of every man, as a 'sickness unto death.'

(2) Quoted in Approach to the Purpose, p. 58.

earlier poems - the old man of Gerontion, the epileptic on the bed'[1], and even 'the evening spread out against the sky'[2] - which merely indicate and suggest the panorama of futility and anarchy. And so The Waste Land marks the end and fulfilment of a particular kind of poetic and imaginative development. Having been 'mythologised' by the figure of the Fisher King the images of disease could no longer operate as mere suggestions or indications of the frustrations and dislocations of human society. In The Waste Land, Eliot, in a sense, passes beyond the point of describing the society to itself. From The Hollow Men onwards the poems are required to bear a new weight: the poet's reflections upon the relationship between that which can be sensuously apprehended - the world - and that which cannot - the Divine; between Time, which is lived in and experienced directly, and Eternity, which can be known only in hints and guesses. And the image of disease, around which the whole of the fourth movement of East Coker is built, is both a self-conscious intrusion and an inappropriate vehicle for bearing this weight. Eliot has already 'worked out' all the treasures that he could obtain from the symbol.

---

(1) Collected Poems, p. 43.
(2) Ibid., p. 11.

This becomes apparent when the image is compared with that of the bell in the fourth movement of The Dry Salvages and that of the dove in the corresponding movement of Little Gidding. These symbols are every bit as traditional in religion and literature, but they are handled in such a way that they are transformed. Without destroying their original associations Eliot gives them a new, and in the context of the poem an even more powerful, and more personal meaning. But the metaphor in East Coker is used in the most obvious, almost banal, way. There is an uneasy blend of seriousness and levity in the tone which seems to indicate a forcing of the issue. His inability to incorporate the Atonement into his vision leads him to an overstatement of the doctrine conveyed by means of an elaborate metaphysical conceit

> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food:
> In spite of that we like to think
> That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood -
> Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday Good[1].

It would be difficult to find, even in the most flamboyant devotional manuals, a pictorial representation of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist that parallels the crudity of the first two lines of this stanza. Moreover there seems to be little reason for this kind of writing. The images 'bloody flesh' and 'dripping blood', presumably

(1) Four Quartets, p. 21.

intended to convey the physical reality of our contact with God hardly do justice to the subtle doctrines of the Real Presence. There is a certain ironic cleverness in the use of the words 'bloody' (as a swear-word and as a reference to Christ's blood) and 'substantial' (as a common colloquial term and as a reference to Transubstantiation) but apart from pointing to the closeness of the Christian faith with ordinary human life, little is achieved in these lines. In all probability, if the stanza could be paraphrased, we should find that it presented an orthodox view of the Atonement: man needing the grace of God and finding it in the memorial of the Calvary sacrifice which is the Sacrament of the Eucharist. But an orthodox view is not the first requirement in a poem, where poetic conviction is achieved by a man's power and control over words. It seems as though Eliot's power and control, so much in evidence in the rest of _Four Quartets_, fails when he approaches the matter of man's corruption and his need for Atonement.

The last stanza of this movement is, admittedly, the worst in the poem but, with the exception of a few lines in the fourth stanza, the whole of this movement fails to be poetically convincing. The allegory of the hospital is laboured and there is a clumsiness in the lines:

> .... we shall
> Die of the absolute paternal care
> That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

The use of the semi-archaic word 'prevents' with its allusions to the collect for the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity[1] and the Augustinian view of 'prevenient' grace is a little self-conscious and ecclesiastical, and its ambiguity is robbed of force by the 'explanatory note': 'That will not leave us.'

In Christian theology, the doctrines of Original Sin and of the Atonement are inseparable, and it is strange that a man as convinced of the meaningfulness and reality of the doctrine of Original Sin as Eliot was[2], should be so unconvincing in his attempt at presenting its necessary corollary. But his vision of human life is such that he sees the 'answer' to man's problems resting in a doctrine of the Incarnation rather than the Atonement. Kristian Smidt is one of the few critics who deal with the theological aspects of Eliot's work, but in his admiration for the poet tends to overlook some of his weaknesses and says, almost in an aside,

---

(1) Lord, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(2) Stephen Spender in his autobiography World Within World says that it was Eliot's belief in Original Sin which divided him so sharply from his older contemporary (pp. 148 and 158).

> As far as Eliot is concerned, there is, of course no exclusion of the Atonement either from his opinions or from his poetry. It has significance, for instance, in the Good Friday poem "East Coker". But it is true that, the Incarnation seems to mean much more to him[1].

There are passages in the plays[2] in which Eliot shows himself capable of expressing, with vigour and conviction, a Christian doctrine of Original Sin: a belief in the corruption of man, his need for grace, and the Atonement wrought by Christ on Calvary. But the deterioration of poetic quality in Four Quartets when he turns his attention to what he obviously believes as a man, and is possibly capable of expressing as a dramatist, is a clear indication that he has failed to experience and explore it, as a poet.

As I have already tried to show, Eliot's investigation and description of the human condition in the early poems does not give us a carefully-worked-out and self-consistent philosophy of Man. The various strands of his thought are developed in separate ways in his later work. So that while the expression of a belief in the Atonement makes an appearances in the plays, Four Quartets concentrates almost exclusively on the meaning of the Incarnation and offers the most important reasons for disagreeing with those critics who, like Edmund Wilson,

(1) Poetry and Belief, p. 158.

(2) Collected Plays, pp. 41-42; pp. 73-74; p. 82; p. 169.

claim that 'his religious tradition has reached him by way of Boston.' D.E.S. Maxwell comes closer to the truth when he tries to place Eliot in the ranks of the Jansenists[1], but here the resemblance consists not so much in a similarity of belief about the sinfulness of Man as in the fact that both Eliot and the Jansenists talk about Original Sin from within the framework of the Catholic Church. And this is a fact of some importance. Not only are many of his images and allusions ones which are drawn out of a Catholic consciousness[2], but the philosophical themes of Four Quartets and its insistance upon the Incarnation are things which find a place in the Catholic tradition much more easily than in a Protestant one. We have already noted Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism that Hellenistic Christianity and certain strains of the Catholic tradition subordinate all other problems to the time-eternity issue, and it is with this strain that the author of Four Quartets must be identified, hence the ease and sureness with which the book of Hellenistic Judaism - Ecclesiastes - is woven into the texture of the poetry.

---

(1) The Poetry of T.S. Eliot, pp. 161-163.

(2) The use of Dante and John of the Cross, the 'Catholic' Caroline Divines of the seventeenth century, liturgical phrases, and the frequent references to the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

But *Ecclesiates* is not the only religious book dealing with the 'time-eternity' issue that Eliot treats so extensively. There is the use of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in the third part of *The Dry Salvages*. The resemblance of much of the teaching contained in this 'gospel of India' to 'the dualism and pessimism of Greek thought'[1] is obvious. There is the same, though never as clearly stated, distrust of the phenomenal world, and the same belief in 'the spark of divinity within the soul' which enables every man to 'identify himself with the spirit and therefore with the Divine Ground'[2], and the same teaching about man's desire to lose himself in an identification with the Principle of Being. But Eliot is no Hindu sage, and the poetry of *The Dry Salvages* is not a paraphrase of the four fundamental doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy. It is true that certain attitudes expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita* (namely, as regards the nature of human action and the relation of the present moment to the past and the future) make their appearance, but they have been transmuted by the poet's own imagination into images which, unlike those of the 'Atonement' movement of *East Coker*, both convince us of the integrity with which the poet is exploring 'his own vision of life'

---

(1) Niebuhr, Vol I, p. 158.

(2) *The Bhagavad Gita*. transl. by Prabhavananda and Isherwood. Introduction by Aldous Huxley, p. 7.

and also startle us into a re-assessment of our own.

In the context of the extended image of human life as a journey, he uses that strange feeling of suspended animation which often comes to travellers, to suggest the moment 'in and out of time' and quotes exactly the words of Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield:

> Here between the hither and the farther shore
> While time is withdrawn, consider the future
> And the past with an equal mind.
> At the moment which is not of action or inaction
> You can receive this: "on whatever sphere of being
> The mind of a man may be intent
> At the time of death" - that is the one action
> (And the time of death is every moment)
> Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
> And do not think of the fruit of the action
> Fare forward[1].

Here, under the abstract terms of Eastern religion the central theme - the meaning of growth and decay and the passing of Time - is sounded again. But we would not be prepared to accept the bland statements:

> (And the time of death is every moment)

had we not been warned of their approach by the images of 'the moment in the rose-garden' and 'the still point' and the 'ragged rock in the restless waters'. All these images are bound up, as is the 'existentialist' statement about the time of death being every moment, with Eliot's presentation of the Incarnation.

---

(1) Four Quartets, pp. 30-1.

The Incarnation is that event which gives meaning to the process of growth and decay and the passing of time. It is that moment 'both in and out of Time' which redeems, what in the first movement of Burnt Norton is called Unredeemable - Time itself.

> Here the impossible union
> Of spheres of existence is actual,
> Here the past and the future
> Are conquered, and reconciled[1],

Although Eliot suggests that the time-process is an enemy which has to be overcome, he nevertheless from this point on, parts company with the Eastern religions. Whereas both Hinduism and Buddhism teach the possibility and desirability of achieving divine knowledge and complete union by 'direct intuition', Christianity is rooted in the fact of the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh, denying the possibility of divine union apart from the worship of the 'God made man'. The created order becomes thus, in a real sense, the mediating vehicle of the Divine. The timeless moment for Eliot is consequently a moment in time, and his acceptance of this kind of union with God is conveyed by the particular images which he chooses for describing the apprehension of this timeless moment.

There are a few occasions (such as the one cited above) on which Eliot states directly his grasp of the meaning of

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 33.

the Incarnation, but to repeat what he himself has said, it is not the point of poetry to persuade us of the truth of what the poet believes, but to indicate what it feels like to believe. The direct statements about the meaning of the Incarnation would be insupportable without the images which convey the way in which it is apprehended. The first movement of Burnt Norton describes the experience in the terms of an 'Alice in Wonderland' remembrance of childhood in which 'reality' and 'fantasy' merge into one another as in a particularly vivid day dream[1]. The moment when

> .... the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
> The surface glittered out of heart of light[2],

was a moment not understood at the time, but is now recalled with associations of sweetness and freshness. The image of the children in the garden

> .... for the leaves were full of children
> Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.

first used in New Hampshire in 1933, appears again in the last few lines of Little Gidding and conveys the innocence and spontaneous joy of this moment - a moment which becomes meaningful only much later. But the meaning of the experience is not directly stated

---

(1) The confusion of 'appearance' and 'reality' here is of a quite different order from their confusion in Prufrock and Other Observations. The disappearance of the usual boundaries of the external world results, not in bewilderment and the despondency, but in enlightenment and joy.

(2) Four Quartets, p. 8.

> I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot
> say where[1].

Similarly the cluster of images at the close of the third movement of Burnt Norton conveys only the apprehension of the meaning of an experience, not the meaning itself

> 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 ....[2]

Eliot writes with all the power of a great Imagist poet here. The images are all clearly-visualised, concrete images, awakening in the reader the proper response not only because of their sensuous quality, but because they have been used before, and, one feels, will be used again and again, and bring with them every time the associations of their other contexts. The images of the earlier poems somehow reach fulfilment in Four Quartets. These are Eliot's 'spots of time' in which the whole pattern of life is, for an instant, perceived. The gardens of Ash Wednesday, The Family Reunion, and numerous other poems become one with the rose-garden here. The moments of painful and unsatisfactory love in La Figlia che Piange and The Waste Land are recalled and subsumed, under the moment in the 'arbour where the rain beat'. And

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 9.

(2) Ibid., p. 10.

the experience in the 'draughty church' recalls and redeems the experience in the 'ruined chapel' of The Waste Land.

How exactly each of these moments was experienced is left unsaid. They might suggest: an experience of love in youth or maturity; a mystical experience. But whatever they do suggest, the actual experiences themselves are somehow inessential, for the sensuous immediacy of the descriptions and the associations which cluster around the images enable them to convey the experience of certain moments of heightened awareness when the whole of life seemed to have a meaningful pattern. Perhaps, as in James Joyce's 'epiphanies' it is suggested that the whole of life seems to be contained and experienced in that one moment. The Incarnation is the crown and universal type of all these individual experiences. That moment when the Word became Flesh was the moment when the passing of Time, and the cycle of growth and decay, had no meaning, for all time - Past and Future - was contained in that Present and all life was consummated in that Event[1].

> Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always[2].

---

(1) cf. W.H. Auden's lines at the close of A Christmas Oratorio. Remembering the stable where for once in our lives
Everything became a You and nothing was an It.
For The Time Being, p. 124.

(2) Four Quartets, p. 37.

It is significant that, in the passage which has been under discussion, there is a process of increasing concretisation in the images as they are presented. The three moments are placed in a scale of increasing detail and consequently of increasing intensity. From the moment of childhood vaguely remembered there is an advance to the moment of maturity vividly recollected. This process runs counter to the movement of the poem (Four Quartets) itself, which begins from an experience of a summer visit to a country home and ends with the recollection of the historical setting of a religious community. From the individual experience, the universal meaning is known and applied. But the individual concrete experience is of the greatest importance. The sensuousness and concreteness of Eliot's imagery are not merely methods of conveying an experience of God which, in the words of the Bhagavad Gita is by 'direct intuition', but of asserting that the experience is somewhat tied to the setting itself ('the draughty church'), the material world in which it is experienced and through which it is mediated

> But only in time can the moment
> ....
> Be remembered; involved with past and future[1].

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 10.

There would be no timeless moment apart from the rose-garden and the arbour and the draughty church, even though these act primarily as images for poetic communication.

Unfortunately, Eliot is not content to rest there with this presentation of the Incarnation and he ends the second movement of Burnt Norton with a metaphysical pronouncement which nearly destroys the effect that has been built up to a climatic expression in three sudden visual images..

Only through time time is conquered.

Up to this moment, the images in the movements have all suggested that a meaning can be given to the passing of time and that a pattern can be discerned in the flux of growth and decay that constitutes physical life. Time is not an enemy to be overcome but a phenomenon to be understood, something to be 'redeemed'.

> The dance along the artery
> The circulation of the lymph
> Are figured in the drift of stars
> Ascend to summer in the tree[1]

The mention of 'the dance' at once suggests something patterned and ordered, but at the same time spontaneous and vigorous, and the image of 'the stars', repeated with a greater emphasis in the last line of this little section, while increasing the suggestion of patterned movements adds a note of serenity in its echo of Dante's

(1) Four Quartets, p. 9.

line at the very end of the Hell[1] Eliot does here, what Yeats has done in the last stanza of his poem Among Schoolchildren. He unites the image of the dance with another image of life and vitality - the tree.

> Ascend to summer in the tree
> We move above the moving tree
> In light upon the figured leaf

Although there is not the same affirmation of the value of physical life in Eliot as there is in Yeats[2], there is still the suggestion that our movements and the trees' are connected and that if we are to discern the pattern of life we cannot withdraw from it. We cannot, in other words, discover the meaning of the time process by seeking to escape from it.

If Frank Kermode is correct in his interpretation of the Dance image[3], Eliot's use of it is peculiarly appropriate, and in the following section he binds the images of the tree, the dance, and the wheel into a complex, and almost unanalysable, whole. According to Kermode the dance or dancer operates as a symbol of something which is both out of the flux of life and yet 'uniquely alive'. Consequently it is closely analogous to 'the still point' which is at the centre of a wheel -

---

(1) The Divine Comedy: Hell, Canto XXXIV,
and thence
came forth, to look once more upon the stars.

(2) Yeats. Collected Poems, p. 244
Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.

(3) The Romantic Image, pp. 70-79.

itself unmoving and yet the cause of all movement ('the bedded axle-tree'). Aotion and contemplation, movement and stillness, time and eternity are united in the lines

...... at the still point, there the dance is[1],

But the images of this section gather meaning also from Charles Williams' novel The Greater Trumps in which the dance of the Tarot figures symbolises the whole of life. In this dance the key-figure is that of the Fool who moves around the pattern with such rapidity that he appears to be standing quite still. All the other figures revolve around him. He is everywhere and nowhere. If there were no Fool there would be no dance

...... Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

This section re-iterates in a less concrete and more obviously paradoxical way the ideas of the previous section: 'There is only the dance'. There is no escape from the wheel, there is only the discovery of the 'still-point'; only 'in time' can the 'timeless moment' be experienced. But the discovery of the 'still-point' means also the discovery of the pattern, and the experience of the 'timeless moment', the 'redemption' of time.

After this profound meditation on the meaning of the Incarnation - a meditation in which even the Buddhist symbol of the wheel is transformed by the poet's insistence

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 9.

on the importance of a life lived in time ('there is only the dance'), it is disturbing to find Eliot closing the movement with a statement which, theologically, denies the Incarnation, and, poetically, destroys the sense of the affirmation of life which has previously been created. The 'conquering' of time and the 'redemption' of time are two entirely different concepts. Eliot betrays here (and later in The Dry Salvages and Little Gidding) an ambiguous attitude to life in time (paralleled by his ambiguous interpretation of the doctrine of Original Sin) and an unsureness about the meaning of the Incarnation, together with a suspicion of the physical world which is closer to an Eastern or Greek view of life than it is to a Christian. This has led Kristian Smidt to contend

> .... that Eliot's supreme visions are not concretely and specifically Christian. They are as closely akin to those of Oriental as to those of European mystics[1].

And even Helen Gardner has difficulty in 'explaining away' the introduction of the Krishna passage in The Dry Salvages, for as she correctly points out

> ...... it is precisely in their view of history and of the time process that Christianity and Hinduism are most opposed[2].

---

(1) Poetry and Belief, p. 160.

(2) The Art of T.S. Eliot, p. 173 n.

But Eliot's affinity with Eastern philosophy must not be exaggerated, for it is the Western Europeanised sensibility of the poet that dominates the poem. Moreover it should be recognised, as Reinhold Niebuhr has been quick to point out, that in the writings of individual ascetics and mystics of the Catholic Church[1] there have been occasional eruptions of 'dualism and pessimism' which the Church has chosen to condone, or at least tolerate. St. John of the Cross might be accused of manifesting attitudes alien to these, and Eliot uses St. John's writings extensively. However, it must be stressed that wherever an upsurge of dualism has taken shape as an evangelistic movement it has been suppressed with vigour, and frequently with cruelty[2]. A Church which has at the heart of its Gospel, a belief in God made Man, Eternity entering Time, cannot tolerate within its framework a party which sees existence in time as an imprisonment, and the material order as evil. 'The world' that the writers of the New Testament demand that Christians should renounce is not to be understood as the created order, for that is the theatre of God's activity, but its perversion, and time does not 'have a stop' - it has an 'end', a goal and

---

(1) e.g. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, the author of The Cloud of Unknowing, St. John of the Cross.

(2) The manicheeism of the Albigenses, for example, was condemned by Councils at Rheims (1148) and Verona (1184), and finally by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). These condemnations resulted in the so-called Albigensian Crusade in which the heresy was crushed by military force.

a pattern. It could also be claimed that the advocates of the Via Negativa, despite some of their wilder utterances, do not have as their aim an escape from the world but from the ineradicable sinfulness of man. Even St. John of the Cross, whose demand that we should 'divest ourselves of the love of created things' seems closer to Buddhism than Christianity[1], is not inspired fundamentally by a desire to be free of the world and the time-process, but of sin and its results. Where the Buddha advocates complete detachment, St. John advocates the most passionate attachment to God[2].

Eliot has occasionally been accused of displaying a Puritan revulsion from physical life. In fact this is seldom the case. Though a Puritan in manners he always, like T.E. Hulme, writes from the background of the Catholic faith[3]. So that throughout his poetry his

---

(1) In his introduction to the Bhagavad-Gita Aldous Huxley quotes Abbot Chapman's dismissal of him as 'a Buddhist'.

(2) In the course of a lecture on the mystic in 1932 E. Allison Peers remarked: "Surely here is the complete apologia for complete detachment - a degree of perfection attained, not by withdrawal from the world of his day, but by 'suffering and battling with the actual facts of life'. St. John of the Cross, p. 32.

(3) cf. Kristian Smidt, Poetry and Belief, p. 164.

attitude to the physical world is much closer to that of the Catholic ascetic than that of the Puritan preacher[1]. Although there are moments in Four Quartets when it seems he comes perilously close to dualism, he manages to avoid the pitfalls and whatever mistrust of the world of the senses his faintly puritan upbringing may have bequeathed him, it is absent from his poetry except in statements about time which both he and T.E. Hulme seem to have been obsessed with and demanded freedom from. In The Dry Salvages there are the lines

> Here the past and future
> Are conquered, and reconciled,

(The conquering comes first it must be noticed, and is more heavily stressed).

> .... and right action is freedom
> From past and future also[2].

And in Little Gidding existence in time is again described as imprisonment

> .... This is the use of memory
> For liberation - not less of love but expanding
> Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
> From the future as well as the past ....[3]

It seems, on the one hand, that Eliot looks for the 'redemption' of time, and, on the other, escape from time.

---

(1) The most obvious example is to be found in Ash Wednesday. The portrayal of growth in grace by spiritual discipline and strict submission to the Church is hardly one which would be acceptable to a Puritan sect.

(2) Four Quartets, p. 33.

(3) Ibid., p. 40.

The 'reconciliation' of past and future in The Dry Salvages seems to have little connection, mentioned as it is in the context of 'victory', with the great image of 'reconciliation' in the second movement of Burnt Norton

> Below, the boarhound and the boar
> Pursue their pattern as before
> But reconciled among the stars

And it is this attitude of negation and denial which contrasts so strangely and inexplicably with the affirmation of life in time conveyed by images like the 'dance' and the 'tree'; and not only by sensuous imagery, but in quasi-philosophical statements like:

> See, now they vanish
> The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
> To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern[1]

And above all perhaps in the quotation from Mother Julian of Norwich: 'Sin is Behovely', the effect of which is much more subtle than, for example, Raymond Preston makes out

> Even 'Sin is behovely' if we profit by what we see is evil - by rejecting the evil[2].

The context makes it quite clear that 'sin' is not merely edificatory. We are reminded of St. Paul's saying of Jesus Christ - He 'became Sin' for our sakes[3]. In the

---

(1) Four Quartets, pp. 40-41.

(2) Four Quartets Rehearsed, p. 59.

(3) The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Ch. V. v. 21.

Incarnation the whole pattern of life is transfigured - sin itself has been transformed. The effect is very similar to St. Augustine's ecstatic, paradoxical utterance

> O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morta deletum est! O felix culpa, quae talem, ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem![1]

The resolution of the problems that beset the personae of the early poems is to be found here in Four Quartets. The conflict between appearance and reality is resolved, the disordered events and disparate experiences are given pattern, the cycle of growth and decay is given a meaning, but one wonders whether the guilt and horror which lie beneath the surface boredom and cynicism of Sweeney Agonistes have been duly considered and incorporated or merely passed over. The latter seems to be the case.

This brief examination of the doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement in Four Quartets is not, in any way, intended to be censorious. Eliot is a poet not a theologian or a teacher, and orthodoxy, as such, is incidental to poetry. But it seems that in Eliot's work orthodoxy and poetic quality do bear some relation to each other. As a Christian poet his faith seems to revolve, almost exclusively, around the doctrine of the Incarnation, so

---

(1) Praeconium Paschale. Missale Romanum.

that the poetry becomes forced and slightly sensational when it has to express an apprehension of Atonement. And his understanding of the Incarnation, though brilliant and penetrating in many ways, shows contradictions and confusions that are reflected in the poetry. Eliot is undoubtedly one of the great modern poets, but the popular conception of him as the Christian poet par excellence is hardly justifiable[1]. The essential Christian experience and vision are frequently conveyed more accurately, though less forcefully, by poets whose output is more limited in range, like Gerard Manley Hopkins and W.H. Auden.

---

(1) cf. Cleanth Brooks. <u>The Hidden God</u>, p. 68.

CHAPTER VII

Eliot's Poetic Drama

Two months before the first production of his play Murder in the Cathedral T.S. Eliot contributed an article to a symposium entitled Faith that Illuminates in which he affirmed

> ...... 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[1].

His detestation of 'secularism', a logical development of his earlier reaction to 'humanism' and 'romanticism', appears with great frequency in the prose work after 1927, and the effort at conveying 'the meaning of the primacy of the supernatural order' is evident in all of the later poetry and the plays[2]. At this basic level both the plays and the later poems can be said to be identical - in content and intention they are deeply and obviously religious. As the purpose of this study is the

---

(1) Reprinted under the title 'Religion and Literature' in Selected Essays, pp. 388-401.

(2) Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats might be excluded.

investigation of the religious ideas of Eliot's poetry, a thorough examination of the plays cannot be undertaken, but they cannot go unmentioned as certain basic Christian themes appear to offer significant parallels and contrasts with the religious ideas that are explored in the poetry.

One of the constant preoccupations in Eliot's life and work was that of the search for order and purpose. In the early poems it is the fragmentary, disordered nature of human experience that is most vividly portrayed. A sense of degradation and corruption sometimes makes itself felt as well, but it is primarily the individual human being's inability to discover an order, a meaningful pattern in existence, that is emphasised. The imagistic technique proved the ideal means of representing this world of unconnected perceptions, while the use of mythical material enabled him, as it had enabled James Joyce in Ulysses, to give coherence to his presentation of the chaotic world and impose upon the events described, a significant pattern. His attitude to History, his naturalisation as an English citizen, his fervid advocacy of the value of tradition, and his entry into the most authoritarian branch of the Established Church all point to his fundamental desire to discover the meaningful pattern and his own place in it. The search, in the final analysis, was for the supernatural 'event' which

would draw all other, apparently separate and arbitrary, events into a coherent and apprehensible pattern.

There can be little doubt that he did discover it although he still speaks of the necessity for 'exploration' in _Four Quartets_ and uses the theme of the 'quest' frequently in the plays[1]. The locus of the discovery was the Christian Church and nearly every work which follows _For Launcelot Andrewes_ (1927) is haunted by the Christian vision. Unlike Dante, however, Eliot seems unable to communicate, either in the poetry or the plays, that vision in its fullness. I have already tried to show that in _Four Quartets_ there is a failure to realise, in poetic terms, the meaning of the 'event' of the Atonement, and even the profound exploration of the Incarnation is occasionally marred by a strange ambivalence to life in Time. The plays take much further the attempt at '..... finding methods to convey the 'reality' of the Christian explanation of the world, and the validity of Christian values for society'[2], but _Murder in the Cathedral_ is the only one in which Eliot brings together, and manages to hold together, the two fundamental doctrines of the Incarnation and of the Atonement.

---

(1) Harry, Celia and Colby all have journeys to make and goals to achieve.

(2) Carol H. Smith. _T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice_, p. 25.

Although there are a great many similarities between Murder in the Cathedral and Burnt Norton (which was published a year after the play), the play has also important connections with earlier works like Poems 1920 and Sweeney Agonistes which, significantly, the first Quartet does not. It is a play which is deeply concerned with sin, its consequences in man's life and his ultimate redemption, and I have argued that the fully developed sense of sin - involving guilt and corruption - is expressed most forcibly in those earlier poems. Giorgio Melchiori, in his discussion of the two Fragments, suggests by implication a resemblance between Sweeney Agonistes and Murder in the Cathedral.

> ...... the modern Samson is the shady hero of Eliot's earlier poems, the ape-like man oppressed by a sense of guilt, so very different from that of the Biblical hero, but in some way his equivalent, since the motive of action in our age is no longer the feeling of having a mission, of leading the people on the path of God .... and guilt, or sin, can only be understood in terms of a sensational crime story[1].

It is interesting that Eliot should choose as a title for his first play one which automatically suggests the 'sensational crime story'. Thomas Beckett is also an equivalent of 'the Biblical hero' suffering his own

---

(1) The Tightrope Walkers, pp. 109-110.

Agon[1], but unlike Sweeney does not himself feel oppressed by a sense of sin. This last is transferred to those for whom Beckett dies - the women of Canterbury. Again we find death at the centre of the play: it is the only means by which release can be obtained and purpose discovered. In Sweeney Agonistes it is suggested in the jocosely macabre lines

> Any man has to, needs to, wants to
> Once in a lifetime, do a girl in[2].

In Murder in the Cathedral it is actually performed on the stage. In Sweeney Agonistes, however, the device of murder fails to give release from the intolerable human round, whereas in Murder in the Cathedral, the discovery of the pattern of life by the perfected victim himself, and his willing acceptance of his destiny, turns mere killing into the atoning sacrifice of martyrdom.

> For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr
> has given his blood for the blood of Christ,
> There is holy ground[3],

A belief in the reality of Atonement and redemption is logically dependent upon an acceptance of Original Sin and its consequences - separation from God and disorder

---

(1) The definitions provided by Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon convey the idea of a life-and-death struggle or conflict.

(2) Collected Poems, p. 130.

(3) Collected Plays, p. 53.

and corruption of the natural world. In Eliot's early work (pre-1922) the poems fell roughly into two categories - those like The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Portrait of a Lady which emphasise the fragmentary, unreal, disordered nature of human experience, and those like Gerontion, Sweeney Erect, and Sweeney Among the Nightingales which convey also the idea of degradation and corruption. In the Sweeney poems the animal metaphor is used to suggest this degradation and the same device appears in Murder in the Cathedral. In the long speech of the Chorus which follows Thomas's first confrontation with the knights, a series of intensely sensuous images describes humanity's descent into bestiality and the gradual identification of human life with animal subsistence.

> I have lain on the floor of the sea and breathed with the breathing of the sea-anemone, swallowed with the ingurgitation of the sponge. I have lain in the soil and criticised the worm ...[1]

D.E. Jones commenting on this passage writes:

> By inflaming the animal part of Man and causing it to dominate the angelic part, Evil turns the order topsy-turvy at its key-point. Man turns his back on God and becomes more animal, for when he forgets the fatherhood of God, he has nothing left but his brotherhood with the beast ....[2]

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 42.

(2) The Plays of T.S. Eliot, pp. 75-76.

This is an experience of disorder which is quite different from that described in <u>Prufrock</u> or <u>Portrait</u>. It is a theological one arising, not out of lack of knowledge or inability to distinguish between appearance and reality, but out of sin - the wilful rejection of the divine hierarchy which was stressed so heavily in the teaching of the Medieval Church. The pattern created by God is thus reduced by man to hideous confusion and the result is not merely bewilderment or despair, but horror - something first suggested in the exaggerated melodrama of the last chorus of <u>Sweeney Agonistes</u>[1]. Here the image of the ape recalls the Sweeney poems

> .... I have seen
> Rings of light coiling downwards, descending
> To the horror of the ape ....[2]

This disruption of the order of creation is associated in the play with the arrival of the knights, the 'death-bringers', but the speech makes it quite clear that the condition of sinfulness which focuses itself in the murder of Thomas is universal and that the woman of Canterbury, though spectators merely, are themselves involved in the crime.

---

(1) "You've had a cream of a nightmare dream and you've got the hoo-ha's coming to you". <u>Collected Poems</u>, p. 132.

(2) <u>Collected Plays</u>, p. 42.

> .... Have I not known, not known
> What was coming to be? It was here, in the kitchen,
> in the passage,
> ....
> As well as in the consultations of powers.

As in the orthodox Christian doctrine, the state of man, and the state of the whole created order are, in a mysterious way, inextricably woven together, so that man's Original Sin involves the whole world in corruption and chaos. By the same token, the redemption of man accomplishes the redemption of the whole world

> For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. That the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now[1].

This restoration of the whole world to its former glory is depicted in the speech of the Chorus at the close of the play where the images of the seasons and the countryside are repeated in a pattern which conveys the joy at discovering the purpose and meaning of life. A few of the images and the movement of the rhythm in the long lines are reminiscent of the last Chorus from _The Rock_, and the Chant of these women, like that Chorus _The Rock_, is intended as a quasi-liturgical ending to what has been a dramatic ritual. The imagery of this speech

---

(1) _The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans_, Ch. VIII vv. 20-22.

lacks the power of earlier speeches (e.g. the ones which begin 'Numb the hand' and 'Clean the air') and the ritualistic element creates an air of impersonality and a feeling of distance. But the speech is not a poetic or a dramatic failure, for the absence of dramatic conflict within the play and the stylisation of character and attitude[1] prepare the audience for an ending in which the playwright asserts 'the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life' in the most formal way by use of the Kyries and invocation of the saint.

One of the most significant symbols in the play and one which links it with Burnt Norton is that of the 'wheel', used by Thomas in his first speech. T.R. Henn in The Harvest of Tragedy quotes the speech and says

> We could deduce, even if we did not know it from other sources, Mr. Eliot's intense interest in the Upanishad's .... Humanity is tied to a vast pattern, like the Buddhist wheel: in part passive, in part active, in its turning. It is submission in suffering, submission in willing suffering which is part of the eternal design.
>
> Now it would appear that such a doctrine is theologically questionable. Any circular structure suggests Determinism .... Nor is the wheel the Christian symbol today .... Nor is a doctrine of semi-passive suffering more than a part of the truth. But in this attitude we shall, I think, find at least a partial explanation of the plays[2].

---

(1) Apart from a brief moment in the scene with the Fourth Tempter there is no conflict in the character of Beckett - he seems always to 'face the same way', a figure rather than a person.

(2) The Harvest of Tragedy, pp. 221-222.

Doubtless there is a suggestion of determinism here and a specific reference to the 'wheel of suffering', but before Eliot is condemned for 'questionable theology', it should be noticed that the 'eternal action' of which Eliot speaks here is vastly different from Buddhist ideas of inevitable suffering from which it is the duty of man to escape. As in the second movement of Burnt Norton, (though less powerfully) the context controls and manipulates the image. Henn falsifies the playwright's position by slightly mis-interpreting the speech. While Eliot does suggest that humanity is tied to the wheel, at the same time, he suggests that man is actually part of the wheel - for the wheel is the whole of life, revolving, here, around the 'still-point' of the Atonement, as it revolves around the 'still-point' of the Incarnation in Four Quartets. And in the lines

> To which all must consent that it may be willed
> And which all must suffer that they may will it[1].

an attempt is made to express the complex, and logically absurd, Christian doctrine of Providence. Unlike Buddhism, Christianity throws into paradoxical conjunction God's omnipotence and man's free-will. The achieving of God's purposes in the world is seen to be dependent upon the free response of His creatures to His love, and

(1) Collected Plays, p. 17.

their willing acceptance of suffering which is the result of Original Sin and the condition of human existence. But this is not a doctrine of 'semi-passivity'; the acceptance of suffering, although paradoxically ordained by God, ('A martyrdom is always the design of God'....) is, as Thomas's death is meant to be, and as Christ's death was, a deliberate act of choice. At the end of the first volume of <u>The Nature and Destiny of Man</u>, Reinhold Niebuhr has a comment which might almost act as a commentary on this speech from <u>Murder in the Cathedral</u>

> We cannot, therefore, escape the ultimate paradox that the final exceroise of freedom in the transcendent human spirit is its recognition of the false use of that freedom in action. Man is most free in the discovery that he is not free[1].

We shall find the same paradoxical assertion made in the Christian poems of W.H. Auden. It is on this question of the relation between God's providential action and man's freely-willed response that Eliot and Auden draw most closely together.

It is interesting to note that in <u>Speculations</u> T.E. Hulme attaches great value to the symbol of the wheel

> This symbol of the futility of existence is absolutely lost to the modern world, nor can it be recovered without great difficulty[2].

---

(1) <u>The Nature and Destiny of Man</u>, Vol. I, p. 276.

(2) <u>Speculations</u>, p. 34.

It seems to be Henn's contention that in _Murder in the Cathedral_, and possibly, by extension in _Burnt Norton_ also, Eliot is attempting the difficult task of recovering the symbol. But although the 'futility of existence' and a Hulmean view of human nature frequently occurs in the early poems of Eliot, and is hinted at in places in _Four Quartets_, there is little evidence to suppose that when he uses the symbol in either _Burnt Norton_ or _Murder in the Cathedral_, the Buddhist belief in life's futility is being suggested. Eliot transforms the image in _Four Quartets_ by placing it in the context of the Incarnation, and in _Murder in the Cathedral_ in the context of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement, both of which doctrines purport to give pattern and meaning to existence. The 'suffering' of which Thomas speaks is not the inescapable and purposeless suffering of the Buddhist, but takes a very definite meaning from the suffering of Christ.

In _Sweeney Agonistes_ Eliot described the situation, and posed the problem, of the intolerable burden of guilt (from which damnation appeared to offer a possible way of escape); in _Murder in the Cathedral_, _The Family Reunion_ and _The Cocktail Party_ the attempt is made to redeem the situation and answer the problem. The result of Original Sin is the experience of guilt and the

knowledge of schism: separation of God from man, man from man, and man from himself. It is a separation known ultimately in death and hell, and Eliot powerfully evokes the experience in the lines:

> Emptiness, absence, separation from God;
> The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land
> Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void,
> Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind
> To distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretence,
> Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are
> no objects, no tones,
> No colours, no forms to distract, to divert the soul
> From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing,
> with nothing[1].

The first step towards the overcoming of separation and the ending of schism is the recognition of sin and the acknowledgement of guilt. But Atonement itself cannot be worked by man. In his treatise on the Incarnation, the Greek father St. Athanasius, goes on in the second half of his work to speak of Atonement

> Here, then, is the second reason why the Word dwelt among us, namely that having proved His Godhead by His works, He might offer the sacrifice on behalf of all, surrendering His own temple to death in place of all, to settle man's account with death and free him from the primal transgression[2].

Helen Gardner claims that martyrdom is the 'central theme' of Murder in the Cathedral. But one wonders quite what she is referring to when she says that it is martyrdom 'in its strict ancient sense' witnessing 'to the awful

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 44.

(2) The Incarnation, p. 49.

reality of the supernatural'[1]. This is certainly true and is obviously in accord with Eliot's desire to show 'the primacy of the supernatural', but it does not take us far enough, for Eliot establishes this primacy in a special way. Thomas's death exemplifies the Christian pattern of the Atonement not merely by reminding men of the 'proffered remedy', but by effecting it in their very lives. They cannot work their own Atonement so Thomas becomes a Christ-figure in the deepest sense. His sacrifice of blood, like Christ's, actually accomplishes the transfiguration of the lives of the women 'forced to bear witness' at Canterbury. His action is not an imitation of Christ's death but a realisation of the sacrifice.

Unlike the choruses from The Rock, the choruses of Murder in the Cathedral are an integral part of the action for they trace the course of this transformation. Although they are unwilling to be implicated in the situation, the women not only acknowledge the disruption of the natural order in its separation from God

> We have seen the young man mutilated,
> The torn girl trembling by the mill-stream[2]

but also discover, in the coming of the knights, their own involvement in sin and recognise their own guilt

---

(1) The Art of T.S. Eliot, p. 133.

(2) Collected Plays, p. 29.

In the mews in the barn in the byre in the market-place
In our veins our bowels our skulls as well[1]

Finally there is the experience of redemption and release from guilt in the restoration of the divine pattern in the world

> The back bent under toil, the knee bent under sin, the hands to the face under fear, the head bent under grief.
> Even in us the voices of seasons, the snuffle of winter, the song of spring, the drone of summer, the voice of beasts and of birds, praise Thee[2].

Shortly after his baptism into the Christian Church, Eliot wrote an essay in which he maintained that in an age of settled religious practice and belief

> ..... drama can and should tend towards realism, I say towards, I do not say arrive at ...... The more fluid, the more chaotic the religious and ethical beliefs, the more the drama must tend in the direction of liturgy[3].

His views on the present age had already been expressed in his review of James Joyce's novel Ulysses in 1923[4] and, taking due account of the purpose for which the play was written, a glance at the structure of Murder in the Cathedral would lead us to conclude that the first few

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 42.

(2) Ibid., p. 53.

(3) "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry'. Selected Essays, p. 49.

(4) 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' Dial, LXXV. 5 (November 1923) pp. 480-483.

decades of the twentieth century were regarded as an age of extreme chaos by Eliot. There is little reason to suppose that events which followed 1935 led him to change his mind; nor does his prose provide any evidence that he did. But it is interesting to note that in his efforts at re-vitalising the English tradition of poetic drama he moved further away from the static, liturgical forms of Murder in the Cathedral with each new production. It was a gradual process, for his first attempt at fashionable 'realistic' drama The Family Reunion although comparatively successful in its reproduction of the tones and manners of upper-class society, is at least as close in spirit to its predecessors, Sweeney Agonistes and Murder in the Cathedral, as it is to The Confidential Clerk or The Elder Statesman.

There is first, the curious ritualistic dance and incantation with which the play ends, reminiscent both of the choric dances of early Greek drama and the Christian liturgical ceremony of Tenebrae[1]. There is a vestige of this static ritualistic behaviour at the close of the second act of The Cocktail Party too, but no traces whatsoever in either of the final plays. Secondly there is the use of a chorus similar to that of the women

---

(1) A ceremony performed each night of Holy Week in which the lights of the Church (candles) are extinguished one by one.

of Canterbury. But whereas in Murder in the Cathedral, the women represent a constant 'unchanging' element in the dramatic action, in The Family Reunion, as in Sweeney Agonistes, the pratogonists themselves disconcertingly turn into a Chorus at significant moments in the play. The depersonalisation of Ivy, Gerald, Violet and Charles, and their translation into a corporato personality requires an imaginative agility that is virtually impossible. It is not only asking too much of the actors, but too much of the audience as well. Finally, there is the use of 'poetic fantasies'[1] - a device which is to be found in the abortive Fragments as well as in Murder in the Cathodral. Within the static, ritualistic framework of both of these earlier productions these 'arias' are not intrusive, but, as Eliot himself has admitted, the 'beyond character' speeches of The Family Reunion.

> .... are so remote from the necessity of the action that they are hardly more than passages of poetry which might be spoken by anybody[2].

In Murder in the Cathedral Eliot presented an apprehension of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement; in his first 'realistic' poetic drama he retraces his steps

---

(1) Eliot's own description.

(2) Poetry and Drama, p. 30.

to the problems which lie at the heart of Sweeney Agonistes - guilt and sin. The connections between The Family Reunion and the two Fragments are obvious and significant. Besides the technical similarities already mentioned, there is the fact that the later play uses as a framework the plot of the Greek tragedy from which the epigram to Sweeney Agonistes is taken[1]. Further, they can both be called melodramas, and have the same central motif of violence. Whether Harry Monchesney actually has 'done a girl in' is not disclosed; nor is it of great importance. What is important is that he endures the same torment as Sweeney's friend, the murderer. The sinister knocking with which Fragment of an Agon closes, suggests, in the light of the quotation from the Choephoroi, the presence of the spirits of Clytemnaestra, the agents of retribution. Here in The Family Reunion the Erinyes [Eumenides] actually make their appearance outside the windows of the drawing room at Wishwood.

> Why do you show yourselves now for the first time?
> When I knew her, I was not the same person[2].

D.E. Jones claims that the play is built around Harry's 'spiritual election' and that everyone else is seen in relation to him. This links him with Thomas Beckett,

---

(1) cf. however T.R. Henn's claim that the framework of The Family Reunion is Euripides' Elektra. The Harvest of Tragedy, pp. 222-225.

(2) Collected Plays, p. 83.

but Harry's election resembles Thomas's in only a very few particulars. In the scene of the Fourth Temptation in Murder in the Cathedral we are given the picture of a man in the last stage of 'making perfect his will.' Thomas has already discovered his part in the pattern of life, he has already come to grips with reality and can accept his destiny. Harry, on the other hand, is in the first stage of discovering his part in this pattern. He resembles far more closely the composite figure achieved by running together Sweeney and his 'friend'.

> .... one thinks to escape
> By violence, but one is still alone[1].

He may speak in the accents of the upper-classes but his problems are almost identical with those of Sweeney. He also is unable to communicate with those around him:

> But how can I explain, how can I explain to you?
> You will understand less after I have explained it[2].

and is surrounded by people who are not alive to the horrors of the real world. The dream/nightmare motif is used in both plays.

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 66.

(2) cf. Sweeney's speech:
I gotta use words when I talk to you
But if you understand or if you don't
That's nothing to me and nothing to you.
Collected Poems, p. 31.

.... You have gone through life in sleep,
Never waken to the nightmare[1].

But this same scene which carries so many reminders of *Sweeney Agonistes*, includes also an echo of *Burnt Norton*.

.... I am the old house
With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,
In which all past is present, all degradation
Is unredeemable ....[2]

Although Eliot tentatively suggests at the beginning of *Burnt Norton* that 'all time is unredeemable', the *Four Quartets* taken together are an exploration of the ways in which past and present can be joined so that time actually is redeemed and becomes a matter, not of '...... the intense moment/isolated .....' but '.... a lifetime burning in every moment.'[3] The phrase from *Burnt Norton* is used in a later scene, and part of the weakness of the play arises from Eliot's failure to unite the metaphysical and psychological categories which he employs. 'Degradation' is a psychological or spiritual category; 'Time' is a philosophical one. Harry's problem is primarily a spiritual one and although there are passages which hint at a resolution of the difficulties by an apprehension of the 'timeless moment' (in the manner of *Four Quartets*) they interrupt the action of the play which is the gradual recognition of guilt. Although the Eumenides frequently

---

(1) *Collected Plays*, p. 65.

(2) Ibid., p. 66.

(3) *East Coker*. *Four Quartets*, p. 22.

make their appearance in the context of the 'operatic' sections of the play, there is no sense of Harry's final decision arising inevitably out of the moments of heightened consciousness suggested by the 'beyond character' speeches. The connection between the illumintion (the 'rose-garden' symbol) and his acceptance of guilt is never made clear.

Unlike the play which immediately preceded it, and that which followed it, The Family Reunion hardly touches on the Christian doctrine of the Atonement; its concern is with Original Sin. Harry is not a sacrificial figure. His 'election', unlike Thomas's and Celia's, is primarily to a vision of the horror of man's universal involvement in sin, not to a life of Atonement for the sins of others. Man's universal imprisonment in a world of fear and bewilderment is conveyed in the grotesque imagery of the speeches given to the Chorus

> And the wings of the future darken the past, the
> beak and claws have desecrated
> History. Shamed
> The first cry in the bedroom, the noise in the
> nursery, mutilated
> The family album, rendered ludicrous
> The tenants' dinner, the family picnic on the moors.
> Have torn
> The roof from the house, or perhaps it was never there.
> And the bird sits on the broken chimney. I am afraid[1].

In the suggestion that madness and terror lie just beneath the surface of the civilised consciousness Eliot comes

---

(1) Collected Plays, pp. 87-88.

close to expressing these notions which underlie productions of the Theatre of the Absurd, but, like Auden, he asks us to believe that this sense of horror and dislocation springs from man's own guilt and his refusal to recognise and accept it.

The play closes with the 'operatic' speeches of Agatha and Mary in which the theme of blood-guiltiness is made plain. It is obviously meant to provide some kind of resolution of the problem Agatha has spoken about in an earlier scene with Harry

> It is possible that you have not known what sin
> You shall expiate, or whose, or why.
> .... You may learn hereafter,
> Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen
> To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer[1].

But although we are meant to see Harry as a scapegoat, there is little evidence that expiation of man's universal sin is actually accomplished, for the last chorus is very like the first

> And what is being done to us?
> And what are we, and what are we doing?
> To each and all of these questions
> There is no conceivable answer[2].

Despite their closing lines, Joy, Gerald, Violet, and Charles are still in the state of the women of Canterbury before Thomas's death.

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 105.

(2) Ibid., p. 121.

.... afraid in a fear we cannot know, which
we cannot face, which none understands[1].

For an exploration of the theme of expiation, we have to turn to _The Cocktail Party_, which, _Murder in the Cathedral_ excepted, contains the fullest vision of Christianity Eliot achieved.

It is a play which tends to arouse critical controversies and two of its most distinguished critics, Raymond Williams and T.R. Henn, have made it plain that the treatment of its themes bears very little relation to the Christian vision of life. Speaking of Celia's death Williams complains

> For sacrifice now does not redeem the world or bring new life to the waste land. Rather in an obscure way, it ratifies the world as it is. Eliot's Christian action is not tragic redemption, but tragic resignation .... I think that Eliot in _The Cocktail Party_ abandons the Christian tradition of sacrifice and redemption ....[2]

And in _The Harvest of Tragedy_, Henn underlines a point he has already made in connection with _Murder in the Cathedral_

> But perhaps the final and most serious objection to _The Family Reunion_ as to _The Cocktail Party_, is the manipulation of determinism in a drama which appears, by intention, to be Christian as to its background, and which uses that background for its snatches of ritual[3].

---

(1) _Collected Plays_, p. 16.

(2) 'Modern Tragedy'. _Critical Quarterly_. Vol. V. No. 1., p. 13.

(3) _The Harvest of Tragedy_, p. 225.

Williams and Henn seem to be criticising Eliot on the same grounds. They find in The Cocktail Party a religious pessimism similar to that of Four Quartets

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

Life, like time, is 'unredeemable' and operates to a predetermined pattern in which human beings are immovably fixed. In such a situation resignation inevitably becomes one of the virtues that will be extolled. I believe, however, that Eliot's view of the 'pattern' of life and the place of suffering and death in this pattern is much more subtle than Williams and Henn allow, and that we have in The Cocktail Party, not a Buddhist or a sub-Christian pessimism, but a convincing expression of the Christian doctrines of the Atonement and Providence.

Though less prominent a figure than either Thomas Beckett or Harry Monchesney, Celia Coplestone clearly belongs in their company. Her actions are cardinal in The Cocktail Party and she is an amalgam of Thomas and Harry. Like Thomas she chooses a way of action which leads to suffering and death; like Harry she is still in the stages of 'perfecting her will', of accepting a burden of guilt which may or may not be hers.

> I've never noticed that immorality
> Was accompanied by a sense of sin;[1]

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 187.

One of the most significant scenes of the play is that in which Celia and Reilly confront each other. It is here that Eliot seems to experience the greatest difficulty in persuading his modern audience of the reality of sin. The scene opens badly with a series of banal remarks about loneliness and the inability to communicate. It is not until the introduction of the 'technical' words 'sin' and 'atone' that the dialogue quickens to conviction, and in Celia's description of her adulterous affair with Edward we find the distortion of the everyday world of human relationships powerfully portrayed

> .... Can we only love
> Something created by our own imagination?
> Are we all in fact unloving and unlovable?
> Then one _is_ alone, and if one is alone
> Then lover and beloved are equally unreal
> And the dreamer is no more real than his dreams[1].

The language is sparse and the picture of corruption has none of the physical repulsiveness that characterises Harry's description of his world, but then Celia is much more articulate than Harry. The image of the succubus[2] flits quickly across the imagination as Celia speaks, and suggests the horror of sin which ends in 'the final desolation' of self-centredness. It is only now that

---

(1) _Collected Plays_, p. 188.

(2) Both R.H. Robbins and G.C. Smith note this image and detect the influence of Charles Williams' novel _Descent into Hell_.

her opening remarks about loneliness take on meaning.

The familiar theme of 'appearance and reality' occurs frequently throughout the scene, but Eliot is not merely repeating what he has said before in the first volume of his poetry. Here the ultimate unreality is the choice to be self-sufficient[1]. Celia's world is not that of Prufrock: sordid, trivial, and disintegrated, but one in which self-enclosure, damnation, has already begun[2]. She has also a self-knowledge which the personae of the early poems are entirely without. She defines the frustration and unreality of her life as 'a source of sin' - a condition which she suffers, but for which she cannot be held personally responsible. In the context of her inability to form a fruitful relationship with Edward she describes that condition of frustration and misery which the church has traditionally called 'fallenness'.

> Its not the feeling of anything I've ever done,
> Which I might get away from, or of anything in me
> I could get rid of - but of emptiness, of failure
> Towards someone, or something, outside of myself3.

---

(1) This point is underlined dramatically by the futile attempts of Edward and Lavinia to exist in separation from each other.

(2) Cf. Niebuhr.
Man, in other words, is a sinner not because he is one limited individual within a whole but rather because he is betrayed, by his very ability to survey the whole, to imagine himself the whole.
The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 117.

(3) Collected Plays, p. 188.

And the feeling of bewilderment and desolation which accompanies the knowledge of separation from God and the search for lost innocence is conveyed in lines which are faintly reminiscent of archetypal images of Biblical and Epic narratives, and fairy stories.

> But even if I find my way out of the forest
> I shall be left with the inconsolable memory
> Of the treasure I went into the forest to find
> And never found, and which was not there
> And perhaps is not anywhere? But if not anywhere
> Why do I feel guilty at not having found it?

Reilly in reply makes it clear that innocence is irretrievable, and that release from the unbearable strain will require faith and courage, for it means 'a terrifying journey'[1]. One which, we discover later, involves renunciation and death.

It has been suggested that The Cocktail Party is about the two traditional methods of mysticism - the two 'ways' by which the soul achieves union with God i.e. experiences Atonement[2]. Celia, it is claimed, represents the Via Negativa, and follows the path of the renunciation of 'created things'. The Chamberlaynes, consequently, are taken as representatives of the Way of Affirmation in which the value of the created order is

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 190.

(2) Cf. Carol H. Smith, T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice, pp. 157 ff.

asserted and is seen as an image of God's glory[1]. It is true that Celia chooses a life which entails a denial of 'earthly' things and eventually death, and that Edward and Lavinia continue their efforts at giving meaning to their marriage, but the play's primary concern does not seem to me to be a mystical one (in this narrow sense). If this interpretation were valid then Eliot's view of the Way of Affirmation would rightly be condemned as dull and second-rate. Eliot himself is partly to blame for this reading of the play. Reilly offers Celia an unambiguous choice between two cources of action one of which he calls 'reconciliation' to the 'human condition', which he paints in grey or neutral tones, and which inevitably means the loss of ecstasy and vision.

> .... In a world of lunacy,
> Violence, stupidity, greed ..... it is a good life[2].

What is more disquieting is the suggestion that, unlike Celia, Edward and Lavinia are given no opportunity of making a choice. In a speech to Celia earlier in the play, Edward remarks

> I see that my life was determined long ago
> And that the struggle to escape from it
> Is only a make-believe, a pretence
> That what is, is not, or could be changed[3].

---

(1) Cf. Choruses from The Rock. Collected Poems, pp. 179-180.
O Greater night, we praise thee for the less,
The eastern light our spires touch at morning
....
We thank thee for the lights that we have kindled.

(2) Collected Plays, p. 190.

(3) Ibid., p. 153.

The world-weary tones have a ring of hopelessness; a resigned acceptance that his life will follow a course over which he has no control. This is hardly the Way of Affirmation as the Christian understands it, and if this is where Edward's vision ended, Henn's point about Buddhist determinism would be justified.

What most critics fail to recognise is the closeness with which the two 'stories' are woven together, and that Celia's death accomplishes a change of a particular kind in the lives of Edward and Lavinia. The final act parallels in a rather strange contemporary idiom the closing scenes of Murder in the Cathedral. If we examine the Chorus of the women of Canterbury we discover that the death of Thomas has not altered the structure of their lives at all. The same things happen; they still

> ..... fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the fist in the tavern, the push into the canal[1],

but Thomas's death has effected a new acceptance of this life which somehow makes its physical structure of little importance. This spiritual transformation is Atonement and is expressed in a poem of praise and joy. In a modern comedy such a poem as the Chorus's is dramatically impossible; the affirmation has to be

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 54.

demonstrated at a mundane level, but within the limits set by the play itself, we see the lives of Edward and Lavinia undergoing a change which is as significant as that of the women.

It is even more important to realise that, as in Murder in the Cathedral it is the shedding of the martyr's blood which accomplishes this change. If Edward and Lavinia had 'worked out their own salvation' then the episode which describes the death of Celia would be an intrusion. But it happens to be at the core of the final act, for around it all significant conversation revolves. The link between his own life and Celia's death is made by Edward when he 'corrects' the unconscious irony of his initial reaction to the news

> And just for a handful of plague stricken natives
> Who would have died anyway[1].

by saying

> I cannot help feeling
> That, in some way, my responsibility
> Is greater than that of a band of half-crazed savages[2].

He echoes here the experience of the women of Canterbury who, while experiencing release and restoration by the death of Thomas, are forced into a recognition of their own guilt.

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 206.
(2) Ibid., p. 210.

In many ways The Cocktail Party is an unsatisfactory play. The central themes do not emerge clearly and there is an air of contrivance about nearly every effect, but there are passages which succeed brilliantly, and the Christian doctrine of the Atonement is investigated with a great deal of imaginative insight. In one way it can be said to be more universal in its vision than the earlier, obviously Christian play, Murder in the Cathedral, for less attention is paid to the problems of 'special election' and more to the common experience of sin and the effect of sacrificial death. D.E. Jones' allegorisation of the play is a little hard to swallow, but he does grasp its religious significance when he says

> ..... the meaning of the party [at the end of the play] is altered. Celia's death has brought them closer together, as it has tied them to Peter. The life of the spirit is invigorated and the bonds of society are strengthened. Before the party itself begins, a crucifixion has been recalled and a vicarious atonement recognised. The cocktail party can be the secular counterpart of the Communion Service if given in the right spirit, the titbits and the short drinks the equivalent of the bread and wine[1].

In The Confidential Clerk Eliot picks up a theme with which he was preoccupied in the first volume of his poetry - appearance and reality - and explores its possibilities within the framework of a dramatic form that is frequently based upon their confusion - the farce.

---

(1) The Plays of T.S. Eliot, p. 143.

The play's action, revolving around a traditionally farcical situation of mistaken identities, gives convenient theatrical emphasis to the playwright's special concern of drawing the contrast between the world of reality and that of appearance. The discovery of personal identity, which is the dominant theme of the play, entails the discovery, both of the difference between appearance and reality, and the necessity of changing the public world of appearance by making it take on reality from the private vision. It is significant that the only person who is deeply distressed by Mrs. Guzzard's revelations is Sir Claude, who, having turned his back on his own vision, is fearful of the prospect of change in the public world, and is unable to accept the new identity which really belongs to him. Problems of identity are not distinctively Christian problems, and in The Third Voice, Denis Donoghue, unlike most critics of the plays, significantly claims that, because of its preoccupation with the nature of reality, The Confidential Clerk is farthest away from Christian doctrine, and closest to Four Quartets[1].

But although the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement make no appearance, there is a religious dimension in the recurrent theme of fatherhood, which

---

(1) The Third Voice, pp. 153-154.

Eliot relates to the Fatherhood of God in Colby's possible vocation to the sacred ministry

Eggerson: I don't see you spending a lifetime as an organist.
I think you'll come to find you've another vocation[1].

The primacy of the supernatural over the natural is certainly demonstrated here, but in terms of priggishness and with a heavy-handedness that not even the farcical structure can alleviate.

There is also the religious dimension which is suggested by the use of an image which has haunted much of Eliot's work, that of the 'garden'. It becomes in The Confidential Clerk, a symbolical focal point, though, curiously enough, the image is almost completely evacuated of religious content. In the interchange between Lucasta and Colby, there is some attempt at using it to convey explicitly religious connotations. As in Four Quartets it is used to suggest a world of reality beyond that of normal apprehension and hardly understood. The poetry frequently reaches a high degree of evocative power, and is occasionally strongly reminiscent of the first movement of Burnt Norton[2]. But confusion enters when Colby says

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 290.

(2) The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
Four Quartets, p. 8.

> If I were religious, God would walk in my garden[1].

The reference is obvious, but out of place. We are reminded, not merely of the innocence and beauty of Eden, but also of the story of the Fall in which the Adam, in shame and dismay, heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day[2]. There is little in the rest of the play which supports this introduction of 'guilt' or suggests that it has any part to play in the discovery of identity or reality. This is left to the last of the plays in which the same problems are presented, and explored in ways which are more closely, though less obviously related to Christian patterns of redemption by penitence and love.

But the almost 'mystical' nature of Colby's experience in this scene is set aside, for Eliot, in a way that is difficult to follow, causes him to reject the 'garden' of his inner world for the more banal one to which Eggerson constantly returns both in speech and at the end of every working day

> Colby: You know I think that Eggerson's garden
> Is more real than mine[3].

It is Eggerson who controls the events of the closing scenes, and we are left, at the end, with the disquieting

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 246.

(2) Genesis, Ch. XII, v. 8.

(3) Collected Plays, p. 245.

impression that Colby's sojourn in Joshua Park, however fruitful in things like 'marrows and vegetables' will not make the public world take on the order and beauty of a priest's vision. The fault lies in the projection of Eggerson who, despite Eliot's irony, never quite manages to gain the audience's sympathy. The intention of the playwright is clear, but an audience cannot but be disappointed by the suggestion that Colby is to become another Eggerson.

The Confidential Clerk ends with Sir Claude Mulhammer's profound bewilderment. In an attempt to save himself and his whole world from complete disintegration, he clutches desperately at what he has previously ignored - the love of Lucasta Angel. The last play - The Elder Statesman, picks up this theme and develops this situation, so that a relationship of love and dependence between a father and a daughter becomes the background against which a pattern of redemption is worked out. In turning from Euripides back to Sophocles, the 'spiritually elect' hero disappears altogether, and, in the figure of Lord Claverton, Sir Claude Mulhammer advances to the centre of the stage.

Although it hardly bears comparison, as a creative achievement, with any of his major poetic works, in many ways this last attempt at drama is remarkable. In

it Eliot has virtually perfected a verse which has '... so wide a range that it can say anything that has to be said ...'[1]. It has a proper 'transparency' so that the listener is never distracted by the medium, which nevertheless is capable of flaming into 'poetry' whenever the emotional intensity of the situation requires it. Consequently there is nothing incongruous or artificial about the love-poetry of Charles and Monica in the opening scene, as there is about some of the poetic speeches of previous plays[2]. Moreover it is a religious play which establishes the 'primacy of the supernatural', without once mentioning the technical terms of religion[3]. But, having noted the technical excellence of the play, it seems there is little more to be said. Repeated readings reveal more and more the perfection of technique but fail to move and enrich the reader in the ways that his great poems do. That which has been compressed into only a few lines in Little Gidding and conveyed, with the greatest emotional intensity, is here spread out over a two-hour drama

---

(1) Poetry and Drama, p. 15.

(2) The 'beyond character' speeches of Harry and Mary, for example, in The Family Reunion.

(3) Cf. Eliot's own remarks about 'religious' and 'devotional' poetry in 'Religion and Literature.' Selected Essays, p. 391.

> Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
> To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
> ....
> And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
> Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
> Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
> Of things ill done and done to others' harm
> Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
> Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains[1].

And the result is a certain flaccidity of language that prevents the reader from making a strong and vital response to it. The characters are convincing enough, but a little 'flat' and uninteresting. The Christian vision is entertained, but seldom conveyed with passion, and is finally set aside. And the moments when the verse flares into 'poetry' are few and far between.

In an interesting parallel between Henry James' The Turn of the Screw and The Elder Statesman, Grover Smith remarks that

> The Elder Statesman blends a Jamesian concern for understanding with a Puritan anxiety about guilt. Its hero, Lord Claverton, escapes the governess' misfortune: he divines that his two ghosts are harmless provided that he purifies his own soul[2].

Smith, like Edmund Wilson and many other critics, is all too eager to label Eliot's religious attitudes 'Puritan'. The distinctive characteristic of Puritanism, as we have already seen, inheres in the combination of a strict Calvinistic theology and a scrupulous psychology, the

---

(1) Four Quartets, pp. 39-40.

(2) T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays, p. 245.

consequences of which are a lack of assurance about salvation and harshness of attitude as regards creed and moral standards. This attitude is foreign to the tone of The Elder Statesman which is realistic rather than harsh, for in it Eliot investigates a situation which has its roots in the universal experience of old age: the fear of the emptiness of life, the sense of having failed to achieve anything of value, the sudden realisation that the clock cannot be put back, and the self-recrimination that borders on remorse.

Lord Claverton: Say rather, the exequies
Of the failed successes, the successful failures,
Who occupy positions that other men covet.
When we go, a good many folk are mildly grieved,
And our closest associates, the small minority
Of those who really understand the place we filled
Are inwardly delighted[1].

This is simply a human attitude, neither Puritan nor even Christian. But, of course, Eliot does not leave the matter there: he makes it clear that Claverton's fears and anxieties arise out of his inability to possess and inhabit that inner, private world which both Monica and Charles know in their love, and which gives reality and meaning to the outer, public world. This was the problem of The Confidential Clerk and Lord Claverton like Sir Claude Mulhammer, is a man who, having chosen the

---

(1) Collected Plays, p. 303.

world of public appearances, has reached the stage where these cease to matter. Solitude and privacy face him and the condition of being able to exist in this inner world is the ability to recognise and accept, not only the weaknesses and limitations of one's own personality, but responsibility for the chaos and suffering one has caused in the lives of others. This theme of the necessity for the recognition and acceptance of guilt had its beginnings in _Sweeney Agonistes_, where in a setting of melodramatic violence the knocking at the end of the second _Fragment_ hints at fears and horrors which have to be faced. In _The Family Reunion_ anxiety and guilt make their appearance in the figures of the Eumenides. In _The Elder Statesman_ they are dramatised and personalised for the first time in Gomez and Mrs. Carghill. This has the effect of making Lord Claverton's guilt much more explicit than Harry Monchesney's, and much more individual. Whereas the obvious intention of _The Family Reunion_ is the depiction of an universal condition, in Christian terms, Original Sin, _The Elder Statesman_ involves us in a particular condition of sinfulness for which a particular act of contrition is needed. Harry is spiritually responsible, Claverton technically.

Lord Claverton: This may surprise you: I feel at peace now.
It is the peace that ensues upon contrition.
When contrition ensues upon knowledge of the truth.

The picture of Lord Claverton facing the shame of his own actions, and acknowledging and accepting his own guilt is, obviously, closely related to the Christian schema of repentance and is at a considerable remove from the specifically Puritan attitude of scrupulous anxiety about guilt.

Smith suggests a kind of 'ritual cleansing' of Lord Claverton by implying that the 'exorcism' of 'the ghosts' is dependent upon 'the purification of the soul', this is slightly misleading. Although there is an element of ritual purification in Claverton's confession to Monica, Eliot makes it clear that exorcism and purification are part of the same process. This again repeats a Christian pattern: recognition of sin is followed by a repentance and contrition which expresses itself in confession and is experienced in liberation. But the action is unbroken, and continuously one. The purification _is_, in a sense, the exorcism as well as the confession.

Despite these Christian elements however, the vision of the play comes closer, in the end, to the stoic ideal rather than the Christian, for Lord Claverton's purification and liberation are seen in isolation. His reliance upon Monica's love, though emphasised at the beginning of the play, recedes further and further into the background. His is an individual act, the culmination of which is his

confession of sins. The Christian doctrine of grace, whether given directly or mediated by the love or suffering or work of others, is of little relevance to The Elder Statesman, for it is not Monica's love which is the important feature of Claverton's salvation but his own humility and strength. He fights a battle in which no-one else can be of any real assistance, and he wins a victory which barely touches on the lives of those around him. The great Christian themes of Atonement and Grace which lie at the centre of Murder in the Cathedral and The Cocktail Party are absent from this last, and probably most successful, verse-drama.

> The long search for poetic drama seems to have led only to discovering how to write a successful west-end play; a remarkable achievement indeed, but a bitterly disappointing one.[1]

At the end of this brief survey of the plays we have reached a point at which it is possible to view and make a brief evaluation of Eliot's attitude to, and expression of, the Christian interpretation of life in his creative works. The predominant concern throughout his life seems to have been the fragmentariness of human perception and understanding, the chaos of the contemporary world, and the need of discovering or imposing an order or a pattern

---

(1) Nicholas Brooke. Durham University Journal, Vol. XLVI, No. 2, pp. 66-70.

which would make sense of experience. The famous statement made in 1928 in his Preface to the volume of essays For Lancelot Andrewes, and which has dogged him all his life but which he has refused to deny[1], is biographical evidence of the concern he felt and of the steps he took in solving the problem in his private life. His profound interest in the work of F.H. Bradley and his investigation of the philosophical problem of 'appearance and reality' as well as his self-effacing, but confident and penetrating, political and sociological studies, show that this was not merely an asthetic or even a religious problem. But it is in the world of art, and more particularly, literature, that the focal point is to be found. From the numerous critical essays there emerges the belief that the artist is the man who has both to impose an order upon chaotic human experience - his art - and also to fit into a pattern which he has inherited - the tradition. When in 1950 he stated in a lecture on Dante

> .... I still, after forty years, regard his poetry as the most persistent and deepest influence upon my own verse, ...[2]

he was expressing an admiration for this aesthetically formal and religiously orthodox poet, not merely because

---

(1) See Preface to To Criticize the Critic.

(2) 'What Dante means to me.' To Criticize the Critic, p. 125.

of his 'width of emotional range'[1], but because of his power to order human experience into a single coherent pattern.

It is against this background that Eliot's exploration and presentation of the Christian vision must be understood. To say that Christianity and the Catholic Church provided him with an answer to the particular questions which troubled him is in no way to denigrate his faith: to question its depth or reduce his acceptance of it to the utilitarian level of a convenient mythology, but it does mean that his approach is distinctive and occasionally blinkered, once again the similarities between, T.E. Hulme and Eliot must be mentioned. Eliot's failure to find order at the natural level and his search for it at the supernatural often bears closer resemblance to the ideas about 'limitation' and 'perfection' in Speculations than to orthodox Christian formulations about the nature of man and his destiny. But, whereas Hulme frequently talks a kind of pseudo-theology, giving technical terms peculiar meanings, Eliot accepts traditional interpretations and explores all the avenues of orthodox theology which the words open up - so long as the concepts which they represent have some bearing on the particular problems which crowd his mind. Consequently the avenue

(1) What Dante means to me. To Criticize the Critic, p. 134.

which is most deeply and thoroughly explored is that of the Incarnation for, in its statement of God made Man, he perceived the vision of order: a supernatural pattern being imposed upon, and giving a meaning to, an inchoate mass of natural occurrences. Christianity, however, takes its life from the inseparable doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement, and while Eliot seems, intellectually and spiritually, to have understood the fact that the Incarnation is not merely involved with, but is theologically dependent upon, the Atonement, it seems to have eluded his creative and imaginative grasp. This is a large generalisation the truth of which I have already tried to demonstrate. That he used the words sin and atonement, and that he was capable of portraying the degradation and depravity of human existence as well as its futility and chaos must be recongised, but the fact remains that his predominating attitude to man's condition is such that he is led to emphasise the importance of the Incarnation and the order it imposes at the expense of the Atonement and the reconciliation it offers.

In the writing of the plays it seems as though Eliot was making an attempt to 'redress the balance' and complete his Christian vision of the world, for the Atonement is a doctrine which deals with guilt and repentance, sacrificial suffering and forgiveness, and

all these themes are prominent in more than one play. But apart from certain sequences in _Murder in the Cathedral_ and _The Cocktail Party_, which bear comparison with the profound analysis in parts of _Ash Wednesday_, his touch is unsure and his presentation theoretical.

In 1935 shortly after the production of _Murder in the Cathedral_, R. P. Blackmur wrote

> Interest will clearly be seen if the statement can be accepted that there has hardly been a poet of similar magnitude in English whose work, not devotional in character, shows the operative, dramatic presence of Christianity[1].

I am willing to recognise both Eliot's magnitude as a poet and the 'operative, dramatic presence of Christianity' in his work (nothing produced since 1935 could substantially alter the evaluation), but an important qualification must be made: However complete his private vision of Christianity may be, his power of expressing it is limited. Far from being the poetic representation of Christian orthodoxy, as many critics maintain, his works only occasionally suggests the presence of the Christian faith in its fullness, and, taken as a whole, provide us with a picture in which the two cardinal doctrines appear very differently. The image of the Incarnation glows with accuracy and depth while that of the Atonement is blurred and superficial. In support of my argument I

---

(1) _The Double Agent_, p. 187.

intend to make a comparison between the achievement of Eliot and that of one of his younger contemporaries W.H. Auden in whose work, sometimes seriously flawed and frequently irritatingly self-conscious, an ability to grasp and express the wholeness of the Christian vision, which evaded Eliot, can be seen.

CHAPTER VIII

Introduction to the poetry of W.H. Auden

G. S. Fraser's book on modern poetry Vision and Rhetoric contains a discussion on the poetry of W.B. Yeats in which the critic makes an interesting aside about the work of two younger contemporaries and their Christian attitudes

> The modern Christian attitude tends to lead to a preoccupation with sin. From this, Yeats was quite free. In the last ten years of Yeats's life, these two contrasting attitudes were well represented in this country by the work of Mr. Auden and Mr. Eliot. Mr. Auden, in the 1930's, was a kind of liberal semi-Marxist, profoundly but not always obviously, [my italics] affected by a Christian upbringing; Mr. Eliot was a Christian conservative, profoundly but not always obviously affected, particularly in his concern with social questions, by a liberal upbringing. These two poets, in fact, had much more in common with each other than either had with Yeats[1].

Fraser is by no means the only critic to draw attention to the similarities between Eliot and Auden: Beach, Spears, Hoggart, and most serious critics of Auden's poetry have all made substantial efforts at comparing the two poets. But although this kind of critical activity has become commonplace, it still has value and interest, and although Fraser's remarks are addressed to their work

---

(1) Fraser, p. 42.

of the thirties, since which time Auden's Christianity has become explicit, he neatly points up similarities and differences that are not confined to that period. It is not surprising that the comparison is so often made: the fact that each reversed his former ideological position, when both were men of some maturity, to accept the Christian faith seems to demand the comparison. Moreover the influence of Eliot can be clearly seen in some of the younger man's poems[1]. What is of significance however, is the further fact that, though possessed of a common faith and owing allegiance to a particular branch of the Anglican church, the two men display a religious sensibility which is as different as their poetic means of expressing it.

This difference is determined to a great extent, as Fraser suggests, by the difference in their social and cultural backgrounds. The upbringing of a boy in the nineteenth-century home of a cultivated, humanistic, and Unitarian Middle-West businessman differs radically from that of a boy born in 1907 whose father is a provincial Medical Officer with strong Anglo-Catholic affiliations. Whereas Eliot retained throughout his life the intellectual

---

(1) Nevill Coghill, in his contribution to the symposium compiled in 1948 by March and Tambimuttu, gives an account of the impression Eliot's verse made on his pupil, Auden, at Oxford in the late twenties. (Symposium, p. 82).

fastidiousness and the Puritan manner which must have characterised his family, it is the specifically religious training of Auden which never seems to have left him. Eliot's final spiritual position involved baptism into the Christian church; Auden simply returned to the tradition in which he had been nurtured from an early age.

T.E. Hulme commenting on his own attitude to the Christian faith remarked: 'It is not, then, that I put up with the dogma for the sake of the sentiment, but that I may possibly swallow the sentiment for the sake of the dogma'[1]. Though Eliot gives little indication of recognising a distinction between sentiment and dogma in his own religion, it is probable that had he been pressed his attitude would have been far closer to Hulme's than to Auden's who makes it clear that while seeing the necessity of dogma, it is the sentiment of the faith which is of greater importance to him

> In my Eden each observes his compulsive rituals and superstitious tabus but we have no morals./ In his New Jerusalem the temples will be empty but all will practise the rational virtues2.

This strong attachment to the sentiment of Christianity is more important to Auden's work than is generally recognised. In Eliot's poetry we are constantly aware

---

(1) Speculations, p. 71.

(2) From 'Vespers'. Shield of Achilles, p. 76.

of the powerful, philosophical intellect questioning, investigating, and ordering the material which is set before us; in Auden's, despite the erudite flourishes and the range of reference, the intellectual control is often slack, and at times completely submerged in, what can only be called, a ritualistic display. Eliot has described his conversion to Christianity as a series of logical arguments which led inevitably to baptism, Auden commented on his return to the faith

> .... however bored I might be at the very thought of God, I enjoyed services in his worship very much more probably than many who were more devout than I ....[1]

His love of the more formal arts of opera and ballet is well-known, and in 1937 Christopher Isherwood spoke of the restraint which he found it necessary to exercise during their collaboration on the plays

> ...... Auden is a musician and a ritualist .... If Auden had his way, he would turn every play into a cross between grand opera and high mass.[2]

The restraint does not seem to have been exercised very effectively, for Isherwood's words are an uncomfortably accurate description of the plays as they stand. They are, for the most part, static compositions of recitatives,

---

(1) Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 37.

(2) W.H. Auden. A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 10.

arias, and choruses nearly all of which can be (and have been) removed from their dramatic context and reproduced as separate pieces with virtually no loss of poetic significance. There are ritualistic elements in Eliot's plays as well, but with the exception of The Rock (a pageant and not a play) violence is done to the material if anything is removed from its immediate context. Until this love of ritual somewhat akin to the playing of a game is understood and recognised, Auden's work frequently presents serious difficulties for it character-ises everything he does and to some extent accounts for the distinctive nature of his religious sensibility.

Both in his autobiography World Within World and in an essay published in 1953 Stephen Spender stresses the intellectualism of Auden and his attitudes[1]; an evaluation which might at first sight seem to be at variance with what has been said about his love of ritual. But Auden's ritualism involves, besides an emotional response to physical expressions which are more immediate in their appeal than verbal ones, the 'strongly intellectual' appreciation of abstract patterns and formal arrangements. A ritual like a game, a mathematical problem, a detective story[2], or a piece of music[3], can be

(1) W.H. Auden. A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 30.
(2) Cf. Auden's essay 'The Guilty Vicarage', The Dyer's Hand, pp. 146-158.
(3) 'The Composer'. Another Time, p. 48.

regarded, at a certain level, as self-contained and complete, and enjoyed for its own sake as an exercise in pure form. To treat the ritual of the Church in this way is to debase it, for religion then becomes an unreal aestheticism that ignores the beliefs and principles from which the ritual purports to draw its life and meaning. Auden is fully aware of this danger, and his delight in the sentiment of Christianity never stops at an aesthetic appreciation of pure form, it leads him on to the acceptance of the intellectual image of that worship - the whole structure of Christian dogma. But whereas Eliot and Hulme value doctrine as a powerful, and ultimately unanswerable, philosophy of life, poems like <u>New Year Letter</u> and <u>Christmas Oratorio</u> frequently give the impression that Auden enjoys the whole structure purely as a perfect interrelation of intellectual arguments.

R.P. Blackmur maintains that

> It is a commonplace assertion that Mr. Eliot has shaped both his Christianity and his technique to forward the expressive needs of his mind[1].

Out of its context this seems to be an unnecessarily 'obvious' statement, for all men, to some extent, shape

---

(1) <u>Language as Gesture</u>, p. 181.

their beliefs, and all artists, in some degree their material, according to their 'expressive needs', but the significance of Fraser's comment becomes apparent in the contrast between Eliot and Auden. The techniques which Auden employs, with the greatest virtuosity, are nearly all 'received' techniques, and the Christianity which he expresses is a 'received' faith in which the existential note is often lacking. Besides the air of detachment from the beliefs and attitudes which the ritual embodies, there is from time to time, a superficiality in his treatment of those beliefs, and a tendency to accept and state rather than explore and re-create. In Eliot we have the exploration and re-creation, but always in answer to particular questions which personally pre-occupy him. In Auden there is a greater breadth, a power to see beyond his own personal problems, an ability, born of the ritualistic sense, to grasp the interrelation of all of the parts of the Christian pattern and occasionally to present the authentic Christian experience with a knowledge that evades Eliot. In Eliot we are given the profound examination of certain Christian dogmas, in Auden we occasionally get a glimpse of the quality of the full Christian experience.

In the essay by Stephen Spender already mentioned,

the author has some remarks about Auden's personal life which, however illuminating about the earlier works, are misleading as a guide to the understanding of the later poetry. Auden's ideas he says

> .... have changed as strikingly as his way of life has remained the same. There is a dualistic idea running through all his work which encloses it like the sides of a box. This idea is Symptom and Cure .... The diagnostician Auden is much the same as he was at Oxford.
>
> It is his conception of the Cure which has changed. At one time love, in the sense of Freudian release from inhibition; at another time a vaguer and more exalted idea of loving; at still another the Social Revolution; and at a yet later stage, Christianity[1].

The implication of a dichotomy between Auden's beliefs and his actual life suggests that there is a fundamental unreality and lack of seriousness about the beliefs. Fraser echoes Spender's remarks in his own evaluation of Auden's work

> God, like the libido, or like the dialectic, is for Auden chiefly a useful generalization; assuming the existence of God, he finds it possible to solve certain problems[2].

Like many of Auden's critics, Spender and Fraser, are suspicious of the 'answers' the poet provides for problems which he himself poses, and lump together, in the same

---

(1) W.H. Auden, p. 28.

(2) Vision and Rhetoric, p. 156.

slightly contemptible bundle, all the ideologies which have found expression in his work. The adoption of Freudianism, Marxism, and Christianity follows an identifiable and monotonous pattern; whatever the cure, its relation to the symptom remains at best a tenuous one. It is true that Auden's air of detachment, his constant experimentation and game-playing give this criticism an element of truth, nonetheless, I find it inadequate as an evaluation of the whole body of his poetry. The later volumes display structures of thought and feeling different from those of the earlier poems, and the demands of the Christian religion are not only more particularised but more deeply felt than the philosophies of Marx or Freud. While the problems do remain largely unchanged, their relation to the answers is so much closer that it can be called necessary. In other words, the problems which Auden poses and investigates in the early writings are primarily religious ones which cannot be solved successfully in Marxist or Freudian terms. Although there are a few poems which capture a Marxist ideal, there are few which can be called 'Marxist' in the same way that many can be called 'Christian'. In earlier volumes the poetic force invariably derives from the poet's understanding of the 'symptoms', in later poems it frequently derives from his recognition of the 'cures'.

CHAPTER IX

Auden's Poetry (1): From Poems 1930 to Another Time

It would be platitudinous to re-emphasise what is evident from all of Auden's early work and what all serious criticisms have pointed out with varying degrees of clarity - the closeness of the poet to his age: his acute awareness of contemporary social and political issues, his interest in the international situation, and his deep concern for the values of the society which surrounded him in England in the second and third decades of this century. There is a poem, however, in his first volume, Poems 1930 which cannot be overlooked but which makes no reference whatsoever to Auden's immediate environment: 'Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle'[1]. It is an unusual poem, not merely because of the neat adaptations of Anglo-Saxon verse techniques, nor because of the absence of contemporary references, but because its images, more sensual than is customary in Auden's work, convey a strong sense of hopefulness and the desire for personal fulfilment which contrasts with the surrounding poems whose themes, for the most part,

---

(1) Poems 1930, p. 43.

are the sicknesses, weaknesses and distortions in human society. Possibly, for this reason, the poem might be called untypical, but it is untypical only of these early volumes, for the same notes of joyful expectancy and confidence of ultimate satisfaction are transposed into the specifically religious key of a later sequence like Horae Canonicae. Spears suggests that the figure of the wanderer represents the middle-class hero leaving his comfortable surroundings and accepted political creeds for more dangerous ways of political thought, but this is too narrow an interpretation and seems hardly justified by the poem itself[1]. Auden may well have been deeply involved in Marxism at the time of the poem's composition, but there is little internal evidence of its influence. What ideological overtones there are, are religious. The mysteriousness of the 'impulse':

> Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle

and the categorical nature of its demand

> Upon what man it fall
> ....
> No cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by women.

both suggest this. Moreover we find in this poem the beginnings of what later becomes a central problem in his apprehension of the Christian faith and a constant theme in his presentation of it: the relationship

---

(1) The Disenchanted Island, p. 41.

between freedom and necessity; God's demand and man's response. The wanderer, even though he appears to choose his path, is not free to refuse it. There is no freedom in the absolute sense, it is seen to be exercised only in the willing acceptance of what is already destined. In the third section of his later quasi-autobiographical poem New Year Letter[1], the problem is elaborated in an unambiguously religious way. Here in Poem XI the verse is less philosophical and more allusive and there is nothing specifically religious about the presentation except that it stands firmly in the context of an essentially religious symbol - the Quest.

Like the image of the solitary hero, this image - a journey which leads to the discovery of ultimate meaning and which involves courage and self-denial - recurs frequently in the early poetry, receiving its most extensive treatment in the sonnet sequence of 1941 entitled simply The Quest[2]. Behind these poems lies Auden's fascination for, what may be called an anthropological aspect of religion: folk-lore and fairy-tale. In this modern setting the traditional figures of folk-tales make their appearance in traditional situations.

> Now everyone knows the hero must choose the old horse,
> Abstain from liquor and sexual intercourse

---

(1) Ll. 914-945.

(2) Published in 1941, the sequence is a collection of twenty poems all of which are sonnets with the exception of the third which has twenty-one lines.

And look out for a stranded fish to be kind to!
Now everyone thinks he could find, had he a mind to

The way through the waste to the chapel in the rock
(XIV)

He parried every question that they hurled,
'What did the Emperor tell you?' 'Not to push?'
'What is the greatest wonder of the world?'
(XVI)

The notion of a quest features prominently in nearly all of the ancient sagas and their presence is clearly discernible here. But there is also, throughout the sequence, the more subtle presence of a specifically Christian saga; the greatest of the English Quest stories - Pilgrim's Progress.

Nor all his weeping ways through weary wastes
he found
The castle where his Greater Hallows are interned:
(IV)

And when Truth met him and put out her hand
He clung in panic to his tall belief
(VI)

Within these gates all opening begins
....
All journeys die here; wish and weight are lifted.
(XX)

The religious implications in this sequence are clear, and come as a kind of fulfilment of all that has been suggested earlier. Apart from the Baroque eclogue Age of Anxiety, the image appears only as a faint echo in the later poetry, and Horae Canonicae gives the impression of the search ended, the destination reached.

Because of the frequency with which the theme occurs in the early work, there is an atmosphere of restlessness and nervous excitement about this poetry which contrasts strongly with the wearily ironical and cynically amused tones of the early Eliot. The general impression that is left by the life and work of Eliot is one in which the idea of the Quest has been stood on its head. The personal movements of Eliot and Auden have been along parallel lines but in opposite directions. The theme of searching deeply embedded in Four Quartets turns out to be a retracing of steps to the recovery of what has been lost. The journey into the future ends in the discovery of the past

> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time[1].

The discovery of the Holy Grail - the myth which underlies The Waste Land - is, of course, a quest-myth, but the theme is treated throughout the poem with a profound irony.

> 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[2].

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 43.

(2) Collected Poems, p. 76.

And in the early volumes (1917 and 1920), the possibility of a quest is never allowed to arise, for in Eliot's world no-one ever has the strength to venture beyond the trivial round. His view of the human condition is consequently far more pessimistic than Auden's. Where Eliot draws a world in which the complete futility of human effort and the powerlessness of human love predominate, Auden in his early volumes depicts (less movingly and penetratingly) one in which human endeavour, however unsuccessful, is of some value, and human affection, however weak and selfish, is capable of alleviating the squalid conditions under which it is experienced.

Both poets have used the device of 'placing' their human figures in characteristic landscapes, and the differences between the two men, not only in artistic apprehension and poetic technique, but in religious sensibility, show up clearly when a comparison of the ways in which they use the device, is made. Where Eliot takes his reader into the nerve-centres of his civilisation - Prufrock and the Lady occupied in their ceaseless and pointless social activities - and forces him to feel and see this world from the inside, Auden compels the reader to stand away from it, to survey the whole scene from outside and above[1]. The image of the

(1) e.g. Poems XXIV, XXIX, (Poems 1930 p. 78, p. 87).

Waste Land is admittedly a symbol by which the chaos of human life is expressed, but it operates much more deeply too. Man's fate and that of the physical creation become bound up with each other. The pictures of dirty cities and barren mountains are more than convenient images of a purely human situation. In, for example, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Rhapsody on a Windy Night the squalor of human life is inseparable from the meanness of its physical environment. Man is seen as a part, and a completely powerless part, of an unregenerate physical world. By contrast, the distinction between man and the rest of the world is a constant feature of Auden's thought. Man is seen as a maker and shaper of things. Consequently even his abortive attempts at asserting himself over his environment are in a small way triumphant:

> Noises at dawn will bring
> Freedom for some, but not this peace
> No bird can contradict: passing, but is sufficient now
> For something fulfilled this hour, loved or endured[1].

His vision of the world, as it is embodied in these early poems, is not a particularly happy or hopeful one: the land which he describes is desolate; the situation in which the human being finds himself is one in which salvation is needed. Poems like Nos. XI and XII of Poems 1930 contain the characteristic images of this early period:

---

(1) Poem XXVI (Poems 1930 p. 82).

'dismantled washing-floors', 'snatches of tramline', 'ramshackle engine' (Poem XI), 'smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals' (Poem XXII) - images of decay and disintegration, but his vision does not arouse the same apprehension of hopelessness and degradation as Eliot's early verse does. This is partly because Auden's manner, though less ironical, is more detached (we are more aware of the poet 'making' the poetry), but also because the human figures are occasionally given some degree of self-awareness and are set over against the landscape, and also because he injects into the verse notes of danger and excitement which Eliot resolutely excludes

> .... Near you, taller than grass,
> Ears poise before decision ....[1].

> Terrors drawing closer and closer, winter
> landscape, fox's death[2];

Where Eliot in his early poems is content to dissect and depict; Auden's words contain an urgent desire for discovering that new mode of life which will enable human communication to be resumed and human action to take on significance. Sometimes, as in Poem XI, this urgency is expressed with subtlety

---

(1) Poems 1930, p. 56.

(2) Ibid., p. 75.

> .... you may hear the wind
> Arriving from the ignorant sea
> To hunt itself on pane, or bark of elm
> Where sap unbaffled rises, being spring;

But frequently we are palmed off with a cheap sensationalism as in the closing lines of Poem XVII

> If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try;
> If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd better start to die.

In much of his early work Auden strives to create the atmosphere of crisis - a possibility in human experience Eliot will not admit. In their lassitude, even the most self-aware of Eliot's figures fail to recognise the necessity for making decisions and are unable to arouse themselves to perform any kind of meaningful act

> No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be[1].

But Auden forces nearly every moment to its crisis, so that even in the little love lyric 'What's on your Mind' (Poem XIII) closes with the line

> Strike for the heart and have me there[2].

Many attempts at the evocation of crisis in Poems 1930 and Look Stranger! result in little more than political posturing. The verse is laboured, the situations melodramatic and the admonitions slightly ridiculous.

---

(1) 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Collected Poems, p. 15.

(2) Poems 1930, p. 58.

The ubiquitous background of mysterious frontier-wars and political tensions; of spies, leaders, and heroes, frequently suggest the schoolboy adventure story, and it is significant that on his return from the Civil War in Spain Auden remained silent about his first-hand experience of actual conflict. The amused, self-critical tones and ironic backward glances of the poem 'August for the people'[1], however, as well as the methods he adopted in editing his early poems, reveal that he was not unaware that much of what he had written had an adolescent ring[2].

There are, nevertheless, many poems in this first volume in which the creation of the desperateness of the human condition and the urgent need for action does not depend upon schoolboy trappings or slick references to current tense international situations. The words of admonition which come, for example, at the close of the poem 'It was Easter' (No. XV)

> .... we know that love
> ....
> Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
> Death of the old gang; .... [3]

---

(1) Look Stranger! pp. 63-66.

(2) Although J. Warren Beach in The Making of the Auden Canon is right to claim that Auden edited his own work on ideological lines, it is also true, as the versions of 'Here on the cropped grass' show, that he was sensitive to early technical crudities.

(3) Op. cit., p. 66.

do not sound either empty or childish because they come at the end of a long poem in which the picture of the dislocation and disturbance of modern society has been prepared for by a more general insight into personal loneliness and bewilderment which is the universal human predicament and which is conveyed in the controlled, imaginative language Auden is capable of writing. The paradoxical juxtaposition of life and death, and the presence, in the midst of vitality and serenity, of human suffering and deformity, is the theme of the first stanza. The use of the Easter images causes the recollection of the ultimate connection between life and death, and, as in Eliot's Waste Land, the power of life reasserting itself at this particular season of the year serves only to emphasise the pitifulness of human experience

> But thinking so I came at once
> Where solitary man sat weeping on a bench
> Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted
> Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken[1].

But whereas Eliot depicts an existence in which the acceptance of emptiness and death has already taken place, Auden goes on to suggest the painful growth of awareness to the dislocation of life and the presence of suffering and death and the necessity for discovering meaning in

---

(1) The Making of The Auden Canon, p. 61.

this jumbled collection of events

> In me so absolute unity of evening
> And field and distance was in me for peace,
> Was over me in feeling without forgetting
> Those ducks' indifference, that friend's hysteria[1],

And in the third section Auden writes of the transience of life and the need men have for accepting into their own experience the fact of death. It has become the practice for editors of verse anthologies to break up this poem and publish its sections separately[2]. The procedure is far from satisfactory, for the publication of the final section for example, by itself, emphasises disproportionately the hectering tones of the poet, narrows the sense of crisis to an appreciation of the immediate political situation, and prevents the direct warnings from drawing power, as they were clearly intended to, from the clear, bright images of the preceding section

> As I shall leave the summer, see autumn come
> Focussing stars more sharply in the sky,
> See frozen buzzard flipped down the weir
> And carried out to sea, leave autumn,
> See winter, winter for earth and us,
> A forethought of death that we may find
> ourselves at death
> Not helplessly strange to the new conditions[3].

---

(1) The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 63.

(2) Even Richard Hoggart in his selection of Auden's poems for school study publishes this section separately.

(3) op. cit., p. 65.

Despite the evident success of many poems in those early volumes, it cannot be said that Auden's insight into the sickness and distortion of society and the crisis in the contemporary world is conveyed with as much poetic power as Eliot's apprehension of degradation and futility. But the purpose here is not a comparison of poetic merit, it is an endeavour to illuminate differences of religious outlook; differences which make themselves felt even at the stage of their 'pre-Christian' poetry. Neither man can be said to have undergone a conversion-experience which involved a sudden radical change of belief and sensibility. In the work of both, clear patterns of an evolutionary kind can be traced. Consequently, Eliot's early preoccupation, not with human suffering and change - aspects of life which might suggest self-awareness and dignity - but with the more strictly philosophical problem of Appearance and Reality combined with a conviction of the helplessness of man in a circular kind of existence, helps to explain why his attitude towards redemption as presented in the later poems frequently has the appearance of an escape from life and time and seldom suggests the ecstatic joy which accompanies the Christian vision of salvation. I have tried to show why this is so in what I have already said about the relationship between Eliot's belief concerning human nature and

the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. In Auden's work, the relationship between the poet's belief and orthodox Christian doctrine is always much closer. For Auden, as for the Christian, the concept of distortion - of man's nature being warped and twisted - is clearly in evidence. The individual is seen as a creature who, while corrupt and deflected from his original purpose, is possessed of a self-awareness, and is capable of taking, in response to what we may call Grace, action that enables him to transcend the limits, and transform the conditions of his corruption. Consequently his apprehension of man's ultimate destiny glows, from time to time, with the same intensity as the Christian vision of heaven

> He is the Life.
> Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
> And at your marriage all its occasions shall
> dance for joy[1].

When Homage to Clio was published in 1960, Philip Larkin reviewing the volume for the periodical Spectator remarked

> Few poets since Pope have been so committed to their period. It is not only that to be at home in Auden's poetry we must recognise Bishop Barnes, Coghlan's Coffin, Van der Lubbe and all the personalia of 'Last Will and Testament', (Letter from Iceland, with Louis Maebhlice) we shall also find the depression, strikes, the hunger marchers, we shall find Spain and China; and above all we shall

(1) For the Time Being, p. 124.

> encounter not only the age's properties but its obsessions: feeling inferior to the working class, a sense things needed a new impetus from somewhere, seeing out of the corner of an eye the rise of Fascism, the persecution of the Jews, the gathering dread of the next war that was half projected guilt about the last... [There follows a quotation from 'The chairs are being brought in'] It is precisely this dominant and ubiquitous unease that lay at the centre of Auden's verse and which he was so apt to express[1].

Larkin's review summarises much that has been said and written about Auden, and in its clarity and understanding surpasses many of the much longer critical studies. Yet he too believes that, as a poet, Auden fails when he ceases to act as a critic of the immediate social and political environment. The 'abandonment' of Europe and the impending struggle of the Second World War, according to Larkin, did irreparable damage to his work.

> My guess is that the peculiar insecurity of pre-war England sharpened his talent in a way that nothing else has[2].

It is true that Auden does convey the 'atmospheric conditions' of the 'twenties and thirties' with great vividness in these early poems, and that much successful verse was produced as criticism and comment on specific social and political issues, but the suggestion that what

---

(1) 'What's Become of Wystan?' <u>The Spectator</u>, July 15 1960, pp. 104-105.

(2) Ibid., p. 104.

lies behind the most successful poetry was little more than an acute awareness of the 'dominant and ubiquitous unease' of pre-war Europe is unacceptable. Richard Hoggart's evaluation of Auden as 'a moralist concerned with the problem of human guilt'[1], though not entirely satisfactory, is closer to the truth, for it is the dominant and ubiquitous unease of every human life that is the central preoccupation of the poet. In religious terms, it is the condition of men suffering the consequences of Original Sin that is his concern. Criticisms like Larkin's verge on mistaking the framework of the building for the building itself; the convenient images for the reality they are intended to convey. Inevitably the poet mirrors his age, and the social and political climate of the twenties and thirties provided a fund of apt symbols by which Auden could convey his own attitudes and feelings, and be certain that he would be understood. Although prompted by it, his vision extends far beyond a sensitivity to a contemporary situation. Recognisable 'personalities' march across the pages and popular psychological and political theories appear in the lives, but at bottom (it becomes clear in Another Time) the concern is religious and personal. The subject is not

---

(1) Auden. An Introduction Essay, p. 34.

the distress of Europe, but self-doubting man.

If it is true that Auden's strength lies in his identification with the tensions of a time and place, then the poem from Look Stranger! 'Easily, my dear you move, easily your head' (XXI) must be accounted as one of the most forceful he has ever written, for here there is the closest possible identifications. Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill, Roosevelt, bankruptcy, political platform all make their appearance and are an integral part of the poem

> Summoned by such a music from our time,
> Such images to audience come
> As vanity cannot dispel nor bless[1]:

But its real strength lies, not in the presentation of the tensions of a particular time and place, however accurately rendered, but in the investigation of a permanent human condition: the experience of human love in a world which opposes and denies it. It is a love poem of a peculiar kind, concerned not merely with the expression of an individual emotion, but with the interaction of two worlds - the private and the public - in the experience of the emotion. In this respect there is a faint resemblance to Donne's poem 'Busie old foole,

---

(1) Look Stranger! p. 50.

unruly Sonne', but where the recollection of the world outside causes Donne, in a big gesture, to dismiss it as unreal and worthless, in comparison to his own world of love, in Auden's poem the private world of the lover becomes unreal if it is cut off from the distresses of the world which surrounds the love. Auden has said much about the relation between two other worlds: Art and Reality, and the dangers of confusing them[1]. And as there is the dangerous temptation to believe in the world of artistic creation as autonomous and real, so there is the danger of retreating into a private world of love and regarding it as self-existent and self-explanatory. Both the lover and the artist possess the same kind of power. Both can impose a credible pattern on the confusion of everyday experience. But unlike Art whose purpose is to provide an analogy for real living, love is actually a part of that real living and must be related to every other part. Hence the patterns the lover is tempted to make by withdrawal have a dangerous unreality

> He from these lands of terrifying mottoes
> Makes worlds as innocent as Beatrix Potter's;
>
> Easy for him to find in your face
> The pool of silence and the tower of grace,
> To conjure a camera into a wishing rose[2];

---

(1) Cf. 'The Poet and the City' in The Dyer's Hand, pp. 72-89. Caliban's speech in The Sea and the Mirror, For the Time Being, pp. 31-58; New Year Letter, p. 19; 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', Collected Shorter Poems, p. 65.

(2) Look Stranger! p. 50.

Authentic existence demands the refusal to impose easy patterns, and involves the painful recognition of the limitations of human powers, the awareness of change and the cruelties and imperfections of love. It is here, in the expression of personal bewilderment and frustration, that Auden's verse is at its liveliest.

> A choice was killed by every childish illness,
> The boiling tears among the hothouse plants,
> The rigid promise fractured in the garden,
> And the long aunts[1].

Unlike Eliot's poem <u>Animula</u> which pictures the gradual corruption of a human life from birth to death, these stanzas of Auden speak, more subtly, about the gradual growth of the awareness of corruption. Innocence is never a real human experience in the poet's vision, just as it never is in the Christian view. The world he depicts is already corrupt, and innocence is a dream, a haunting memory of something which has been lost, somehow, before it has been enjoyed. The myth of the Fall in the Garden appears frequently in the poetry, and Eden always lies out of the reach of man, dimly longed for, but far beyond the hope of recovery[2]. The Christian belief about the nature of man is close to the surface

---

(1) <u>Look Stranger!</u> p. 51.

(2) Cf. Six Sonnets <u>In Time of War</u>.

of this particular poem, not merely because the poet appears to believe in the regenerative power of love, but because, like 'the promise in the garden', the whole of human existence is flawed and distorted. Beauty and Goodness are not necessarily connected; the power to corrupt is an ever-present reality; suffering and corruption are not merely unfortunate features of the universe but the inevitable consequences of deliberate choice and action. The world and the flesh lie around as snares in which man can be caught easily: objects not evil in themselves but which prove to be disappointing or illusory when given ultimate value.

> .... O, be deaf
> When hatred would proffer her immediate pleasure,
> And glory swap her fascinating rubbish
> For your one treasure[1].

Speears, in his long study of Auden's work, contends that, in this second volume Look Stranger! the poet offers two principal forms of escapism - religion and romantic love[2]. This is an inaccurate over-simplification. Religion, as a conscious relationship with some kind of Divine Being, hardly appears at all, and therefore cannot be offered as a way of escape, and romantic love,

(1) Look Stranger! p. 52.
(2) The Disenchanted Island, p. 124.

though occasionally seen as a panacea for all ills, is generally treated with a high degree realism. In, for example, the lyric 'May with its light behaving' the connection between the corruption of the world and human love is again stressed. There is no escape here. The real world is the world in which there is confusion and pain

> The dying master sinks tormented
> In the admirers' ring,
> The unjust walk the earth[1].

for the poem is built up around a central image of the Fall of the Adam. It is in consequence, for Auden understands the theological implications perfectly, a poetic exposition of the meaning of Original Sin.

> We stand with shaded eye
> The dangerous apple taken

These are unquestionably the most effective lines of the poem. The curious juxtaposition of the words 'shaded' and 'eye' with their suggestions of darkness and light, ignorance and knowledgo, accurately conveys the doubleness of the human condition: man's acquiescence in evil and attempt at self-deception as well as his painful self-awareness. Where there should shine the bright clarity of innocence there is only the half-darkness of

---

(1) <u>Look Stranger!</u> p. 41.

acknowledged guilt. Innocence is not the refusal to be corrupted, it is the inability to recognise evil. Auden sees man's position as being far from innocent: he is aware of his predicament, yet unable to change it, for even love, far from being the instrument of release, is itself caught up in the pattern of feebleness and guilt

Before the evil and the good
How insufficient is
The endearment and the look.

This same belief in the connection between the weakness of love and the corruption of the world is the theme of poems III: 'Our hunting fathers' and XXVIII 'Dear though the night is gone'. In the first of these poems Auden casts an ironical eye at evolutionary theories as he contrasts animal and human life. Real humanity entails not merely the possession of the gifts of reason and love, but the curse of guilt. Where there is choice to love there is also cause to regret. The animal world knowing neither reason nor love is also totally unaware of remorse or guilt.

Who nurtured in that fine tradition
Predicted the result,
Guessed love by nature suited to
The intricate ways of guilt[1]?

The second poem is a drooping little lyric about the deceitfulness of the love relationship. Here there is

(1) Look Stranger! p. 17

pity in Auden's treatment of a world in which every emotional experience is without significance

> Indifferent to those
> Who sit with hostile eyes
> In pairs on every bed,
> Arms around each other's necks,
> Inert and vaguely sad[1].

The preaching tone which Auden all too easily adopts is noticeably absent here, and the pity stems from his sensitivity to the universal experience of frustration and hopelessness. There is some similarity between this poem (XXVIII) and the one discussed earlier: 'Easily my dear, you move ......', for the same problem of the connection between private and public life is present. The lover's attempt to create a world of his own is a failure. The self-existent world of love where everything makes sense and has its place is an illusion which leads only to despair.

In the ballad 'O what is that sound' (VI), this concept of the deceitfulness and insecurity of human love crops up again. The form is ideally suited to the poet's purpose and the poem is a technical tour de force, but it is not only the mounting tension of the rhythm in the growing fear of the soldiers' approach that gives it

---

(1) <u>Look Stranger!</u> p. 61.

such power and brilliance, it is the increasing blandness of the replies to the lover's breathless questions.

> O it must be the farmer who lives so near,
> It must be the farmer so cunning, so cunning?
> They have passed the farm already, dear,
> And now they are running.

The full horror breaks when the lover finds her love betrayed and herself deserted, facing the splintered door and burning eyes alone.

Probably the finest poem of the volume is the thirtieth, the one entitled '_Birthday Poem_' (_To Christopher Isherwood_.) The technical dexterity is not obvious, the wit is not precocious and the pity is not sentimental. Auden is gently sarcastic about the enthusiasm which informed his early idealistic belief in the power of love

> Five summers pass and now we watch
> The Baltic from a balcony: the word is love.
> Surely one fearless kiss would cure
> The million fevers, a stroking brush
> The insensitive refuse from the burning core[2].

But he does not call upon Love to redeem the world from the 'expanding fear and savaging disaster', as he did in the poem which stands as a Prologue to the

---

(1) _Look Stranger!_ p. 21.
(2) Ibid., p. 64.

collection[1], human promises and vows of Love proved themselves deceitful. Instead, with a hint of irony which does not detract from the genuineness of the tribute, he asks Christopher Isherwood's 'strict and adult pen' to diagnose the disease and prescribe the cure.

At the core of the long poem which was later entitled The Malverns[2], a slightly different note is struck

> These moods give no permission to be idle,
> For men are changed by what they do;
> And through loss and anger the hands of
> the unlucky
> Love one another.

In a world that is squalid and cruel, and in lives that are cramped and deformed, men are still capable of making some gestures which assert their nobility. No way of escape is offered, for, as the image of the 'hands' makes clear, it is only a groping towards love that is pictured. Men remain blind and feeble even when they act in this way. There is a half-bitter resignation which recognises the experiences of loss and anger even in the effort of loving. Despite, however, the acceptance of the corruption of human integrity in the deceitfulness of human promises, and the betrayal of human love by the passing of time, Auden's attitude seldom becomes cynical and never has the

---

(1) O love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven,
Make simpler daily the beating of man's heart......

(2) Look Stranger! pp. 42-46.

appearance of that detached despair which characterises the early verse of Eliot. In, for example, the lyric 'Fish in the unruffled lakes', (XXVII)[1] he begins by contrasting the carefree, instinctive life of animals with the constricted, self-conscious behaviour of human beings, but ends with the conviction that this narrow anxious life possesses a glory which no animal can know. The poet, unfortunately, is less at home in the 'natural' world than in the human, for there is a curiously lifeless quality about the images of the fish and the lion in the first stanza which robs the poem of the necessary power of contrast, for the second stanza beginning with mockery and ending poignantly is beautifully contrived. The theme is, perhaps, an old one, but it is given new life as the reader is made to feel that the reproaches and regrets in human life

> Sighs for folly said and done
> Twist our narrow days

are an indispensable part of an extreme which would otherwise not contain the glory of a 'voluntary love'. It is part of Auden's talent that he is able to use the cerebral and deliberately unromantic word 'voluntary', echoing the judicious tones of 'I must bless, I must

---

(1) Look Stranger! p. 60.

praise, without incurring any sense of anti-climax. The poem has a nice irony which conveys the ambiguous nature of human love. The gift is praised but there is the suggestion, on the one hand, that it is a petty, self-conscious and unreliable affair, and, on the other, that merely by virtue of its being freely-made it achieves a real dignity and beauty.

In his sympathetic, but highly critical, study The Making of the Auden Canon, J. Warren Beach divides the poet's development into four stages[1]. From 1928 to 1936 he maintains that Auden was a Marxist and from 1936 to 1939 a humanist. The short period 1939 to 1941 saw the change from secular humanism to the strictly Christian position, and in the years that followed the working out of this position in specific terms. Beach finds these categories convenient for he is concerned to establish certain principles which Auden adopted in the editing of his poetry, and it is probable that the poet's thinking did follow these lines. But poetry is a more complex matter than the expression of intellectual attitudes, so that as a guide to the understanding of the verse itself, the 'four stages' tend to be misleading.

---

(1) Beach, pp. 231-232.

I have already tried to show how the political interests of the first two volumes (from the Marxist period) are subordinate to Auden's concern with psychological and emotional problems, and that the actual Marxist content is negligible.

The story is slightly different when we come to the plays, for taken as a whole, they are obvious in attitude and didactic in intention. Here political theories and social criticisms are precise in their references and directly expressed. Auden, at this time, like Brecht, seems to have regarded contemporary drama not as a way of giving delight and increasing individual sensibility, but as an instrument for teaching and goading into action. Yet it is possible to detach most of the best poetry from its context in the plays in such a way as to retain its poetic significance while robbing it of any political relevance. Unlike Eliot's poetic dramas in which the language intensifies into poetry at the behest of the action, Auden's best speeches in verse have the appearance of intermezzos and tend to hold the action up rather than press it forward.

Of the six plays, or theatrical devices, which Auden had a hand in, the most obviously political are _The Dance of Death_ produced in 1933 and the one in which he first collaborated with Christopher Isherwood in 1935

The Dog Beneath the Skin. With the exception of a few witty touches and satirical flourishes The Dance of Death is an insignificant work seldom rising above the level of strained farce[1]. The Dog Beneath the Skin is another matter, and, though unmanageable as a stage production, contains a number of songs and choruses which are memorable. Auden included two of them 'Happy the hare at morning'[2] and 'Now through night's caressing grip'[3] in his Collected Shorter Poems in 1950[4].

The second of these two choruses 'Now through night's caressing grip' could be taken from its context and reprinted without alteration, and it stands unchanged, with the exception of a single unimportant word, in Collected Shorter Poems. It is used in the fifth scene of The Dog Beneath the Skin as a lullaby sung over Alan and his companion. It is incidental to the action of the play, (as most of the fifth scene is)[5] and is a

---

(1) Spears has called it 'Auden's only real experiment in the writing of propaganda'. (The Disenchanted Island, p. 87).

(2) The Dog Beneath the Skin, pp. 91-92.

(3) Ibid., pp. 115-116.

(4) Collected Shorter Poems, pp. 62 and 247-248 respectively.

(5) It was presumably intended as a comic interlude, but the script contains the footnote: 'In a performance the ensuing dialogue should probably be cut.' (p. 50).

simple, quiet little prayer for protection against sinister forces, and moves with the ease and relaxed confidence of the best of Auden's lyrics.

The first of these poems is a chorus occurring as an interlude between two stages of Alan Norman's journey: the incidents on the train and those in Paradise Park. And presumably it is intended to remind the audience of the meaning of the play; namely, the decay of the established English middle classes and the necessity for taking immediate action in a revolutionary direction. The section of the chorus which begins

> How comely are his places of refuge and the
> tabernacles of his peace,
> The new books upon the morning table, the lawns
> and the afternoon terraces!

with its rather obvious mock-religious tone sounds like a tirade against the comfortable and perversely ignorant security of the upper-middle classes. But the thought-pattern of the poem is confused because these tones are dropped suddenly, and Auden introduces a new mood with a characteristic flourish

> Here are thickets where accosted lovers combatant
> May warm each other with their wicked hands,

And although he returns to the sufferings of the down-trodden in the penultimate line, it is only after introducing images of cultural activity that extend far beyond specific references to English middle-class social

behaviour, the whole structure of human society is being criticised. Moreover the two sections of the chorus are poorly integrated. What immediately precedes the 'denunciation' of comfortable life is the elaboration of a theme familiar in Auden's work - the contrast of the world of brute creation with the world of human beings; the world of mindless complacency with that of painful self-awareness.

> Or best of all the mineral stars disintegration
> But what can man do, who can whistle tunes by heart[1].

It seems that Auden was aware of these flaws, for the revision of the poem in 1950 shows the poet not merely eradicating specific political references but attempting to eliminate some of the confusion. He tries to bridge the gap between the sections by substituting the line

> What can he do but defend himself from his knowledge?

for the somewhat petulant phrase of the original version

> We will show you what he has done.

There is an indication here of the frame of mind expressed in the essay Psychology and Art in which he somewhat crudely states the view that there are only two kinds of art: didactic art and escape art[2], a view which tends to

---

(1) The first of these two lines is omitted in Collected Shorter Poems.

(2) Quoted by Bayley in The Romantic Survival, p. 140.

denigrate the value of artistic experience. Here in the poem the comfortable surroundings and the music that is played become ways of warding off the terrifying knowledge of inevitable and universal suffering and decay. His reading of Kierkegaard probably reinforced a belief in Art as illusory, and The Shield of Achilles contains poems which indicate that Auden believed it necessary to advance through the three stages which Kierkegaard spoke of: from the Aesthetic through the Moral to the Religious, where, presumably, the reality of suffering and death is willingly accepted.

The objection that Auden's revisions rob the opening lines of the second section of their previous vigour and asperity has some justification for alterations which clarify the poem in certain directions tend to create confusion in others. The changes did not appear until 1950 and it is impossible to discover exactly when Auden decided upon them. But only three years after The Dog Beneath the Skin he produced a volume of new poetry which had much in common with the spirit of these alterations. The twenty-first poem of this collection[1] bears comparison with the chorus that has been under discussion because Auden again takes up the theme of suffering - this time tragic suffering - and developes it in an allied, though

---

(1) Another Time, p. 47.

slightly different way

> About suffering they were never wrong,
> The Old Masters: how well they understood
> Its human position; how it takes place
> While someone else is eating or opening a
> window or just walking dully along;

Apart from suggesting the sensation of isolation experienced by every sufferer when he sees the world continuing on its way as though nothing had happened, Auden makes the point that all suffering, however significant, appears to go unnoticed in the lives of ordinary men. This does not mean that the tragic events are unimportant, the suggestion is simply that life has somehow to continue in the middle of pain and death. Expressed baldly, the argument may sound callous, but Auden writes with a warmth and sympathy that is not usually associated with his name, and in such a way as to weave the tragic events themselves into the texture of the lives of those very men who appear to be oblivious of them.

> .... and the expensive delicate ship
> that must have seen
> Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
> Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

In the later sequence <u>Horae Canonicae</u> the theme appears again; developed at greater length and with specific reference to the Christian doctrine of the Atonement - the meaning and application in the lives of ordinary men of Christ's suffering and death upon the cross.

Another Time is probably the most significant of Auden's volumes in that it is a transitional work giving the first clear evidence of a hardening both in style and attitude on the part of the poet. As far as technique is concerned many of the defects of the later volume make their first appearance here. In, for example, the first poem 'Wrapped in a yielding air, beside'[1] wit has turned into mannerism and there is a wealth of grandiloquent but vague gesturing

> The friendless and unhated stone
> Lies everywhere about him,
> The Brothered-One, the Not-Alone,
> The brothered and the hated

At times there is an imaginative crudity as in the stanza from the poem later entitled Crisis where the reader cannot help but feel that the poet is straining after effect

> O the striped and vigorous tiger can move
> With style through the borough of murder; the ape
> Is really at home in the parish
> Of grimacing and licking:...[2]

And in a poem like Oxford over-subtlety of reference and imprecision of imagery result in an obscurity that unfortunately has become a feature of much of Auden's later poetry.

---

(1) Another Time, pp. 15-16.

(2) Ibid., p. 52.

Oh, if that thoughtless almost natural world
Would snatch his sorrow to her loving sensual heart!
But he is Eros and must hate what most he loves;
And she is of Nature; Nature
Can only love herself.[1]

On the other hand, there are poems which are as skilful and moving as anything in the earlier volumes. The seven-lined 'Modoigal' 'O lurcher-loving collier' comes close to being a perfect modern lyric, and the conversational style for which he appeared to be striving in Poems 1930 and Look Stranger! is managed here with ease and naturalness wherever it is attempted. Moreover with the adoption of a more relaxed attitude and a quieter tone Auden abandons his previous roles of detached observer and condescending orator so that the loss of nervous energy and compelling excitement is compensated for by a deeper emotional expressiveness and a greater warmth. The Prophets, Brussels in Winter, In Memory of W.B. Yeats, as well as the poem already mentioned Musee des Beaux Arts, are all examples of the increased humanity of his attitude.

In New Year Letter, published a year later than Another Time, the poet traces his own spiritual, intellectual and artistic progress. This long poem is

---

(1) Another Time, p. 23.

a coherent and final statement, in the sense that it is a record of change taking place. In poems like 'Hell is neither here nor there', 'Underneath the leaves of life', and 1st September 1939 specifically religious considerations come to the surface, while in Spain, Gare du Midi, and The Capital the vestiges of the political and social consciousness, for which Auden was so admired in the thirties, can be found. Yet even in Spain, a poem written for the purpose of raising funds for the 'Medical Aid for Spain' campaign there is the feeling that Auden is further removed from the immediate crisis than he was in many of the poems of earlier volumes. The stanzas beginning with the word 'Tomorrow' and containing Auden's vision of the future beyond the war are peculiarly unconvincing in comparison to his description of the struggle itself

> To-day the makeshift consolations; the shared cigarette,
> The cards in the candle-lit barn and the scraping concert,
> The masculine jokes; to-day the
> Fumbled and unsatisfactory embrace before hurting[1].

It seems that Auden's vision as a poet is confined to this kind of struggle which is the only reality in the human condition. The war in Spain is merely the image

---

(1) Another Time, p. 106.

by which this reality is expressed. There are, of course, the topical references

> ... the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting

but the poem ends with a cluster of images which suggest that the tensions and frustrations of human life are not caused by a particular confluence of historical circumstances but a permanent condition in which men have to live and act and discover meaning.

> The stars are dead; the animals will not look:
> We are left alone with our day, and the time is short and
> History to the defeated
> May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.

Although the words 'the time is short' may indicate, in this context, some kind of call to action, what the stanza communicates more deeply is an experience of bewilderment and desolation. The expending of powers on pamphlets and meetings, like the fighting of the war in Spain, may be necessary at certain moments in history, but it fails to give men ultimate satisfaction, or even release them from the sense of loss. The problem is a religious one and a re-statement of the theme more often conveyed in Auden's Eden imagery. It is interesting to note that fourteen years later he uses a line very similar to the one in Spain ('We are left alone with our feat') in attempting to convey the emptiness and shame which follows

on the crucifixion[1].

This section of Another Time (Occasional Poems) contains also 1st September 1939 in which the same observation about the lack of purpose and frightened bewilderment in human life is made more explicitly, but more sentimentally.

All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

This particular image of children wandering frightened in a wood is repeated near the beginning of Christmas Oratorio.

Alone, alone about a dreadful wood
Of conscious evil runs a lost mankind,
Dreading to find its Father lest it find
The Goodness it has dreaded is not good:
Alone, alone, about our dreadful wood[2].

Auden hardly paused in any of the poems of Another Time to investigate the cause of man's sense of fear and loss. This was left to New Year Letter, For the Time Being, and The Age of Anxiety. But the twelfth poem, entitled afterwards Hell[3], gives a slight indication of the way

---

(1) Nones, p. 48.

(2) p. 65. See also the Prologue to New Year Letter.

Which cannot stop us taking our walks alone,
Scared of the unknown unconditional dark,
Down the avenues of our longing:

(3) Another Time, p. 32.

his mind was working. In 'Hell is neither here nor there', the religious and philosophical difficulties of the relation between Being and Becoming are touched upon for the first time. But the poem is elusive and Auden is content with the oblique suggestion that the meaning of Hell, which 'is not anywhere', is somehow connected with confusing the two.

A short time after the publication of New Year Letter, Francis Scarfe produced his critical book Auden And After in which, after making a few observations about the way Auden's work has always tended to show man in a 'social setting' - observations which have the familiar ring - he went on to remark

> He has bothered hardly at all about man's relation to nature, or about such end-problems as life, death, eternity, which have occupied Eliot[1].

It is true that themes such as Scarfe mentions crop up more obviously and frequently since the publication of Auden and After even so, the criticism seems to rely too heavily on the reputation Auden had acquired by 1940 of the poet of the 'social consciousness'. Throughout all of these early volumes with their insistent imagery of the industrial landscape there is an implicit questioning of the place of the human being in the context of a

---

(1) Scarfe, p. 21.

natural order upon which he has imposed his will. Moreover, there are a considerable number of poems in Another Time alone which at least give the appearance of a deep concern over 'end-problems' of life and death.

Possibly, however, Scarfe is implying more than is openly stated, especially as the comment occurs in a comparison of Auden and Eliot. The title of Auden's collection Another Time is significant, for the most interesting of the poems concerned with life and death are those which have the problem of Time recurring through them. If we compare Auden's treatment of this motif with that of Eliot we may see the possible implications of Scarfe's comment. The predicament of man living in a time-sequence was Eliot's most intense preoccupation and he presents the problem in an entirely different way from Auden. Eliot sees the metaphysical dimensions of the problem much more clearly, and connects it moreover with a personal view of the nature of Appearance and Reality in human life. In his work, life in time becomes an appearance from which man must discover a way of escape; an unreality given meaning only by the entrance of the Eternal: the intersection of the timeless moment. Hence the almost exclusive concentration upon the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Auden's attitude, especially in the earlier

work, is more conventional and more existential. The metaphysical problem does not interest him: the sufferings and guilt of individual men in specific situations occupy the centre of his attention. For Auden time is a reality and is personified over and over again[1] as a destroyer and corrupter bringing frustration and sorrow into human lives. Even in his specifically Christian verse the metaphysical question remains a side-issue, for it is the reconciliation of man with his condition of frustration and guilt that it is his prime concern. For this reason his most powerful verse in later years is centred upon the Christian doctrine of reconciliation and salvation: the doctrine most concerned with the sufferings of humanity, the Atonement.

---

(1) Another Time, Poems XV, XVIII, XXVI, XXX.

Compare his statement in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims.

> The various "kerygmas" of Blake, of Lawrence, of Freud, of Marx, to which, along with most middle-class intellectuals of my generation, I paid attention between twenty and thirty, had one thing in common. They were all Christian heresies; that is to say, one cannot imagine their coming into existence except in a civilization which claimed to be based, religiously, on belief that the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us, and that, in consequence, matter, the natural order, is real and redeemable, not a shadowy appearance or the cause of evil, and historical time is real and significant; not meaningless or an endless series of cycles. (p. 38).

CHAPTER X

Auden's Poetry (2): New Year Letter and For the Time Being

In 1940 a collection of essays by a small number of eminent people was published in England under the title I believe[1]. Auden was among those who were asked to contribute, and his statement of faith is of some interest. In the first place, it is by no means a Christian apology, but the elaboration of the position taken two years earlier in an essay called Living Philosophies : Morality in an Age of Change[2]. Yet, as Spears remarks, the Epilogue to New Year Letter, dated Autumn 1940, is the clear expression of a specifically Christian faith. The essay is characteristic of Auden. The tone is dry, the attitude is detached and there is a delight in conceptual complexities. He quotes with approval the pronouncement "Freedom is the consciousness of necessity"[3] and declares in a familiar

---

(1) I Believe. The Personal Philosophies of Twenty-three eminent Men and Women of our Time. May 1940.

(2) Nation, CXLVII, 26 (24 December 1938), pp. 688-91.

(3) I Believe, pp. 18-19.

phrase that men are born 'neither free nor good'[1]. There is even a statement about the relation of the individual to society which would appear to give substance to Scarfe's claim about Auden's attitudes[2]

> Man has always been a social animal living in communities ...... The individual in vacuo is an intellectual abstraction. The individual is the product of social life; without it he could be no more than a bundle of unconditioned reflexes[3].

It is surprising therefore to come upon the line in the third part of New Year Letter, published only one year later

> Aloneness is man's real condition[4].

The contradiction in Auden's thought is, I believe, only apparent. Taken as a whole the autobiographical poem expresses thoughts and feelings which are a logical extension of those contained in the essay. But while these quotations may not be evidence of a sudden radical change of belief, they are evidence of a particular interpretation of man's existence, for the contradiction in human life, as seen through the eyes of Auden, is real. To grasp this is to grasp the essential clue to the understanding of New Year Letter, the theme of which is

---

(1) I Believe, p. 19.

(2) That he shows little concern about the relation of man to Nature and the end problems of life and death.

(3) I Believe, p. 19.

(4) New Year Letter, line 1542, p. 69.

contained in Montaigne's epigram at the beginning of the poem and the title under which the American edition was published: The Double Man.

The English title emphasises the personal element in the poem: Auden's own feelings of friendship and loyalty, the reason for his choice of the United States of America as a permanent home, his misgivings and fears about the international situation in 1940, his private memories of the English countryside. And those sections where the poet himself stands most clearly in the centre of the picture are, poetically speaking, the most successful. Near the beginning of Part I for example, the precisely imagined recollection of events actually experienced gives the recreation of a tense restless atmosphere real power

> Twelve months ago in Brussels I
> Heard the same wishful-thinking sigh
> As round me, trembling on their beds
> Or taut with apprehensive dreads,
> The sleepless guests of Europe lay,
> ....
> A ship abruptly change her course,
> A train make an unwanted stop,
> A little crowd smash up a shap,
> Suspended hatred crystallize
> In visible hostilities[1].

The transition from the feverish atmosphere and the uncertainties and fears of Europe to the peace and security in the lives of the poet and his companions in

(1) New Year Letter, pp. 17-18.

America is accomplished smoothly and deftly

> And the same sun whose neutral eye
> ....
> The very morning that the war
> Took action on the Polish floor,
> Lit up America and on
> A cottage in Long Island shone
> Where Buxtehude as we played
> One of his passacoglias made
> Our minds a civitas of sound
> Where nothing but assent was found[1].

But the quality of New Year Letter is uneven, and behind the flippant cleverness of the poet's rhymed octosyllabic couplets there is a great deal of pretentious philosophising. I cannot agree with Beach's excuse that the poem '... has no pretension to being a work of imaginative creation'[2], for there are a number of sections which quite obviously attempt to appeal to the poetic imagination[3], and Beach himself admits that the invocation at the end is one such section. There can be no objection, on principle, to philosophy in verse or the assumption of the conversational 'middle style', but the poem disturbs by its disconcerting vacillation between what can be taken as seriously appealing to the poetic

---

(1) New Year Letter, pp. 17-18.

(2) The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 206.

(3) e.g. Ll. 12-29
208 ff.
806 ff.
1034 ff.

imagination, and what can only be of interest to the admirer of technical skill.

As a lesson in dexterity New Year Letter could hardly be bettered, but it remains in essence the deliberate, and at times pretentious, verification of 'a point of view'[1]. Central to the 'point of view' are the theological concepts of sin and guilt, freedom and necessity, and the more particularly Kierkegaardian principle that life is a process of 'Becoming' rather than a state of 'Being'. This third principle is not peculiar to the Danish philosopher, but it seems to be from Kierkegaard that Auden draws much in his own attitude. In comparison to Eliot he is a far more derivative writer. No author can help being derivative to a certain degree, and Eliot would doubtless have been the first to acknowledge his debt to the thoughts and efforts of others. But while it is possible to trace ideas in Eliot's work back to specific sources in Dante, St. John of the Cross, Puritan theology and behaviour, and E.H. Bradley, he uses his sources in such a way as never to allow his own work to lose its distinctive individuality. Auden, on the other hand, frequently incorporates the theories of others in a way that, however consistent in

---

(1) John Bayley, The Romantic Survival, p. 171.

style, gives his poetry the appearance of a patchwork of ideas. New Year Letter is the prime example of this. At his best, however, as in Horae Canonicae, he is quite capable of weaving his source material into the fabric of his own deep and convincing apprehension of Christianity with coherent and moving results.

John Press, in a book which deals with some of the problems of 'obscurity' in modern poetry, claims that much of the obscurity of Auden's early work

> comes from his fondness for ringing the changes upon his four main themes - the world of saga, the world of machinery, and of social engineering, the impending Marxist catastrophe, and the clinical analysis of Groddeck[1].

Whether Press is justified in referring to these as 'themes' is debatable; they are often merely technical devices, but it cannot be denied that they are significant features of the early verse. The worlds of 'saga' and 'machinery' remain prominant in later work, but the intellectual interests of the poet - the political theories of Marx and the psychological theories of Freud - are replaced by more accurately imagined and deeply-felt Christian attitudes which owe a great deal to the writings of two modern theologians: Soren Kierkegaard and Charles Williams.

---

(1) The Chequer'd Shade, p. 65.

It is a strange combination of influences, and one which, in part, accounts for the comprehensiveness of Auden's Christian outlook. Kierkegaard was a Protestant, a mystic and a melancholic; a man conscious of each individual's personal and unique "existential" relation to God'[1], deeply aware of his (and all men's) guilt, and tormented by the despair which arises out of the knowledge of separation from God. Williams was a Catholic, also a mystic, but one who saw the whole universe singing the praises of its Creator. That Auden should have been attracted by Williams was probably inevitable, for Williams, like Auden, was an Anglican High Churchman and a ritualist, and an authority on Dante and Milton. He was a man of wide and varied knowledge, possessed of strongly held and original beliefs about the meaning of romantic love, the sacramental nature of the universe, and the personal responsibility of every human being in the cosmic conflict between Good and Evil[2]. In his Introduction to the 1956 edition of Williams' history of the Christian Church, The Descent of the Dove, Audon describes

---

(1) The phrase is Auden's own; taken from his essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 42.

(2) Cf. the monograph Charles Williams by John Heath-Stubbs in the series Writers and their Work.

the book as

> a source of intellectual delight and spiritual nourishment which remains inexhaustible.

They met in the offices of the Oxford University Press where for some years Williams worked as an editor, and Auden describes their meetings in the following way:

> .... for the first time in my life [I] felt myself in the presence of personal sanctity. I had met many good people before who made me feel ashamed of my own shortcomings, but in the presence of this man - we never discussed anything but literary business.- I did not feel ashamed. I felt transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving. (I later discovered that he had had a similar effect on many other people.)[1]

It was probably Williams who first introduced Auden to the works of Kierkegaard, for he was responsible in 1936 for getting the first English edition of Kierkegaard published[2]. Moreover, Auden leads us to believe that it was only after his meeting with Williams that his own attention was caught by the Danish theologian. The Christian religion as seen through the eyes of these two men seemed uniquely fitted to deal with the problems about which Auden was most deeply concerned, and which he investigates at some length in New Year Letter.

---

(1) Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 41.

(2) A. . Hadfield, An Introduction to Charles Williams, pp. 125-126.

In the curious bundle of quotations, expositions, aphorisms, references, and verses which accompanies New Year Letter, Kierkegaard is referred to five times and Blaise Pascal three. Though separated by two centuries and many differences in temperament, training and theological background, these two men are linked by one strong tie: the inadequacy of the intellect to provide a foundation for the spiritual life and the necessity for each individual to make an act of faith when faced with the ultimate question of God. For Pascal it is a 'wager' that men have to make - a staking of one's life upon a choice made entirely by faith. For Kierkegaard, it is a leap into darkness - a deliberate choice of the absurd. For both men it is only this act of faith which is able to release the individual from his unbearable experience of separation from God. Kierkegaard makes a clear analysis of the despair which comes upon man in the acknowledgment of his guilt[1], coming to the conclusion that despair, though sin and sickness unto death in itself, is unavoidable and necessary in the lives of men for it is the realisation of the meaning of

---

(1) His most detailed examination of this particular human experience is contained in Sickness unto Death.

despair that drives men to make the leap into the unknown[1]. This paradoxical idea is by no means strange in Christian theology, and can be found in the writings of both St. Paul and St. Augustine, but it is the vocabulary of Kierkegaard that lies behind Auden's lines

> .... What except despair
> Can shape the hero who will dare
> The desperate catabasis
> Into the snare of the abyss
> That always lies just underneath
> Our jolly picnic on the heath[2]

The leap of faith is not one which is made easily for the abyss is not a pleasant place, it is always made with what Kierkegaard called 'fear and trembling'.

There can be little doubt, despite Lowrie's efforts in his biography, that Kierkegaard was obsessed with the consciousness of his own guilt to the point of morbidity. Auden never manifests this attitude, but it is possible nonetheless to argue that Kierkegaard's stress upon the necessity for recognising universal guilt caused Auden to treat the problem as he did in New Year Letter. In earlier poems Auden makes specific charges; men are

---

(1) Kierkegaard's English biographer explains that for the Danish philosopher '.... the whole importance of despair which in itself is sickness unto death, lies in the fact that instead of plunging a man into more outrageous sin, it may prompt him to seek healing through faith.' (Kierkegaard, p. 410).

(2) New Year Letter, p. 40.

guilty of specific crimes: self-deception, class-consciousness, cowardice, lack of generosity, self-concern. But there is always the uneasy feeling that guilt is a permanent condition and not occasioned merely by the committing of particular 'crimes'. In <u>New Year Letter</u> he treats the problem in both a personal and theological way for the first time.

At the beginning of the poem (11 233-259), under the jocular guise of a detective story, guilt is related, in the usual way, to the disorders of Europe.

> The situation of our time
> Surrounds us like a baffling crime

All men are guilty of this specific crime. (l. 259) But he continues in a somewhat surprising vein and as a prelude to a vivid description of the horrors of war and the pains of men he produces the lines:

> And more and more we are aware
> However miserable may be
> Our parish of immediacy,
> How small it is, how, far beyond,
> Ubiquitous within the bend
> Of an impoverishing sky,
> Vast spiritual disorders lie.

Although the images are vague and portentous, the outlines of the thought are clear. There is a kind of cosmic disruption which man is only a part of, and which he cannot escape from.

Later at the close of one of the finest passages in the poem Auden introduces the personal note of

guilt. (ll. 1034-1152) He employs, rather obviously at first, the technique, which can be seen in the earlier poem The Malverns, of letting his interior emotions and attitudes find expression in the description of particular geographical areas. For fifty-two lines he laboriously explains his symbolism, but when he comes to

> I see the native of my kind
> As a locality I love,
> The limestone moors that stretch from Brough
> To Hexham and the Roman Wall.

a new intensity comes into the verse. The geographical area is described strongly and precisely, and the 'inner' and 'outer' scenes weave into one another in a wholly convincing way. His descriptions of the geographical features lead us to a climatic point in the poem:

> There I dropped pebbles, listened, heard
> The resevoir of darkness stirred;
> 'O deine Mutter kehrt dir nicht
> Wieder. Du selbst bin ich, dein Pflicht
> Und Liebe. Brach sie nur mein Bild.'
> And I was conscious of my guilt. (l. 1147-52)

- the recognition of the psychological and spiritual condition of the individual. There is no question of guilt for a specific crime; this is merely knowledge of an inescapable situation.

One of Kierkegaard's most famous books, the philosophical treatise Either/Or ends with a chapter entitled Ultimatum which reads more like a sermon than an argument. In it the author pronounces in a

categorical, but surprisingly joyful, way on the utter sinfulness of man. Time and again, in almost every paragraph, the sentence 'Against God we are always in the wrong' appears[1]. Just over a hundred lines after Auden's confession of guilt which has just been quoted, the poet refers directly to Kierkegaard's remarkable chapter on the guilt of man

> Ironic Kierkegaard stared long
> And muttered, 'All are in the wrong.' (ll. 1266-67)

Again it is necessary to say that Kierkegaard's is not an original insight. The guilt of man before the righteousness of God is part of the orthodox doctrine of Original Sin[2], but there is a great deal of evidence that Auden came to grasp the meaning of this doctrine by way of Kierkegaard's expositions. Not only do we have his own acknowledgment of debt, the frequent references to Kierkegaard in essays and notes, but the echoing of the philosopher's central preoccupations in a poem like New Year Letter. Auden's remark on the importance to Kierkegaard of each individual's 'unique, existential' relation to God has already been referred to.

---

(1) Cf. Either/Or, translated by W. Lowrie, Vol. II, pp. 281-294.

(2) Cf. the article on Original Sin in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.

In the introduction to his own selection of Kierkegaard's writings, Auden again stresses the centrality of this concept in Kierkegaard's thought.

> ..... like God each man is aware of his existence as unique[1].

For Auden, as for Kierkegaard, this uniqueness involves isolation and so is an ambiguous thing. It is the result of Original Sin which disrupts the unity in which all men should live, but also, paradoxically, the only condition in which man can experience a real relation with God[2]. In New Year Letter Auden gives us the simple, unqualified statement 'aloneness is man's real condition' (l. 1542) - a state of affairs which, he somewhat speciously argues, men have been forced to accept by the Industrial Revolution. But in the later poem Their Lonely Betters, in the familiar framework of the contrast between the human and animal worlds, he calmly and clearly describes man's isolation and their acceptance of it, as the very hallmark of their humanity.

The influence of Charles Williams in New Year Letter is less obvious even though in one of his notes which follow the poem, Auden acknowledges that Williams' book The Descent of the Dove was 'the source of many ideas in

---

(1) Kierkegaard, p. 5.

(2) 'Either there exists this paradox, that the Individual as the Individual stands in an absolute relation to the Absolute, or Abraham is lost.' [And clearly, as far as Kierkegaard is concerned, Abraham cannot be lost] Fear and Trembling. p. 182.

the poem'[1]. All the Latin quotations in New Year Letter can be found in Williams' book, and though there is no way of proving it, Spears' supposition that it is only because of The Descent of the Dove that they are used at all, is probably correct. Furthermore Williams' history could have supplied Auden both with the title of the American edition of New Year Letter : The Double Man, and also the epigraph from Montaigne. But Auden refers specifically to 'ideas' which have their source in Descent of the Dove, and it is in the closing lines of the poem that Williams own attitudes show their influence.

We fall down in the dance, we make
The old ridiculous mistake
But always there are such as you
Forgiving, helping what we do,
O every day in sleep and labour
Our life and death are with our neighbour
And love illuminates again
The city and the lion's den,
The world's great rage, the travel of young men
1697-1707)

In this deeply personal section, which is a homage to the friendship of Elizabeth Mayer, Auden is heavily reliant upon 'ideas' which are fundamental to Williams' thought. The line 'Our life and death are with our neighbour', which contrasts oddly with much he has said before about the essential loneliness of man, is a direct quotation from The Descent of the Dove[2]. It is

---

(1) New Year Letter, p. 154.
(2) The Descent of the Dove, p. 46.

not necessary to repeat what has already been said about Auden's interest in man as a 'social' being, it is only necessary to remember it and see how this interest has been transformed. In earlier poetry it seemed necessary that men demonstrate their unity by action, from this point on, overt demonstration is no longer needed. Auden lifts his interest out of the political and social sphere and places it firmly in the religious. If this line were an isolated statement original to Auden, it could not suggest a religious context, but coming as it does at the close of an essentially religious poem, and following so quickly upon the quotation from the _Confessions_ of St. Augustine, the religious implications cannot be ignored. More significant is the fact that it is a quotation from Charles Williams. Consequently it brings with it all the associations of Williams' belief in 'co-inherence' - the doctrine that the lives of all men are united across the barriers of both space and time, and that all are caught up ultimately in the unity of Christ. This is no more than the Catholic doctrine of the Church, but Williams presented this doctrine with a passionate intensity and extended it in some unusual ways. One of the images which he used to convey the doctrine was the image of the city. It occurs over and over again in _The Descent of the Dove_ and apart from a symbol

which is intended to convey the unity of men on earth is also an apocalyptic figure of the Kingdom of God - '.... the state into which Christendom is called; but, except in vision, she is not yet ....'[1]. Auden takes up this image and uses it, not only here but earlier in New Year Letter

> To what conditions we must bow
> In building the Just City now. (ll. 1523-1524)

and, more frequently, in his essays. Williams himself is building upon, and using images found in the book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine and the writings of St. Augustine, and we must beware of tracing Auden's use of the 'city' image only as far as The Descent of the Dove. He has after all, recalled St. Augustine in his use of the word 'civitas' earlier in the poem when describing the patterned and harmonious world of art (a city) in contrast to the confused and chaotic world of war-torn Europe

> And the same sun .....
> Lit up America and on
> A cottage in Long Island shone
> Where Buxtehude as we played
> One of his passacaglia's made
> Our minds a civitas of sound
> Where nothing but assent was found,
> For art had set in order sense,
> And feeling and intelligence, (l. 46-53)

---

(1) The Descent of the Dove, p. 15.

But the reference is a very slight and passing one, for Auden is not really introducing associations of the City of God here, except in an ironic way. The poem clearly follows the pattern of Kierkegaard - helpful and wonderful as the ordered world of art may be, it cannot serve as a permanent dwelling-place. It is a world of Being, and life is a constant process of Becoming, of 'building the Just City'. Man has to pass beyond the realm of the Aesthetic, through that of the Ethical, to that of the Religious[1].

> Hell is the being of the lie
> That we become if we deny
> The laws of consciousness and claim
> Becoming and Being are the same,
> Being in time, and man discrete
> In will, yet free and self-complete; (898-903)

Both Hoggart and Spears detect another major influence in Auden's work in the writings of the German theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Hoggart remarks of Auden that his important creditors

> as important as Freud or Marx earlier - have been Kierkegaard and Niebuhr[2].

---

(1) Cf. Auden's explanation of Kierkegaard's three levels of experience in his Introduction to selections from Kierkegaard, pp. 5-6.

(2) Auden. An Introductory Essay, p. 143.

And Spears speaks of Niebuhr as one

> whose impact upon Auden would seem to be second only to Kierkegaard's[1].

Both critics are too emphatic in their insistence on Niebuhr's influence and both became rather vague (at least as far as Niebuhr's thought is concerned) when it comes to providing evidence for this debt which Auden apparently owes. It is true that the poet knows the theologian's ideas and beliefs intimately. The two men are personal friends and Auden dedicated the volume Nones (1952) to Reinhold and Ursula Niebuhr. Furthermore he has reviewed the works of the Protestant theologian in Nation and New Republic[2], but, ideologically, he stands in rather the same relationship to Niebuhr as Eliot stands to T.E. Hulme. There is undoubtedly similarity of ideas but little proof that the beliefs of the one are derived from those of the other. Auden may well have learned a great deal from the German theologian but it is difficult to say precisely what this was. One of the reasons for this difficulty is that Niebuhr is not nearly as profound and original a theologian as either Kierkegaard

---

(1) The Disenchanted Island, p. 179.

(2) Nation, CLII, I. (4 January, 1941). pp. 24-25.
A review of Christianity and power politics.
New Republic, CIV, 1383 (2 June 1941), pp. 765-766.
A review of The Nature and destiny of man.

or Williams; he is systematic rather than creative, concerned with examining his articles of belief rather than discovering their hidden or wider meanings. His language is therefore, far closer to the terminology of orthodox Christian doctrine, so that the mere use of traditional theological words like 'necessity', 'grace', 'freedom', 'alienated', '[illegible]', in Auden's work is not necessarily an indication of Niebuhr's influence.

I have already tried to show that a recurrent theme in Auden's poetry is the contrast between the natural and human worlds, and the peculiar position in which man finds himself in contrast to that of the animals. His lordship over the world of nature carries with it peculiar responsibilities of choice and self-reflection, experiences of guilt, weakness and self-contradiction. Only men are capable of sinning because only men are divided against themselves and are capable of making choices. Behind the long passage in <u>New Year Letter</u> which begins

> The flood of tyranny and force
> Arises at a double source; [1]

lies this particular belief about man. He stands at the meeting-point of the intellectual (and by extension the

---

(1) ll. 1366-1367.

spiritual) and the animal (the natural), and dare not choose either at the expense of the other.

One of the cardinal points of Niebuhr's system, as it is expounded in his most significant work The Nature and Destiny of Man is the reiteration of the doctrine that all sin and guilt arise at the juncture of spirit and nature, in which position man finds himself, for it is only at this point that self-knowledge is a possibility and that freedom, necessity and choice can be realities[1]. The situation in which man finds himself is one of tension between the forces of nature and spirit. This does not mean that to sin is to relapse into the animal condition. Niebuhr, like Auden, clearly presents the non-self-conscious animal state as one in which sin, an act of the will, is an impossibility. Sin is the wrong choice in circumstances which allow freedom of choice. Guilt is the inevitable consequence of such wrong choice and the doctrine of Original Sin supposes all men to experience it. Anxiety, on the other hand, though equally inevitable, is not a consequence of guilt or sin, but the pre-condition of both and is inherent in man's created condition whether he has sinned or not

---

(1) Niebuhr, Vol. I, pp. 24 ff., 160, 181 ff.

> Man knows more than the immediate natural situation in which he stands, and he constantly seeks to understand his situation in terms of a total situation. Yet he is unable to define the total human situation without colouring his definition with finite perspectives drawn from his immediate situation .... In short, man, being both free and bound, both limited and limitless is anxious. Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved[1].

The resulting experience is one of almost intolerable strain and tension, and yet it is man's chief glory.

It is not only in New Year Letter that Auden embodies his awareness of this paradoxical situation which at the same time is glorious. In the love lyrics man is seen as a creature who can never give himself wholly in any particular way. He can never be undivided or love without being aware of that ideal freedom which prevents him from accepting his own limitations even in the middle of the most self-forgetful experience[2].

---

(1) Niebuhr, Vol. I, p. 194. He refers to Kierkegaard in a footnote in the course of this discussion and owes a great deal of what he says to his reading of the Danish philosopher.

(2) 'Lay your sleeping head my love'
'Underneath the abject willow'
'Fish in the unruffled lakes'

It must be remembered that anxiety is not sin, and as Niebuhr says[1], is the basis of creativity as well as the pre-condition of sin, for man refuses to accept his apparent limitations and strives to go beyond the natural boundaries of his existence. This ability is denied to the animal world. In the poem Their Lonely Betters Auden uses the theme of human language to adumbrate these beliefs. Man's self-awareness and powers of creation are seen to be embodied in the means by which he has chosen to express himself. Again Auden refers to the loneliness: to the inescapable isolation and suffering that such 'gifts' bring.

> Let them leave language to their lonely betters,
> Who count some days and long for certain letters;
> We, too, make noises when we laugh or weep,
> Words are for those with promises to keep[2].

Language is the symbol of man's painful but wonderful separation from the rest of creation. Man finds himself bound by the necessities of nature: to the time-process, to decay and death, but also free in so far as he is able to view the process from outside; to be conscious of his own mentality and his desire 'to understand his situation

---

(1) The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I., p. 195.
(2) Nones, p. 15.

in terms of a total situation'. It is this unavoidable tnesion which creates anxiety, which, in turn is the necessary pre-condition of his ability both to sin

> No one of them was capable of lying

and to create

> Or could have with a rhythm or a rhyme
> Assumed responsibility for time.

The resemblance to Niebuhr's thought is striking and yet the poem cannot be called derivative. It comes from the later volume Nones and adequately represents the stage of Auden's development when theological attitudes are no longer intellectually satisfying and exterior, but have become part of the poet's own experience and are capable of being transmuted into images that call forth the imaginative response of the reader. But it wa some years before Auden reached this stage, and between New Year Letter and Nones lie For the Time Being and The Age of Anxiety in which the successes and failures of Auden's struggle to realise Christian doctrine in poetry can clearly be seen.

Poetry is neither theology nor philosophy, however much of both it may contain, and A Christmas Oratorio fails in many places because it has the appearance of being compressed doctrine; second-hand versions of the intellectual disciplines. Auden's theological views

are orthodox and his knowledge extensive but the poem is a verification of 'received ideas'; the Christian vision of redemption, for the most part, remains exterior to the poet's sensibility. In, for example, the Boys Semi-Chorus from the section called The Temptation of St. Joseph, he presents in a deft ten-line stanza a classic summary of the doctrine of Original Sin which has its origin in the teaching of the Western theologians, Tertullian and St. Augustine[1].

> Joseph, Mary, pray for us,
> Independent embryos who,
> Unconscious in another, do
> Evil as each creature does
> In every definite decision
> To improve; for even in
> The germ-cell's primary division
> Innocence is lost and sin,
> Already given as a fact,
> Once more issues as an act[2].

There can be no doubt that Auden is reproducing the expositions of the early Fathers correctly, but the poetry is slack and cold, lacking any quality that could convince the reader of the reality or importance of the poet's apprehension of man's sinfulness.

---

(1) Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, pp. 175 and 363.

(2) For the Time Being, p. 82.

Similarly, in the Recitative from Advent which, in its convalutions seems to owe much to the style and thought of Eliot in the first and second sections of Burnt Norton, Auden has done little more, as Beach remarks, than produce a number of 'strained paradoxes of theological metaphysics'[1]. The images of the garden and the desert are drawn, of course, not merely from Eliot's work, but from the Biblical narratives of the Fall and the Temptations of Christ. The road to salvation is seen to be the Way of the Cross.

> And life is the destiny you are bound to refuse
> Until you have consented to die[2].

All these concepts are acceptable as intellectual propositions, but they are unconvincing as poetry. It is significant that two of the most successful parts of the Oratorio are the two in which Auden substitutes prose for poetry. In the speeches of Simeon and Herod Auden's delight in the intellectual paradoxes and complexities of Christian theology is communicated with wit and subtlety. The attempt at direct emotional and imaginative impact is set aside for a more oblique approach, and prose rhythms inhibit Auden less than those of poetry.

---

(1) The Making of the Auden Canon, p. 208.
(2) For the Time Being, p. 66.

In many ways, A Christmas Oratorio represents no substantial doctrinal advance on New Year Letter. The reliance upon Kierkegaard is still much in evidence, though placed now in a specifically Christian context. Auden is more obvious in his use of the Danish philosopher however, and many of Kierkegaard's favourite words appear, and frequently with capital letters to single them out[1]. The important theme of the relation between freedom and necessity; spirit and nature which appeared in the early poem is hardly developed at all, though the presence of St. Paul is more discernible than that of Niebuhr as Auden introduces it. Niebuhr's thought is essentially Pauline of course, for behind his adumbration of the conflict in man lies St. Paul's exposition of the doctrine of man in his Epistle to the Romans. Knowing the good, man finds himself unable to attain to it, and with a despairing cry the apostle rejects the dictum of Socrates and Plato that sin is ignorance.

> The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do[2].

This for Auden is 'Plato's lie of intellect.' Deliverance from this unbearable condition 'this body of death' is

---

(1) For the Time Being, pp. 65, 66, 67, 109, 110.

(2) The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, Ch. VII, v.19.

offered, for St. Paul, by the figure of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. In New Year Letter, despite its distinctively religious ending, no solution is offered directly. Forgiveness and love make their appearance, but they are introduced quietly and unostentatiously as consolators rather than as saviours.

Three years later they became incarnate in the figure of the Saviour in A Christmas Oratorio which had as its epigraph a quotation from the Epistle to the Romans

> What shall I say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.

Immediately preceding these words in their original context is a passage in which St. Paul verges on the suggestion that sin is to be welcomed in order that the power and love of God may be demonstrated more fully. The apostle, however, pulls himself up before he reaches this point, though not before leaving his readers with the conviction that it is only because of man's sins and divisions, that God's triumph of grace is so glorious. Many theologians since the first century have re-iterated the concept, Kierkegaard more firmly than most, and Auden has taken it up in his own way. In the closing speech of the Narrator, Auden echoes the cry of St. Paul

> .... So, once we have met the Son,
> We are tempted ever after to pray to the Father;
> 'Lead us into temptation and evil for our sake.'[1]

The whole of A Christmas Oratorio cannot be dismissed as a failure. Parts of Advent, The Annunciation and The Flight into Egypt, though not as controlled and convincing as much of Auden's work, do convey an apprehension of the Christian Gospel that is genuinely felt. In his review of Niebuhr's The Nature and Destiny of Man in 1941, Auden said a propos of the Incarnation that 'at an impasse in history Christ arrived.'[2] This impasse is chillingly suggested in Advent

> The prophet's lantern is out
> And gone the boundary stone,
> Cold the heart and cold the stone,
> Ice condenses on the bone:
> Winter completes an age[3].

It is not merely the impasse in history that he communicates, but the impasse in the individual human life: the inescapable moments of fear, uncertainty, and failure where men realise with despair the limitations of their own existence.

Later, in the confrontation between the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary the poetry flares into some

---

(1) For the Time Being, p. 124.
(2) New Republic, civ, p. 765.
(3) For the Time Being, p. 62.

kind of intensity as Auden demonstrates an aspect of the doctrine of the Incarnation which Eliot frequently fails to emphasise - the joyful realisation that the whole world is re-created by the birth of God in history. He links Mary's response and the consequent birth of her son with the Eden myth; the temptation of Eve and the Fall of Man. In her acceptance of the Holy Spirit Mary re-establishes the link between Heaven and earth; becoming the figure of the Second Eve in a way that is characteristic of the ancient typology of the Catholic church.

> What her negation wounded, may
> Your affirmation heal today;
> Love's will requires your own, that in
> The flesh whose love you do not know,
> Love's knowledge into flesh may grow[1].

Unfortunately Gabriel's message in the closing stanza collapses into a string of paradoxical platitudes, and the metaphysical conceit of Mary's second reply is strained, robbing the stanza of the ecstasy of her first reply.

Auden's vision may be cruder than Eliot's, but he brings into his expression of it a note of joy which the authentic apprehension of the miracle of the Incarnation

---

(1) For the Time Being, p. 74.

demands. And in his insistence upon 'the flesh', both here in <u>The Annunciation</u> and later, he conveys the real meaning of the union of God and Man so strongly emphasised in the New Testament in the writings of St. John. This does mark an 'advance' on earlier poetry though the joyfulness of <u>For the Time Being</u> is hinted at in the strange dream-like sequence at the end of <u>New Year Letter</u>. The Johannine note is sounded again in the final stanza of the Oratorio as Auden rings the changes on the words of Christ recorded in the Fourth Gospel: 'I am the Way, and the truth, and the life'[1]. The familiar theme of the Wanderer returns, but this time linked once and for all with that of the pilgrimage and the symbol of the city where all hopes are fulfilled. Eliot was, in many respects, the advocate of the <u>Via Negativa</u>; Auden turns naturally the 'other' way to God: the <u>Via Affirmative</u>.

> Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
> And at your marriage all its occasions shall
> dance for joy[2].

Possibly in this he was again influenced by Charles Williams whose essay on the 'Way of the Affirmation of Images' had been published in May 1939[3]. It is difficult

---

(1) <u>The Gospel according to St. John</u>, Ch. 14, v.6.
(2) <u>For the Time Being</u>, p. 124.
(3) <u>The Image of the City</u>. And other essays, pp. 68-75.

to tell and impossible to be dogmatic, but the image of the 'dance' recurs frequently in Williams' work, and the effect for which Auden is striving is precisely that which Williams was always trying to create: the sense of the value of the material order, and the transfiguration of the world by the grace of God in the Incarnation.

The task of the religious poet is a difficult one in that it involves the demonstration of the way in which metaphysical belief takes effect in human life Doctrine must not only be concretised in sensual images, but shown to have existential reality. Auden in For the Time Being tries to overcome this difficulty by using the device of the Narrator - a twentieth century figure commenting on the pageant of the Nativity and applying its meaning to the life of the modern urban Christian. Of the five speeches given to this character, the last is clearly the most significant, but, in some ways, also the most unsatisfactory. Its tone is, at times, smug and its attitudes embarrassingly self-conscious.

> Remembering the stable where for once in our lives
> Everything became a You and nothing was an It.

And the deliberate matter-of-factness of the opening deteriorates after four lines into flatness and bathos.

It is this speech which demonstrates the way in which Auden's attitude to the Incarnation differs from,

and is similar to Eliot's. Once again it must be emphasised that Eliot is more subtle and moving than Auden but that he lacks a completeness of vision which his younger contemporary expresses in his wider fashion. Inevitably the Incarnation provokes meditation on the meaning of Time, and, almost inevitably, both men use the phrase from the Epistle to the Ephesians 'redeem the time'. The redemption of time is central to Four Quartets and For the Time Being. Eliot refers to the apprehension of the Incarnation as 'the moment in and out of time', Auden refers to it as 'the actual Vision'. Both stress the fact that this moment of illumination is not a permanent condition, but that it gives meaning to the permanent condition. Ordinary, hum-drum human life has to continue in the long stretches between the moments.

> .... and the rest
> Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action[1]
>
> .... But, for the time being, here we all are,
> Back in the moderate Christotelean city
> Of darning and the Eight-Fifteen, where Euclid's geometry
> And Newton's mechanics would account for our experience,[2]

But for Auden the redemption of time is incomplete without

---

(1) Four Quartets, p. 33.

(2) For the Time Being, p. 123.

the doctrine of the Atonement so that he puts into the mouth of the Narrator a strange but characteristic line

> .... Now, recollecting the moment
> We can repress the joy, but the guilt remains conscious[1].

Such an emphasis on guilt would be foreign to the thought of Eliot who tends to separate the Incarnation and the Atonement. In Auden's vision they are welded firmly together. The redemption of the Time Being 'from insignificance' can be accomplished not merely by experiencing the excitement of the Nativity but by living 'the night of agony' which is the Passion and the Crucifixion. This belief is marked out more delicately and more convincingly in the cycle of poems on the Crucifixion _Horae Canonicae_.

---

(1) _For the Time Being_, pp. 123-124.

CHAPTER XI

Auden's Poetry (3): From The Age of Anxiety to About the House

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry delivered before the University of Oxford in June 1956, Auden said

> A poem is a rite; hence its formal and ritualistic character. Its use of language is deliberately and ostentatiously different from talk[1].

However much we may agree with him, we are constantly aware of this point of view being demonstrated in an extreme form in his Baroque Ecloque The Age of Anxiety. It was published in 1948 and dedicated with sly good-humour to John Betjeman, and, as the title indicates is not only a non-dramatic but a deliberately elaborate poetic dialogue which, in places, is extremely difficult to read. Technically, it is a remarkable achievement, for, with the exception of a few songs and some explanatory remarks in prose, it is written throughout in imitation of allitrative Anglo-Saxon verse with lines

---

(1) The Dyer's Hand, p. 58 from the lecture 'Making, Knowing and Judging' pp. 31-60.

of varying syllabic quantities but more or less equal stress. The adoption of a prescribed form, even one as comparatively flexible as the non-rhyming stressed line, for a long work, has many attendant dangers; ones which Auden does not always successfully avoid. Some of the faults of New Year Letter are repeated and accentuated in The Age of Anxiety: the tendency to verbosity and flashy virtuosity; the use of esoteric and archaic expressions for the sake of obscurity or because they happen, conveniently, to fit in with the alliteration and rhythm; and the tendency to allow immediacy and spontaneity to be drained away by the rigid adherence to the rules of the prescribed form.

Auden announces that it is a 'baroque ecloque' and the reader is prepared to accept the intentional artificiality and extravagances which the words imply. Nevertheless it is difficult to excuse the wordy flaccidity of many parts of the poem e.g. the speech of Rosetta beginning 'I refuse to accept/Your plain place...', and the stilted quality of passages like the following which becomes laughable with the alliteration of the last line

But Emble objected:

Muster no monsters, I'll meaken my own.

So did Rosetta:

You may wish till you waste, I'll want here.

So did Quant

Too blank the blink of these blind heavens[1].

And the ironic pretentiousness of the advice given to Emble by Malin, towards the end of the poem, hardly justifies the wild and private symbolism of lines like

O stiffly stand, a staid monadnock
On her peneplain ....[2]

While admitting the truth of these objections, it is necessary to admit as well, that the poem does contain some fine passages - frequently (though not invariably) in places where the influence of those theologians already mentioned, especially Kierkegaard, seems most obvious. Auden has referred to 'anxiety' in a number of earlier poems so the theme is not new to him, and in the last stanza of Christmas Oratorio there appears the line

Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety[3].

But unlike For the Time Being, The Age of Anxiety approaches Christian doctrine from an oblique angle. It is a poem which only implies a belief in salvation, for its purpose

---

(1) The Age of Anxiety, p. 27.
(2) Ibid., p. 108.
(3) For the Time Being, p. 124.

is to examine the lives of four inhabitants of that Kingdom in which Christ, if sought, can be found.

'Anxiety' here means far more than psychological or emotional disturbance. Doubtless it does imply these as well, for in the course of the poem the 'characters' display neuroses and fixations which amount almost to pathological conditions. But just as Auden went beyond psychological theory to religious belief in an attempt to discover meaning behind the puzzling phenomena of human life, so the word 'anxiety' is extended to include not only a psychological but a religious or spiritual condition. A good deal of this meaning is drawn from Kierkegaard's concept of 'angst' - a word almost impossible to render accurately in English but which is roughly translated as dread or anguish - a passionate condition which, paradoxically, precedes both sin and faith. It is intolerable and yet inescapable for it is the consequence of original sin: the agonising recognition by the individual of the loneliness of his separation from God and the constant tension in his life between freedom and necessity. It is the pre-condition of sin in that it entices the human being to that state of ultimate despair in which all hope or faith in the mercy of God is abandoned, but it is also the pre-condition of faith in that the entering of the world of dread can

mean, for the individual, a recognition of the true reality: his guilt before God, and the hopelessness of his situation without the grace offered in Jesus Christ. Although the experience of 'angst' is unavoidable, Kierkegaard, curiously, speaks of 'choosing the despair; for despair itself is a choice'[1] So for him, as later for Niebuhr, the freedom of the human being can be exercised only in the recognition and willing acceptance of the necessity already laid upon him. Niebuhr makes the connection between 'freedom' and 'anxiety' more explicit when he writes

> Anxiety is the internal pre-condition of sin. It is the inevitable spiritual state of man, standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness.
>
> Man is most free in the discovery that he is not free[2].

Those ideas have all been touched upon in <u>New Year Letter</u>, and the debt to the theologians already acknowledged. But the debt must not be exaggerated, and it be untrue to say that either Kierkegaard or Niebuhr were directly responsible for bringing 'anxiety' to

---

(1) Quoted by Lowrie in his biography of Kierkegaard, p. 90.

(2) <u>The Nature and Destiny of Man</u>. pp. 194-195, p. 276.

Auden's notice. As a theme, as I have already suggested, it occurs frequently in much earlier poetry. The Age of Anxiety is the final, and most significant, variation on that theme. The anxiety pictured in Poems 1930, for example[1], though aggravated by the disintegrating contemporary society, has its roots not in an external set of circumstances but in the personal, and often sub-conscious, life of each individual. The disturbed condition of the world of politics and international relations, class prejudice and civil strife is used as a mirror of individual disorders and fears. The technique is not entirely abandoned in The Age of Anxiety either, for its setting is war-time New York. Quant, Malin, Rosetta, and Emble, drifting and lost, have been brought together by the war, but clearly it is not merely the atmosphere of bewilderment and hopelessness brought about by war-time conditions that has occasioned their meeting at the bar-counter. The reference to the outside world is a symbolic gesture. The ironic suggestion of the opening paragraph is that it always 'looks good to the bar business' whatever the state of the nations, and that it is not merely war which causes 'necessity' to be 'associated with horror and boredom with freedom.' These

---

(1) Poems VI, XI, XXIX. Poems 1930 pp. 48-49, 56, 87-88.

four are the representative 'lonelies' and 'failures' who desperately grasp at what they imagine the barman has to offer; spokesmen for humanity each with a different experience of the meaning of anxiety; each at the point of choosing despair and of finding a way through the kingdom of anxiety.

At first isolated from each other and preoccupied with their own thoughts, each character endeavours to escape despair by retreating from it. Rosetta's is the most obvious attempt for her thoughts linger on the peace and security of childhood.

> Far down each dale industrious there ran
> A paternoster of ponds and mills,
> Came sweet waters ....[1]

But this way of retreat is not only impossible, it is a dangerous illusion, for she fabricates dreams of a childhood she never had. In a subtle way, this is a variation on the Eden symbol. The dream of innocence may constantly present itself, but return to it is an impossibility[2]. The effects of Original Sin are irrevocable; the only way of Salvation is through the experience of those effects.- the wandering in the world of anxiety and guilt.

---

(1) The Age of Anxiety, p. 15.

(2) Cf. For the Time Being, p. 123.

> For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly
> Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be
> Grew up when it opened ....

At the end of the first part Malin is given a speech in which he attempts to reach the cause of anxiety in men. It is more profound, philosophically, than most of Auden's verse, but fails to communicate as poetry. The beginning of the speech contains a faint reminder of Charles Williams' statement in The Descent of the Dove

> Christianity is, always, the redemption of a point, of one particular point. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." In this sense there is nothing but now; there is no duration[1].

Auden raises again that problem which so concerns him: the redemption of time, not, as in Eliot's work, the metaphysical problem of Time itself, but the existential problem of the nature of human life lived in a time-sequence.

> Let us then
> Consider rather the incessant Now of
> The traveller through time..........[2]

The anxiety of the individual, in part at least, is caused by his knowledge of finitude and death. 'Knowledge' and 'experience' constitute a 'doubleness' in human nature which is stressed throughout the speech. The 'Now' in which man knows himself most fully is every moment in which he knows himself to be dying. Consequently

---

(1) Williams, p. 14.

(2) The Age of Anxiety, p. 27.

he is seen as two creatures: the one who is living and dying, and the one who observes himself inextricably bound up in that very process. As the speech closes the 'doubleness' is investigated more deeply

> .... All that exists
> Matters to man; he minds What happens
> And feels he is at fault, a fallen soul
> With power to place, to explain every
> What in his world but why he is neither
> God nor good ....[1]

The Christian doctrine of the Fall is explicit here. Man is caught between two worlds, or two modes of being, in 'the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness', a situation in which he is capable of knowing and aspiring to the good, but incapable of achieving it. The ultimate solution being beyond his grasp he is left in the state of 'comprehensive dread' which leads either to the ultimate sin of despair in which the grace of God is refused, or final redemption through faith. The specifically Christian note is struck again in the closing lines with their references to the division between knowledge and power[2], the shattered image of God in which man was created, and the purpose which God had originally ordained for him. What follows in the rest of the poem is the description of the way in which these

---

(1) The Age of Anxiety, pp. 27-28.

(2) Cf. St. Paul. The Epistle to the Romans, Ch. VII.

wanderers in the Kingdom attempt to discover the means by which the image can be restored.

They first delineate the conditions of human life by examining the Seven Ages of Man and pass on in the third part to an actual quest for salvation. The most significant, as well as the most successful section, poetically, of the second part is that in which they speak of the Fourth Age. Here the metaphysical observations of Rosetta

> Too soon we embrace that
> Impermanent appetitive flux,
> Humorous and hard, which adults fear
> Is real and right, the irreverent place,
> The clown's cosmos[1].

is demonstrated imaginatively by each of the others. This Fourth Age stands at the centre of human life and it proves to be unstable and frightening. At a time when the possession of security has become important, when the outlines of life should be hardening, pattern and order are seen to dissolve completely. The flux follows an arbitrary course. Abysses open, and despite the amused and melodramatic tones of the poet, the sinister nature of the unexpected and uncontrollable occurrence is conveyed

---

(1) The Age of Anxiety, p. 41.

> .... lightning at noonday
> Swiftly stooping to the summer-house
> Engraves its disgust on engrossed flesh,
> And at tea-times through tall french windows
> Hurtle anonymous hostile stones[1].

This, although a long way removed from the melancholic tones of the Danish philosopher, is still the world of Kierkegaard for he emphasised in his personal life as well as his writings the absurdity of human existence. The 'clown's cosmos' was the real world. Man's life of tension was described in terms of the comic situation, but like the traditional figure of the French clown the comedy is at times bitter and heart-rending. The only means of redemption is the acceptance of the 'absurd' religion of Christianity; absurd because it requires the utterly illogical leap of faith.

Both Spears and Hoggart stress the importance of faith, or rather its conspicuous absence, in the lives of the four characters in The Age of Anxiety. Spears maintains that each one fails to discover the solution to their dilemma because each desires a way which will not make the supreme demand of faith[2]. Hoggart, in similar fashion, interprets the obscure third part of the eclogue as a series of quests doomed to failure because, while each pilgrim possesses a variety of gifts:

---

(1) The Age of Anxiety, p. 42.
(2) The Disenchanted Island, p. 232.
Auden. An Introductory Essay, pp. 194-211.

intelligence, liveliness, imagination, intuition, the essential gift is lacking. In their confused situation none of these gifts can 'bring about the possibility of order - only Faith'[1]. I do not find the faith-motif as explicitly-expressed as Hoggart and Spears do, but it is undoubtedly present; as are many of the formulations of Kierkegaard. Hoggart is surely correct in interpreting the strange Sixth Stage of the Journey - the arrival in the Hermetic Gardens - as a symbolic equivalent of the entry into Kierkegaard's Field of Being, which Auden has already referred to in New Year Letter[2]. There is also a parallel with Eliot's garden in the first movement of Burnt Norton, for these gardens offer, momentarily only, a glimpse of reality[3]. The Kierkegaardian insistence that life is a process of Becoming and not Being entails that they cannot be chosen as permanent dwelling-places, for all choice is suspended here, while men necessarily need to make decisions in the process of Becoming. If dwelt in, the gardens petrify into unreality and

---

(1) Hoggart, p. 211.
(2) pp. 47-48.
(3) 'Yet this a theatre where thought becomes act' The Age of Anxiety, p. 82.

meaninglessness; their charm becomes 'an accusation'[1]. This is what happens to the four characters in The Age of Anxiety, but before the unreality descends upon them, Quant and Malin speak in a way which suggests that they have glimpsed the meaning of the illogical choice to accept necessity and to take the absurd leap of faith.

[QUANT]

> The ruined rebel is recreated
> And chooses a chosen self.
> ....
> His hardened heart
> Consents to suffer, and the sudden instant
> Touches his time at last.

MALIN says

> Tense on the parterre, he takes the hero's
> Leap into love; ....[2]

Their courage, however, deserts them at the crucial moment of choice, and, making excuses, each character steps away, back into his or her old existence, which, though confused and meaningless, does not compel them to the terrifying decision. Significantly, for they have returned to their original condition of solitary wanderers in the Kingdom of Anxiety, they do not meet each other again until the Journey is over.

The ironical fourth part of the eclogue is a re-inforcement of the belief that anxiety cannot be cured by anything other than the religious decision offered at

---

(1) The Age of Anxiety, p. 83.

(2) Ibid., p. 82.

the Sixth stage of the Journey. Quant and Emble remain unchanged, but Rosetta and Malin are given speeches which portray a fumbling towards a recognition of the truth about themselves and a groping towards an offered salvation. In a recollection of the religious traditions and sufferings of her race Rosetta echoes the one hundred and thirty ninth psalm[1] and faces the reality of her childhood in Laburnum Crescent. Her ancestors' faith, no less than the Christian, is absurd with its emphatic insistence upon trust in God. Malin picks up the note of the ubiquity of God's knowledge and presence as he closes the poem

> .... In our anguish we struggle
> To elude Him, to lie to Him, yet His love observes
> His appalling promise; His predilection
> As we wander and weep is with us to the end,[2]

In his autobiography Stephen Spender speaks of the peculiar nature of Auden's re-conversion to Christianity

> As an Anglican, Auden had difficulties to overcome in accepting the moral and ethical judgements of the Church. He was, as I have already noted, peculiarly free from a sense of guilt or of sin. And now when he used these terms they had a curiously theoretical air. With my Puritan upbringing convincing me of a

---

(1) v.6. Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit: Whither shall I go then from thy presence?

v.7. If I climb up into heaven thou art there: if I go down to Hell, thou art there also.

(2) The Age of Anxiety, pp. 125-126.

> guilt from which I had spent years struggling to be free, it was curious to hear Auden discussing sin as an intellectual position of which one could be convinced by the reasoning of 'Mother Church'[1].

This statement seems decidedly at odds with Richard Hoggart's estimation of the poet and whose proposition 'a moralist, concerned with the problem of human guilt'[2] colours nearly all his critical evaluations. It is true that Spender is speaking of the man and his personal apprehensions while the critics are concerned only with the work that has been produced, nevertheless, the man and his work cannot be sundered completely and there is an element of truth in Spender's words about the man that enables the critic to see more clearly certain aspects of the poetry. World within World was published in 1951, a year before the appearance of Nones; consequently, though Spender could have been acquainted with some of the poems of the new volume[3], the works of Auden, if any, which he must have had in mind must have been New Year Letter, For the Time Being, and The Age of Anxiety. It cannot be denied that in all three of these volumes there are passages, often long and important passages, in which the apprehension of 'sin', however

---

(1) World within World, p. 299.

(2) Auden. An Introductory Essay, p. 34.

(3) All but three of the poems had appeared in periodicals before the publication of Spender's autobiography. Cf. Bloomfield, W.H. Auden. A Bibliography, pp. 57-58.

correct according to the teachings of the Church, is decidedly 'theoretical'. The imagery and rhythm fail to create patterns in which the personal conviction of sin is adequately conveyed. But Spender oversimplifies the case in failing to draw the distinction between sin and guilt. As long as he is talking about 'sin', and as long as we are restricting our frame of reference to this particular group of volumes, Spender's words have some validity as a criticism of the poetry as well as the man. But 'sin' and its complex consequence 'guilt' are different things however closely they may be related, and Auden's ability to convey, poetically, the conviction of guilt is indisputable. The universality of man's experience of the consequence of Original Sin has always been the Church's teaching, and the early volumes of Auden's poetry are primarily devoted to investigating this peculiar and, from the non-Christian point of view inexplicable condition. The three volumes of his 'middle period' constitute the attempt to reach the explanation. The Age of Anxiety can be seen as marking the culmination of that particular development. From this point on it is primarily the nature of salvation that occupies the centre of Auden's attention. Strangely enough it is only when this happens; when he discovers the means by which the consequence is overcome and the

guilt destroyed i.e. in the Atonement, that the cause, which is sin itself, becomes imaginatively and personally real in the poetry.

In a minor way this can be seen in the little satirical poem Love Feast from Nones[1]. The contrast between the Agape of the early Christians and the squalid twentieth century party, between real love and debased love, is obvious but not jarringly so. The poet prescribes clear and limited outlines and is almost entirely successful within these boundaries. The quotations (of salvation) from St. Augustine and Dante fall into their ironical positions easily. Spears places a question-mark against the tone of the poem, 'is he [the protagonist] overly complacent about being a sinner'[2], but he seems to have missed some of Auden's subtlety. It is not merely the secular Love Feast which is being satirised but, precisely, the complacency of the protagonist. It is not his easy submission to the desire for 'Miss Number' that is being condemned, but the smug assurance of the mercy of God. In an unobtrusive way Auden demonstrates a real knowledge of the meaning of sin. The depravity of the guests at the party is less horrifying than the blasphemy of the sinner's prayer.

---

(1) p. 18.

(2) The Disenchanted Island, p. 194.

In her contribution to the Writers and Critics series, Barbara Everett in 1964 remarked

> The dominant impression left by the last ten years of Auden's work, is that of a willed, or accepted, stabilisation .... it is possible that, for instance, Nones, The Shield of Achilles, and Homage to Clio are the only three successive volumes in Auden's career which, if bound together, would offer something like a coherent poetical character, the different poems arousing no bewilderment by a diversity of tone and subject[1].

This coherence, she claims, arises from the fact that Auden has found a role and a voice which satisfies him. A consistent persona emerges from these three volumes, and her evaluation of his later poetry is based upon this concept of the poet's 'willed stabilisation'. Her criticism, for the most part, holds good. It is possible to say of these last volumes what is possible to say of all Eliot's verse, that there is an 'essential unity' about them. The achievement of this new stability means that the poetry no longer displays the slightly hysterical outbursts of indignation or the artificial attitudes of the self-conscious social critic; the occasional brilliant analytical shafts or the cutting satirical glance. But even in so sympathetic a critic, there is the suggestion that the gain of stability has

---

(1) W.H. Auden, p. 95.

meant the loss of something more important (she devotes less than twenty pages - a sixth of the book - to these volumes); that by the creation of a new landscape 'deliberately set at a distance from the actual'[1], Auden has become increasingly detached, increasingly the technician concerned primarily with the 'formal coherence' of his work. I do not believe that this is true. It is true that in all his lectures and essays on the writing of poetry Auden has become more emphatic about the importance of the writers' 'craft', and that his own technical vertuosity is much in evidence, but, though slightly self-conscious, the style is never cheap or showy, and the emphasis upon craftsmanship need in no way necessarily impair imaginative power. There is an absence of the heroic pose, of the 'grand style' in the adoption of the 'sotto voce'[2], but in their quiet, meditative, and sophisticated way these poems have warmth and feeling, and Auden conveys a greater sympathy with, and knowledge of, the pains and joys and foibles of individual human lives than he has ever shown before.

---

(1) W.H. Auden, p. 107.

(2) No civil style survived
The pandemonium
But the wry, the sotto-voce,
Ironic and monochrome.
'To Reinhold & Ursula Niebuhr'
Nones.

Barbara Everett speaks of the 'diversity of subject' displayed in the last volumes. Superficially this is an accurate statement; Auden composes nursery rhymes and fairy tales, love songs and travel songs, poems about music and poems about managers, domestic verses and satires, but the underlying doctrinal themes: his belief about the nature of man, his relation to God, to society, and to the whole of creation, remain the same. There is, as it were, a systematic theology underpinning the superficially unconnected structures, and it is this theology which has helped to create the 'role and voice', the consistent persona. The new 'stabilisation' is closely related to the doctrinal preoccupations of the poet, for the themes which we have been considering in the earlier volumes are present in these too, but have undergone a transfiguration. They are the same because they are recognisable, but different because they are placed in new relations with each other and in a new context. The problems of human existence are now placed concretely and definitely in the context of a sure knowledge of Christian salvation.

The clearest example in Nones of this perpetuation, but transfiguration, of thematic material is offered by the long and elaborate poem Memorial for a City. Here the familiar compulsions of necessity and freedom, and

man's paradoxical predicament as a creature of nature and spirit receive their customary emphasis.

> The captives are led away, while far in the distance
> A tanker sinks into a dedolent sea,
> That is the way things happen; for ever and ever
> Plum-blossom falls on the dead,..................[1]

Men are inextricably caught up in the processes of nature. A man, no more than an animal, can prevent himself from being born or from dying. This is what is seen through the eye of the camera or the crow; birth, life, and death are merely occurrences which are recorded - no action has more value than any other action. But although caught up in the process a man can never be explicable in terms of the process. The camera's eye lies to men because they are affected and changed by

> The cries of the whipped and the sighs of lovers

Men have the ability to stand outside their own lives in Nature, to ask questions about their position at the juncture of spirit and Nature. The peculiarly confused state of the human condition - its tragedy, its frustration, its courage, its bewilderment - which makes men fall so easily into despair and cling so longingly to hope, is beautifully brought out in these lines

> .... Even now, in this night
> Among the ruins of the post-Vergilian City
> Where our past is a chaos of graves and the barbed-wire
> Stretches ahead
> Into our future till it is lost to sight,

(1) <u>Nones</u>, p. 34.

> Our grief is not Greek: as we bury our dead
> We know without knowing there is a reason for
> what we bear[1],

Again Auden emphasises the quality of life lived in the time-sequence and not the sequence itself. The problem of time is dismissed in a curt sentence. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with Nature or being bound up in time - it is simply one of the areas of man's activity. The cyclical view of time occasionally suggested by Eliot in East Coker is dealt with in a similar curt fashion 'Our grief is not Greek'. It is the Christian hope of the consummation of creation that Auden is suggesting here.

Inevitably, the image of the city dominates the poem and is used to mean a variety of things. As in New Year Letter, it is probable that the poet owes something to Charles Williams for his conception of the city: that city which is the apocalyptic symbol of the Kingdom of God, the state of being in which the conflict between necessity and freedom, the dichotomy between knowledge and power, and the tension between Becoming and Being are no longer experienced. The quotation from the writings of Dame Julian of Norwich can be found in The Descent of the Dove[2]. But Auden does not merely repeat

(1) Nones, pp. 34-35.
(2) Williams, p. 224.

Williams' idea in this poem as he did in New Year Letter, he incorporates the symbol into his own scheme of imagery giving it dimensions and outlines that are peculiarly his own. The city of which he speaks is both historical and personal. It represents the societies which men have tried to set up in history: 'the New City', 'the Sane City', 'the Glittering City', 'the Rational City', and also the various ways in which men have tried to resolve the problems of their own nature. In history the cities crumble, the civilisations fail, and the twentieth century is left with a city which is no city. The desolation of occupied territory and the bleak horror of partitioning is conveyed in

> Between the burnt-out Law Courts and Police
> Headquarters,
> Past the Cathedral far too damaged to repair
> ....
> The barbed wire runs through the abolished City[1].

Similarly, it is suggested, the efforts of each individual are doomed to failure because each man is, and always has been to some degree, 'an abolished City'. The symbolist technique of embodying personal emotions and beliefs, even abstract, metaphysical ideas, in concrete (here 'geographical') images is employed in the third section of the poem. The arbitrary division of invading

---

(1) Nones, p. 37.

armies ('the barbed wire runs which neither argues nor explains') seen in geographical cities are experienced in the human consciousness as well. Each man, entirely against his will, finds that he is divided against himself.

> Across the square
> ....
> Across the plains
> ....
> Across our sleep
> The barbed wire also runs......

The final stanza of this section re-emphasises the conflict: spirit and nature; freedom and necessity, and the image of the other self makes it s appearance. Auden has used the mirror-image before, but never with this kind of effect. In an early poem like Through the Looking Glass[1] the mirror world is a topsy-turvy, 'Alice' kind of world. Nevertheless the notion, both of the connexion between the two worlds by the reversal of values is there. In The Sea and the Mirror, the image is used as a symbol of the world created by the artist-static, in some sense illusory, but nonetheless connected with the real world and of peculiar value. Here in Memorial for a City, Auden seems to draw upon St. Paul's

(1) Look Stranger! pp. 25-27.

famous image of the thirteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians[1]. The mirror image suggests an unchanging reality, an integration of the individual and a resolution of conflicts that is not achieved in this world. The section ends with a reminder of the epigraph from Dame Julian

This is Adam waiting for His City[2].

Adam, as representative man stands 'in the self-same point that our soul is made sensual'[3]; at the 'juncture of spirit and nature', (Niebuhr) and the sensuality of man's life is important. The Church has always taught that it is in the spiritual rebellion of Adam that sin arises, and that is why Auden places the final section in the mouth of his sensual weakness. For man to wish to escape Nature, its weaknesses and limitations, is to wish for damnation. Anxiety and conflict arises at the union of spirit and nature but it is precisely because the spirit is joined inseparably with the flesh that self-knowledge can be obtained. The flesh demands the acceptance of a frailty which in turn demands salvation.

---

(1) For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Cor., Ch. XIII, v.12).

(2) Nones, p. 38.

(3) Cf. Genesis, Ch. III, v.7 '... and man became a living soul.'

The tone of this concluding section may be a little complacent and the images clever-clever, but towards the end the poetry works up to a surprisingly forceful assertion of the expectation of the City of God achieved by the Resurrection

> At the place of my passion her photographers are
> gathered together; but I shall rise again
> to hear her judged.

The whole of this final section can be read as a longer and more restrained version of the expectation envisaged in the closing lines of a Christmas Oratorio where all the Occasions of the Flesh shall dance for joy.

The technique of embodying interior, personal emotions and attitudes in the descriptions of particular geographical areas is used more obviously in the poem from the same volume _In Praise of Limestone_ and in the cycle of poems _Bucolics_ which constitutes the first part of _The Shield of Achilles_. The poet's feelings and theories about certain human qualities and activities are concretised in the presentation of landscapes and figures. _In Praise of Limestone_ turns around the point of human weakness and instability, and the limestone landscape is chosen 'Because it dissolves in water...'[1]

---

(1) _Nones_, p. 11.

It is a landscape which has neither great heights or great depths, neither spectacular beauty nor awesome ugliness; it has been civilised,changing softly over the years;refusing to allow destructive passions or stifling austerity in the lives of its inhabitants. The figures represent the comfortable, secure side of human life, but also the monotonous pottiness and humdrum squalor of existence

> So, when one of them goes to the bad, the way his mind works
> Remains comprehensible: to become a pimp
> Or deal in fake jewellery or ruin a fine tenor voice[1]

The figures of this landscape do not destroy or distort what is beautiful and good, they haven't the power; they either ignore it or degrade it, this is their weakness. Yet Auden sees this weakness, as in the final section of <u>Memorial for a City</u> as that which saves them from unreality, in Christian terms: from Pride, and in turn from damnation. The Kierkegaardian choice of despair has been 'civilised' here into the calm recognition of frailty. The poem lacks the religious fervour of <u>Memorial for a City</u> and conveys an intensely personal vision which lays no claim to universal acceptance; we cannot read the poem without hearing the inflexions of

---

(1) <u>Nones</u>, p. 12.

the poet's own voice. There is a curious tension between the ideal and the real

> .... Dear, I know nothing of
> Either, but when I try to imagine a faultless love
> Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur
> Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone
> landscape[1].

The whole point about the landscape is that it is both faulty and changing - aspects of existence which have no application in the ideal world where love is perfect and life is eternal. In these poised, meditative complexities Auden somehow manages to convey the impossibility of 'imagining' the experience of faultless love or the life to come while convincing us of the reality of his belief in it. His belief about the nature of man has changed little since the early lyric 'Lay your sleeping head, my love'[2] the acceptance of life as incomplete and bewildering is still present, but it is made easily and quietly in these later poems and placed firmly in the context of redemption.

Few of the poems in Bucolics are as successful as In Praise of Limestone. The symbolist techniques often

---

(1) Nones, p. 13.
(2) Another Time, pp. 43-44.

seems strained, and there is frequently an insufficient identification of idea and image. In many places Auden's verse has a slick verbosity[1], and the tone, though consistently amusing and slightly mocking, becomes embarrassingly urbane from time to time.

> Moraine, pot, oxbow, glint, sink, crater,
> piedmont, dimple?
> Just reeling off their names is ever so comfy[2].

Of the seven poems in the sequence, Plains is the most convincing. Here the poet manages to convey the cruelty and callousness of human beings as well as their smallness, their nakedness, and their defencelessness. Plains are those areas in which both the cold and tyrannical and those who are forced to be dominated have their habitation. No account is taken of the frailty or pleasant muddle or untidiness of human life for 'Zeus is with the strong'[3]. Plains moreover offer no means of escape or possible hiding-place, and in a stanza which describes the common nightmare experience by recalling the surrealism of a Salvador Dali painting, Auden conveys the terror of those who are hunted and helpless which is real to all men

---

(1) Cf. the first stanza of Winds; the third stanza of Plains.

(2) The Shield of Achilles, p. 24.

(3) Ibid., p. 28.

even though they may experience it only in dreams.

> I have tried to run, knowing there was no
> hiding and no help;
> On them, in brilliant moonlight, I have lost my way
> And stood without a shadow at the dead centre
> Of an abominable desolation,
> Like Tarquin ravished by his post-coital sadness[1].

The transfiguration of thematic material, which has already been mentioned, becomes apparent in a slightly different context when that same love lyric from _Another Time_: 'Lay your sleeping head, my love' is compared with the, somewhat strange, love-song from _The Shield of Achilles_ : _The Willow-wren and the Stare_[2]. In the earlier poem the value of the moment of love is stressed despite the fact that those who experience it are guilty and mortal, and that the moment itself is a fleeting one. The same belief is expressed in the later poem where the inconstancy of the lovers is brought out by the birds and the extravagant, and sometimes silly, declarations of the young man are contradicted by their wry and worldly commentary. Despite the claims, love can be mean and selfish; lovers treacherous and unfaithful. In both of the poems the complexity of the human experience is conveyed for in

---

(1) _The Shield of Achilles_, p. 29.
(2) Ibid., pp. 41-42.

both the joy of the moment is accounted as real. But whereas, in the early poem Auden leaves the reader with the impression that this fleeting experience is one snatched from a life-time of emotional poverty and deceit, the later poem suggests that impermanent and incomplete as the moment is, it illuminates, and makes bearable the life in the context of which it occurs. In the colloquial quip with which the stars concludes the poem, Auden places the whole emotional adventure under the protection of God's mercy from which the joy of the particular moment is ultimately derived.

The Shield of Achilles ends with a cycle of seven poems entitled Horae Canonicae which, as far as this study is concerned, is the focal point of the poet's work for it contains the clearest and the finest expression of his religious beliefs. Prime and Nones both appeared earlier but have been included here to form a sequence which, as the title indicates, is built upon the structure of the monastic office of the Western Church. The modern monastic breviary actually contains eight offices, but Auden uses the original form prescribed by St. Benedict in the fifth century and omits the night office of Matins. His choice of this particular structure signifies the preoccupation with the familiar theme: the redemption of time - the way in which human life can

be consecrated to the purposes of God. It is the symbolic function of the Divine Office to sanctify time, and the monks' daily round of prayer and praise acknowledges symbolically that all men live in God's time, that all life is holy, and that it is the prime duty of all men to adore and glorify their creator

> The monk and his imitators gave the church the divine office and the conception of the _whole_ life of man as consummated in worship, instead of regarding worship as a department of life, like paganism, or the contradiction of daily life, like the pre-Nicene church[1].

Every hour of every day is God's, and it is to be lived under his care and protection as well as to His glory. Auden builds upon this pattern and uses these associations as starting-points for his own meditations upon the human condition. It is, obviously, not a poem about the Divine Office. Each office is used in much the same way as each landscape in _Bucolics_ was used, but the coherent structure of the whole office gives these seven poems a unity, despite their diversity of tone, which _Bucolics_ does not possess.

Unfortunately the poetic quality throughout the sequence is uneven and the string of adverbs with which the first poem, _Prime_, opens is not an auspicious beginning

> Simultaneously, as soundlessly
> Spontaneously, suddenly
> As, at the vaunt of dawn.......[2]

---

(1) Gregory Dix. _The Shape of the Liturgy_, p. 332.

(2) _The Shield of Achilles_, p. 61.

Nothing is accomplished by the mere repetition of the sibilant, and despite Allan Rodway's arguments in his recent article on the necessity for Auden's tortured 'logicless' style, the convolutions of the language are not justified by the difficulty of the concepts and attitudes it is meant to convey[1]. And at the beginning of the second stanza the poet lapses into a smirking banality with the assurance

Holy this moment, wholly in the right.

But a little later, with the reference to the Fall and the introduction of the familiar Eden theme, the poetry does achieve some imaginative depth. The dream of innocence; the state of being 'previous to any act' continues to haunt humanity, and in that curious waking moment in which dream and reality merge the desire is experienced almost as a physical sensation. This is a moment before the drawing of breath, when life, as it were, is suspended. But the moment is gone in a flash and the first breath is drawn. With that breath comes self-knowledge, and with that self-knowledge, action, and to act is to die and experience the loss of Paradise.

---

(1) 'Logicless Grammar in Audenland'. <u>London Magazine</u>, March 1965, pp. 32-38.

I draw breath; this is of course to wish
No matter what, to be wise,
To be different, to die and the cost,
No matter how, is Paradise
Lost of course and myself owing a death[1].

Here the link between man's sinfulness and his mortality is made unambiguously explicit. Previously in the poetry, death has been pictured as an inescapable fact of the human condition vaguely connected with the problem of knowledge and guilt, but not necessarily bound to it. Even A Christmas Oratorio leaves the relation undefined. But now the causal connection between the Fall and man's experience of death, as contained in the doctrine of Original Sin, is emphasised. This opens the way for Auden to consider the meaning of another death: that of Jesus Christ, and it is the relation between these two deaths - which is, in fact the doctrine of the Atonement - that is the point around which the whole sequence revolves.

In the original Benedictine scheme, the three small offices of Terce, Sext, and None were intended to commemorate three of the hours of the Passion of Christ on the first Good Friday, and so here, in these three

(1) The Shield of Achilles, p. 62.

poems Auden shows himself most obviously concerned with the events of the Passion and Crucifixion. The intention of the artist is quite clear; it is the same as that of A Christmas Oratorio where the 'events' of the Incarnation were summoned into the present, but the technique is less obvious and the investigation more personal. Auden attempts to identify the actions of contemporary man with those of people living in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago; to weave the occurrences of the first Good Friday into the fabric of every man's experience and so convey the meaning of the reality enshrined in the doctrine of the Atonement. The task is immensely difficult, and one which Auden does not always successfully perform. Bridging the gap of hundreds of years so that the past comes alive in the present is possibly something that can be achieved only in the religious society by means of ritual and liturgical observance. Auden seems to have realised this, and for this reason chose to rely so heavily upon the structure offered by the Divine Office.

The failure of Terce has its roots in this difficulty, for it is a failure of tone. Auden has always enjoyed the juxtaposition of the serious and the trivial; the solemn and the comic; even the ancient and the modern, but in this poem the transitions are too sudden and the juxtapositions tend to jar rather than illuminate. It

is only with difficulty that the reader places the man praying to his image in the context of Good Friday. Terce is the hour in which the monastic community recalls the figure of the Saviour being led away to the place of Crucifixion. It is the hour, in the world, at which men prepare to begin their daily work. The last stanza catches up the suggestions of the Narrator at the end of A Christmas Oratorio,

> God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph[1].

The killing of Christ is a triumph for the world and for all of its inhabitants who demand that they suffer no embarrassment; that the machinery runs smoothly. Auden links each man with the hangman. On this day it is the work of the world to crucify; the selfishness of man's prayer accomplishes the death.

Sext is the hour in the middle of the day when the nailing to the Cross is commemorated, and is used by the poet to stress again the fact of man's divided nature; that it is not only his weaknesses but his strengths, not only his vices but his virtues which cause his separation from God and demand the Crucifixion. Singleness of mind, determination, selflessness, and courage have built civilisations and given men dignity and

---

(1) For the Time Being, p. 124.

stability, and without them men should still be

> slaves of Dame Kind, lacking
> all notion of a city[1]

Yet it was the determination and courage of the Jews, not the vacillating weakness of Pilate which brought Christ to Calvary. But the weakness of men is not forgotten and in the third section of the poem Auden recalls in his image of the crowd the way in which, that too, contributes to the tragedy.

> but the crowd rejects no one, joining the crowd
> is the only thing all men can do[2].

This is the religious expression of the 'intolerable neural itch' of the earlier poetry. The situation in which man finds himself condemned to failure is intolerable, yet unavoidable. At the end of each section in Sext Auden brings the reader back to the scene on Calvary 'this death', 'this dying'. The refrain is a sad one, but not a pessimistic one, it not only reminds man of his condition but seems to offer some kind of meaning behind the bewilderment which he feels in looking at the figure nailed to the wood. That meaning is revealed in the next four poems.

---

(1) The Shield of Achilles, p. 66.

(2) Ibid., p. 69.

Nones, at the ninth hour of the day, commemorates the actual moment of death upon the cross, and it is the hour by which Auden chooses to symbolise man's freedom to sin and his ability to destroy as well as to create. This is the hour in which each individual is compelled to acknowledge his sin and accept the responsibility for his actions. The all-too-easy transition from desire and intention to action and accomplishment is conveyed in the opening lines

> What we know to be not possible
> Though time after time foretold
> By wild hermits, by shaman and Sybil
> Gibbering in their trances,
> Or revealed to a child in some chance rhyme
> Like <u>will</u> and <u>kill</u>, comes to pass
> Before we realize it:[1]

The stanza continues to suggest the childish fears, helplessness and revulsion which come over the adult who has done something shameful. But the lines are more powerful than that for the petulance and the hysterical edge hide a real, almost supernatural, terror.

> .... we are not prepared
> For silence so sudden and so soon;
> The day is too hot, too bright, too still,
> Too ever, the dead remains too nothing.
> What shall we do till nightfall?

Ultimate evasion of responsibility is impossible. Men can never escape the anxiety of their lives because they can never escape the consequences of their actions.

---

(1) <u>The Shield of Achilles</u>, p. 70.

As was suggested earlier, Auden sees clearly the irrevocability of the Fall whose ultimate consequence is the crucifixion of Christ.

> .... wherever
> The sun shines, brooks run, books are written,
> There will also be this death[1].

The image of death here is a deliberately ambiguous one. It symbolises man's finitude, his anxiety, his guilt, and the tensions of his life, but, as it echoes the phrases of the previous poem, it signifies the death of Christ which serves not merely as a reminder to the individual of his sinfulness but as a hope of redemption.

In the penultimate stanza of Nones Auden introduces the image of the Doppelgänger. It goes unexplained until the following poem Vespers which is built around the idea of a meeting with the mirror-image. This is a collection of witty, epigrammatic antitheses rather than a poem in its own right, but is deft in its construction and clear in the point it has to make. Eden, the dream of the recovery of innocence, is finally rejected, though not in favour of the austere and virtuous life of the New Jerusalem. (Auden's use of the New Jerusalem image is not one gathered from the Revelation of St. John the Divine.) The Kingdom of God is neither of those places,

(1) The Shield of Achilles, p. 72.

but a city founded upon a death the whole meaning of which can only be apprehended when each man has met the image from which, in circumstances other than the twilight post-crucifixion world, he automatically turns away. Only in the sacrificial death is the divided nature of man united

> forcing us both, for a fraction of a second, to remember our victim (but for him I could forget the blood, but for me he could forget the innocence)[1].

From the point of view of the doctrine of the Atonement, the words contained by the brackets are of some significance. Auden is making an oblique reference here to a dialectic in the interpretation of the Atonement which can be traced back as far as the writings of St. John and St. Paul. In the Johannine books the emphasis is placed upon the perfect self-oblation of Christ, the sinless and innocent Lamb, while St. Paul places the sacrificial death, reconciliation 'by the blood of his Cross' at the centre of his picture[2]. Both aspects are necessary if a complete vision of the redemptive work of Christ is to be obtained.

In the quiet, sympathetic, conversational tones of Compline, the juxtaposition of grandeur and simplicity,

---

(1) The Shield of Achilles, p. 77.

(2) The Epistle to the Colossions, Ch. I. v. 20.

serious and trivial, natural and supernatural is accomplished easily and naturally. The recognition of guilt has been accomplished in the previous poems and now, in this hour before sleep, the poet begins to explore the meaning of salvation. The significant image is that of the dance - mentioned at first almost as an aside

> Leave me, without a status,
> Among its unwashed tribes of wishes
> Who have no dances and no jokes[1]

and then stressed heavily at the close of the stanza which is an evening prayer

> That we, too, may come to the picnic
> With nothing to hide, join the dance
> As it moves in perichoresis,
> Turns about the abiding tree.

The image of the dance does not make many appearances in Auden's poetry, but when it does appear the reader is conscious of a significance which is often lacking expressions which appear with greater frequency. In the early theatrical device _The Dance of Death_ it performs two important functions. First it suggests the traditional image of the _Danse Macabre_ which turns the conventional association of dancing with youth and vitality upside down, and secondly, it conveys the sense of these taking part in the action being caught up into a pattern

---

(1) _The Shield of Achilles_, p. 79.

which ends in death and from which there can be no escape. Only this image with its double connotation of lively movement and ritualistic order could adequately convey the ironies of the situation Auden was attempting to describe. In the later poem The Dead Echo from the volume Letters from Iceland[1] the image is used more conventionally as the poet echoes the note of Ecclesiastes 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die'[2] in the refrain of each stanza. The image stands for the wild and desperate, though ultimately useless, assertion of life and vigour before the final annihilation. The connection between dancing and death is still prominent and in the closing lines Auden recalls the greatest of the Romantic ballets Giselle in which the Queen of the Dead condemns the hero to dance himself to death.

Letters from Iceland was published in 1937; four years later the image re-appeared at the close of New Year Letter with specifically Christian connotations. In l. 1656 Auden, quoting from a medieval Easter carol, recalls the delicate ambiguity of words which identify the

---

(1) Letters from Iceland, pp. 227-229.
(2) Ecclesiastes, Ch. VIII, v. 15.

lover with the figure of Christ, and the country dances on the village green with the joyful celebration of the Resurrection[1]. Forty-three lines later the image occurs again

> We fall down in the dance, we wake
> The old ridiculous mistake[2]

and a similar ambiguity is suggested. The dance stands both as a symbol for ordinary life and a symbol for life lived in obedience to the will of God - ideally one in the religious perspective. The contrast between Auden's early and later uses of the image is nowhere more marked than in The Sea and the Mirror where Antonio, refusing the repentance and joy of the other characters, responds to the song of Miranda in words which echo the title of the early play

> Happy Miranda does not know
> The figure that Antonio,
> The Only One, Creation's O
> Dances for Death alone[3].

The choice to be self-sufficient, separate from others and from God, can produce only a parody of the Dance-Death. In Miranda's song, which in itself has the form of a dance - a villanelle - the vision of innocence and the hope of redemption are preserved by the linking of

---

(1) The Oxford Book of Carols, Carol No. 71.

(2) New Year Letter, p. 74.

(3) For the Time Being, p. 30.

hands in the dance - a ritual activity performed in conjunction with all the other creatures of the imperfect world. The dance has become the symbol of life lived joyfully and hopefully; the final chorus of A Christmas Oratorio emphasises it unambiguously[1].

As a symbol 'the dance' has been used innumerable times in literature and painting, and it is remarkable that while Auden shows his awareness of its cultural associations he never allows his own use to become self-conscious or precious. In Compline, he consummates his own earlier uses while, at the same time, recalls the image of the dance in the writings of three of his contemporaries: W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Charles Williams. At the end of his poem Among Schoolchildren Yeats employs both the image of the dance and the tree. Both represent a constantly-moving life formalised into an abstract but profoundly satisfying pattern[2]. Auden's vision is not tragic like that of Yeats, nor is his image as complex, but his similarity to Yeats is evident, for in the same kind of way the dance conveys the idea of life moving and changing, though in a discernible and wonderful pattern, but he makes it turn

---

(1) 'Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.'

(2) Cf. Frank Kermoda. The Romantic Image, pp. 70-79.

about something fixed and unchanging 'the abiding tree'. A greater degree of complexity enters here, for in the traditional typology of the Catholic Church the tree acts both as a symbol of the Fall of man and also his redemption. The Cross is the eternal tree, that centre of life around which everything else moves[1]. So the crucifixion, the death of Christ in which the reconciliation of man is achieved, remains at the core of the poem. There are also echoes here of <u>Four Quartets</u>: Eliot's 'dance along the arterys', the 'axle-tree', 'the still point of the turning world'[2], and it is in the use of this image that Eliot and Auden draw closest together. Both see the divine and conflicting forces of man's life being drawn together into a meaningful pattern around a single point. For Eliot this point is the birth of Christ: the moment in which the temporal and the eternal meet. But for Auden (in this sequence at least) it is the death of Christ which performs this function: the act in

---

(1) Cf. The daily office Hymn from Passion Sunday to Holy Thursday

> Faithful cross! above all other
> One and only noble tree!
> None in foliage, none in blossom
> None in fruit thy peer may be;
> Sweetest wood and sweetest iron!
> Sweetest weight is hung on thee.

(<u>English Hymnal</u>. Hymn 96).

(2) <u>Four Quartets</u>, pp. 8-9.

which the reconciliation of God and man is effected. So, while both poets are united in an affirmation of the validity of the Christian experience, the context in which this experience becomes real displays with utmost clarity their differences in religious sensibility. Eliot's metaphysical philosophical questionings about the relation between appearance and reality; the timeless and time, limitation and imperfection find some kind of solution in a doctrine which lends itself most easily to speculative treatment - the Incarnation. Auden's were personal and existential problems of guilt, frustrations and tensions in human life are resolved in a doctrine which addresses itself directly to the condition of human sufferings and conflicts: the Atonement. Needless to say, no Christian vision of salvation can be complete unless both doctrines are seen as complementing each other, for there can be no Atonement without the 'Word made Flesh', and the Incarnation has no purpose unless death is overcome and union with God achieved. Both poets have seen this clearly and have tried to express it, but whereas Eliot, as I have already tried to show, only occasionally manages to convey the vision, Auden in a sequence of poems devoted to the death of Christ, treats the Atonement in such a way that we are aware constantly of his vivid sense of the Incarnation. And from this

completeness of vision there arises a consistent expression of Christian joy and confidence that Eliot never achieved.

At the end of his treatise On the Incarnation the fourth century Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, who was largely responsible for the formulation of the Nicene Creed, crystallised the dominant attitude of the early church to the Incarnation in the words:

> He, [God] indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God.[1]

Although Auden's poem has as its theme the death, and not the birth, of Christ, this belief in the deification of man is what lies behind the closing lines of Compline. The poet uses the specifically theological word 'perichoresis'; a technical term for emphasising the essential unity of the Blessed Trinity. Perichoresis is explained by Charles Williams as 'co-inherence', the constant weaving in and out of the Three Persons so that wherever one acts all three act, for each exists eternally in the others. It is the dance of love between the members of the Trinity and it is into this exchange that man, by reason of the Atonement, is taken up. In Athanasius' words man becomes God. The influence of Yeats and Eliot

---

(1) The Incarnation, p. 93.

is comparatively easy to discern, the presence of Williams is more subtle, and more pervasive. There is the obvious connection between Auden's use of the dance image and Williams' dance of the Tarot figures in his novel The Greater Trumps, but more significant is the way in which both men link together the sacrificial death of Christ and the transfiguration of the created order. In the writings of Williams the conviction of the reality of the 'Word made Flesh' underlies everything that is said but the doctrine as such never becomes prominent. It is by the great act of substituted love on Calvary that the flesh of men is taken into glory. From this moment onwards co-inherence is the dominant principle of the Christian life: the co-inherence of God and God in the Trinity; of man and man in the Church; and of God and man in the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ[1]. In Lauds, Auden produces a poem in which this principle of co-inherence is embodied.

Lauds is the hymn of praise which begins the cycle of the Daily Office, and it is significant that Auden, in his own schema, places it at the end of the cycle, emphasising the fact that the goal of man's life is the adoration of his Creator. It is a simple little poem

---

(1) The Descent of the Dove, pp. 234-236.

cast in the form of a Spanish cossante, and creates a sense of freshness associated with the best Medieval lyrics. The form itself is important for it is circular and repetitive, ending at the point at which it began, becoming thus a formal image of co-inherence. There is the suggestion of a quiet but deep appreciation of the natural world

> The dripping mill-wheel is again turning;
> Among the leaves the small birds sing;[1]

All the pains and disillusionments of man's life have disappeared. His guilt and anxiety are taken away as he finds himself capable of experiencing an unalloyed joy in the harmony with the rest of creation. In this, almost ostentatiously, ritualistic poem the sense of the unity and coherence of everything is emphasised. In A Christmas Oratorio the consequences of Original Sin are demonstrated by the separation of man from man and the divisions which man knows within his own being[2]. Here all are united again in Redemption so that it is with no feelings of regret or fear or anger that

> Men of their neighbours become sensible

The rather wistful phrase of New Year Letter

> Our life and death are with our neighbour[3]

---

(1) The Shield of Achilles, p. 80.
(2) For the Time Being, pp. 69-73.
(3) p. 75.

becomes a reality in Lauds. A man's neighbours are part of the coherent pattern of his life, without them he is incomplete. But for all this Auden has not lost his grasp of the realities for the strange, and constant refrain

In solitude, for company

recalls what he has always believed about the essential loneliness of the individual, as well as his need to find his own place in the complex pattern of human experience. The ringing of the mass-bell re-iterates the familiar theme of the spirit/nature tension in man, for the Eucharist is a constant reminder to man of his citizenship in two worlds. But there the conflict is resolved for it is at this point in the anamnesis of Christ's Death and Passion, which is the Mass, that God gives Himself in material form again. The Blessed Sacrament represents the co-inherence of God and man, and at this point spirit and nature are wonderfully united. The words of Dame Julian of Norwich are brought to mind

> In the self-same point that our souls are made sensual, in the self-same point is the City of God ordained to him from without beginning[1].

---

(1) Nones, p. 34.

A detailed examination of any of the poems contained in Auden's most recent volume Homage to Clio[1] and About the House[2] will add nothing to what has already been discovered about the religious ideas in his poetry, for the beliefs which underlie the poems in these publications are those of Horae Canonicae. But although there is no development of idea, it is possible to say that in much the same way as his style and tone have changed, so his religious sensibility seem to have altered. He has become more domestic and more secure, in some ways more dull; intent upon conveying personal and private attitudes in the most impersonal kind of way. In a few isolated instances the grand vision which informed the earlier poems can be caught from an oblique angle, but in his deliberate preoccupation with household appliances, local customs, domestic incidents and all the trivia of day-to-day living, he refuses to allow this vision overt expression. The reader is aware that the Christian conviction is there, but it is hidden a long way beneath the surface, and since 1955 has preferred to reveal itself in prose rather than poetry.

Nearly all of these poems are in their quiet and detached way a celebration of man, not in the sense of

---

(1) Published in 1960.
(2) Published in 1966.

the nineteenth century liberal progressive who saw him as a hero conquering his environment and marching towards perfection, (Auden's notion of heroism lies in another direction altogether) but as a creature who is frail and weak, selfish and guilty, but who nonetheless has managed to civilise and communicate. The images of this civilisation are numerous and varied: musical creation, poetry, cooking, and household gadgets. These poems are a hymn of praise, not to the great life of quests and crucifixions, but to the good life in which the gentler virtues are practised. It is not that Auden has abandoned the tragic and glorious vision of earlier poems, but that he is attempting to translate that vision into the terms of the trivial details of practical existence. Frequently he fails and the poetry descends to the level of bathos as in the final stanza of Tonight at Seven-thirty[1] where, despite the obvious irony, the picture of spiritual and natural forces (both spelt with capital letters) uniting to concoct a good meal does not escape absurdity. But occasionally he succeeds; and in the poem from Homage to Clio, On Installing an American Kitchen in Lower Austria there is the subtle introduction of the heroic element into the trivial preoccupation. The poem is, again, about cooking and food and the physical

(1) About the House, pp. 39-41.

necessities of life, and it has the epigram

Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral[1].

This does not mean that the Moral is of no significance. As in the poem First thing's First[2] the poet addresses himself with common-sense to practicalities; there can be no heroism where there is starvation. But for all that, when man has fed well, he discovers that Thermopylae is still waiting

All we ask for,
Should the night come when comets blaze and wires break.
Is a good dinner, that we
May march in high fettle, left foot first,
To hold her Thermopylae[3].

The poem ends thus on a note of heroism, not willingly asked for, but recognised as a possible strand in the fabric of human life, and so looks back to the Narrator's remarks about temptation and sin in the closing passages of A Christmas Oratorio. But it looks forward too, to the poem which concludes the volume About the House, Whitsunday in Kirchstetten

about
Catastrophe or how to behave in one
I know nothing, except what everyone knows –
if there when Grace dances, I should dance[4].

Here, with the introduction of the image of the dance, we are given that rare glimpse, from the oblique angle,

---

(1) Homage to Clio, p. 24.
(2) Ibid., p. 58.
(3) Ibid., p. 26.
(4) Ibid., p. 94.

of the vision of God which gives the peace, the security and the serene tolerance that characterise the best of these late poems. Despite the frailty and helplessness of man there is confidence in his belief that in the end 'Grace dances' and that he is part of that dance.

I said earlier that Auden was a derivative writer but the progression of his work from New Year Letter to About the House shows that the influence of specific theological authors becomes less and less apparent and that the themes with which he was pre-occupied in earlier work undergo transfiguration. Many of the poems in these later volumes are badly blemished, and only a few capture the imagination, but the reason for their failure is not, as Bayley suggests, that they are verifications of a point of view; it is caused by faults that are discernible in the very first volume he produced. The desire to be the 'craftsman' and the technical virtuoso triumphs over imaginative effort and sympathetic response. In many of the poems which do succeed, the influence of Auden's theological reading can still be seen, but in the best of them he does not merely repeat or interpret; the theology has been made his own, and it is in terms of his own experience that it is transformed into poetry.

CHAPTER XII

The character of twentieth century theology and the relation of Eliot's and Auden's work to this pattern of religious sensibility

At a time when impatience and irritations with the Aesthetic Movement was steadily growing among English intellectuals, A.C. Bradley was elected Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford and provocatively chose as a title for his inaugural lecture in 1901: Poetry for Poetry's Sake. Though specifically disclaiming allegiance to the more extreme forms of the dogma 'art for art's sake', he nonetheless argued strongly and convincingly for, what he called, the 'autonomy' of poetry:

> For its nature is not to be a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase), but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality[1].

---

(1) Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 5.

There is nothing in this statement that the most extravagant aesthetics could quarrel with (except possibly the phrase 'for the time'), and for fear that his beliefs might sound too reminiscent of the sentiments of Pater or Wilde, Bradley hurried on with the assurance that there was

> plenty of connection between life and poetry, but it is, so to say, a connection underground[1].

And with these two points in mind, he passed on to the main purpose of the lecture which was an analysis and demolition of the currently popular vogue in literary criticism which placed 'substance' and 'form' in poetry, in a falsely antithetical relationship. Consequently, the relationship between life and poetry - the problem hinted at in the title of the lecture - was dealt with obliquely; it has to be inferred from his perceptive examination of only one of the 'autonomous' worlds: poetry. While it would be unfair to criticize Bradley for failing to do something he never intended to do, it is nonetheless disappointing to find, in a lecture whose title so deliberately echoes the disputes of earlier decades, that the problem of the relationship between

---

(1) Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 6.

contemporary art and contemporary life received only indirect treatment.

Certain conclusions can, of course, be drawn. Bradley was obviously no aesthete in that he believed a real relation to exist between contemporary art and contemporary life, but there is an aesthetic vagueness about his use of the phrase 'the other world of reality', and he makes no attempt to suggest that it might be important to 'place' works of art historically, and the closing paragraphs of the lecture[1] are strongly reminiscent of some of Shelley's more ecstatic utterances, debased forms of which might be found in the aesthetes' attempts to drive a wedge between Art and Life - especially contemporary art and contemporary life.

At the other end of the scale from Shelley, the Aesthetes and Bradley, all of whom believed in the 'autonomy' of the world of art, stand the Marxist critics of our own day whose attitude to the relationship between art and life is even less ambiguous, and certainly more crudely expressed, than e.g. Pater's. Whereas Bradley leaves us in some doubt as to the 'content' of his 'other world of reality', Marxist criticism is disarmingly frank about its conception of the nature of the world. And whereas Bradley is totally

---

(1) Oxford Lectures on Poetry, pp. 26-27.

uninterested in 'placing' a work historically, the Marxist critic treats this as one of his major concerns[1]. Even Margaret Schlauch, whose book Modern English & American Poetry is concerned primarily with the matter of modern poetic technique, makes her pronouncements out of a background of clearly defined and depressingly restricted beliefs about the nature of human life and human history, in which poetry has its part to play. The world for the Marxist critic is a world of class-conflict, of social, political and economic struggle, and, inevitably, of numberless programmes in the course of which the individual eventually attains to freedom and self-realisation. The orthodox Marxist critic might even go so far as to demand that art should not merely depict the struggle of men towards self-realisation, but actually give itself over to the propogation of the Marxist gospel. In his essay Inside the Whale, George Orwell quotes an extreme formulation of this point of view

> Literary criticism which aims at being Marxist must .... proclaim that no book written at the present time can be "good" unless it is written from a Marxist or a near-Marxist viewpoint2.

---

(1) Cf. John Press. The Fire and the Fountain, pp. 173-174.

(2) Collected Essays, p. 153. Orwell is quoting Edward Upward.

As Orwell points out, the author himself italicizes "at the present time" because 'he realizes that one cannot, for instance, dismiss Hamlet on the ground that Shakespeare was not a Marxist.' Even the Marxist (and his Christian counterpart) has enough sense to see that there is a close and direct connection between the artist and his environment, that he cannot choose the moment of his birth nor the society into which he is born, and that he must of necessity, embody the attitudes and values of his own age, as well as his own reaction to them, in any work which he produces. The recognition of a direct relation between a particular society and its artistic products, places the Marxist in a difficult position, for while he is bound to say that the latter is the direct result of the former[1], he has to admit, at the same time, that ages of singular decadence (from the dialectical materialist's point of view) have somehow managed to produce works of indisputable greatness. (The Divine Comedy, The Canterbury Tales, King Lear).

Few critics, without an extra-literary axe to grind, are willing to go as far as the Marxist in interpreting literature as the emanation of a historical social and political situation, and yet most have jettisoned

---

(1) Christopher Caudwell. Illusion and Reality, pp. 59-60.

(though not overtly) the idea of an 'autonomous' world of art. It is taken for granted by critics of art and cultural historians that there is a direct and unavoidable relation between the art of a period and the complex combination of ideas, beliefs, and emotional attitudes which constitutes the 'spirit of the age.' T.S. Eliot's maxim that the great poet 'in writing himself, writes his time'[1] goes largely unchallenged, though Raymond Williams is at pains to point out that open acknowledgment of this kind of relation is of comparatively recent origin:

> An essential hypothesis in the development of the idea of culture is that the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent 'way of life', and further that, in consequence, aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely interrelated. Such a hypothesis is now so generally accepted, as a matter of intellectual habit, that it is not easy to remember that it is, essentially, a product of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century[2].

Critics attach varying degrees of importance to the closeness of the artist to his age. H. V. Routh goes so far as to demand that the artist embody the 'spirit of the age' in anything he produces and suggests that he betrays his vocation if he does not. Writing

(1) 'Shakespeare and the stoicism of Seneca'. Selected Essays, p. 137.

(2) Culture and Society, p. 130.

about the twentieth century he says

> This is the world of humanistic insight and scientific imagination, which poets, moralists, and novel writers also must capture[1].

F.R. Leavis is less extravagant and attaches a far higher value to the poet's individual insight, but his statement in New Bearings in English Poetry that

> .... if the poetry and the intelligence of the age lose touch with each other, poetry will cease to matter much, and the age will be lacking in fine awareness[2].

sees the necessity for a close relation between art and its immediate environment. Nearly every modern critic of repute has considered this question of the relation of the art to its age, and, however much they differ in their views on the exact nature of the relation of the artist to his time, they regard it as inevitable that he should reflect and respond to the spirit of the age which has produced him.

Nor is this interest in the relation between works of art and their historical environment confined to literary and art critics. Those scholars whose main concern is with neither literature nor art, have made it quite clear that the understanding of any period of

---

(1) Towards the Twentieth Century, p. 377.
(2) New Bearings in English Poetry, p. 20.

history depends, not only upon the examination of factual accounts and official documents, but also upon a serious consideration of contemporary imaginative creations. The historian especially, cannot afford to ignore works of art for they 'fix the historical moment, intentionally or not'[1] in a way in which no other evidence can, so that in discussing the art of an age, the historian finds himself writing, not merely a history of art, but a history of a people. The German historian Oswald Spengler illustrates this point to perfection in his book The Decline of the West. Agreement or disagreement with his thesis is not in question here, it is important only to notice that he treats all works of art in the West as unambiguous embodiments of the Faustian Zeitgeist[2].

At the other end of the historical spectrum, the English historian David Thomson allows the artist a far greater degree of personal freedom, but in no way abandons the hypothesis that works of art are inextricably bound up with the period of history in which they are created; that the forms which they take are influenced by the political, social and economic conditions under which they were produced. In his detached accounts of

---

(1) George Boas. The Heaven of Invention, p. 123.
(2) The Decline of the West, pp. 259-295.

the history of modern Europe, he argues as Toynbee did a few years before[1], that the iconoclasm, the experimentalism and the revolutions in technique which characterise modern art, have a 'spiritual' cause, namely, the experience of religious and moral bewilderment and insecurity in an age of increasing technological advancement.

> The culture of crisis suffered, naturally enough, a cris of culture[2]

But of all modern writers who have given their attention to this particular problem, it is probably T.S. Eliot who has shown the deepest, though not necessarily the most consistent, understanding of the issues involved, and whose own poetry provides a demonstration of his perception that is more convincing than any of his arguments in prose.

In the essay Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca he writes

---

(1) A Study of History, Vol. I., (abridged edition). pp. 258-259.
'Our abandonment of our traditional artistic technique is manifestly the consequence of some kind of spiritual breakdown in our Western civilization; and the cause of this breakdown evidently cannot be found in a phenomenon which is one of its results.' (p. 259).

(2) Europe since Napoleon, p. 868.

> What every poet starts from is his own emotions. And when we get down to these, there is not much to choose between Shakespeare and Dante .... The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time. Thus Dante, hardly knowing it, became the voice of the thirteenth century; Shakespeare hardly knowing it, became the representative of the end of the sixteenth century, of a turning point in history. But you can hardly say that Dante believed, or did not believe, the Thomist philosophy; you can hardly say that Shakespeare believed or did not believe, the mixed and muddled scepticism of the Renaissance. If Shakespeare had written according to a better philosophy, he would have written worse poetry; it was his business to express the greatest emotional intensity of his time, based on whatever his time happened to think[1].

That there is a great deal of truth in what Eliot is saying here is indisputable. He brilliantly confutes the efforts made at turning creative works into philosophical treatises or their creators into 'thinkers', but in his antagonism to the 'historical' attitude in criticism he overstates his case by oversimplifying the relationship between the 'thought' of an age and its poetry. In the first place, he, very strangely, suggests a severance of the connection between thought and feeling in the poet's own sensibility. The poet is prevented from having thoughts of his own, let alone from experiencing them in ways which could modify his whole sensibility[2]. Instead he is reduced to a bundle of emotions to which he gives

---

(1) Selected Essays, p. 137.

(2) Ibid., p. 138.
'I doubt whether belief proper enters into the activity of a great poet, qua poet'.

expression by adopting contemporary patterns of thought in much the same way as he might utilise a currently fashionable metrical system or rhyme scheme. The fact that there can be a fruitful interaction between the poet's thought and that of his age and that the result, felt 'as immediately as the odour of a rose', could be the cause of poetry, is overlooked. This is the assumption of a position, for polemical reasons, which Eliot himself contradicts in the writing of his own poetry. In the second place, Dante, in The Divine Comedy, is writing his time not merely because, as Eliot suggests, the poem's philosophy corresponds exactly with the Thomistic system, but because he possessed what Eliot, three years later praised Charles Baudelaire for possessing, and what he himself possesses in abundance - a 'sense of his age'[1].

In this later essay Eliot shows a far deeper understanding of the relation of the poet to his historical environment. Here it is made clear that he is rooted in the age into which he is born without being limited to it. He is seen in the double role of observer and visionary. The poetry of Baudelaire is worthy of praise, not merely because it contains the expression of intense

---

(1) Selected Essays, p. 420.

personal emotion in terms that were the most convenient to hand, nor because it presents an accurate picture of the intellectual and emotional atmosphere of mid-century Paris, but because it represents the poet's own response to his age; a response which causes him both to embody it and transcend it in his work.

The inadequacy of Eliot's earlier remarks on the relation of the artist to his age is pointed up when they are placed side by side with a passage on the same subject from the work of a man is not concerned with art but with religion.

> If we study the portraits of Rembrandt, especially in the later period, we confront personalities who are like self-enclosed worlds - strong, lonely, tragic but unbroken, carrying the works of their unique histories in every line of their faces, expressing the ideals of personality of a humanistic Protestantism. To compare these portraits with Giotto's pictures of St. Francis and his monks is to recognise the difference between two worlds. Giotto's Francis is the expression of a Divine Power by which man is possessed and elevated beyond his individual character and personal experiences[1].

This is effective criticism because it enhances what the observer of Rembrandt's and Giotto's paintings may only dimly have been aware of by relating it to a wider context - in this case theology. It is an interesting coincidence that the painters under discussion are

---

(1) Quoted by Nathan A. Scott in Rehearsals of Discomposure pp. 188-189.

almost exact contemporaries of Shakespeare and Dante. (It is true that Rembrandt's life stretches well into the seventeenth century, but it overlaps with Shakespeare's by about twenty years). Tillich makes it clear that he regards the works of Rembrandt and Giotto as embodiments of two different theologies, and perhaps it is unfair to compare his remarks with Eliot's, for Eliot is speaking specifically about the artist's use of 'philosophies'. But to separate the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas from his theology is an impossible task. So the logical conclusion of Eliot's argument would be that the theology of St. Thomas is incidental to the writing of the Divine Comedy when clearly this is not the case, for the qualities which Tillich discerns in Giotto, are also the outstanding qualities of Dante. Both artists express, in their unique ways, the same theological emphasis which, far from being incidental to their work is at least partly, responsible for it. The conclusion to be drawn from this comparison is plain: any work of art which expresses the religious sensibility of the artist, expresses also the religious sensibility of the age, for the artist cannot fail to be profoundly affected by the prevailing theological atmosphere of his immediate environment.

It could be argued (but not with justification in Tillich's case) that this kind of delineation of the relationship between the work of art and its age denigrates the role of the artist. This is a danger towards which both historians and theologians are tempted[1]. But the artist is not, as John Wain has recently remarked, in an article in The Observer, 'the obsequious Oriel of the Zeitgeist'[2]. He does much more than embody the 'feeling' of his age in his works. Reacting to this 'feeling' with his personal vision he goes a long way to creating the Zeitgeist itself. John Press makes this point forcibly in a passage from his book The Fire and the Fountain.

> Nor have we the right to assume that poetry and the other arts passively reflect current events and preconceptions. Roger Fry warned us that the relationship between Art and Life was less simple than it appeared to be on the surface. Baroque art, we are told, may be regarded as the visible expression of Counter-Reformation piety, but it is equally legitimate to hold that this piety was partly induced by a contemplation of that Baroque art which sprang inevitably from the flowering of certain elements latent in the painting and in the architecture of the Italian Renaissance[3].

---

(1) Cf. Roger Lloyd. The Borderland, p. 38.

(2) The meaning of Yeats. The Observer, June 13 1965, p. 26.

(3) p. 171.

It is true that an art as public as architecture has a far more immediate impact on the lives of men and women, and possibly a far greater power to modify the ways of thought and feeling - the sensibility - of a whole society, than arts, like poetry, which are becoming increasingly 'private'. Press's argument however, still holds good, for the centrifugal tendencies of modern society have not yet forced the arts into a position of complete isolation from their environment. But the complexity of modern life has made the interdependence of the various strands which make up the cultural pattern less obvious than it has ever been, and difficult problems are raised when any effort is made at relating the work of an artist to his environment.

It has been part of the purpose of this study to deal with some of the problems in the course of an examination of the Christian doctrine in the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden. I have already tried to show that a condition of all art is an intimate connection with its age. That there is a close relation between the work of Eliot and Auden and the attitudes, values and events, even, of the twentieth century is indisputable. But they are both avowedly Christian poets, and the investigation has been concerned primarily with their relation to the complex set of beliefs, attitudes and

feelings which constitute the specifically religious sensibility of the age.

I have already tried to indicate that the word 'sensibility', however difficult to use with precision, is one which has real denotation, and that the concept of a cultural sensibility at any given point in the history of the world, is not a meaningless one. The belief that sensibility can be apprehended objectively has been the pre-supposition of nearly all historical thinking in the West. The use of the word 'civilisation' and the acceptance of the division of the time sequence into historically identifiable periods assumes that there are, to greater or lesser degrees, real structures of collective feeling and thought to be known and recognised. Persian ascendancy in the Middle East at the time of Darius, for example, is recognised as being different from its Babylonian predecessor for reasons much more far-reaching than that of a change of personages in the ranks of the rulers; just as a real difference in sensibility separates the Dark Ages from the years of the Reformation. It would be silly to lay down lines of clear demarcation in history, for, obviously, each period grows out of that which precedes it and is responsible for that which follows it, but differences are, nonetheless, real. At times changes occur gradually, as over the period in European history

between the reign of Charlemagne and that of William the Conqueror. At other times, as in the century which separates 1950 from 1850 the change appears to have taken place rapidly. But however change occurs, and however misleading the practice of 'categorising' may be, it is possible to observe the ways in which structures of thought and feeling take shape over any given period. And so it is possible to discern some of the outlines of the sensibility of the twentieth century as it grows out of, and stands in contrast to, that of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The main concern of this study is the religious sensibility of the last half-century, but it will be seen that the developments in the theological field frequently mirror the events and attitudes that form the whole pattern of cultural activity in the West.

Unfortunately, the attempt to outline the religious sensibility of the twentieth century is faced by difficulties at the outset. The first is raised, by our own proximity to, not to say involvement in, the life and attitudes we are trying to apprehend. This proximity may add colour or originality to the picture that is presented, but it prevents the achievement of that objectivity and coherence which can be obtained from the examination of a period with which we have no direct

physical connection and can know only by way of the second-hand experience of contemporary 'documentation'.

There is a further difficulty which is inherent in the period itself: the absence of obvious cultural unity in the twentieth century. Although it is still possible to say, for example, that one cannot understand the religious or social or political sensibilities of the century without reference to the ways in which the whole pattern of life has changed, it is undeniable that the dominant movements are centrifugal ones. An essay like C.P. Snow's '<u>The Two Cultures</u>' however inaccurate, could not have been produced in a period other than the present. In his book <u>The Condition of Man</u> published towards the end of the Second World War, Lewis Mumford complains

> Henry Adams was right: the last thirty years have been witnessing the active disintegration of Western civilization[1].

It has become commonplace to remark on the disintegrating forces of the Western World, and Mumford is only one of hundreds of spokesmen from every occupation and station in society to observe this fact. Nearly every work of literary and dramatic criticism which tries to place creative works in their cultural context must take the word 'disintegration' as a key-concept for the understanding

---

(1) p. 391.

of modern artistic expression. Nathan A. Scott entitles his study of modern poetry Rehearsals of Discomposure; G.S. Fraser's The Modern Writer and His World confidently asserts that Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice all show themselves aware of living in a period of peculiar crisis[1]. Kafka's heroes have become, for Fraser, types of modern experience. J.R. Cohen in Poetry of This Age refers to the present period as an age of 'anxiety, of analysis, unease and catastrophe'[2]. Cleanth Brooks in The Hidden God, quotes Burton Roscoe's judgment on The Waste Land

> it gives voice to the universal despair or resignation arising from the spiritual and economic consequences of the war, the cross-purposes of modern civilization[3].

as a result, the situation has arisen in which 'disintegration' itself and its consequences, anxiety, bewilderment, fear have become recognisable, and probably definitive features of the modern sensibility.

In the year following the publication of Mumford's book, 1945, T.S. Eliot contributed an essay to a volume

---

(1) Fraser, pp. 15-17.

(2) Cohen, p. 26.

(3) Brooks, p. 69. Cf. also Stephen Spender. The Struggle of the Modern, pp. 20-23, and A.C. Ward. The Nineteen-Twenties, Ch. I, 'A Decade of Despair', pp. 1-17.

edited by the sociologist Maurice B. Reckitt, which reinforced what Mumford said from a different angle[1]. To anyone familiar with The Sacred Wood, For Lancelot Andrewes, The Idea of a Christian Society, or any of the early critical essays, Cultural Forces in the Human Order will present little that is new, but it is a clear definition of the basis upon which much of his earlier work is produced. He makes explicit his belief in the total dependence of human beings upon each other and upon society which is conceived of as an organic entity, and in lamenting the decline of the West he describes a kind of 'dissociation of sensibility' which is the inevitable by-product of the complex highly-sophisticated civilisation which has evolved in the West. He casts an eye back to a primitive society in which the several strands of cultural activity were 'inextricably woven' together in a single purposeful action

> The Dyak who spends the better part of a season shaping, carving, and painting his barque of the peculiar design required for the annual ritual of head-hunting, is exercising several cultural activities at once - artistic, religious, and military[2].

---

(1) The essay was subsequently revised, without substantial alteration, and reprinted three years later as the first chapter of Notes Towards a Definition of Culture.

(2) Prospect for Christendom, p. 59.

Eliot's main concern is with the separation of the religious and artistic sensibilities, and in his own work, taken as a whole can be regarded as an attempt to unite these two modes of man's experience. He speaks, primarily, of the dissociation of sensibility within the individual, but he makes it clear that this is connected with the disintegration of society as a whole and the increasing isolation of the individual in the group.

What he does not go on to argue, is that this, in turn, gives rise to dissociation within the artistic, religious, political sensibilities themselves. This is what makes the task at hand peculiarly difficult. The religious sensibility of Western Europe can be said to have evinced no unity since the later Middle Ages and the breaking up of the Catholic community. Moreover, the divisions between the various interpretations of the Christian gospel have given every appearance of becoming harder and faster as the centuries since the sixteenth have passed, so that it could be argued that these differences between the Churches of the West preclude any realistic discussion about the religious sensibility of the twentieth century at all. This argument does contain an element of truth, but in the last resort, fails to convince. Although it is too early to judge the

meaning of the so-called Ecumenical Movement of the Christian churches, it could be said, with justification, that the efforts at re-integrating the separate ecclesiastical communities is the outcome, in the face of many external pressures, of the discovery that there is a unified religious sensibility. Pragmatically, moreover, the fact remains that the Christian of the nineteen-thirties or nineteen-forties, whatever his ecclesiastical tradition, differs profoundly in his view of the world, from his Victorian grandparent. Certain theological movements, contain prominent scholars, and, more important, certain pressures from the secular world, have forced a change in the structures of thought and feeling which go to create the religious sensibility of this century.

This conviction underlies the statement made by Eliot in 1939 when he outlined his political theories in The Idea of a Christian Society

> The attitudes and beliefs of Liberalism are destined to disappear, are already disappearing. They belong to an age of free exploitation which has passed.....[1]

And it lies behind the whole of Norman Nicholson's argument about the nature of modern poetry and art in his book Man and Literature

---

(1) p. 18.

> As against these two pagan or romantic doctrines, I see the classical and Christian conception of Man re-emerging in literature .... It seems to me very significant, therefore, that such important writers as Eliot and Joyce, and so many of the younger men, should be reasserting a view of Man which is in strong contradiction to that held by those who have been a dominant influence in the literature of the earlier years of this century[1].

Both Eliot and Nicholson characterise the modern sensibility as anti-romantic and anti-liberal, and, although Eliot surveys the whole cultural scene, both men write out of the consciousness of persons whose primary concern is literature. Whatever the validity of their view in the literary and cultural sphere, it is beyond doubt that in the theological world a revolution, or rather reaction, very like the one they describe was taking place in the second and third decades of this century. By 1930 theological liberalism was virtually dead.

A.R. Vidler, an authority on the Liberal Movement, explains the failure of nineteenth century liberal attitudes and the consequent reaction to them, in his by no means unsympathetic, book, The Church in an Age of Revolution. The ironities of international hatred and the horrors and sufferings of gigantic wars had much to

---

(1) p. 5.

do with the breakdown of liberal theology and the formation of the new sensibility.

> In the first place, there was the catastrophe of the First World War, which dealt a deadly blow to the idea of inevitable progress through intellectual enlightenment and moral endeavour .... Had the Church no message from beyond the reach of human reason, no revelation from on high which it must witness to and interpret, no goal to proclaim other than the refinements of bourgeois society? The Liberal Theology in its various forms, which, as we have seen, had been more and more in the ascendant, seemed to have little to say to the agonizing questions that the breakdown of civilization drove home[1].

In the face of the welter of meaningless suffering and tragically foolish destruction men abandoned belief that the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth could be achieved by the living of the decent moral life. In the somewhat harsh words of H. Richard Niebuhr, a God without wrath, bringing

> man without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross[2]

could hardly avail men for whom suffering and madness had become keynotes of contemporary existence.

In literature, the dimension of hell, which was largely omitted from the universe of the Georgians, was

---

(1) Pelican History of the Church, Vol. V, p. 212.

(2) Quoted by Vidler, p. 213.

being restored by the vision of Eliot. In theology it would not be an exaggeration to say that the knell of Liberal theology was sounded first decisively by the Swiss theologian Karl Barth whose first book Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans appearing one year after the publication of Eliot's first volume of poems, 'fell like a bomb on the playground of the theologians'[1]. The importance of Barth's thought for the whole of the Christian world in the West can hardly be over-emphasised. It cannot be said that he has caused any single Communion to change their doctrines but he has caused each one to reconsider their beliefs and frequently to re-interpret the existing structures in terms of the new insight which he had produced. Vidler remarks:

> On all hands he has been recognised as the greatest theologian of his time, and it is striking that many Roman Catholics have regarded him as such and have sought to engage with his thought[2].

In his own survey of the religious thought of the twentieth century J. Macquarrie speaks of the habit of dating the 'revolution in theology' from the publication of Barth's commentary, and says, in words similar to

(1) Vidler, p. 217.
(2) Ibid., pp. 216-217.

Vidler's

> By far the most outstanding of the theologians we have to consider, and probably the most famous Protestant theologian of the twentieth century so far, is Karl Barth (1886-).[1]

It is important to see that his influence extends far beyond his own disciples and the Calvinist churches with which his own Swiss community was connected. The Roman Catholic historian, K.S. Latourelte, in the fourth volume of his series Christianity in a Revolutionary Age, endorses the opinions of Vidler and Macquarrie and indicates the extensiveness of the treatment of Barth's work by Roman Catholic theologians

> The most widely recognised Swiss theologian of the post-1914 decades was Karl Barth (1886-). It is no exaggeration to say that Barth was the most influential Protestant theologian after Schleiermacher. He was generally esteemed as the outstanding figure in what was variously called the theology of crisis, dialectic theology, or neo-orthodoxy[2].

Since 1918 Barth has expended a great deal of effort in constructing, like Thomas Aquinas, a theology which is systematic and entirely self-consistent. Granted his presuppositions his conclusions are irrefutable, and these presuppositions grow out of the conviction which underlie his very first publications: the failure of Liberal Theology to provide any significant answer to

(1) Twentieth Century Religious Thought, p. 321.
(2) p. 358.

the problems of a disintegrating culture. In consequence there is an insistence upon the frailty and helplessness of man, on the absolute sovereignty of God, on the necessity for redemption solely by grace, and on the futility of any human effort. His intense antipathy to his own early liberal training can best be observed in the way he constantly returns to the nation of the destruction of the image of God in man, and the seriousness of Original Sin[1]. In a sense the whole of neo-orthodox theology can be seen in terms of the re-discovery, and frequently extreme interpretations, of the doctrine of Original Sin.

It would be a mistake to create a picture of Barth as a solitary prophet, wielding unaided, all the power required to alter the religious sensibility of the Christian world. Many of his contemporaries were beginning to grasp similar ideas, and his admirers were responsible for disseminating his extreme pronouncements, in a modulated form, throughout Europe. It is always difficult, in the theological disciplines, to apportion debt and influence because so much theology is the re-statement and re-communication of doctrines which have

(1) Cf. Dogmatics in Outline, pp. 114-120.

been lost, and Barth would be the first to admit that he was merely recovering the meaning of an ancient truth which had been obscured for centuries. Nonetheless, whether directly or indirectly, he provided much of the driving force behind that pattern of religious thought known as the 'theology of crisis', and it is only in a climate created by the shattering events of the First World War and the insights of 'crisis' theologians that men so completely different from Barth as the German Roman Catholic Romano Guardini and the Franco-Russian Nicolas Berdyaev could produce books like The End of the Modern World, and The Destiny of Man[1]; books which annihilate the optimistic attitudes of earlier decades, emphasise the radical instability of human life, and the 'critical' nature of every decision and action.

It is important also, to see that this 'theology of crisis' does not spring to life fully armed in the second and third decades of this century, and that behind the labours of theologians like Barth, Tillich, Guardini and Berdyaev there are those of the nineteenth century Kierkegaard whom Vidler describes as one born before his due time[2]. There is no need to rehearse the

(1) Published in 1957 and 1937 respectively.
(2) The Church in an Age of Revolution, p. 201.

main aspects of his thought again, it is sufficient to say that it was he, who in a liberal and progressive age, emphasised the belief that guilt and sin, despair and death were the fundamental and inescapable facts of man's existence; that good work and reasonable behaviour could never lead to salvation; that there was an infinite qualitative difference between man and God - a gap bridged only in the person of the God/man Jesus Christ, and that the achieving of salvation for the individual depended upon his irrational 'leap of faith' - the abandonment of the whole personality on God. Kierkegaard was a Lutheran and Barth a Calvinist; consequently the differences between them are many, and sometimes radical, but they are at one in their conviction of the helplessness of man and the 'critical' nature of his existence. Kierkegaard has often been considered not only as the source of the 'theology of crisis' but as the progenitor of 'existentialism'. This latter relation must not be pressed too far, but the connection between Kierkegaard's attitudes and modern secular existentialist thought is indisputable; and significant, for it emphasises the fact that the new religious sensibility which was being forged in the 'twenties and 'thirties was not divorced from the secular developments of the modern world. It

was Kierkegaard's work which brought the word 'crisis' into prominence, and it is this word which has become the clue to the understanding of most of the cultural structures of this epoch[1]. Religious thought and attitudes become then an important part of the changing pattern of sensibility in the first few decades of the century.

Eliot's place in this cultural pattern is not difficult to define, although in some aspects it is ambiguous. He embodies in his person and his work the connection between the specifically religious sensibility and that of the total culture of which it is a part. Although not as brash and outspoken as T.E. Hulme, he portrays no less strongly the growing disillusionment with belief in the nobility of man, the value of his institutions, and his progress towards happiness and perfection. On the contrary, for Eliot the reverse procedure seemed to be taking place. Romano Guardini, in the course of a discussion on the place of twentieth century man in society comments on the dehumanisation of the individual.

---

(1) Cf. David Thomson, Europe since Napoleom, p. 868 ff.

> With the loss of personality comes the steady fading away of that sense of uniqueness with which man had once viewed his own existence .... It is taken increasingly for granted that man ought to be treated as an object[1].

Guardini's lecture was delivered in 1950 and he is doing little more than re-emphasise what has become a truism. Yet as early as 1917 Eliot had produced a volume containing poems like Preludes and Rhapsody on a Windy Night which conveyed this loss of uniqueness and the sense of degradation which inevitably followed. Auden is far less sensitive to this feature of contemporary existence than Eliot. The anxiety which characterises the lives of his human beings makes them intensely and feverishly aware of their separate existences, so that apart from the amusing flourish of The Unknown Citizen[2] and a speech by the Narrator from A Christmas Oratorio in which he formally acknowledges dehumanisation as the result of Original Sin[3], the theme goes virtually untouched. In Poems 1920, and Sweeney Agonistes and Murder in the Cathedral, as I have already tried to show, Eliot furthers his vision of the dehumanisation of

---

(1) The End of the Modern World, p. 79.

(2) Another Time, pp. 96-97.

(3) For the Time Being, p. 124.

Remembering the stable where for once in our lives
Everything became a You and nothing was an It.

humanity by the introduction of the themes of violence and the use of animal imagery. In so doing he forges another link between himself and the neo-orthodox theologians for whom the destruction of the image of God in man entailed, not merely the loss of supernatural virtue but the lapse from the natural state to the unnatural.

Strangely enough, it is in his pre-Christian poems that Eliot shows himself most alive to the religious sensibility of his own age. It is in the early volumes that his delineation of the condition of man has most in common with neo-orthodox theologies. Vidler, in one of his most perceptive comments on Barth's thought said

> Men would never come to hear the authentic Word of the true God till they had acknowledged their own plight; till they had discovered that all their last questions were unanswerable questions, and that all the alleys they went down in their enlightenment, including the alley of religion, proved to be blind alleys. It was only the blind, and those who knew themselves to be blind, who could receive their sight[1].

The extraordinary feature of this summary is its applicability to the early work of Eliot. Allowing for a few modifications, it could easily operate as a free commentary on a poem like <u>The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock</u>. Vidler's remarks help to point up the

---

(1) <u>The Church in an Age of Revolution</u>, p. 215.

similarity of the ways in which the two men faced the human situation at the beginning of the century. They both had the same vision of a disintegrating world order and shared the same disillusionment with human endeavour. They both despaired of man's blindness and deafness, the futility of his searchings, and the fatuousness of his social activities. But, as has already been pointed out, the similarity is a negative one only, for having demolished the optimism of an earlier generation, they proceeded to construct schemes of salvation which differed greatly, and, interestingly enough, both, to a certain extent, began to separate themselves from a sensibility which they had helped to form. Underlying nearly all the critical evaluations of Eliot's work is the assumption that he is the great Christian poet of the age. It has been my intention to show, however great he may be as a poet, his Christian vision is seriously incomplete and that his relation to the specifically religious sensibility of the century is not nearly as dull as has been imagined. Coincidentally, it was at about the same time that Auden began to direct his energies to the serious writing of poetry, that Eliot started to lose that 'closeness to his age' for which

he had been famous[1].

Auden somehow picked up where Eliot had left off, just as many lesser theologians picked up where Barth left off. In a real sense these men inherited situations which their two masters had created. And old enough to be accounted as belonging to the same generation and to have had first-hand knowledge of the revolutions of the Imagists and dialectical theologians, they were not old enough to have played active parts in these movements. The romanticism and liberalism of the previous century had, to a large extent, been swept away before the men of the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-forties came to maturity. Their task seemed at first an obvious one; they were free to reconstruct in all spheres of cultural activity. For this reason many became communists convincing themselves of the reality of a new world-order. Auden, however, never joined the Communist Party and with his crypto-religious attitudes could never bring himself to believe in this new society: his insistence upon the weakness and imperfectibility of man in all his early work demonstrates his feelings. But those who espoused the efforts at reconstruction

---

(1) Cf. F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, p. 67.

found themselves in an ambiguous position, for the world was so obviously one in which the forces of disintegration, instability, suffering, and bewilderment could hardly be stemmed, and could only be ignored with peculiar obstinacy. Auden did not suffer from this kind of blindness, and his proximity to the sensibility of his age is as marked in religious matters as it is in social, political, and economic affairs.

In discussing the religious ideas of Eliot and Auden, I have tended to centre the argument on the way in which each has presented the doctrines of Original Sin, the Incarnation and the Atonement. This has been both deliberate and inevitable in that Christianity, which is a religion revolving around man's estrangement from God and his reconciliation to Him in the person of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ, has these specific doctrines at its core. Differences in religious sensibility are thus nearly always governed by the ways in which these doctrines are interpreted and emphasised. The sensibility of our own age has been defined by the reaction to the optimistic anthropocentrism of theological liberalism and the consequent heavy stress upon the doctrine of Original Sin. Both Eliot and Auden have deeply aware of this, but it is Auden who has more consistently embodied the existentialism

of the modern climate. Eliot's belief about the nature of man, complex as it is, and identical in many respects with classical Christian formulations, has been bound up with the metaphysical problems of Time and Reality, which, though fundamental to the construction of a Christian philosophy, are nonetheless peripheral to the theological pre-occupations of this century. Kierkegaard, more than a century ago, had begun to dismiss, in the strongest possible terms, attempts at philosophical synthesis in Christianity, and to insist upon the importance of the 'existential' attitude: the immediate spiritual and emotional response of each individual to the conditions in which he found himself. He was followed in this by the numerous philosophers who refused to construct or embrace any kind of metaphysical system, and by the neo-orthodox theologians for whom Natural Theology (as opposed to the Or Arbitrary Revelation of the Divine Word) was anathema. Auden is not a Barthian, nor ultimately a disciple of Kierkegaard, but he has imbibed the attitudes which have percolated into Western European philosophical and religious traditions, and in his poetry has concentrated, far more than Eliot, upon the immediate psychological and spiritual problems of the individual: his guilt and

frustration, his bewilderment, conflict and tension. At the risk of over-simplifying, it would be possible to say that for Eliot the resolution of the problems occurs when the philosophical pattern is perceived, whereas for Auden, resolution is an immediate experience which creates its own pattern.

The differences between the two poets become clearer when the issues of the Incarnation and the Atonement are approached, and here we find that Eliot's failure to incorporate the doctrine of the Atonement into the vision from which his finest poetry springs is intimately connected with his divergence in the nineteen-thirties from the peculiar structures of thought and feeling which characterise the first half of this century. In 1949 the Bishop of Oxford K.E. Kirk in a lecture entitled <u>The Coherence of Christian Doctrine</u> chose to discuss the whole structure of Christian theology in terms of the Incarnation and the Atonement and remarked

> What is incontestable is that by the end of the nineteenth century attention was focussed upon the Incarnation, and the Atonement had slipped into relative oblivion[1].

---

(1) The Charles Gore Memorial Foundation Lecture. 1949. p. 8.

With their profound interest in the person of Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure; a teacher and a leader, the nineteenth century liberals had given little energy to considering the nature of his suffering and death. Sacrifice seemed to be irrelevant in the lives of men who could achieve beatitude by following the example of a holy Master. The theologians of the following generation, with their disillusionment about man's goodness, their renewed emphasis on Original Sin and the corruption of the world, inevitably placed the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus Christ at the centre of the Christian's vision of salvation. And J.K. Mozley in his survey of modern British theology quotes the Bishop of Derby announcing in 1937 in a charge to the clergy of his diocese that he was

> 'profoundly encouraged by the manifold signs which are all about us, in the world of modern theology of a fresh, constructive and positive grasp of the essential Gospel of Christianity, and of a renewed apprehension and understanding of the ancient doctrines of Sin, and of Atonement, and of Redemption'[1].

---

(1) Some Tendencies in British Theology, p. 60.

It is significant that Eliot, with all the profound insights into the meaning of corruption in the two early volumes of poems, should turn away from the Death of Christ and place the Incarnation at the centre of his specifically religious poems. Once again it is possible to see the ways in which his presentation of the Christian faith is shaped by the particular philosophical problems with which he was pre-occupied. Christ is seen as the eruption of the Eternal in Time, the Saviour of men bound to a time sequence which has no meaning. Incarnation is that which gives meaning to the sequence and reality to the lives involved in it. It is almost inevitable that we should be reminded again of the words of Niebuhr who, endeavouring to express the typically religious sensibility of the age, maintains that the basic issue with which the Christian is confronted is not

> the finiteness of man but his sin; not his involvement in the flux of nature but his abortive attempts to escape that flux. The issue of Biblical religion is not primarily the problem of how finite man can know God, but how sinful man is to be reconciled to God.

Auden's religion could never be called 'Biblical' in the sense in which Niebuhr would use the word, any more than it is Kierkegaardian or Barthian, but he displays that concern with what Niebuhr calls 'basic issues' in

nearly every serious poem he writes. In the early poems the religious dimension is implicit but in the later work, as in the poems which constitute _Horae Canonicae_, the complete picture of his own beliefs emerges. The cycle does not bear comparison with Eliot's _Four Quartets_ in range of imaginative power or depth of perception or feeling. Auden's poems are clearly inferior to Eliot's. And yet there is a satisfactory apprehension of the Christian faith which Eliot's work lacks. In _Horae Canonicae_ Auden shows his ability to embody the religious Zeitgeist of the twentieth century and to transcend the limitations of his time. The Atonement is at the centre of his vision of the world, for the Crucifixion is the pivotal point of the poems. Here the specifically sacrificial nature of Christ's life and work is related to the frustrations and guilt of men in every hour and activity of their lives. This is the 'courageous existentialism' that the modern religious spirit demands. Auden's Christian apprehension is wider than Eliot's at this point, but it is wider too than the demands made by Kierkegaard and neo-orthodoxy, for Auden, like Eliot, is part of a tradition which, at it s best, refuses to accept the ultimate separation of philosophy and faith, the

'infinite qualitative difference between God and man,' and stresses consistently, in its worship, the importance of the Incarnation. It is true, in his poetry, that the doctrine of the Atonement is the cardinal feature of his Christianity, for his direct treatment of the Incarnation is, as in A Christmas Oratorio, is only partially successful. Yet, as I have tried to show, when dealt with obliquely, as the indispensable substructure to the work of reconciliation, the meaning of the Incarnation is really understood and imaginatively conveyed.

The American critic Amos Wilder remarks, in his discussion of what he regards as prominent features of modern culture

> The flight from disintegration and rootlessness, finally takes a third form in a return to tradition. Here we have a return to absolutes that are defined by history. Thus we have the neo-orthodoxies of various schools. Among these, neo-humanism has the greatest difficulty in lifting its voice ..... It starts with the handicap of little knowledge from the inside of the forces of today, and it lacks an adequate philosophy. Either it represents only an aesthetic eclecticism or, if it appeals to the philosophia perennis, it too evidently stops short of the authoritative appeal of either Aquinas or Calvin[1].

---

(1) Modern Poetry and the Christian Spirit, p. 66.

Auden occupies a peculiar position in this cultural scene. He has undoubtedly returned to tradition. An Anglo-Catholic, like Eliot, he is deeply aware of his incorporation into the divine community, and is willing, as Spender has remarked[1], to submit himself as an individual to its authoritative judgment. At the same time he manages to convey the attitude of the humanist and the dialectical theologian. Because of the increasingly impersonal tone of his poems and his ability to assume any 'poetic' mask he chooses he often appears chameleon-like in his adaptability. But at his best, he manages to unite in a single imaginative structure a Christian vision which combines the appeal to both Aquinas and Calvin (in their neo-orthodox mode) which is deeply humanistic and distinctly personal.

---

(1) World Within World, p. 299.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In the text books are referred to by their titles. Details of date and place of publication can be found in the Bibliography.

SECTION A — T. S. ELIOT'S WORKS

Poetry:

Collected Poems. 1909-1935. London. 1954. (Fifteenth Impression)

Four Quartets. London. 1955 (Tenth Impression)

The Cultivation of Christmas Trees. London, 1954.

Drama:

The Rock. A Pageant Play written for performance at Sadler's Wells Theatre. 28th May-9th June 1934, on behalf of the Forty-five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London. London 1934.

Collected Plays. London. 1962.

Criticism and General:

The Sacred Wood. London, 1928 (Second Edition)

For Lancelot Andrewes. London, 1928.

Selected Essays. 1917-1932. London, 1951. (Third enlarged edition)

The Idea of a Christian Society. London, 1939.

'Cultural Forces in the Human Order'. Prospect for Christendom. Essays in Catholic Reconstruction. Edited by Maurice B. Reckitt. London, 1945.

Notes Towards the Definition of Culture. London 1948.

Poetry and Drama. The Theodore Spencer Memorial Lecture. (Harvard University) London 1951.

The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. London, 1955.

On Poetry and Poets. London, 1957.

Introduction to _Ezra Pound. Selected Poems_. (Faber edition) London, 1959.

Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley. London, 1964.

To Criticize the Critic. London, 1965.

SECTION B: **W. H. AUDEN'S WORKS**

Poetry:

Poems. London. 1933. (Second edition).

Look Stranger! London. 1936.

Another Time. London, 1940.

The Double Man. New York. 1941.

New Year Letter. London. 1965. (Second Impression).

For the Time Being. London. 1958. (Third Impression).

The Age of Anxiety. London. 1949. (Second Impression).

Collected Shorter Poems. 1930-1944. London, 1962 (Fifth Impression)

Nones. London. 1952.

The Shield of Achilles. London. 1955.

Homage to Clio. London. 1960.

About the House. London 1966.

A Selection. Edited by R. Hoggart. (Hutchinson Educational Series). London. 1961.

Drama:

The Orators. London. 1932.

The Dance of Death. London. 1933.

The Dog Beneath the Skin or _Where is Francis_ (with Christopher Isherwood) London. 1935.

The Ascent of F6. (with Christopher Isherwood) London. 1937. (Second edition)

On the Frontier. (with Christopher Isherwood) London. 1939.

Travel:

Letters from Iceland (with Louis MacNeice) London. 1937.

Journey to a War. (with Christopher Isherwood) London. 1939.

Criticism and General:

'Living Philosophies : Morality in an Age of Change'. _The Nation_. Vol. CXLVII, No. 26 (24 December, 1938), pp. 688-91.

Essay in _I Believe_. London. 1940. (Expansion of essay in _The Nation_ listed above).

'Tract for the times'. Review of *Christianity and Power Politics* by Reinhold Niebuhr in *The Nation*. Vol. CLII, No. 1 (4 January, 1941), pp. 24-25.

'The Means of Grace'. Review of *The Nature and Destiny of Man* by Reinhold Niebuhr in *The New Republic*. Vol. CIV, No. 1383 (2 June 1941), pp. 765-66.

'A Preface to Kierkegaard'. Review of the translation of *Either/Or* in *The New Republic*. Vol. CX No. 1537 (15 May, 1944), pp. 683-86.

The Enchafed Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea. London. 1951.

Poets of the English Language. An anthology with introductory notes by W.H. Auden and N.H. Pearson. London, 1952.

Kierkegaard. The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard. Edited and introduced by W.H. Auden. London. 1955.

Essay in *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*. Edited by James A. Pike. London. 1956.

Introduction to *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*. (Translated by Rae Dalven). London. 1961.

The Dyer's Hand, and other essays. London, 1963.

SECTION C. SELECTED CRITICISM AND REMINISCENCE.

Bayley, J. The Romantic Survival. London. 1957.

Beach, J. Warren, The Making of the Auden Canon. Minneapolis. 1957.

Benziger, J. Images of Eternity. Studies in the poetry of religious vision from Wordsworth to T.S. Eliot. Carbondale. 1962.

Blackmur, R. P. The Double Agent. New York. 1935. Language as Gesture. London. 1954.

Bloomfield, B. C. W. H. Auden. A Bibliography. Charlottesville. 1964.

Brooke, N. 'The Confidential Clerk: A Theatrical Review.'

Durham University Journal. Vol. XLVI. No. 2 (March 1954).

Brooks, C. Modern Poetry and the Tradition. London. 1948. The Hidden God. New Haven. 1963.

Braybrooke, N. (ed.) A Symposium for T.S. Eliot's Seventieth Birthday. London. 1958.

Caudwell, C. Illusion and Reality. A study of the sources of Poetry. London. 1946.

Cohen, J. M. Poetry of this Age 1908-1958. London. 1960.

Deutsch, B. Poetry in Our Time (Second edition). New York. 1956.

Donoghue, D. The Third Voice. Modern British and American Verse Drama. Princeton. 1959.

Everett, B. Auden. (Writers and Critics Series). London, 1964.

Fairchild, H. N. — *Religious Trends in English Poetry*. Vol. V 1880-1920. New York/London. 1962.

Forster, E. M. — *Abinger Harvest* (Pocket edition). London. 1953.

Fraser, G. S. — *The Modern Writer and his World*. London. 1953.
Vision and Rhetoric. London. 1959.

Frye, N. — *T. S. Eliot*. (Writers and Critics Series). London. 1963.

Gallup, D. — *T. S. Eliot. A Bibliography*. London. 1952.

Gardner, H. — *The Art of T. S. Eliot*. London. 1949.

George, A. G. — *T. S. Eliot. His Mind and Art*. London. 1962.

Harding, D. W. — 'Progression of Theme in Eliot's Modern Plays'. *Kenyon Review*. Vol. XVIII. No. 3 (Summer 1956).

Henn, T. R. — *The Harvest of Tragedy*. London. 1956.

Hoggart, R. — *Auden. An Introductory Essay*. (Second impression) London. 1961.

Howarth, H. — *Notes on Some Figures behind T. S. Eliot*. London. 1965.

Isherwood, C. — *Lions and Shadows*. (Four Square paperback edition). 1963.

Johnstone, J. K. — *The Bloomsbury Group*. London. 1954.

Jones, D. E. — *The Plays of T. S. Eliot*. London. 1960.

Jones, G. — Approach to the Purpose. A Study of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot. London. 1964.

Kenner, H. — The Invisible Poet. T. S. Eliot. London, 1960.

Kermode, F. — Romantic Image. London. 1957.

Knight, G. Wilson, — 'T. S. Eliot. Some Literary Impressions'. Sewanee Review. Vol. LXXIV. No. 1. Winter 1966. (Special Issue).

Larkin, P. — 'What's Become of Wystan'. The Spectator. July 15, 1960.

Leavis, F. R. — New Bearings in English Poetry. Peregrine Books. 1963.

Lehmann, J. — The Whispering Gallery. Vol. I of autobiography. London. 1955. I am my Brother. Vol. II. of autobiography. London. 1960.

Lewis, C. Day, — The Buried Day. London. 1960.

March, R and Tambimuttu (ed.) — T. S. Eliot. A Symposium. London. 1948.

Matthiessen, F. O. — The Achievement of T. S. Eliot. (Second enlarged edition) London, 1947. American Renaissance. London. 1941.

Maxwell, D. E. S. — The Poetry of T. S. Eliot. (Routledge p'back) London 1960.

Melchiori, G. — The Tightrope Walkers. London. 1956.

Nicholson, N. — Man and Literature. London. 1943.

Orwell, G. — Collected Essays. London. 1961.

Peter, J. 'Murder in the Cathedral'. *Sewanee Review*. Vol. LXI. No. 3. Summer 1953. 'Sin and Soda'. A review of *The Cocktail Party*. *Scrutiny*. Vol. XVII. No. 1. Spring 1950.

Press, J. *The Fire and the Fountain*. An essay in poetry. London. 1955. *The Chequer'd Shade*. Reflections on obscurity in poetry. Oxford paperback. 1963.

Preston, R. *Four Quartets Rehearsed*. London. 1946.

Rajan, B. *T. S. Eliot*. A Study of his writings by various hands. London. 1947.

Reschmann, H. Review of 'The Disenchanted Island'. *English*. Vol. XV. No. 86. Summer 1964.

Robbins, R. H. *The T. S. Eliot Myth*. New York. 1951.

Rodway, A. E. 'Logicless Grammar in Audenland.' *London Magazine*. March, 1965. 'An Altered Auden.' (with F. W. Cook). Review of *The Making of the Auden Canon*. *Essays in Criticism*. Vol. VIII. No. 3. July 1958.

Ross, M. M. *Poetry and Dogma*. New Brunswick. 1954.

Savage, D. S. *The Personal Principle*. London. 1944.

Scarfe, F. *Auden and After*. The Liberation of Poetry 1930-1941. London. 1942.

Schlauch, M. *Modern English and American Poetry*. London. 1956.

Scott, N. A. *Rehearsals of Discomposure*. London. 1952.

Smidt, K. — *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*. Skrifter utgitt av det norske videnskaps-akademi. i Oslo. (II. H st-Filos. Klasse. 1949. No. 1). Oslo 1949.

Smith, C. H. — *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice*. London, 1963.

Smith, Grover — *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*: a study in sources and meanings. Chicago. 1956.

Spears, Monroe K. — *The Disenchanted Island*. The Poetry of W. H. Auden. New York. 1963.

Spears. (ed.) — *Auden*. A Collection of Critical Essays. (Twentieth century view series). Englewood Cliffs. 1964.

Spender, S. — *The Struggle of the Modern*. London, 1963.
World Within World. London. 1951.

Unger, L. (ed.) — *T. S. Eliot*. *A Selected Critique*. New York. 1948.

Ward, A. C. — *The Nineteen-Twenties*. Literature and Ideas in the Post-war Decade. London. 1930.

Wain, J. — 'The Meaning of Yeats.' *The Observer*. June 13. 1965.

Wilder, A. — *Modern Poetry and the Christian Spirit*. New York. 1952.

Wilson, E. — *Axel's Castle*. A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930. Fontana Library. 1961.

Williams, R. — 'Tragic Resignation and Sacrifice.' *Critical Quarterly*. Vol. V. No. 1. Spring 1963.

Wright, G. T. W. — *The Poet in the Poem*. London. 1960.

SECTION D. **OTHER WORKS. CONSULTED.**

Andrewes, Lancelot — 'Sermons of The Nativity and Repentance and Fasting'. Ninety-Six Sermons. Vol. I. Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology.

Aquinas, Thomas, — Summa Contra Gentiles. Vol. III. Translated by the English Dominican Fathers. London. 1928.

Arnold, Matthew, — Literature and Dogma. London. 1876. Discourses in America (Second edition) London 1912.

Athanasius — The Incarnation of the Word of God. Translated by a Religious of C.S.M.V. London. 1944.

Augustine — City of God. Abridged and translated by J. W. C. Wamd. London. 1963. Confessions. Translated by Sir Tobie Matthew. Revised by Roger Hudleston. (Fontana Books) 1963.

Barth, K. — Epistle to the Romans. Translated from the sixth edition by E. C. Hoskyns. 1933. Dogmatics in Outline. Translated by G. T. Thomson (Fifth impression). London. 1958.

Berdyaev, N. — The Destiny of Man. Translated by N. Duddington. London. 1937.

Boas, G. — The Heaven of Invention. Baltimore. 1962.

Bradley, A. C. — Oxford Lectures on Poetry (Reprint of Second edition). London. 1926.

Bradley, F. H. — Appearance and Reality. (Ninth impression. Authorized and corrected). Oxford. 1930.

Bultmann, R. — Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting (Fontana edition). London. 1960.

Bunyan, J. — Grace Abounding and The Pilgrim's Progress. Edited by John Brown. Cambridge. 1907.

Dante, Alighieri, — The Divine Comedy. Translated by Dorothy L. Sayers (and Barbara Reynolds). In three volumes (Penguin Books. 1949-1962).

Darwin, C. — The Origin of the Species (Everyman edition). London. 1956.

Demant, V. A. (ed.) — Faith that Illuminates. London. 1935.

Dix, G. — The Shape of the Liturgy. (Reprint of Second edition). London. 1962.

Emerson, R. W. — Essays. 1st. Series. (Revised copyright edition). Boston. 1885. Representative Selections. With Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes by F. I. Carpenter. New York. 1934.

Forster, E. M. — Howard's End. London. 1910.

Frazer, J. — The Golden Bough. A study in magic and religion. (Abridged edition). London. 1922.

Gates, J. A. — The Life and Thought of Kierkegaard for Everyman. London. 1961.

Gilson, E. — The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages. London. 1955.

Grisewood, H. (ed.) — Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians. London. 1949.

Guardini, R. — The End of the Modern World. Translated by J. Theman and H. Burke. London. 1957.

Hadfield, A. M. — *An Introduction to Charles Williams*. London. 1959.

Heath-Stubbs, J. — *Charles Williams*. (Writers and their Work Series. No. 63) London. 1955.

Hulme, T. E. — *Speculations*. Edited by Herbert Read. (Routledge Paperback). London. 1960.

John of the Cross — *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, In three volumes. Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers (Revised edition). London 1953.

Jones, D. M. — *Epoch and Artist*. Selected writings edited by Harman Grisewood. London. 1959.

Julian of Norwich — *Revelation of Divine Love*. Edited from MSS. and with an introduction by R. Hudleston. (Second edition). (Orchard Books). 1952.

Kelly, J. N. D. — *Early Christian Doctrines*. London. 1958.

Kierkegaard, S. — *Journals* 1834-1854. Edited by Alexander Dru. (Fontana edition). 1960.
Either/Or. Vol. II. Translated by W. Lowrie. London. 1944.
Fear and Trembling. Translated by Robert Payne. London. 1939.
Sickness unto Death. Translated by W. Lowrie. New York. 1944.

Kirk, K. E. — *The Coherence of Christian Doctrine*. Charles Gore Memorial Foundation Lecture 1949. London. 1950.

Latourette, K. S. — *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*. Vol. II. The Nineteenth Century in Europe. London. 1960.
Christianity in a Revolutionary Age. Vol. IV. The Twentieth Century in Europe. London. 1962.

Lawrence, D. H. — *Selected Literary Criticism*. Edited by Anthony Beal. London. 1955.

Lowrie, W. — *Kierkegaard*. A Biography. London. 1938.

Miller, P. — *The American Transcendentalists*. Their prose and poetry. New York. 1957.

Moore, E.C. — *Christian Thought Since Kant*. London. 1912.

Mozley, J. K. — *Some Tendencies in British Theology*. London. 1951.

Mumford, L. — *The Condition of Man*. London. 1944.

Macquarrie, J. — *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*. London. 1963.

Niebuhr, R. — *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Two volumes. London. 1941.

Oesterley, W. O. E. & Robinson, T. H. — *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*. London. 1934.

Peers, E. Allison, — *St. John of the Cross*. And other lectures and addresses. 1920-1945. London. 1946.

Routh, H. V. — *Towards the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge. 1937.

Schweitzer, A. — *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*. Translated and with an introduction by W. Lowrie. London. 1925.

Spengler, O. — *The Decline of the West*. Authorized translation with notes by Charles Francis Parkinson. One volume. London. 1959. (Sixth impression).

Shakespeare, W. — *The Complete Works*. Oxford University Press. 1955.

Schleiermacher, F. — The Christian Faith. Translated and edited by H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart. Edinburgh. 1928.

Tennyson, Alfred, Lord — The Poetical Works. London & Melbourne. 1951.

Thomson, D. — Europe since Napoleon. London. 1957.

Toynbee, A. — A Study of History. Abridgment in two volumes by D. C. Somervell. London. 1946.

Trilling, L. — Matthew Arnold. (Third impression). London. 1955.

Unamuno, Miguel de — The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples. Translated by J. E. Crawford Flitch. London. 1921.

Vidler, A. R. — The Church in an Age of Revolution. Pelican History of the Church. Vol. V. 1961.

Weston, J. L. — From Ritual to Romance. New York. 1941.

Whitman, W. — Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters. London. 1958.

Williams, C. W. S. — The Greater Trumps. London. 1932.
Descent into Hell. London. 1937.
The Figure of Beatrice. (Fourth impression). London. 1946.
The Descent of the Dove. London. 1939.
He came down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins. London. 1950.
The Image of the City. And other essays. Edited by Anne Ridler. London. 1958.

Williams, R. — Culture and Society. 1780-1950. London, 1958.

Yeats, W. B. *Collected Poems*. (Reprint of 1955 edition). London. 1955.

Zahrnt, H. *The Historical Jesus*. Translated by J. S. Bowden. London. 1963.

The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the Church according to the use of the Church of England.

The Day Hours of the Church. London. 1950. (New edition. Revised 1950).

Doctrine in the Church of England. The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of C in 1922. London. 1962.

Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Edited by James Hastings. 13 vols. Edin. 1908-1920.

English Hymnal. London. 1906.

Holy Bible. Translation of 1611. (Auth. Version).

Greek-English. *Lexicon*. Compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott. 2 vols. Oxford. 1925.

Missale Romanum. Ex Decreto Sacrae. Concilii Tridentini. 1876.

Oxford Book of Carols. London. 1928.

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Edited by F. L. Cross. London. 1957.

Penguin Book of the Renaissance. Edited by J. H. Plumb. 1964.