T. S. Eliot: Turning Darkness into Light

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of light and dark imagery throughout T. S. Eliot's literary career; in his poetry (*Inventions of the March Hare*, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, *The Waste Land*, *Ash-Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*) and in his dramatic works (*The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*). The aim of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, it aims to show how, by an attentive analysis of light and dark imagery in Eliot's works, it is possible to discern a continuous pattern of light and dark correlation and opposition throughout his oeuvre, which can be interpreted in historical, biographical, and existential terms. Secondly, this thesis seeks to explain poetry qua poetry, with the light and dark imagery proving a remarkable path of investigation, in which to understand Eliot's poetry and its important relationship with his own literary "debts". If, on the one hand, many critics have considered the importance of light and dark imagery in Eliot's most significant poetical work after his religious conversion, *Four Quartets*, as an important turn to mysticism and religion, this has too often been perceived as a sudden change in his beliefs and in his poetics, rather than as a gradual development. The presence of light and dark images in Eliot's early poetry, as well as in his earlier masterpiece *The Waste Land*, shows how Eliot had consciously imagined a path of light throughout his oeuvre, demonstrating his own preoccupations with regard to soul, rationality, and religion from his very early years as a poet. This thesis thus wants to fill a gap in the field of Eliot studies, where the importance of light and dark imagery in Eliot's early poetry, as well as in his drama, and the connection of light and dark in *Four Quartets* with his other literary works, has been underestimated by previous scholars.

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Statement of Copyright

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Introduction

T. S. Eliot:

TURNING DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

'I get wisdom day and night
Turning darkness into light.'
Anonymous, *I and Pangur Bán my cat*[1]

'Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after
In a dim light: neither daylight
Investing form with lucid stillness
Turning shadow into transient beauty
With slow rotation suggesting permanence
Nor darkness to purify the soul
Emptying the sensual with deprivation
Cleansing affection from the temporal.'
T. S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', III, lines 1-9[2]

The inspiration for the title of this doctoral dissertation comes from an Irish poem found in a ninth-century manuscript in a monastery in Carinthia.[3] The monk in the Irish poem turns 'darkness into light' by studying manuscripts, and presumably also by copying them as an amanuensis, transforming ignorance into wisdom. Eliot, too, turns darkness into light, on two main levels: the literary and the religious. The light of the 'Pangur Bán' poem is intended by its anonymous monk as a light bringing knowledge and religious insight. This thesis, intended as a study of the light and dark imagery throughout Eliot's poetry and drama, and the use Eliot made of it at various stages of his literary career, must

[1] Robin Flower, 'Version', *Greece & Rome*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1959), p. 180.
[2] Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Complete Poems & Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), pp. 173-174. Further references to this edition are given as *CPP* after quotations in the text.
[3] Seamus Heaney, 'Pangur Bán', *Poetry*, vol. 188, no. 1 (2006), pp. 3-5 (5).

therefore include an understanding of the complex nature of his literary allusions, when it comes to Eliot's choice of light and dark atmospheres, and also of his own, biographically attested to spiritual worries and doubts. It is probably unlikely that Eliot ever came across this particular Irish poem, but the juxtaposition in the last lines of the rhyming 'day and night' with 'darkness into light', is not only pleasant to the ear, but also particularly fitting to describe the main argument of this PhD thesis. The opposition of these two couples of terms is then united by the conjunction 'and' first and the verb 'turning', thus implying a resolution, and helping picture a darkness which is also a light, and a light which is also a darkness.

0.1 From the Heart of Darkness to the Heart of Light

The idea of a monk slowly turning darkness into light by the act of copying and preserving works of literature is comparable to Eliot's use of light and dark imagery, witnessing a gradual shift in the different stages of his life and literary works. For this reason, this PhD thesis is organized chronologically, moving from Eliot's early poems in *Inventions of the March Hare* and *Prufrock and Other Observations*, up to *Four Quartets*, to demonstrate how Eliot's use of light and dark imagery does not appear suddenly in his later, post-conversion poetry and drama, but rather has been a fundamental element of his poetics, since his very early compositions. Each chapter is also named after specific degrees of darkness or light, moving thus from chapter one's 'Darkness', through chapter two's 'Dusk' and chapter three's 'Twilight', to chapter four's 'Invisible Light' and finally chapter five's 'The Heart of Light', to support the argument of Eliot's gradually changing perception of light and dark images throughout his career.

Chapter one, 'Restless nights and torpid days: Darkness', starts with the very beginnings of Eliot's poetry, the posthumously published collection *Inventions of the March Hare*, which, including poems written by Eliot from as early as 1909 up to 1920, contains a wide spectrum of light and dark imagery. In his early poetic compositions, Eliot

explored the 'dark' of humanity, and of the new modern city: here I look especially at the influence of certain nineteenth-century French writers on Eliot, with a particular emphasis on Baudelaire 'master of dark imagery', while beginning to introduce the theme of *flânerie* in Eliot's early poems. The young poet must learn how to experience the new, sordid, dark reality of the modern cities he finds also in himself; especially, he needs to find a poetic language in which to describe them. As the title of this chapter suggests, Eliot's early poetry is one of wanderings at dusk and at night, necessarily lit up by artificial sources of illumination: activity, life, and action are linked to the dark, while the day is turned into the highest image of passivity, despite its brightness. *Inventions of the March Hare* is particularly relevant to this theme as it already contains some of Eliot's light and dark images which he will develop specifically in his later poetry. The image of the shadow, as an important combination of light and dark, and in its Dantean conceptualization, appears here foreshadowing *Prufrock and Other Observations* and *The Hollow Men*. The opposition of light and dark, too, is especially apparent in these poems, especially through images of burning, or lights in the dark, showing how Eliot was already driven to spiritual self-introspection, and sentiments of expiation (such as, for instance, in 'The Burnt Dancer').

Chapter two, 'The lighting of the lamps: Dusk', follows naturally from *Inventions of the March Hare* to *Prufrock and Other Observations*, approaching Eliot's use of light and dark imagery not only according to his complex use of allusions, but also from a historical point of view. Electric lighting was one of the most important technological inventions of the early twentieth century and so this chapter analyzes the ways in which young Eliot might have been influenced by this new atmospheric change while observing the growing, electrically lit metropolis. In *Prufrock* Eliot still mentions earlier sources of light in his poetry, as a way of looking back to authors slightly preceding him and the way they faced modernity (in particular, James Thomson, John Davidson, and Arthur Symons). *Prufrock*, close to *Inventions* in style and imagery, still owes much to an atmosphere of artificially illuminated darkness, and evenings spent as a *flâneur* about town. This chapter explores the ways in which Eliot identifies his poetic self with shadows, and various light sources,

as almost an outer representation of himself. The image of the soul represented as shadow and flames finds here a deeper allusive resonance with the framework of *La Divina Commedia*. The poet also pushes his use of light and dark images further at this stage, creating more developed light images, often bringing him in direct interaction with the light sources the poet meets in his nocturnal wanderings (lamps, lanterns, streetlamps), which help him communicate his thoughts, doubts, and fears as he walks along the lit city, thus turning the artificial sources of light encountered into metaphors standing for reason and common sense. Eliot's own *flânerie* leads him to a better knowledge of himself, as well as of the city environment and the overpowering, new modernity, which this thesis argues is also represented through the images of the sunset, fog and smoke, and light through the shutters.

Chapter three, 'The violet hour: Twilight', sees a further step in Eliot's employment of light and dark images, as *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* bridge the divide between Eliot's more secular and more religious poems. The image of the twilight is particularly reminiscent of this, indicating a balanced presence of both light and darkness in the sky, taking place both in the early morning and early evening, and identifiable in Eliot's *The Waste Land* with the colour violet. Continuing from Eliot's early pattern of expiation through fire, burning, and flames, the twilight becomes for Eliot a symbol of Purgatory. Dante's second kingdom of the dead is represented as one neither of infernal ashes and dark, nor blinding brilliance like *Paradiso*, but rather one of changing lights, and sunsets. This chapter thus proposes a reading of *The Waste Land* after *Purgatorio*, by comparing the three sunsets, or evening twilights, as described by Dante with the three moments of violet light as found in Eliot's masterpiece. In *The Waste Land*, as in *Purgatorio*, the three sunsets are linked to instances of failed love, which would thus support the argument of a purgatorial world on earth. Similarly, twilight is also representative of *The Hollow Men*'s atmosphere. Alongside this new reading of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* through the image of twilight, it is necessary to consider the further development of images such as the shadow, and fire/burning, which continue the

theme of repentance and self-representation by images of light and darkness, after Arnaut Daniel's figure and St. Augustine's writings.

Chapter four, 'Fiat lux: Invisible Light', tackles four rather varied works by T. S. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday*, Choruses from *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Family Reunion*, in order to demonstrate the renewed importance of light and dark imagery in the works written immediately after his religious conversion in 1927. Firstly, the importance of the colour white in *Ash-Wednesday* is analyzed as a symbol of achieved expiation, and thus purification, together with an interpretation of the poem's 'Lady', also radiant with light, as well as dressed in white. Eliot's light imagery becomes even more mystical, and spiritual, as it reaches *The Rock*, a pageant play whose Choruses naturally revolve around the polarity of visible and invisible light. A self-aware use of light and dark as part of the dramatic narrative as well as to recreate a certain atmosphere on the stage is clearly evident from *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*, where light and dark play an important role in the two plays' subtext of repentance and expiation.

Chapter five, '*Excessus mentis*: The Heart of Light', bears in its title a reference to Eliot's image of the 'heart of light' and explores the final act of light and dark in Eliot's *Four Quartets*: darkness does not vanish from Eliot's poetic scene here, but both light and dark acquire even more apparently mystical, as well as historical, connotations. The psychological, spiritual, yet also material darkness of World War II combines with Eliot's quest for the Light of God, in order to reach the heart of light of Dante's *Paradiso* and the final mystical vision. Eliot pushes the usage of light and dark imagery in *Four Quartets* further, by using moments of mystical dark after St. John of the Cross and Dante, through ones of dawn and spiritual awakening, bringing light to darkness, and ultimately of illumination, and immobile pure light.

0.2 LIGHT AND DARK IN CONTEXT

This PhD research builds on the realization that most critics have noticed, studied, analyzed, and discussed Eliot's use of light and dark imagery in his last major poetical work, *Four Quartets*, decidedly the one work by Eliot which sees the most evident – although not necessarily the most prominent– use of light and dark in his poetry. Many of Eliot critics also make a sharp distinction between his pre- and post-conversion poetry, marking the year 1927 as a watershed year in Eliot's poetic career, as well as the beginning of his writing for the theatre. In the preface to Kenneth Asher's *T. S. Eliot and Ideology*, the writer correctly highlights the major 'obstacle' for Eliot scholars is 'the problem of connecting the periods before and after his religious conversion', how to reconcile 'the young aesthetic revolutionary and author of *The Waste Land* [...] with the later champion of Christian orthodoxy?'[4] Asher argues the existence of 'a continuous Eliot', consistently influenced by the French reactionary tradition (above all, represented by Charles Maurras). With Asher's argument of a continuous Eliot in both his political ideology and his poetic writings in mind, this thesis will argue that by studying Eliot's light and dark contrastive imagery throughout his career, it is possible to establish, if not a sense of full unity, at least one of continuity in his thought and in his poetics. Eliot had already begun by exploring his sense of loss in the new urban reality around him, and the displacement of his faith and of his personality by creating a poetry of darker atmospheres and of modern Dantean 'dark woods'. Yet these are hardly ever completely 'dark', with the artificial light sources lit about the *flâneur*'s city, representing his search for reference points in his life. After all, as Hugh Kenner pointed out, 'Modernism was the invention of people who had come to the capitals from remote places, to be struck with sudden comprehensive novelty', and he likened Modernism to the literature of Augustan Rome as a 'work of provincials', which did 'for our idea of Rome what Tom Eliot from Missouri did for our idea of a London wholly changed since the times of Dickens and Conan Doyle'.[5] Eliot's city is indeed 'a

[4] Kenneth Asher, *T. S. Eliot and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 0.
[5] Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 28-29.

strange mixture of lived and literary experience',[6] where light plays a necessary role for him at this stage towards the discovery of new experiences, and also a poetical re-connection with his own sources of inspiration.

Four Quartets' opposition of light and dark images is not reached suddenly and abruptly within Eliot's corpus of works, but rather gradually from his poetic beginnings. *Four Quartets* is often celebrated for its recurrence of paradoxically juxtaposed, 'opposed concepts', such as 'from' and 'toward', 'arrest' and movement',[7] and obviously 'dark' and 'light'. If Eliot's preference for a contrastive use of imagery as well as vocabulary reaches its full actualization in *Four Quartets*, where it is most apparent, Eliot had been preoccupied 'with bringing together apparent contraries' throughout his life,[8] and this thesis will show that this poetic preoccupation of Eliot's actually takes root as early as the 1910s, with such poems significant in this respect as 'The Burnt Dancer', or 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'. Eliot thus turned to a contrastive use of light and dark in his poetry, in order to give his inner turmoil an immediate visual representation. Donald J. Childs had already partially traced the importance of the different light sources in Eliot's early poetry in his study *From Philosophy to Poetry: T. S. Eliot's Study of Knowledge and Experience*, where he reconnects them to the poet's perception of Bradley's and Bergson's philosophy, as well as of Laforgue's poetry.[9] Childs hints at the talking street lamp's role as a symbol of modernity, practicality, and the city, against the moon, or memory.[10] This is, arguably, one of the very few instances in Eliot criticism of consideration of his nocturnal urban imagery of light and dark as something more than mere poetic atmosphere: yet Childs does not take the comparison further, to include Eliot's later poetry under this aspect, as he is interested in the philosophical signification of the natural and artificial light divide within 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' exclusively. In this case, chapter two proposes a more historical-biographical interpretation of the light imagery in this poem. 'Rhapsody' is also

[6] Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 3.
[7] Geoffrey Herman Bantock, *T. S. Eliot and Education* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 36.
[8] Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, p. 1.
[9] Donald J. Childs, *From Philosophy to Poetry: T. S. Eliot's Study of Knowledge and Experience* (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), pp. 51-54.
[10] Childs, *From Philosophy to Poetry: T. S. Eliot's Study of Knowledge and Experience*, p. 60.

not a one-off in Eliot's career, but rather is symbolical of the poet's tendency towards a light and dark dichotomy from his very early poetry. Before Childs, Piers Gray had noted the philosophical importance of the street lamp, the table lamp, and the moon in 'Rhapsody', with the light of the first two interpreted as directly addressing the poetic persona's own consciousness (and so not representing it themselves), contrasted by the image of the moon-memory.[11] Gray then attempts to turn to the *Preludes* to take the study a step further, but ultimately comes to the rather simplistic conclusion that there: '[t]he lamp is a lamp and has none of the subtle importance it achieves in the later 'Rhapsody'.[12] By contrast, what this thesis argues is that the lamps, or similar artificial sources of light, are ultimately what binds T. S. Eliot's later poetry to his earlier, making one 'continuous Eliot'. Eliot's poetic landscape never fails to have images of light and dark, starting with a constellation of lamps of various sorts in his early poetry, culminating with the mystical 'white light' of *Four Quartets*.

Another important scholarly work in this regard is Ronald Schuchard's *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*. Schuchard recognizes the importance of Eliot's reading of the British poets of the 1890s before Dante and Baudelaire, for instance, in shaping Eliot's early poetic imagery,[13] whose poetry teaches him a way of creating 'metaphors of a divided self'[14] in the dawning modernity. Schuchard, despite identifying this important connection, still leaves it underexplored. It is relevant to this work, though, that Schuchard should define this attitude of Eliot's with the image of the 'dark angel' of his poetry, 'at once his fury and his muse, causing and conducting the internal drama of shadows and voices that inhabit his acutely personal poems and plays'.[15] Eliot begins writing poetry with an exploration of the dark, which is both a darkness of the self and of the world surrounding him: this mental shadow will never leave his poetry. It will adopt a more religious meaning, though, with his own conversion, and will shift from a darkness

[11] Piers Gray, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development, 1909-1922* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 50-1.
[12] Gray, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development, 1909-1922*, p. 53.
[13] Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 9.
[14] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*, p. 12.
[15] Schuchard, p. 3.

without God, or at least with a God who Eliot does not fully understand, to a darkness *of* God, a self-imposed darkness in order to reach the light. Schuchard describes Eliot's poetry as that of one 'faithfully waiting for the darkness to become the light':[16] in this thesis, I argue that Eliot does not expect the dark to become the light, but rather that he imagines a darkness which is also a light, both elements necessary to lead him to the spiritual and to God.

This thesis thus builds on scholarly published research on Eliot's spiritual development, such as Staffan Bergsten's *Time and Eternity: A Study in the Structure and Symbolism of T. S. Eliot's* Four Quartets (1960), Eloise Knapp Hay's *T. S. Eliot's Negative Way* (1982), Paul Murray's *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism: The Secret History of* Four Quartets (1991), Manju Jain's *T. S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* (1992), Kenneth Asher's *T. S. Eliot and Ideology* (1995), Barry Spurr's *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (2010), and Erik Tonning's *Modernism and Christianity* (2014), all of which, in various degrees, contextualize Eliot's own religious beliefs with his own poetry and interest in mysticism. Despite awareness of scholarly research on Buddhism in Eliot, notably Cleo McNelly Kearns's *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions. A Study in Poetry and Belief* (1987) and Paul Foster's *The Golden Lotus: Buddhist Influence in T. S. Eliot's* Four Quartets (1998), this is a path consciously not pursued in this thesis, as Eliot's Harvard studies on Eastern religions and philosophies only marginally influenced his life-long poetic inclination for light and dark imagery.

This thesis' approach to Eliot's poetry is at times historical and biographical, drawing from Eliot's own experiences, and from his living at certain eventful times in history (such as the London Blitz in World War II). If these approaches are present in this thesis, the principal approach to Eliot's poetry is one that draws much from such fundamental scholarly works as Helen Gardner's *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (1949) and *The Composition of* Four Quartets (1978), Hugh Kenner's *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (1959), Steve Ellis' *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to T. S. Eliot* (1983), Robert Crawford's *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (1987), and Christopher Ricks' annotated

[16] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, p. 15.

edition on *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996): a close-reading of Eliot's poetry, and a study of his poetic allusions. Gardner and Ricks especially look at manuscripts and original drafts of Eliot's poetry, and thus justify certain choices in Eliot's poetical imagery by use of first-hand material. This thesis is meant to be a commentary on Eliot's poetry, explaining poetry qua poetry, using a special focus on the specific thread of light and dark as a way of interpreting Eliot's own poems, where the use of images and allusions in this case are seen to provide an additional layer of meaning.

0.3 A CORRELATIVE APPROACH

Another approach utilised by this thesis is that of a correlation of two apparently opposite images. Jewel Spears Brooker's research on Eliot's early philosophical studies at Harvard shows how crucial these are in understanding Eliot's poetic and intellectual development from his early university years, and it is also where she finds an important support of her theories on polarity in his poetry: her approach to Eliot thus tends to be mainly philosophical, and throughout her works, when theorizing on Eliot, she makes frequent use of terms such as 'dualistic', 'contrast', 'polarity', 'binary', 'complementarities', and 'theory of opposites'.[17] Brooker's theory of a polar philosophy in Eliot's poetry and prose thus applies well to this study of light and dark imagery in a wide spectrum of his poetry (*Inventions of the March Hare*, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, *The Waste Land*, *Ash-Wednesday*, and *Four Quartets*) and drama (*The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Family Reunion*).

[17] Jewel Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 156, 157, 178, 199, 220, 221. Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley, *Reading* The Waste Land*: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 93, 199. Jewel Spears Brooker, 'Yes and No: Eliot and Western Philosophy', *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 53-65 (p. 61). Jewel Spears Brooker and William Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites: Kant and the Subversion of Epistemology', *T. S. Eliot and Our Turning World*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001), pp. 47-62 (49-50, 57).

In a chapter of Brooker's edited collection *T. S. Eliot and Our Turning World*, she looks at three papers Eliot wrote for a graduate seminar at Harvard University in 1913, entitled 'Kantian Philosophy', and held by Professor Bakewell from Yale University.[18] In these papers, Eliot's reflections on certain aspects of Kant's philosophy show a remarkable connection to his own mind and art.[19] Brooker examines the most relevant parts of these papers, which relate to Eliot's creation of a 'theory of opposites' of his own, which are essential to our understanding of his early as well as his later poetry. Eliot's focus on a specific area of Kant's philosophy which includes a study, as well as refutation, of dichotomies and epistemological dualism, suggests his interest, from an early stage, in a reality which cannot possibly be determined by a simple opposition of polar elements, such as light and darkness for instance, but rather by a combination of the two. Throughout this study of light and darkness in Eliot, it is possible to see how these two concepts are hardly ever separated, but rather are part of one same whole. Eliot's early theorizations on dualism would also confirm this. Eliot articulates three main points to explicate his theory, which would support this thesis. Brooker and Charron report Eliot's first point of his theory as 'correlativity', hence the idea that all core opposites are 'neither contradictory, nor contrary; rather, they are correlative'.[20] Thus, according to Eliot's denomination of 'correlative opposites', each term enters into the definition of the other, also implying that the occurrence of one term in a specific subject determines the occurrence of the opposing term:[21] if something is real, something else will be unreal, and so consequently if something has the characteristic of giving light, something else will not; if something is light, something else must be dark too. Light and dark are thus 'mutually implicating':[22] for Eliot it was clear enough that they should not exist separately, but rather that they should make the same whole. Eliot's second point is that these opposites are ascribed to a degree, and so they cannot be predicated in absolute terms, allowing for a 'more or less' qualification: thus something can be more or less real when compared to

[18] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 47.
[19] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 49.
[20] Ibidem.
[21] Ibidem.
[22] Ibidem.

something which is also real,[23] and something can be more or less dark when compared to some other dark element of reality. Hence the necessity of identifying different degrees of light and dark in Eliot's works: even though light and dark as a basic opposition remain throughout, it is also important to see how certain degrees of light (or dark) are made more apparent and more relevant at precise times of his life. And so, dusk, twilight, and even the 'antelucan' moment of light at dawn. The third point put forward by Eliot is a 'point of view relativity'[24] applied to the opposites, and so that both opposing predicates can be ascribed to the same subject, and considered from different points of view: something can thus be both large and small, real and unreal. Nothing is absolutely "anything", as absolute qualities are limiting concepts: nothing, it seems, in Eliot's early poetry, is either absolutely light, or absolutely dark, as in chapter one and two, I show how little sources of light always illuminate moments and ambiances of full darkness.

In Eliot's first essay 'Report on the Kantian Categories', he approaches Kant's subversion of a dualistic conception of epistemology, as argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, introducing the idea of a reality which can only be experienced by degrees, or grades. Eliot begins his essay with a comparison of the treatment of categories in Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, and he ultimately judges Plato's and Kant's epistemology as closer in dialogue, and the basis for his later theory of the existence of various 'grades of reality, representing different points of view', rejecting the Aristotelian concept that it really exists in 'only one grade'.[25] Brooker and Charron support the idea that Eliot's 'conception of degrees of reality and truth' will find its fuller appreciation in the theories of F. H. Bradley, and will be crucial to Eliot's own dialectic, dating from his studies at Harvard, and throughout his writing career.[26] Interestingly, in this essay ultimately Eliot also observes that '[i]t is obvious that the categories imply the transcendental unity of apperception. It is equally obvious that that latter should imply the former' and that 'x is not conceivable without y[,] x and y are not necessarily the same x and y as in the proposition y is not

[23] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 50.
[24] Ibidem.
[25] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Report on the Kantian Categories', in T. S. Eliot, Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard, *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition. Apprentice Years, 1905-1918* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 29-39 (31).
[26] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 52.

conceivable without x.'[27] In Eliot's epistemological vision, he thus already recognizes the importance of an approach where each term of an opposition must imply the other: hence, the importance that light should not be an *a priori* concept, but rather is not imaginable without darkness, and vice versa.

Eliot's second essay, 'Report on the Relation of Kant's Criticism to Agnosticism', tackles the concept of point of view and experience in deeper detail, again in relation to Kant's epistemology. The important details springing from Eliot's exploration of this theme are, namely, that experience for Kant presents both an external and an internal aspect:

> Experience is by definition essentially relative; for it is a complex relation so organic that, taken as a whole, no element can be separated or wholly distinguished from the rest; while on the other hand it likewise implies, from an internal point of view, very certain reactions and independences.[28]

He thus continues,

> Experience always presents an internal and an external aspect, which are indissoluble but which contradict each other. The transcendental must consist of one aspect only; hence it is outside of experience.[29]

The external aspect of experience is 'taken whole', whereas the internal one is envisaged by a specific point of view, and thus internalized, and made one's own. Transcendence, and so everything concerning God's realm, is to happen *outside* of experience, akin to mystical perceptions, usually felt as "outside oneself". In Eliot's reading of Kant, he argues how all knowledge ultimately proceeds from the inside, which he links here with 'faith':

> If you contemplate knower and known from the outside, what you find is <u>not</u> simply knower and known, but a peculiar complex of existents, and knowledge fades into ontology. Hence, in order to

[27] Eliot, 'Report on the Kantian Categories', *The Complete Prose*, p. 36.
[28] Eliot, 'Report on the Relation of Kant's Criticism to Agnosticism', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, pp. 40-48 (43).
[29] Ibidem.

know, we must begin with faith, that is to say, the conception of an external relation, a real which is "outside of ourselves," and just that which possesses this externality to the highest degree is the world of "Gegenstände. [objects]".[30]

Transcendence, and faith, must occur 'outside of ourselves': knowledge is thus from the inside, but only with a conception of what is really outside of oneself. Why is this relevant to our understanding of Eliot? Eliot embraces the idea of a dual experience, external and internal, placing transcendence and faith as necessary conditions to reach knowledge, and yet locating them outside of oneself, which thus highlights the importance of something 'other', whether religion or merely a belief in transcendence, outside our experience, without which it is impossible to reach the truth. Eliot develops this idea from his early adulthood. He maintains, with Kant, that 'we have no knowledge of an external world, because the world so far as known is no longer external':[31] actual knowledge of the world is entirely internal. Furthermore, Brooker and Charron stress how Eliot makes it clear in his argument how 'point of view must always be taken into account', and '[e]xperience [...] is always in relation to some practical interest, always associated with some point of view'.[32] This is particularly relevant to understand both Eliot's later criticism and his own relativism, as emphasized by Brooker and Charron,[33] as well as to comprehend Eliot's early poetry, where knowledge and experience are always mediated by the poet's various *personae*, and also by the objects representing the poet's self and his common sense, such as flames, lamps, and the street lamp.

Similarly, in a third essay, 'Report on the Ethics of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*', Eliot openly criticizes Kant's attempt to reduce ethics to a logical science by challenging his 'creation of absolute distinctions whose distinctions are purely relative, or perhaps [...] "relatively absolute."'[34] Ethics, according to Eliot, cannot depend on the Kantian conception of science, but rather, like the existence of God, on 'a vague entity (felt

[30] Eliot, 'Report on the Relation of Kant's Criticism to Agnosticism', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, p. 43.
[31] Eliot, 'Report on the Relation of Kant's Criticism to Agnosticism', p. 45.
[32] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 55.
[33] Ibidem.
[34] Eliot, 'Report on the Ethics of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, pp. 49-56 (55).

rather than seen) known variously as common sense, or faith, or response to environment', which is by all means 'not determinable'.[35] This thesis argues that Eliot's early images of light can thus be linked to his own early inward fights, between common sense and nature, often between an artificial source of light (i.e. the street lamp in 'Rhapsody on Windy Night') and the moon. The influence of Eliot's reasoning on Kant's philosophy during his studies at Harvard is thus of the utmost importance to understand his early poetry. Eliot develops here a relativism of his own, which again takes him to conceive of the two opposites of Kant's dualism, nature and morality, not as disjointed terms in opposition to one another (after Kant), but rather as 'mutually irreducible correlatives': nature and morality must be in relationship to one another, lest they lose meaning in our experience.[36]

An apparent example of Kant's influence on Eliot's poetry according to the two critics can be found in Part V of "The Hollow Men", a poem 'built on the gaps existing between opposites, near-opposites and other differentiated terms'.[37] The unifying, and yet dividing, element there is the 'shadow', 'visually represented on the page as an italicized fragment falling across the abstract philosophical statement, [...] between the sets of pairs', and a 'necessary intermingling of the best and worst as correlatives in human existence'.[38] This is particularly interesting, as the shadow is an important image of light and dark in Eliot, embodying the vital combination, and interrelation, of both opposites in itself. The shadow is here turned into a symbol of two opposites resolving into one correlation, one whole, which comes to represent the best and the worst of every human being, after the influence of Kant's dialectical thought on his own comprehension of philosophy. The image of the shadow, Brooker suggests, also springs from Eliot's own personal displacement, perceived in his earlier work by a general feeling of living in an 'in-between land'.[39] His sense of alienation was not only given by the feeling of being a Bostonian in

[35] Eliot, 'Report on the Ethics of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 49-56 (p. 55).
[36] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 56.
[37] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 59.
[38] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 61.
[39] Jewel Spears Brooker, 'Introduction', *The Placing of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), p. 3.

the American Mid-West first, and an American in England afterwards, but also took place at a spiritual level, especially in the years before his conversion, where the poet finds it suitable only to live in what Brooker defines as a 'shadowland'.[40] A world between places, a tension between nature and morality, between religion and lack of faith, a shadow between light and dark: tensions which will find their solutions in the correlation of the here and there, the past and future, tradition and originality.

The argument of this thesis does not support the postulation of any precise dividing line between Eliot's early poetry and his post-conversion poetry and drama. It is undoubtedly the work of a more spiritually mature Eliot, yet spirituality was not completely absent, nor rejected, in his early writings, but rather it developed up to 1927, the year of his conversion. Brooker remarks:

> Eliot's interest in religion (literally, a retying or rebinding, an attempt to reconnect fragments into a whole) did not appear suddenly in his thirty-ninth year. His awareness of fragmentation, his dissatisfaction with brokenness, had been evident in his earliest work. The Harvard masterpieces — "Portrait," "Preludes," "Prufrock," "Rhapsody" — all exhibit a consciousness of broken connections. People are cut off from friends, from lovers, from any community, from God.[41]

Brooker's statement supports a search for God in Eliot's early poetry, and even his situating himself (or better, his poetic *personae*), after Dante's *Commedia*, in Hell first, and consequently in Purgatory, which can be detected in his use of light and dark imagery in his early poetry. As considered in chapter one and two, Eliot looks at the world surrounding him precisely through division, absence, and brokenness, much influenced by Baudelaire, and the French and British symbolists particularly, looking for various substitutes for religion, as well as ways to describe, approach, and understand modernity. In his second and third reports on Kant, Eliot had already equalled faith with common sense, something felt and not seen, and outside our knowledge: common sense talks to the poet wandering at night, with images of artificial light, in *Prufrock and Other Observations*.

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[40] Brooker, *The Placing of T. S. Eliot*, p. 3.
[41] Jewel Spears Brooker, 'Substitutes for Religion in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot', *The Placing of T. S. Eliot*, p. 11.

Brooker classifies the various kinds of Eliot's substitutes for religion in his early life as 'erotic, religious, aesthetic, and philosophical',[42] and eventually arrived at his search for substitutes for religion in 1927, with his conversion.[43] This was also inspired, and supported by Bradley's philosophical doctrine, which Brooker connects with Eliot's religious scheme, as it maintained that the fragmentation of human existence should be justified by all its parts being interrelated to a single system, the Absolute.[44] This is consistent with the various different influences Eliot was exposed to during those years, experimenting with a number of routes and schemes in order to overcome his feelings of fragmentation and displacement.[45] My early chapters also argue that Eliot also turned to nineteenth-century poetry, and especially the Baudelairean poetics of looking for 'le vide, et le noir, et le nu':[46] Eliot sought to understand the world's fragmentation through images of light and dark. Eventually, both dark and light will become images of God, in his post-conversion poetry, with religion bringing unity to all the different fragments:

> To be religious is first to be aware of fragmentation, of brokenness; second, since rebinding suggests previous unity, to be religious is to be aware on some level that we live in a postlapsarian world, that the condition of brokenness and loneliness is not part of our first world. To be religious, finally, is to be discontented with brokenness and to imagine that it can be transcended.[47]

Light and dark as correlated opposites are united again in the mystical perceptions of *Four Quartets*, where they are both of God, and, as I show in chapter five, even darkness is a necessary stage to reach God, and the light of God. Brokenness and wholeness are again correlative opposites which define well Eliot's poetics throughout his career. Brooker, in *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism*, defines this precisely as Eliot's impulse of 'mastery and escape', which he applies to Henry James, Samuel Johnson,

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[42] Brooker, 'Substitutes for Religion in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot', p. 14.
[43] Brooker, 'Substitutes for Religion in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot', p. 19.
[44] Brooker, 'Substitutes for Religion in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot', p. 22.
[45] Brooker, 'Substitutes for Religion in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot', pp. 23-24.
[46] Charles Baudelaire, *Fleurs du Mal. The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 150. English translation from the same edition: 'the black, the blank, the bare' (p. 151). Further references to this edition will be indicated as *FDM* and the number page in brackets in the text.
[47] Brooker, *The Placing of T. S. Eliot*, p. 24.

and Ezra Pound.[48] The two terms may not be immediate opposites in themselves, but their juxtaposition is quite paradoxical: how can one master anything by escaping it? Yet, Brooker demonstrates how this phrase, employed by Eliot in the three examples given above, is particularly suitable to describe his and, more generally, the modernist poetics of a 'going forward [which] involves going back'.[49] Mastery begins with the mind's surrender, consequently developing as a knowledge of and control over something, and culminating in transcendence, hence an 'escape' where nothing is lost.[50] Brooker reaffirms how Eliot's dialectic is ultimately an all-inclusive one of 'both/and' and not 'either/or'.[51] Eliot credited Henry James's genius to 'his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas'; similarly, according to Eliot, one could escape Johnson only after having mastered him, and Pound's own escape from the rigidity of conventional form had only been possible by his mastery of it.[52]

Brooker's suggestion of a 'both/and' logic in Eliot's poetry and criticism, extends to his use of concepts such as 'common ground' and 'collaboration', which are important in the reader's understanding of Eliot's poetry, as well as his employment of other literary sources and allusions. Throughout this thesis, investigation of Eliot's complex use of allusions will support fresher interpretations of some well-known passages in his poems. In order to portray a full picture of Eliot as a poet, one must not ignore the importance of the two concepts brought forward by Brooker. 'Common ground', a concept regularly mentioned by Eliot in his prose from 1917 to the early sixties,[53] is felt by Eliot with no pejorative connotation which the adjective 'common' might possibly carry, but rather falls for him, according to Brooker, under the meaning of something 'shared', and which can be experienced by many, as even most doctrines embraced by Eliot (for example, tradition, wholeness, orthodoxy, and so on) participate with commonness.[54] Brooker even comes to argue that Eliot attempts to create a common ground even in his poetry, and poems such

[48] Jewel Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 2.
[49] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 2.
[50] Ibidem.
[51] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 3.
[52] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 2.
[53] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 68.
[54] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 65.

as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and *Four Quartets*, as well as in his attraction to the theatre and his association with the Church of England, would 'constitute a pursuit of commonness'.[55]

Eliot's great interest in Dante and Europe would guide his search for a 'commonness', which is a European common ground and a European common culture: Dante in particular is 'European', and thus 'common' because he uses a literary form which is commonly understood by everyone, and makes his experiences common to all other human beings.[56] 'Genuine poetry' is for Eliot of a kind that 'can communicate before it is understood', and appeals to 'the universality [indeed, the commonness] of the senses'.[57] Eliot employs literary allusions to compare and contrast his real condition in twentieth-century London with thirteenth-century Florence, for instance, or pre-Christian Rome, and to lament the difficulty of making art in the modern world, lacking the same shared, common ground with his audience which Dante could boast, in a mainly Christian society, during the Middle Ages.[58] It is precisely in his poetry that Eliot attempts to build a European common ground of languages, cultures, and references. His audience perhaps may only partially share it, but they will still manage to collaborate with his art: similarly, his use of light and dark imagery is meant to create a visual common ground with his audience. As Dante enabled his reader to see what he was seeing, or thought he was, Eliot reaches out to the reader by making them see what he saw, too, in his poetic imagination. This would exemplify Eliot's definition of 'collaboration of an artist with his immediate audience',[59] in search for a shared ground between him and his readers: allusions reinforce this link. Secondarily, perhaps even more importantly, the use of allusions on Eliot's part would also prove to be another type of collaboration, of poets with other artists, and the poets' 'capacity for assimilation'.[60] Eliot quoting and referencing various authors, also ranging from different literary genres as well as artistic forms, creates a link of

[55] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 65.
[56] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 66.
[57] Ibidem.
[58] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 69.
[59] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 72.
[60] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 73.

'extratemporal' collaboration,[61] acting throughout the centuries, and merging into a poetic present to be found in Eliot's compositions.

It should also be immediately noticeable to most readers of Eliot how his relativism, preference for dialectical refutation, and theory of opposites continually re-appear throughout his career. One major example is Eliot's thesis in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', where Eliot challenges the nineteenth-century opinion that tradition and originality should be contrary opposites in literature, by placing the conjunction 'and' between the two terms, and thus subverting the 'binary 'either/or' logic'.[62] The importance of the study of allusions is particularly important in Eliot's poetry, where this becomes interrelated with the correlativity of opposites: a good poet must be aware of both tradition and individuality. Eliot states in that essay that 'the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.':[63] thus literary allusions are essential to understand the poet's originality and individuality, and so studying the light and dark imagery in Eliot's poetry, as well as his sources of inspiration, indeed 'the dead poets' he mentions in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is in fact revelatory of his own use of light and dark symbolism.

Both *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* are texts containing polarities, and examples of the fragmentation of various literary genres and cultures which can be recollected into a whole.[64] From the very beginning of 'Burnt Norton', the reader will attend to a number of opposites, paradoxes, and contradictions, which continues throughout *Four Quartets*, with Eliot's focus on opposites, and his insistence on absence, on what is *not* there, which is also an insistence on presence.[65] Hence the focus on the light and dark opposition would prove to be a thread, a pattern, indeed not only in *Four Quartets* but also throughout Eliot's poetry, with its contrastive imagery thus making up an important polarity which would link the majority of Eliot's works. Moreover, Eliot's use

[61] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 74.
[62] Brooker and Charron, 'T. S. Eliot's Theory of Opposites', p. 57.
[63] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Indivual Talent', *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1932), p. 4.
[64] Eliot, 'Tradition and the Indivual Talent', p. 146.
[65] Eliot, 'Tradition and the Indivual Talent', pp. 155-156.

of polar terminology 'displaces focus from the terms themselves to the relation between them' and the juxtaposition of these opposite terms directs the reader away from the terms themselves towards the actual relation that unifies, and yet separates them.[66] Brooker remarkably notices a parallel in section III of 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker', and 'The Dry Salvages', where in all three central parts 'a horizontal temporal journey through the darkness unexpectedly intersects with a vertical journey into the darkness that leads paradoxically into the light', 'a descent that is also ascent',[67] where the 'shadow' would fill the gaps between polarities.[68] Darkness must intersect with light in order to achieve unity in fragmentation, and allow Eliot a glimpse of a mystical vision in *Four Quartets*: they are correlative halves of one unique whole.

Light and dark as opposites represent the pair that perhaps most appeals to Eliot, as it symbolizes the peak of vision: Eliot is a poet of images. Eliot's concern was to *see*, and especially to make his readers see what he was seeing, and his model in this respect was Dante. In his 1920 Dante essay, he had stated that '[t]he aim of the poet is to state a vision',[69] and consequently, in his 1929 essay, we read:

> Dante's is a *visual* imagination [...] in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten, but as good as any of our own. We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions — a practice now relegated to the aberrant and the uneducated — was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming. [...]
>
> All that I ask of the reader [...] is to clear his mind, if he can, of every prejudice against allegory, and to admit at least that it was [...] really a mental habit, which when raised to the point of genius can make a great poet as well as a great mystic or saint. And it is the allegory which makes it possible for the reader who is not even a good Italian scholar to enjoy Dante. Speech varies, but our eyes are all the same. And allegory was [...] a universal European method.
>
> Dante's attempt is to make us see what he saw. He therefore employs very simple language, and very few metaphors, for allegory and metaphor do not get on well together.[70]

[66] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, pp. 156-157.
[67] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 158.
[68] Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, p. 159.
[69] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Dante', *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1928), p. 170.
[70] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Dante', *Selected Essays: 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), pp. 204-5.

Eliot, similarly, had a visual imagination, and tried to share his visions with the reader: the light and dark imagery threaded throughout his works in particular suggests Eliot's ability at summoning up specific atmospheres and places, as well as a predilection for allegory in the form of '*clear visual images*', whose meaning the reader must obviously acknowledge, although this may not always be immediately apparent.[71] 'Our eyes are all the same', says Eliot, and so, even if our knowledge of one particular language is not proficient, we can still enjoy the power of poetic images, overtaking that of words.

Eliot's objective is to make the reader see, and perceive, what he philosophically, mystically, and poetically imagines:

> The mystical experience is supposed to be valuable because it is a pleasant state of unique intensity. But the true mystic is not satisfied merely by feeling, he must pretend at least that he *sees*, and the absorption into the divine is only the necessary, if paradoxical, limit of this contemplation. The poet does not aim to excite — that is not even a test of his success — but to set something down; the state of the reader is merely that reader's particular mode of perceiving what the poet has caught in words. Dante, more than any other poet, has succeeded in dealing with his philosophy, not as a theory [...] or as his own comment or reflection, but in terms of something *perceived*. When most of our modern poets confine themselves to what they had perceived, they produce for us, usually, only odds and ends of still life and stage properties; but that does not imply so much that the method of Dante is obsolete, as that our vision is perhaps comparatively restricted.[72]

The poet has to transmit to the reader, in words, what he has seen in his mystical perceptions. Early philosophical poets, argues Eliot, were interested in a mixture of philosophy, religion, and poetry, rather than viewing each of them separately, and Eliot, through his imagery of light and dark, strikes to create a kind of allegory which is after Dante and a philosophical, religious poetry after such philosophical poets as Parmenides and Empedocles.[73] Dante's use of allegory is mingled with the emotional significance of each episode in the *Commedia*: allegorical interpretation cannot be separated from its emotional importance.[74] The relevance of emotions through allegory in Dante is also witnessed by the fact that they cannot be appreciated individually, but rather in their

[71] Eliot, 'Dante', *Selected Essays: 1917-1932*, p. 204.
[72] Eliot, 'Dante', *The Sacred Wood*, pp. 170-1.
[73] Eliot, 'Dante', *The Sacred Wood*, p. 160.
[74] Eliot, 'Dante', *The Sacred Wood*, p. 165.

relation to the other emotions.[75] With regard to this, Eliot comes to argue, quite correctly, that one 'cannot understand [...] the *Inferno* without the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*'.[76] The three Dantean poems are, and must be, interrelated to one another; similarly, Eliot's poetry is always continuously referencing other arts and other poems, and yet always referring to itself, looking back and looking forward. Eliot's poetry is a continuum of thoughts, life, philosophy, and spirituality, where light and dark create a coherent pattern of images that give fuller meaning to biographical events, historical conditions, and glimpses of mystical visions. This thesis seeks to offer new readings of well-known Eliot poems, viewed in the context of the light and dark imagery, retying and rebinding them together.

[75] Eliot, 'Dante', *The Sacred Wood*, p. 168.
[76] Ibidem.

Chapter One

Restless nights and torpid days:

DARKNESS

'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
ché la diritta via era smarrita.'
Dante Alighieri
La Divina Commedia
(lines 1-3, *Inferno*, Canto I)[1]

When young Thomas Stearns Eliot started writing poetry, he was neither "in the middle" of his life, nor had he lost the right path. Still, the atmosphere permeating his early writings resembles that of a Dantean 'selva oscura': if not in the medieval wilderness of the vegetation around him, at least in the confusing, persistent darkness of the world around the poet.

This is shown by Eliot's early poems from his Notebook called *Inventions of the March Hare*, which covers, in its entirety, the period from 1909 to about 1920. Some of the poems (such as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', or 'Gerontion') would later appear in two of his first published poetry collections, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) and *Ara Vos Prec* (or *Poems 1920*), whereas others were excised from the Notebook by Eliot himself (the Bolo series), before John Quinn purchased it.[2] The remaining thirty-

[1] English translation: 'In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost.', in *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1932), p. 3.
[2] Christopher Ricks, 'Preface', in Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. xvi.

seven poems, although Eliot considered them not worth publishing and sold them to his lawyer with reluctance, are particularly relevant when looking at Eliot's use of the imagery of light. The special atmospheres of these early poems influence Eliot's first published poetry collections. I will argue that a strong influence from French nineteenth-century literature, especially Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Jules Laforgue 'father of light'[3] (1860-1887), and Charles-Louis Philippe (1874-1909), can be detected in Eliot's earlier poetry: light and dark images are in his earlier poetry mostly related to his own poetic encounter with the modern metropolis, St. Louis and Boston, and then Paris, London, and Munich in 1910-11.[4] Baudelaire's influence is particularly intertwined with Eliot's early knowledge of Dante: still, if, on the one hand, Dante could provide him with poetic tools to represent his own personal turmoil in metaphoric terms, a poet like Baudelaire taught him to understand the modern metropolis, in a far more seducing, enticing, and at the same time realistic way. Eliot himself admitted what he had learnt from Baudelaire was 'the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic.'[5] Dante taught Eliot how to express the 'hell' of his own existence, and supported him, never-failingly, throughout his career, leading him to the 'heart of light'. Baudelaire, on the other hand, taught him to re-propose the 'dark', the sordid, the terrible of the world surrounding him in poetic terms. 'Obsession' from the collection *Fleurs du Mal* (*Flowers of Evil*; 1857) epitomizes this aspect of Baudelaire's poetics:

> Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! sans ces étoiles
> Dont la lumière parle un langage connu!
> Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!
>
> Mais les ténèbres sont elles-mêmes des toiles
> Où vivent, jaillissant de mon œil par milliers,
> Des êtres disparus aux regards familiers.[6]

[3] He is defined in such terms by Ezra Pound, in Ezra Pound, 'Irony, Laforgue, and Some Satire', *Poetry*, vol. 11, no.2 (1917), 93-98 (p. 98).
[4] Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Abacus, 1984), p. 45.
[5] T. S. Eliot, 'A Talk on Dante', *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1952), 178-188 (p. 179).
[6] English translation: 'But how you'd please me, night! without those stars | Whose light speaks in a language I have known! | Since I seek for the black, the blank, the bare! | Ah, but the darkness is itself a screen | Where thousands are projected from my eyes – | Those vanished beings whom I recognize.', p. 151.

Darkness is one of Baudelaire's main topics of interest in his poetry: wandering the streets of Paris at night as a *flâneur*,[7] he looks for 'the black, the blank, the nude', the debris of society, the ghosts and shadows —*êtres disparus*— that inhabit the city at night, and are projected onto the darkness surrounding him. If it is immediately perceivable from Eliot's poetry how Dante's influence was strong throughout his work, Baudelaire's is perhaps less apparent, and also limited mostly to his early poetic production. Eliot had learnt 'some one thing' from Baudelaire, but it was not 'the greatest contribution' to his own poetry.[8] Eliot remembers how Baudelaire was defined by some critics as 'a fragmentary Dante', and he himself calls him 'a later and more limited Goethe'.[9] If Dante was for Eliot a master of light imagery,[10] I will demonstrate in this chapter how Baudelaire is, for Eliot, a master of dark imagery.

Similarly, it is important to consider the relevance of Charles-Louis Philippe's *Bubu of Montparnasse* to Eliot's treatment of light and dark imagery in his early poetry. Eliot had read *Bubu* for the first time in 1910, when he first came to Paris, standing in his eyes as the French capital 'as some of Dickens' novels stand for London'.[11] *Bubu*'s characters, Eliot continues, are 'perfectly French and [yet] universally human':[12]

> [Charles-Louis Philippe] is both compassionate and dispassionate; in his book we *blame* no one, we blame not even a "social system"; and even the most virtuous, in reading it, may feel: I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed.[13]

[7] Barbara Wright, 'Baudelaire's Poetic Journey in *Les Fleurs du Mal*', *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, ed. Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 31-50 (p. 44).
[8] Eliot, 'A Talk on Dante', p. 179.
[9] T. S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire' (1930), *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt and Brace Company, 1932), 335-345 (p. 336).
[10] T. S. Eliot, 'Dante' (1929), *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt and Brace Company, 1932), 199-237 (p. 227).
[11] T. S. Eliot, 'Preface', in Charles-Louis Philippe, *Bubu of Montparnasse* (New York: Shakespeare House, 1951), p. 3.
[12] Eliot, 'Preface', in *Bubu of Montparnasse*, p. 6.
[13] Eliot, 'Preface', in *Bubu of Montparnasse*, p. 7.

Importantly, Eliot mentions sin in Philippe's novel. Throughout the poems of *Inventions of the March Hare*, it is possible to notice an acknowledgement of Eliot's sense of sin, and even though this preface was published in 1932,[14] it is remarkable that he should remember the feelings he associated with his reading of *Bubu*. Without Philippe being a propagandist of any sort,[15] his naturalistic account of the life of the lower classes in *Bubu of Montparnasse* shows its influence on Eliot in his own representation of urban, lower-class life, as well as the use of light and dark metaphors in the city. Early in the novel, Philippe writes:

> Le boulevard Sébastopol vit tout entier sur le trottoir. Sur le large trottoir, dans l'air bleu d'une nuit d'été, au lendemain du Quatorze Juillet, Paris passé et traîne un reste de fête. Les arcs voltaïques, les feuillages des arbres, les voitures qui roulent et toute une excitation des passants forment quelque chose d'aigu et d'épais comme une vie alcoolique et fatiguée.[16]

Baudelaire teaches Eliot how to make a poetic use of the modern, urban 'dark'; Philippe shows Eliot the way to describe the city after dark, with all its excitement of a swarming underworld coming alive in the metropolis at the lighting of the arc-lights.

In section 1.1, I will thus consider Eliot's early contrastive descriptions of the various moments of the day: the evening is given bright colours, for the presence of both the sun setting, and modern improved public lighting, whereas the day has, on the contrary, become a poetic symbol of passivity. Like a watershed, a sunset marks the divide, the important transition from day to night in literary-impressionist terms, a union of stasis and motion, which acts as a prelude to the image of the sunset in Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations*, intended as a step towards action. 'The night is anything but dark', says the poetic persona of 'Embarquement pour Cythère': the new urban modernity

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[14] Grover Smith, 'Charles-Louis Philippe and T. S. Eliot', *American Literature*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1950), 254-259 (p. 254).
[15] Eliot, 'Preface', in *Bubu of Montparnasse*, p. 4.
[16] Charles-Louis Philippe, *Bubu de Montparnasse* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1978), p. 48. English translation: 'The whole of the Boulevard Sébastopol lives on the sidewalk. On this broad sidewalk, in the blue air of a summer night, the day after the Fourteenth, Paris passes and trails the residue of the holiday. The arc-lights, the trees' foliage, the moving vehicles, the variegated excitement of the passersby, create something dense and sharp like a jaded and alcoholic life.' in Charles-Louis Philippe, *Bubu of Montparnasse* (New York: Shakespeare House, 1951), p. 12.

the poet has to confront leads him astray into the spiritual night of complete darkness. In section 1.2, I will briefly analyze the image of the shadow, as the poet's alter ego, beginning with Dante's failed embrace between shadows, whose significance for Eliot I will only mention here, and study more deeply with regard to *Prufrock*, to the figure of the clown, which is also a shadow, prefiguring the famous refrain of *The Hollow Men*. Self-identification with the world of shadows, a Purgatorial legacy, thus already occurs as early as in the *March Hare* poems. In section 1.3, I will look at how Eliot already expresses his souls' inner tension with the polar opposition of light and dark imagery in such poems as 'The Burnt Dancer', 'Inside the Gloom', 'The Little Passion', and 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', which all revolve around images of burning, self-punishment, and martyrdom. Like the moth getting burnt by the flames ('The Burnt Dancer'), or the scorpion setting its tail on fire ('Inside the Gloom'), Eliot's early use of light and dark imagery is already directed towards a desire for expiation, and purification.

1.1 YELLOW EVENINGS AND RAINY DAYS

The repetitiveness and monotony of everyday routine is a key feature of Eliot's early poetry. The obsessive insistence on time references is apparent in his early poetry: mention of months, together with weekdays and moments of the day (mornings, afternoons, evenings, or nights), recurs throughout both the unpublished poems of *Inventions of the March Hare* and those published in *Prufrock and Other Observations*.

Remarkably, Eliot's repetitive time references are often connected to colours, light and darkness. In 'First Caprice in North Cambridge' (1909), for instance, Eliot describes a scene at dusk in North Cambridge, Massachusetts, near Harvard University, where he was studying at the time:

> A street-piano, garrulous and frail;

> The yellow evening flung against the panes
> Of dirty windows: and the distant strains
> Of children's voices, ended in a wail.
>
> (*IMH* 13, lines 1-4).

The evening is here given the colour 'yellow' by Eliot, which, together with the mention of the window-panes, should remind the reader of another, more famous yellow evening, the one when J. Alfred Prufrock is wandering in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' ('The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, | The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,' *CPP* 13, lines 15-16). The colour of the evening here is given by the street lamps' artificial light and the fog that creeps up the window-panes: similarly, North Cambridge's 'yellow evening' would thus stand for a foggy evening in a modern industrialized town. The 'yellowness' of the evening is also due to the light at that hour of the day, leading the reader to think that it should presumably be dusk; the use of the verb 'to fling' suggests an abrupt movement, indicating a sudden change on the scene in that moment. Sunsets are not particularly sudden, although sometimes they can be perceived as quicker, at certain times of the year, such as in winter: thus, Eliot would give us two time references, dusk and winter, in just one single poetic expression of colour. A similar scene appears in *Bubu de Montparnasse*, despite Eliot reading Bubu a year later after writing 'First Caprice in North Cambridge':

> Dans la chambre de l'hôtel, rue Chanoinesse, à midi, la fenêtre donnant sur la cour, avec ses rideaux gris et ses carreaux sales, envoyait un jour sale et gris. Le papier des murs à fond jaune, le parquet mal soigné, les quatre meubles et la malle formaient un intérieur de fille publique à cinq francs la semaine.[17]

A dirty light at noon-time shines on the characters of *Bubu*: the dirty window-panes, the grey light in a yellowed room, and the general sordid atmosphere all lead back to Eliot's 'yellow evening' in the outskirts of Cambridge, MA, and the 'yellow fog' of Prufrock's stroll in an American or European city. Philippe, though, sets the scene at noon, the time when

[17] Philippe, *Bubu de Montaparnasse*, p. 93. English translation: 'At noon, in the hotel room of the rue Chanoinesse, a grey and dirty light filtered through the grey curtains and dirty panes of the window that gave on the court. The wall-paper with its yellow ground, the ill-kept floor, the four pieces of furniture and the trunk. It cost five francs a week and constituted the home of a public whore.' in Philippe, *Bubu of Montparnasse,* p. 49.

his characters, after troubled nights with little sleep, finally wake up and light displays all their poverty, and, perhaps to Eliot, their sins. Eliot's early poems, by contrast, are hardly ever set at noon, or in broad daylight: the contrast of light and dark there is often given by a darker time of the day (evening, night) against a natural or artificial source of light (sunset, streetlamps). Philippe operates in exactly the opposite way: noon discovers his characters still sleeping, not with a cheerful, bright daylight, but rather with a sickening grey light highlighting their pettiness, and sinful condition. In Baudelaire's poem 'Les Sept Vieillards' ('The Seven Old Men'),[18] Baudelaire associates morning dusk and mist with the colour yellow, as it is filtered by the street lamps' light, still lit from the night before: 'Un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l'espace,' (*FDM* 176-8, line 9; 'A dirty yellow steam filled all the space'). Yellow is the colour of the modern metropolis, dirty, polluted, crowded with a growing population: it is a dirty yellow spreading through the city, and uncovering its urban outcasts and debris (not unlike the 'yellow press' of the late nineteenth century). It is the same yellow which covers everything and every character in Philippe's novel, too: the yellow of the cheap hotel-room mentioned earlier even grows onto the personages, with Berthe, who, with '[s]es épaules étroites, sa chemise grise et ses pieds malpropres, mince et jaune, [...] semblait sans lumière non plus.'[19] The characters, spent with their sordid routine, have also turned yellow.

In 'Portrait of a Lady', the author expresses preoccupation that his lady friend might die on an 'evening yellow and rose' (*CPP* 21, line 115): the poet has thus chosen dusk again, a beautiful winter sunset. A similar expression appears in another poem from *Inventions of the March Hare*, 'Second Caprice in North Cambridge' (1909): the setting of the scene is very similar to the above-mentioned 'First Caprice', and it ends similarly, with 'an evening in December | Under a sunset yellow and rose.' (*IMH* 15, lines 16-17). The

[18] Eliot had openly admitted being influenced by this poem and in particular its opening lines ('Fourmillante cité, cité plene de rêves, | Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!', *FDM* 176, ll. 1-2),[18] which we can find echoes of in *The Waste Land* (see 'Unreal City, | Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, | A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, | I had not thought death had undone so many.', *CPP* 62, ll. 60-63, and 'O City city, I can sometimes hear | Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street', *CPP* 69, ll. 259-61).

[19] Philippe, *Bubu de Montparnasse*, 93. 'With her narrow shoulders, her grey shirt and her unclean feet, she too seemed, in her pale yellowish slimness, to have no light.' in Philippe, *Bubu of Montparnasse*, p. 49.

placing of the sunset at the very end of this rather short poem, after the description of a ghastly town, which cannot even be considered a city as a whole anymore, but it is only what vaguely remains of it, the 'débris of a city' (*IMH* 15, line 8), appears to have a more positive meaning if compared to the 'yellow evening' against dirty window-panes of the 'First Caprice': the evening is here a bearer of light too, thanks to the illuminating colours of its sunset, left at the end, as if it were meant to rescue North Cambridge's depressing depiction given by the wandering poet. The winter sunset, although still leading to night, and therefore to more dark, is perceived here as an element of resurrection for the city and its inhabitants – waking them up to beauty, from their dull, grey everyday lives. The poet perceives this, and thus the 'charm' of this place is 'unexpected' (*IMH* 15, line 14): he did not think it possible that North Cambridge could be transformed through the light of a setting sun.

In Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886), the narrator also describes the poverty of a scene in Cambridge and Charlestown's suburbia, as it is touched by a wintry sun's rays, in similar terms as Eliot's:[20]

> There was something inexorable in the poverty of the scene, shameful in the meanness of its details, which gave a collective impression of boards and tin and frozen earth, sheds and rotting piles, railway-lines striding flat across a thoroughfare of puddles, and tracks of the humbler, the universal horse-car, traversing obliquely this path of danger; loose fences, vacant lots, mounds of refuse, yards bestrewn with iron pipes, telegraph poles, and bare wooden backs of places. Verena thought such a view lovely, and she was by no means without excuse when, as the afternoon closed, the ugly picture was tinted with a clear, cold rosiness. […] Olive often sat at the window with her companion before it was time for the lamp. They admired the sunsets, they rejoiced in the ruddy spots projected upon the parlour-wall, they followed the darkening perspective in fanciful excursions.[21]

This Jamesian passage condenses two main attitudes of Eliot's early poetry: the careful eye for 'the charm of vacant lots', and a near-impressionist rendering of the sun setting. In the series of caprices set in North Cambridge, Eliot used light to discover the moral and material dirt of the modern city, its poverty and its sordidness, and yet also to redeem the whole scene, and make it indeed more 'charming', and agreeable to the eye, almost as in

[20] William Viney brings together Eliot's poem with James's passage from *The Bostonians*, focussing on the image of 'waste' and 'vacant lots' which characterizes then Eliot's early poetry, see William Viney, *Waste. A Philosophy of Things* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 87.
[21] Henry James, *The Bostonians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 167-8.

an impressionist painting, with Eliot's 'sunset yellow and rose'. The two female protagonists of *The Bostonians*, Olive and Verena, observe the sunset projecting its light onto the room's wall, as if it were an actual impressionist painting, with a few 'ruddy spots' as finishing touches of colour. In 'Mandarins II' (1910), at teatime, two ladies of undefined age (*IMH* 20, line 1) watch a sunset by the sea while sipping their tea (lines 2, 5-6): the mention of tea together with the sun setting over the sea helps situate the scene at a definite time of day. Still, this is emphasized even more by hinting at a game of lights and shadows: 'Grey and yellow patterns move | From the shoulder to the floor.' (lines 9-10). Sunlight caresses the two gentle ladies observing the sunset with its warm yellow colour and, at the same time, forms shadows on their figures. Light here is depicted in 'grey and yellow patterns', as in an impressionist painting: the vagueness of 'pattern', and the description of the sunset later in the poem as 'abstract' both convey the idea that the sunset they are watching is not real, but rather a painting they are contemplating during teatime. Like a scene from James's *The Bostonians*, Eliot's also contains elements of literary impressionism: 'visual perspective, motion and stasis, harmony of feeling, formlessness of colours and shapes, random and isolated detail, and the pervading source and reflection of light at a particular time of day.'[22] Eliot depicts a scene where its characters are immobile while observing the moving, formless patterns of light created by the sunset onto the wall: in this case and in the two mentioned earlier, the sunset redeems the evening from its passivity, and makes the contrast with the approaching night much more evident by its light.

In another poem from Eliot's *Inventions of the March Hare*, 'Afternoon' (1914), the precise reference to time in the title is once again linked to a colour, although this is done here less obviously than a direct reference to 'yellow' or 'grey': 'And the green and purple feathers on their hats | Vanish in the sombre Sunday afternoon' (*IMH* 53, lines 5-6). The Sunday afternoon is 'sombre', and thus gloomy, dark: the Oxford English Dictionary exemplifies the adjective 'sombre' as '[c]haracterized by the presence of gloom or shadow; depressingly dark, dusky, or obscure', and again '[o]f colours or colouring: [o]f a dark

[22] H. Peter Stowell, *Literary Impressionism, James and Chekhov* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 51.

shade or tinge; dark, dull.'[23] The reader's imagination is led to think that the sombreness of this Sunday afternoon should be given by rain: earlier in the poem, Eliot mentions 'drying rubber overshoes' in the British Museum's hall (line 4). Ricks interestingly points out that Baedeker's *London and Its Environs* (Eliot owned a copy) suggests spending rainy days in galleries and museums.[24] In 'Fourth Caprice in Montparnasse' it is not very clear if the time should be day or night, but the scene is once again defined by rain, contributing to make it even more grim and darker:

> [A] landscape grey with rain
> On black umbrellas, waterproofs,
> [...]
> Into a mass of mud and sand.
> Behind a row of blackened trees
> The dripping plastered houses stand
> Like mendicants without regrets
>
> (*IMH* 14, lines 3-4, 6-9)

As the shade of dark chosen by Eliot in this description of urban misery is 'grey' (rather than 'dark' or 'black'), and also for the presence of 'umbrellas' and 'waterproofs', which make the scene appear bustling with people, it would seem easy to suggest that it should be a grey afternoon rather than a grey evening.

It is interesting to notice how, in the poems considered so far, the evening is linked to light, be it that of a sunset or an electric one, and how the afternoon is instead connoted with darkness. For Baudelaire, sunset is anticipated with impatience and it is also indicative of the last light before the dark night: the beginning of his nocturnal wanderings, as well as his encounters with the other sex. In 'Le Balcon' ('The Balcon'), the poet looks at the city slowly lighting up as dusk drops, while going to meet his lover, the 'queen':

> Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,
> Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses.
> [...]
> Nous avons dit souvent d'impérissables choses

[23] Oxford English Dictionary Online, <www.oed.com> [last accessed 14th January 2012].
[24] Christopher Ricks, 'Notes', in Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), p. 203.

Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon.

Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!
[…]
La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison

(*FDM* 72, lines 6-7, 9-11, 16)[25]

The setting sun has become 'les soleils' (the suns) in Baudelaire's poem, with the lights of the city gradually lighting up the neighbourhood the poet is watching, presumably from the balcony of either his house or his lover's. The artificial suns of gas and coal warm long winter evenings, and mark the time when the city sparkles with characters other than the ones who inhabit it during the day: it is time for the *flâneur* to leave home, and go out to wander around the city under gaslight. Walter Benjamin describes, in his essay 'Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire' ('The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire'), how the appearance of the first gas-lamps in the streets of Paris made it safer for the population to go out at night, and in fact how this encouraged the activities of the *flâneur*,[26] a person who could be defined as a combination of wanderer and dreamer.[27] Evening air is often associated with the colours 'pink' or 'yellow' in Baudelaire, as a result of his mixing wandering with seeing, dreaming with imagining the newly gas-lit city around him.

Similarly, the author exclaims in 'Goldfish (Essence of Summer Magazines) II – Embarquement pour Cythère' (1910) that 'The night is anything but dark, | Almost as clear as day' (lines 5-6), for the presence of the moon (*IMH* 27, line 1) making the night shine almost like day: as the voyage the speaker is about to undertake with a generic 'ladies' (line 1) is for Cythera, a legendary Greek island associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love, it is appropriate that the light of this poem should be that of the love-inspiring moon. A few lines later (line 12), another pertinent image appears with the mention of the 'evening star', that is the planet Venus. Eliot chooses not to use its more scientific term of 'planet',

[25] English translation: 'Evenings illumined by the ardour of the coal, | And on the balcony, the pink that vapours bring; | […] | We often told ourselves imperishable things, | Evenings illumined by the ardour of the coal. | How beautiful the suns! How warm their evening beams! | […] | Then we would be enclosed within the thickening night', pp. 73-75.
[26] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p. 50.
[27] I will discuss more at length the importance of the *flâneur* figure with regard to Eliot's first collection of poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, in chapter two of this thesis.

in spite of its direct reference to the goddess whom the island Cythera is dedicated to, but prefers the more imprecise but possibly more common one of 'evening star'. Remarkably, the expression chosen by Eliot contains again a reference to both time and light, and at the same time to both light and darkness, as the planet Venus is in fact not only commonly referred to as 'evening star', but also as the 'morning star'. For this reason, when Eliot decides to refer to Venus as the former rather than the latter, it is possible to conclude that this choice is deliberate, since, just like the image of 'the yellow evening' ('First Caprice in North Cambridge'), this image strikes the reader for its combination of light (star) and darkness (evening). Also, the evening star here is also seen as a bearer of light and fire: the poet even lights cigarettes on it (line 12).[28] Ricks in his 'Notes' to *Inventions of the March Hare* suggests how the character's exclamation 'The night is anything but dark' may be a reference to St. John of the Cross,[29] and Eliot must have been familiar with the Spanish mystic as early as his Harvard days.[30] If so, it should be considered in ironic terms – the night is not a spiritual dark night of the soul, but rather a night of pagan enjoyments, under the enticing light of the Moon and the planet Venus. Yet, famously, Baudelaire (among other writers) also wrote a poem entitled 'Un voyage à Cythère' ('A Voyage to Cythera'), where the island and everything about it is linked to the colour black: 'île triste et noire' (*FDM* 54, line 5; 'sad black isle'), with a gibbet, also black (*FDM* 256, lines 27-28; 'un gibet…noir'), and 'tout était noir et sanglant désormais' (*FDM* 258, line 54; 'the world was black, and bloody'). Although love is not exactly present in Eliot's poem either, it is not quite as dark in themes as Baudelaire's, as in the latter, even Venus is described as 'antique' ('ancient'), and everything on the island is connected to death rather than love. This is exemplary of how Eliot adapts from Baudelaire for certain poetical themes, and certain imagery, but the way he reassembles this material together is very much his own, ultimately detaching himself from Baudelaire's mastery. In his 1930 essay on Baudelaire, Eliot underlines how most of the imagery Baudelaire is notorious for (prostitutes, death, corpses, cats, serpents, and so on) 'has not worn very well', not standing the comparison

[28] A similar image to that of the evening star is found in 'Hidden under the heron's wing': 'Evening whisper of stars together' (*IMH* 82, l. 3) includes again a similar combination of light and darkness.
[29] Ricks, 'Notes', p. 152.
[30] "A. MS. notes on philosophy [1907]", T. S. Eliot Papers 1878-1958 (MS Am 1691 129), Houghton Library (Harvard University).

with other poets from even earlier ages, such as Dante and Cavalcanti.[31] Baudelaire's poetry is set too deeply in a specific place and time to be as universal as Dante's, or Cavalcanti's. What Eliot particularly admires in Baudelaire's poetry is his use of 'a new stock of imagery of contemporary life', elevating the new metropolis 'to the first intensity', showing it for what it is and yet making it convey much more than that.[32] Eliot's Cythera is not an island of Death like Baudelaire's, or even Laforgue's wasted floral beauty of 'Cythère' ('Cythera'), bright in broad noon light,[33] but rather it merges the two French poems' atmospheres, with Baudelaire's dark and Laforgue's daylight, becoming an island of modern, urban lights: 'The night is anything but dark', both in actuality (electric light lighting up the metropolis), and metaphorically – with such amusements, why search for a spiritual dark night? After all, as we will see in section 1.3, this is a world too inane and too strange for good, or evil.

In 'Suite Clownesque III' (1910), Eliot imagines himself parading in Broadway, New York, at dusk and then at night, extolling the charms that this street shed on him, surrounding him with girls: the time reference to dusk is made explicit by the line 'Five o'clock in the afternoon,' (*IMH* 35, line 2), and the one to night again by the moonlight's presence, as Eliot is walking 'Under the light of the silvery moon,' (line 7), and by his exclamation 'It's Broadway after dark!' (line 14). Broadway is renowned worldwide for its theatre shows, which usually take place in the evening or at night: it is therefore precisely after dark when Broadway becomes even more attractive and makes the speaker appear more attractive as well. The image of the poet walking in Broadway after 5pm, under the moonlight, suggests the idea that things and people can look very different at night – they appear in a light they would not appear by daylight. The poet here is clearly alluding to Jules Laforgue's many poems on Pierrot and clowns, such as 'Complainte de Lord Pierrot'[34] and 'Complainte Variations sur le mot «Falot, Falotte»',[35] where the light of the

[31] Eliot, 'Baudelaire', p. 340.
[32] Eliot, 'Baudelaire', p. 341.
[33] 'Mains oisives dans les toisons aux gros midis' ('Hands idling in hair in broad noon light'), in Jules Laforgue, *Poems*, trans. by Peter Dale (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1986), pp. 286-7 (l. 26).
[34] 'Au clair de la lune, | Mon ami Pierrot, | Filons, en costume, | Présider là-haut!' ('In the light of the moon, | My old mate Pierrot, | Let's, in costume, zoom, | Soar, presiding so!'), in Laforgue, *Poems*, pp. 106-7 (ll. 1-4).

moon shines on the clown, making him look even more ridiculous. Eliot's 'silvery' moonlight is reminiscent of Laforgue's own moon, but his clownish persona gets transformed by Broadway's artificially lit charm into an 'Euphorion of the modern time', with a crowd of girls around him.

The poem 'Oh little voices of the throats of men' (1914) presents a similar dichotomy between sun and night:

> And we who seek to balance pleasure and pain
> We blow against the wind and spit against the rain:
> For what could be more real than sweat and dust and sun?
> And what more sure than night and death and sleep?
>
> (*IMH* 75, lines 11-14)

The first line in this passage exemplifies once again Eliot's attitude towards life at the time, he appears to have been particularly obsessed with the theme of having to decide between pleasure and pain, and the impossibility of achieving a proper balanced way. The people who try to balance pleasure and pain are nothing else but comedians and shadows, black moths and scorpions, common men and saints. Pleasure and enjoyment of life is indeed perceived as an impossible achievement, according to the author, who opts for desire and pleasure but who will be punished with more pain, either with a cross in a garret or by burning in its own self-created fire. In 'Oh little voices of the throats of men', Eliot returns to this theme by representing life's adversities precisely as weather elements, such as wind and rain, which fall on every one, regardless of whether happy or sad, rich or poor. Man's counteraction against these adversities is basically the same weapon as the adversity itself, albeit notably inferior and much more ridiculous. Reality belongs to the realm of light, as sun is the only 'real' thing, together with sweat and dust, because of its everyday presence in the sky and its apparent visibility, but still not as certain as night and darkness (death). Sweat and dust represent life, pleasure and pain, confronting humanity with reality, and night is as 'sure' as death, because it is established that night should follow day.

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[35] 'La Lune, voyant ces ballets, | Rit à Pierrot! | Falot, falot! | Falot, falotte!' ('This dance the laughing moon remarks, | The clown's eyes gleam. | Light beam, light beam. | Light beam, beam light!'), in Laforgue, *Poems*, pp. 150-1 (ll. 5-8).

The contrast between darkness and light arises again later in the same poem, at line 17, when the poet 'question[s] restless nights and torpid days': this image summarizes perfectly Eliot's choice of atmospheres for *Inventions of the March Hare*, as it combines in the same line both light and darkness, expressed in both cases with images of time (night and day). At the same time, it is exemplary of the poet's behaviour in those days: he has got few certainties and many doubts with regard to his future (for example, shall he settle in America, or in Europe?), and so he finds himself asking his questions while wandering about cities after dusk has fallen, and (ma)lingering at daytime. Day and night are thus completely reversed for Eliot in his early poetry – full activity of thought and restlessness of the body in darkness, and torpidity of the soul during the day. This matches particularly well with the image of the Parisian *flâneur*, together with Baudelaire's poetry: young Eliot put into practice what the nineteenth-century French poet had taught him – to describe the modern metropolis, with all its fancy lights, and sordid dark corners. This is not meant to create a realistic kind of poetry on living in Paris, or London: again, what Eliot particularly admired in Baudelaire was, as mentioned earlier, the combination of the realistic with the phantasmagoric.[36] This fusion, which is at the same time a juxtaposition, begins to be expressed in the poems contained within *Inventions of the March Hare*, and will be further developed in *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Eliot follows Baudelaire's example (and, as I will discuss in chapter two, that of the British poets of the 1890s) to explore the city at night, becoming himself a *flâneur* and watching the different urban realities becoming alive after the lighting of the lamps in the streets, with the alienated eyes of a man who cannot lead a more 'natural' way of living,[37] sleeping at night and working during the day, but rather its exact opposite. Like a *flâneur*, Eliot explores the city with a certain detachment. He observes it, perhaps with even a 'conciliatory gleam' at it,[38] and the way its dwellers lead their life, but somehow he does not feel he belongs there at all, and its gaze is from the outside, rather than from the inside of the urban society, and is more interested in their night activities, rather than their day-time chores. In the poem 'Le Crépuscule du soir', Baudelaire had already used the image of the evening dusk to describe

[36] Eliot, 'A Talk on Dante', p. 179.
[37] Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', p. 170.
[38] Ibidem.

the moment in the city when its more honest workers swap with some more characteristic figures:

> Ô soir, amable soir, désiré par celui
> Dont les bras, sans mentir, peuvent dire: Aujourd'hui
> Nous avons travaillé! — C'est le soir qui soulage
> Les esprits que dévore une douleur sauvage,
> Le savant obstiné dont le front s'alourdit,
> Et l'ouvrier courbé qui regagne son lit.
> Cependant des démons malsains dans l'atmosphère
> S'éveillent lourdement, comme des gens d'affaire,
> Et cognent en Volant les volets et l'auvent.
> A travers les lueurs que tourmente le vent
> La Prostitution s'allume dans les rues;
> [...]
> On entend çà et là les cuisines siffler,
> Les théâtres glapir, les orchestres ronfler;
> Les tables d'hôte, dont le jeu fait les délices,
> S'emplissent de catins et d'escrocs, leurs complices,
> Et les voleurs, [...]
> Vont bientôt commencer leur travail, eux aussi,
> [...]
> La sombre Nuit les prend à la gorge; [...]
> [...]
> [...] — Plus d'un
> Ne viendra plus chercher la soupe parfumée,
> Au coin de feu, le soir, auprès d'une âme aimée.
>
> Encore la plupart n'ont-ils jamais connu
> La douceur du foyer et n'ont jamais vécu!
>
> (*FDM* 192-4, lines 5-15, 21-26, 32, 34-38)[39]

The night has ceased to be the idyllic repose of the honest workers, but it is now rather become the 'friend of the criminal', with the gleams of all these nocturnal activities filling the town: the fireside is longed for by a selected few, the 'honest workers'; the rest of the population does not know the value of a friendly, hearth-lit home, preferring the gaslight of the city's restless night life — nearly 'noctambulism'.[40] Indeed a sort of noctambulism which is driven by curiosity for the modern metropolis and its inhabitants, and for his own

[39] English translation: 'O evening, night, so wished for by the one | Whose honest, weary arms can say: We've done | Our work today! — The night will bring relief | To spirits who consume themselves with grief, | The scholar who is bowed with heavy head, | The broker worked falling into bed. | Meanwhile, corrupting demons of the air | Slowly wake up like men of great affairs, | And, flying, bump our shutters and our eaves. | Against the glimmering teased by the breeze | Old Prostitution blazes in the streets; | [...] | One hears the hissing kitchens close at hand, | The playhouse screech, the blaring of a band. | The tables at the inns where gamesmen sport | Are full of swindlers, sluts, and all their sort. | Robbers [...] | Get ready for their nightly work-a-day | [...] | Black night will grab their throats; [...] | [...] | [...] They have | No further need to think of evenings spent | At fireside — the fragrant soup, the friend. | But most of them have never known the call | Of friendly hearth, have never lived at all!', pp. 193-5.

[40] Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire', p. 50.

inner self, is what set young Eliot on a life of poetic discoveries, made up of 'torpid days and restless nights'.

1.2 BLACK MOTHS AND SHADOWS

The title 'Inventions of the March Hare' appears on the Notebook on its front flyleaf.[41] On its endpaper, one can read Eliot's dedication to Jean Verdenal and an epigraph chosen from Dante's *Purgatorio* XXI. As is well known, Eliot often used epigraphs, and it is enough to think of the epigraphs before 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'Portrait of a Lady', or *The Waste Land*, and their relevance to the poems' content, to understand that these must not be underestimated, as they may help the reader contextualize the poem better. In this case, the epigraph from Dante reads:

> …tu se' ombra ed ombra vedi.
> …puoi, la quantitate
> comprender del amore ch'a te mi scalda,
> quando dismento nostra vanitate
> trattando l'ombre come cosa salda.
>
> (*IMH* 3)[42]

The dialogue in the epigraph is between two shadows, Virgil and Statius: the two are in different situations though, as Virgil is a 'lost soul'[43] from the heathens' Limbo, whereas Statius is a shadow in Purgatory, expiating his sins, and is in fact a saved soul. Ricks suggests the hypothesis that the epigraph from Dante, together with the dedication to Verdenal, was not affixed by Eliot while he was actually using the Notebook to record his poems, but was added by Eliot as late as 1922, shortly before selling his Notebook to

[41] Ricks, 'Notes', p. 4.
[42] Eliot quotes these same lines from *Purgatorio* in his essay on *Dante* (1929), giving the English translation as '[…] for you are but a shadow, and a shadow is but what you see. […] Now can you understand the quantity of love that warms me towards you, so that I forget our vanity, and treat the shadows like the solid thing.' in T. S. Eliot, 'Dante', in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), p. 216.
[43] Ibidem. If this is accurate, Eliot's later addition of the lines from *Purgatorio* XXI to the Notebook in 1922 would support my theories regarding Purgatory in *The Waste Land*, as discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

Quinn.[44] Yet, the idea must have been on his mind before then, as Eliot uses the same epigraph for *Prufrock and Other Observations*,[45] with the exclusion of the first line, which are words pronounced by Virgil, about to be embraced by Statius. It is remarkable that he should choose to add precisely this epigraph to *March Hare*, giving a new relevance to all the mentions of light, shadow, and darkness contained in the Notebook's poems. In 'Suite Clownesque IV' (1910), the author describes a surreal stage show, with much dancing, Venetian masks, and sarabands, 'But through the painted colonnades | There falls a shadow dense, immense | It's the comedian again' (*IMH* 38, lines 11-13). The comedian, or better the clown, as the title suggests, is nothing but a shadow, and its dark image strikes with the colourful props on the stage: the line 'There falls a shadow' preludes to *The Hollow Men*'s famous refrain 'Falls the Shadow', as they both share an echo with Ernest Dowson's poem 'Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae', and its lines 'There fell thy shadow' and 'Then falls thy shadow'. earlier in the poem, in Part I, the same clown is interrogating the stars with his nose (*IMH* 32, line 16), an oddly dressed shadow, watching and interrogating the stars. The adjective 'dense', which sounds here nearly like a contradiction, makes the shadow more real and more human: it gives it actual density, which a shadow cannot possibly have. Eliot merges the Laforguian image of the clown with that of a shadow, remarking on the lack of physicality of the self, and its failed interaction with the other human beings, like a clown on stage.

In Eliot's early poetry, shadows and darkness are often linked with madness, and with an altered state of mind. In 'Prufrock's Pervigilium' (1911-12; excised from the revised version, published as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'), Prufrock is in a mad, feverish state watching through the night. In this interesting excised section, evening, darkness and dawn are all personified by the use of verbs of action that we normally would associate with human beings (such as, for instance, 'to wake', 'to fight', or 'to turn'), and it is exactly dusk when Prufrock starts his wandering, or *flânerie*, about the city, watching life after sunset: it is a scene which will build up to the imagery of poems like 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', with the evening having lost its idyllic poetic value of rest

[44] Ricks, 'Notes', p. 4.
[45] See chapter two of this thesis for a longer comment on the *Purgatorio* XXI epigraph.

and repose, and having become the moment of day for restless poets, *flâneurs*, prostitutes, poor old men, and idle boys to come together, showing the sordidness of the new urban reality. The evening abruptly 'wakes' and even fights itself awake, rather than envelop the city naturally, and the lights of the shops shine in the coming darkness, making reality even more evident on the dark backdrop of the approaching night ('And boys were smoking cigarettes, drifted helplessly together | In the fan of light spread out by the drugstore on the corner', *IMH* 43, lines 12-13). In opposition with other poems such as 'Goldfish (Essence of Summer Magazines) II – Embarquement pour Cythère', where the night was anything but dark, with the Moon in the sky and the lights of the city, here darkness plays an important role in the atmosphere surrounding the poet: the 'evil houses' (line 15) Prufrock walks by at night '[p]ointed a ribald finger at [him] in the darkness' (line 16), and 'chuckled', again 'in the darkness' (line 17). In the next stanza, darkness is represented as a monstrous shadow, as it crawls, leaps, hisses, darts across walls, flattens itself, stretches out its tentacles, and leaps. Darkness slips stealthily into the protagonist's mind, in fact permeating it, as he watches it moving about the room, as if this were a projection of his own feverish brain: darkness and 'Madness' are effectively linked to each other in this excised passage, where Madness in fact appears 'before day' (line 36), and with its singing 'the world began to fall apart' at dawn. It is interesting that for the poet the world falls apart at dawn, with light approaching, rather than at night, with the dark. Later on in this thesis, I shall show how dawn will become a metaphor for a mystical approach to God, after St. John of the Cross, and how Eliot perceives it still as 'revelatory', and yet devoid of spirituality. The world falls apart at dawn, as sunlight will bring it back to nature's regular order, and thus normality: no fancy lights, and no shadows with the coming of dawn onto the world. Baudelaire wrote in praise of darkness in a poem entitled 'Les Hiboux' ('Owls'), birds of the night, teaching how the world ought to prefer the quietness of the night in the wood over 'Le tumult et le mouvement' (*FDM* 136, line 11; 'All movement, uproar, turbulence') of urban nights. This is impossible for man, though, Baudelaire concludes, because human existence is 'ivre d'une ombre' (*FDM* 136, line 12; 'drunk on shadows'): attraction to the darker side of life is irresistible. In this respect, the

shadow is an interesting mixture of light and dark: without the opposition of these two elements, there could be no shadows.

1.3 Light and Dark Dichotomy

Eliot apprehended Baudelaire's lesson on shadows as a necessary combination of light and darkness for human beings, and in 'Suppressed Complex' (1915) shadow becomes for the author another way to describe himself, and the way he feels: here again, the idea of the shadow being almost a 'burlesque' one is evident, as he says he 'was a shadow upright in the corner | Dancing joyously in the firelight.' (*IMH* 54, lines 3-4). He is in a woman's room, but his mind and soul appear very much detached from his body: the atmosphere between the two of them is presented as quite stiff and sickening — psychologically 'suppressed', according to the title — although his body is physically in the room with the pale and hard-breathing woman (line 6), his shadow, a projection of the character's personality, would rather dance 'joyously' near the fire. Light imagery in this poem is made contrasting by the shadow's darkness and the firelight: his gloomy soul seems attracted to the light coming from the fire. Still, he would like to escape this situation of repression and inhibition, and get out of the room through the window, once again 'joyously' (line 8).

Eliot's treatment of darkness and light as polar opposites is an important feature of his early poetry. 'The Burnt Dancer' (1914), the title referring to a black moth that dances and gets burnt in a candle's fire, is a poem rich with references to light and darkness, lighter and darker colours, and it is most interesting to understand Eliot's contrastive use of both, which begins with this very early poem. This poem is also the product of a more mature Eliot, showing imagery and references that will come up again and again in his poetry. Firstly, the reference to *Purgatorio*'s Arnaut Daniel passage in the epigraph;

secondly, the image of burning; lastly, the use of mixed Dantean and Baudelairean allusions. The poem begins in the following way:

> Within the yellow ring of flame
> A black moth through the night
> Caught in the circle of desire
> Expiates his heedless flight
> With beat of wings that do not tire
> Distracted from more vital values
> To golden values of the flame
> [...]
> O danse mon papillon noir!
>
> (*IMH* 62, lines 1-7, 14)

In the first two lines of the poem, Eliot clarifies the specific opposition of colours between the two main elements: the 'ring of flame' is yellow, whereas the moth getting burnt is black. In the case of the moth, it is interesting that Eliot should establish which colour the moth is, as well as specify the colour of the flames as 'yellow'. Eliot wants the reader to visualize the scene perfectly, making them focus on a striking contrast between the light's yellowness and the moth's blackness, which is also emphasized by the action taking place at night ('through the night', line 2). At the same time, by using the colour 'yellow' at line 1, he makes an important distinction with the later image of 'whiter flames':

> The singèd reveller of the fire,
> [...]
> Losing the end of his desire
> Desires completion of his loss.
> O strayed from whiter flames that burn not
> O vagrant from a distant star
> O broken guest that may return not
>
> O danse danse mon papillon noir!
>
> (*IMH* 63, lines 34, 36-41)

The black moth dances crazily in yellow flames, but is not permitted to burn in 'whiter flames that burn not': the whiter flames remind us of the 'frigid purgatorial flames' of *Four Quartets* – these do not burn, but are there to 'purify' the souls, who are in fact saved. Hence the fact that these are 'yellow' and really do burn the moth link the image directly to Dante's *Inferno*, and the punishment of most sins by fire. Ricks believes this to be a

reference to the episode of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* V, caught in the circle of the carnal sinners, and that of Arnaut Daniel in *Purgatorio* XXVI, in the circle of lust.[46] This cannot be denied, and yet I believe this is not the whole truth. The moth is black, and its colour is stressed once again in the refrain in French (lines 14, 29, 41). In French the plural 'papillons noirs' means 'dark thoughts',[47] hence the black moth of the poem has dark thoughts but not necessarily dark actions. It is unclear whether the moth (or, effectively, the poet) has sinned in action at all. 'Within the circle of my brain | The twisted dance continues' also would confirm that both sinning and expiating its sins occurs on a more theoretical level. This is the same Eliot who, at the same time, writes 'Do I dare disturb the universe?' in 'Prufrock': the black moth is attracted to light, and gets burnt because of its more sensual desires (hence the reference to Arnaut Daniel, and possibly to Paolo and Francesca), which nevertheless remain unsatisfied. Interestingly, Philippe in *Bubu of Montparnasse* describes men looking for nocturnal entertainment in terms which are very similar to moths drawn to the light: 'Ils ont des faux-cols neufs, des cravates élégantes et sobres piquées d'une épingle brillante et se précipitent vers la lumière avec de l'argent dans leurs poches.'[48] Men are attracted to the light of the night's entertainment in the dark, like moths to the fire. Yet, the moth of Eliot's poem has not really sinned, and is rather burning and expiating like one of the indolent souls just outside river Acheron, in *Inferno* III. Souls here expiate a different kind of sin, that of neither doing good or evil during their life on Earth, as explained by Virgil's reply to Dante's question: 'Ed elli a me: "Questo misero modo | tegnon l'anime triste di coloro | che visser sanza 'nfamia e sanza lodo.' (*Inferno* III, lines 34-36).[49] Virgil's words are interestingly echoed in 'The Burnt Dancer':

> What is the virtue that he shall use
> In a world too strange for pride or shame?
> A world too strange for praise or blame

[46] Ricks, 'Notes', pp. 220-21.
[47] Ricks, 'Notes', p. 222.
[48] Philippe, *Bubu de Montparnasse*, p. 49. English translation: 'They wore stiff new collars, smart sober ties pierced with gaudy stickpins, and they hastened off, with money in their pockets, towards the light.' in Philippe, *Bubu of Montparnasse*, p. 13.
[49] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia: Inferno*, ed. Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2002), p. 42. English translation: 'And he to me: "This miserable mode the dreary souls of those sustain, who lived without blame, and without praise.', in *The Inferno*, p. 29.

Too strange for good or evil:

(*IMH* 62, lines 8-11)

Like the Dantean souls confined on the other shore of the Acheron, who behaved 'without shame or praise' in life, the world is thus seen with Eliot's eyes, as early as 1914: a mass of damned souls, who can do neither good nor evil. Eliot's moth is tempted by sin, but is giving up its 'vital values' (line 6), thus committing suicide for more precious (as they are 'golden', line 7) values, which radiate from the flames. The third stanza, by starting again with the word 'within', suggests drawing a comparison between the author's brain and the flames: the black moth burning in flames for 'golden values' would then resemble Eliot's own inner struggle at the time. He, like the black moth is drawn to firelight, is attracted to beauty and physical pleasure ('circle of desire'), but ends up in almost martyred accents ('the patient acolyte of pain', *IMH* 63, line 32; 'strong beyond [...] human sinews', line 34; the Dantean epigraph from *Purgatorio* XXVI, 'sotto la pioggia dell'aspro martiro'), sacrificing himself for higher values. Again, this occurs all within the poet's brain, with little actualization in the world of smaller values. It is interesting that the poet's soul should be represented by the image of the moth, both for its French symbolism, as stated earlier, and also for the Irish myth that butterflies, and moths, are the souls of the dead.[50] If 'The Burnt Dancer' is on the one hand a very Dantesque poem in terms of its theme and atmosphere, it is also very much affected by Baudelaire's imagery. In 'Hymne à la Beauté' ('Hymn to Beauty'), for instance, Baudelaire uses the image of the burning mayfly to symbolise the poet's physical and sensual yielding in front of Beauty: 'L'éphémère ébloui vole vers toi, chandelle, | Crépite, flambe et dit: Bénissons ce flambeau!' (*FDM* 44, lines 17-18; 'You are a candle where the mayfly dies | In flames, blessing this fire's deadly bloom.'). Beauty, or perhaps better sensual beauty, is not conceived here as a blinding light, or in fact even the Sun, but rather as a simple candle as that is enough to burn a little mayfly, symbolising human transience: Baudelaire equates man's yielding to Beauty with the irresistible attraction of certain insects toward light sources – Baudelaire's 'chandelle' is not very different from Eliot's 'yellow ring of flame'. Still, burning, for Baudelaire, is felt,

[50] William Butler Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Limited, 1973), p. 118.

and described as very sensual: if Eliot nearly always associates it with some kind of sin, or expiation, it is not so for Baudelaire. Again in Baudelaire we find, in a poem which is quite remarkable for this topic from the very title, 'Les Plaintes d'un Icare' ('Lament of an Icarus'), Icarus 'brûlé par l'amour du beau' (*FDM* 344, line 13, 'burned by love of beauty'). Baudelaire's burning has greater aesthetic rather than moral connotations.

Eliot's poetry often imagines expiating one's sins by burning in flames. In 'Inside the gloom', constellations take their places on a garret room's ceiling (*IMH* 72, lines 1-4), where the Scorpion is dancing with its tail on fire (lines 9-10). The image is therefore quite similar to the one previously seen in 'The Burnt Dancer', as the Scorpion is in quite a precarious situation too, and Eliot uses once again a contrasting imagery of light and darkness, juxtaposing a dark, sombre garret room with the beautiful light of night-time constellations. It is also important to notice here how the image of the scorpion has to be read as both the constellation and the insect. Ricks interestingly points out that here Eliot might refer to a legend, according to which the scorpion would sting itself to death with its own tail, when surrounded by fire.[51] In this case, if Ricks' suggestion is persuasive, the image created by the poet shows the scorpion dancing with its tail on fire, resuming the idea of burning by what is felt like an irresistible choice, here and in 'The Burnt Dancer': the ring of fire around the scorpion which would force it to sting its tail is nothing but another 'circle of desire' leading to its victim's moral and physical destruction.

The complex poem 'The Little Passion – From "An Agony in the Garret"' (1915) carries a similar message: light's virtue leads to punishment and atonement of one's sins. The author describes another man, possibly representing everyman:

> Now following the lines of lights
> Or diving into dark retreats
> Or following the lines of lights
> And knowing well to what they lead:
> To one inevitable cross
> Whereon our souls are pinned, and bleed.
>
> (*IMH* 57, lines 3-8).

[51] Ricks, 'Notes', p. 252.

Whether one decides to follow light and virtue (represented here as 'lines', and therefore straight, direct, and so apparently simple to pursue), or rather to opt for darkness and shady atmospheres, the result will be the same. Atonement's cross is impossible to escape, at the same time one's self realization and happiness appear very hard to achieve. Here light and darkness are again established as opposites, although they end up being placed on the same level, with the final act having to be death, through pain, regardless of one's following a life of virtue or vice. After all, both Jesus Christ and Barabbas were crucified in the same way. In this poem Eliot deliberately decides to deal with light and darkness imagery from a religious, Christian point of view, as the reader can assume precisely from the title 'The Little Passion'. The allusion is obviously to Jesus Christ's Passion, but the fact that it is defined as 'little' clearly makes it more everyday, more human, or at least closer to the common man. This is not the bigger Passion experienced by Jesus on the Cross, but it is rather man's daily struggle with life. The garret, too, where the common man's agony and crucifixion takes place, suggests a lowermost, shady place with little light: the same image is presented again in the poem 'He said: this universe is very clever' (1911), where the common man is crucified precisely 'in an attic' (*IMH* 71, line 11). This image was frequently in Eliot's mind at the time. According to Conrad Aiken, when Eliot, returned to the United States after his stay in Paris, he pinned on his bedroom's wall a reproduction of Paul Gaugin's *Crucifixion*, better known as *The Yellow Christ*.[52] By hanging this painting in his room, Eliot could see the crucifixion on a daily basis. It is thus natural that this should have influenced his poetry, and thus also increased his usage of light and the colour yellow.

'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' (1914) also attests to Eliot's early use of light and darkness imagery with religious connotations. In this controversial, unconventional portrait of St. Sebastian the scene is set at night, and the poem thus starts off immediately with a contrasting image of light and darkness: the saint will 'come with a lamp in the night' (*IMH* 78, line 2), possibly reminiscent of the Biblical parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), where the five wise virgins wait for the bridegroom's arrival prepared

[52] Ricks, 'Notes', p. 249.

with enough oil to light their lamps, in case he should arrive at night (which he does, arriving at the Virgins' house at midnight and fulfilling all symbolical expectations), and the other five (called 'foolish') are left without oil for their lamps, and so are absent at the bridegroom's arrival. The arrival of a lamp at night hence is considered as a carrier of some divine revelation, to light up the dark: here, on the contrary, St. Sebastian's martyrdom and elements of his own story apparently point towards a completely different direction. There is, clearly, no mention of arrows, and yet a woman appears in the poem. According to some legends, St. Sebastian would not have died from the arrows' wounds, as he would have been nursed and healed by St. Irene, and only later would he have been beaten to death.[53] With regard to this part of the story, it is interesting that in a letter to Conrad Aiken from Marburg, dated 25th July 1914, Eliot would send the draft of the poem 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' along with the following words:

> I have studied S. Sebastians – why should anyone paint a beautiful youth and stick him full of pins (or arrows) unless he felt a little as the hero of my verse? Only there's nothing homosexual about this – rather an important difference perhaps – but no one ever painted a female Sebastian, did they?[54]

Eliot's St. Sebastian is clearly intended as an image of martyrdom and self-punishment. Another moth burning in the fire, or the poet crucified. Eliot shapes this figure mixing more religious elements (i.e. the lamp in the night) together with some which are reminiscent of medieval courtly love. He is not a saint on his own, sacrificing himself for God — he is firstly a man, and his desire is set on a physical level. He flogs himself until his 'blood should ring the lamp | And glisten in the light', in order to be accepted by the woman. The scene is, to me, influenced by medieval settings of knights courting ladies of higher rank, usually married. In Arnaut Daniel's sirventes 'Doutz braitz e critz' ('Sweet tweets and cries'), for instance, the poet asks God to bless his meeting with his lover, so

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[53] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit, MI: The Gale Group in association with the Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p. 853.
[54] T. S. Eliot, *Letters 1898-1922*, vol. I, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 49.

that he will be able to meet her again, and admire his lover's body in the lamplight.[55] The presence of the lamplight in Daniel's sirventes helps to merge the erotic with the religious. The lamplight will not only permit Arnaut Daniel to see his lover, but also it is an indication that their union is in fact allowed and blessed by God, and not a clandestine one. Interestingly, in another medieval work, Chrétien de Troyes' poem *Lancelot le Chevalier de la Charrette* (*Lancelot, or the Knight of the Cart*), Lancelot visits Guinevere secretly at night in her chamber, and the whole scene takes place in complete darkness, since Lancelot was pleased 'that no moon was shining, and no stars, | And all through the house not a candle | Or a lamp or a lantern was lit.'.[56] Darkness is necessary for their furtive meeting, and at the same time this will brand it as an unblessed union, as not even the moon or the stars decide to shine on the two secret lovers. Consequently, Lancelot wounds himself while pulling out the window's iron bars; his wound bleeds all night, but for lack of light neither he nor Guinevere can notice this, and thus Lancelot stains Guinevere's bed sheets (although not her white gown), which will later lead to their love affair's discovery. Eliot might have or might not have had this specific passage in mind; yet this passage is relevant to understand some stylistic choices regarding his use of imagery in 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', linked to ideas of martyrdom, self-punishment, and relationship with the other sex. In the poem's first stanza, we read:

> And then put out the light
> To follow where you lead,
> To follow where your feet are white
> In the darkness toward your bed
> And where your gown is white
>
> (lines 10-14)

[55] 'Dieus lo chauzitz, | Per cui foron assoutas | Las faillidas que fetz Longis lo cecs, | Voilla, sil platz, qu'ieu e midonz jassam | En la chambra on amdui nos mandem | Uns rics covens don tan gran joi atendi | Quel seu bel cors baisan rizen descobra | E quel remir contral lum de la lampa.', Arnaut Daniel, 'Doutz braitz e critz (V)', English translation: 'God who did tax | not Longus' sin, respected | That blind centurion beneath the spikes | And him forgave, grant that we two shall lie | Within one room, and seal therein our pact, | Yes, that she kiss me in the half-light, leaning | To me, and laugh and strip and stand forth in the lustre | Where lamp-light with light limb but half engages.', in *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Hugh Kenner (New York: New Directions, 1953), pp. 172-175.

[56] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, trans. by Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 144 (ll. 4568-70). Original text: 'ne ce mie ne li greva | qu'il ne luisoit lune n'estoile, | n'an la meison n'avoit chandoile | ne lanpe ne lanterne ardant.', in Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot, ou le chevalier de la charrette,* ed. by Jean-Claude Aubailly (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), p. 294 (ll. 4560-63).

The light is put out: the lamp of religion, the lamp of common sense is extinguished, and the scene soon turns from one of love (the martyr's adoration for his faith, and God, as well as the woman's sympathy for him who prompts her to take care of him) into a form of self-punishment, jealousy and sado-masochism.[57] Like the jealous lover in Browning's *Porphyria's Lover*, or in fact Othello instigated by Iago in Shakespeare's tragedy, Eliot's St. Sebastian has to kill the woman whom he loves, and in this case who has just saved him, because she is of a purity and beauty that he cannot aspire to. He has to kill her in the darkness, because she is radiant with white: similarly to Baudelaire's earlier Beauty-candle, St. Sebastian's woman also shines with her perfection, and her admirer can only either surrender to her grace (by medieval courtly love standards), or make her surrender to his strength, and kill her. He cannot simply enjoy her beauty and sympathy, he has chosen to suffer, and enjoyment is beyond his possibilities. Eliot is mixing various sources in this poem, a poem he himself thought could be perceived as 'morbid', and 'forced'.[58] Interestingly, in Shakespeare's *Othello*, in the famous scene shortly before Desdemona's murder, Othello too asked to put out the light:[59]

> Put out the light, and then put out the light.
> If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
> I can again thy former light restore
> Should I repent me. But once put out thy light,
> Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
> I know not where is that Promethean heat
> That can thy light relume.
>
> (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 7-13)

Putting out the light stands, of course, for killing Desdemona. Even if a candle can be lit again after extinguishing it, it is impossible to do the same with human life, which, once taken, is taken forever. For Eliot's St. Sebastian, putting out the light naturally conveys a

[57] Richard A. Kaye defines 'The Love Song of S. Sebastian' 'a work concerned with heterosexual jealousy that has turned insanely murderous', in Richard A. Kaye, '"A Splendid Readiness for Death": T. S. Eliot, the Homosexual Cult of St. Sebastian, and World War I', in *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999), 107-134 (p. 121).
[58] Eliot, *Letters 1898-1922*, p. 48.
[59] John Paul Riquelme, 'T. S. Eliot's Ambiviolences: Oscar Wilde as Masked Precursor', *The Hopkins Review*, vol. 5 (2012), 353-379 (p. 371).

similar meaning, and yet, his cold blood and determination are not shaken by any doubts, and so puts out the light and kills his female companion. The whiteness she radiates in the night's darkness is exemplary of her perfection and at the same time it contributes to the consistency of the poem's imagery, as in the second stanza, the world is prophesied as ending in the sun by melting (line 26) – a final image of self-destruction.

'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' is essential to our understanding of Eliot's early use of light and dark imagery. Although he is attracted to light, it is in fact darkness he prefers – in this respect, he is influenced by Baudelaire's poetry as well as attitude towards life. In 'Baudelaire', Eliot discusses the French poet's morbidity, with special attention to his wish to suffer, his Satanism, and his relationship with the opposite sex. With regard to the first point, Eliot stated, 'He was one of those who have great strength, but strength merely to *suffer*. He could not escape suffering and could not transcend it, so he *attracted* pain to himself.'[60] An element of suffering effectively appears in various instances of Eliot's early poetry, where his suffering is remarkably linked to his early spirit of self-punishment. Young Eliot's early experiences of the modern city are accompanied by the sense of suffering which Baudelaire tried to attract to himself throughout his life.

1.4 CONCLUSION

Inventions of the March Hare contains a number of poems which demonstrate Eliot's skilful use of light and dark images from his very early poetry. Eliot draws mainly on his own reading of late nineteenth-century French authors to find a way to describe the dark and the sordid of the new American and European metropolis. In section 1.1, I have considered Eliot's early contrastive descriptions of the various moments of the day: the evening is associated with bright colours such as yellow and pink due to the new public lighting, which literally turned night into another day, and the afternoon has, on the contrary, been changed into a poetic symbol of passivity. The passage from afternoon to

[60] Eliot, 'Baudelaire', p. 338.

evening becomes for Eliot the time of the day when he shifts from passivity to action, a combination of paralysis and movement, which will become even clearer in his first collection of poetry, *Prufrock*. Eliot moves about the new urban modernity in a dark which lacks a spiritual direction, attempting to understand the growing metropolis of the early twentieth century. In section 1.2, I have analyzed the image of the shadow, which in his earliest poetry works as the poet's alter ego, especially by looking at Dante's failed embrace between shadows, which thus would hint at sin and expiation, and the figure of the clown, derived from Laforgue, which Eliot also merges with the idea of the shadow, denoting a lack of physicality of the self, and its failed interaction with other human beings, like a clown on stage. In section 1.3, I have explained the poet's inner tensions in his soul through the polar opposition of light and dark imagery. I have explored how in the *March Hare* poems, light and dark are often employed as a metaphor to signify the poet's inward self: self-punishment, and martyrdom appear with images of burning and getting burnt. The contrast between virtue and vice is expressed again by a direct opposition between light and dark; light ultimately starts carrying meaning of divine revelation, and is also used as a metaphor for life. Eliot's early use of light and dark imagery situates itself at once as a search for light, expiation, and purification.

Chapter Two

The lighting of the lamps:

DUSK

'My tea is nearly ready and the sun has left the sky;
It's time to take the window to see Leerie going by;
For every night at teatime and before you take your seat,
With lantern and with ladder he comes posting up the street.
[...]
For we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door,
And Leerie stops to light it as he lights so many more;
And O! before you hurry by with ladder and with light,
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him tonight!'

Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Lamplighter'[1]
A Child's Garden of Verses (1885)

In a lecture delivered at Nice in 1952, entitled 'Scylla and Charybdis', Eliot stresses how, while looking for the right word in a passage of 'Little Gidding', where he wanted his readers to be able to perceive a particular atmosphere of early morning light in London during World War II, the word 'dusk' was too ambiguous for him as it means both 'twilight before dawn' and 'twilight before night'. 'Dusk' alone, though, Eliot continues in his lecture, would be immediately perceived by an English-speaking audience as the latter meaning, and so evening dusk, hence his struggle finding the right word to signify morning dusk in 'Little Gidding'.[2] Dusk is effectively most frequently associated with that

[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), p. 31.
[2] HB/P/32, 'Scylla and Charybdis' (King's College Archive, Cambridge).

moment during the day when twilight reaches the darker stage and is giving way to night and hence complete darkness.[3]

I am using this term here to identify Eliot's first collection of published poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), as evening dusk, with its atmospheres of sunsets and the beginning of nocturnal *flâneries*. The presence of light and dark imagery may not strike the reader as a very obvious one in this collection, since its occurrences are quite fragmented and Eliot's use of them is quite subtle. Instead of a constant repetition of words such as 'light', 'dark', or 'fire' (as is the case of *Four Quartets*), in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, Eliot uses a wider range of words which are related to the semantic fields of light and dark, such as artificial sources of light — 'lamp', 'lamplight', 'street lamp', 'candles'; different times of the day – 'night', 'midnight', 'afternoon'; colour adjectives – 'grey', 'yellow', 'white'; and even weather conditions — 'fog', 'rain'. In this chapter I will consider in detail those images of light which do not occur very often in Eliot's later poetry but are essential for him to recreate a precise kind of poetic atmosphere in his early poetry. Here the darkness of his poetry's urban settings is illuminated by 'the lighting of the lamps' (*CPP* 22, line 13). It seems appropriate to remember at this stage Hugh Kenner's words on Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations*:

> We never ask what it's routine to ask about Wordsworth or even Keats: what Thomas Eliot may have observed when he opened his eyes, and what he made of it.
>
> Yet he called his first book *Prufrock and Other Observations*, and in its earliest poems, the first two *Preludes*, an alert man in an American city is taking note of the new century's novelties.[4]

The question at the core of this chapter is then, what did Eliot observe in the new century?

Thomas Edison's first successful experiment with incandescent electricity took place in 1879,[5] and the first central electricity stations opened in 1882 in London and New

[3] Oxford English Dictionary Online, <www.oed.com> [accessed 4 January 2014].
[4] Hugh Kenner, 'Eliot Observing', *The Mechanic Muse*, p. 19.
[5] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Angela Davies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 58.

York.[6] At the turn of the twentieth century, electric lighting was the one invention that changed the modern way of life as well as the landscape of European and American cities. Gaslight had already altered man's natural rhythms by extending light hours and making circulation at night much safer, but it is electric lighting that shapes the modern city, turning it into an actual 'metropolis'.[7] The use of electric light in the city made it possible for man to create a 'second day', which started precisely at dusk when the natural lights were fading.[8] And yet, as Chris Otter points out in his work on light in Victorian Britain:

> New technologies never fully or immediately replace old ones: there is never a point of rupture dividing, say, the "age of electricity" from "the age of gas" or "the age of tallow." Instead, technologies, as they become embedded and integrated into everyday practice, become superimposed over, and slightly displace, older artefacts. Illumination is a splendid illustration of this process. The nineteenth century is the history, not of the rise of electricity or even of gaslight, but of the proliferation, concatenation, and spatial juxtaposition of multiple light forms. In 1900, one might routinely have encountered electric, gas, and oil lamps as well as candles over the course of a day.[9]

With this quotation in mind, I will argue in this chapter how Eliot's use of light imagery in his early poetry is naturally influenced by this technological and atmospheric change of his era.

This chapter has been divided into three sub-sections, which all deal with a different aspect of light and dark imagery in *Prufrock and Other Observations*. In section 2.1, I will focus on the ways in which Eliot uses images of various light sources as self-representation. The section will begin with the Dantean epigraphs' paradoxical images of the solid shadow and the motionless flame, and then interpret how the Dantean epigraphs in relation to Eliot's poems can lead to a new understanding of light imagery as means of imagining either the poetic self or other poetic characters in 'Portrait of a Lady', 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', and 'Preludes'. Section 2.2 will explore the theme of light imagery as a metaphor for reason, common sense and respectability. A particular feature

[6] Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, p. 65.
[7] Olivier Namias, 'Electric Light and the Cityscape', *The Culture of Energy*, ed Mogens Rüdiger (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 82-92 (p. 82).
[8] Namias, 'Electric Light and the Cityscape', pp. 84-85.
[9] Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 261.

of light imagery in *Prufrock and Other Observations* proves to be the poet's direct interaction with light sources, which help the poet to mediate his own thoughts and instincts. In this section I will thus consider an early draft of 'Portrait of a Lady' (included in *Inventions of the March Hare*), 'Conversation Galante', and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'. In section 2.3, I will argue that some of Eliot's early poems ('Portrait of a Lady', 'The Love of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'La Figlia Che Piange') can be considered as the achievements of a restless, nocturnal *flâneur*, exploring three specific images: 1) the image of the sunset, which is reclaimed by Eliot from its status as poetical cliché to a step towards activity thanks to the new public lighting technology; 2) the image of smoke and fog as a means of representing human solitude; 3) a brief exploration of the image of the 'shutter' in Eliot, Proust and Symons, and its link to Walter Benjamin's theory of the *flâneur* by which the city's 'exterior' is turned into 'interior'. Throughout my analysis of Eliot's early use of light and dark imagery, I will also consider his debt towards William Shakespeare in the instance of 'Portrait of a Lady', and especially towards the poetic ambiances of some late nineteenth-century British poets, such as James Thomson (1834 - 1882), John Davidson (1857 – 1909), and Arthur Symons (1865 – 1945), who all in different ways teach Eliot how to make a meaningful use of light imagery against a dark backdrop of the metropolis at night.

2.1 LIGHT AS SELF

The collection *Prufrock and Other Observations* opens with lines from Dante's *Purgatorio* XXI (the same lines as in Eliot's Notebook *Inventions of the March Hare*), and is here preceded by a dedication to his French friend Jean Verdenal, killed in World War I:

> Or puoi la quantitate
> comprender dell'amor ch'a te mi scalda,
> quando dismento nostra vanitate,
> trattando l'ombre come cosa salda.

It is interesting that Eliot should have chosen exactly these lines from *La Divina Commedia* for their mention of 'shadows' as something 'solid': in the version affixed to the Notebook *Inventions of the March Hare*, the line 'tu se' ombra ed ombra vedi.' was included too. Eliot's decision to excise the first line of the original epigraph was designed to make the quotation more effective by ending it with Statius's final remark, which also concludes Dante's Canto XXI. A solid shadow is a contradiction in itself, and therefore cannot exist – souls in Purgatory are shadows that cannot be touched, nor embraced[10] (with the only exception of Sordello in Canto VI):[11] no human contact is possible among souls, whether they are repentant ones like Statius or lost pagans like Virgil. This passage of *Purgatorio* can be read in two different ways in relation to Eliot. Firstly, he chooses a failed physical encounter between two poets from two different religions, to signify that, even if physical contact between the two is forbidden in Purgatory, contact at a more psychological, intellectual level, is still present, showing Statius's own debt to Virgil and appreciation of the *Aeneid*, hence provoking a transfer of poetic inspiration[12] to Dante who is witnessing the scene, and ultimately to T. S. Eliot, who picked that precise epigraph to begin his first published collection of poetry. Secondly, Eliot's choice of a passage in *Purgatorio* where shadows cannot touch each other (as opposed to the Sordello episode) leads to another level of interpretation: the Purgatorial shadows' lack of physicality reinforces Eliot's own perception that physical contact between human beings is never easy – if not impossible — even on Earth: throughout *Prufrock and Other Observations*, the poet's personae stumble at social events, whether tea parties, or more intimate meetings with a lady. Eliot felt one could only join these meeting in a 'controlled' way, thus going against the absolute need of human beings to fully communicate with one another,[13] hence his nocturnal ramblings to and from rooms where the 'women come and go, | Talking of Michelangelo' (*CPP* 13, lines 13-14). Eliot shows here some kind of empathy

[10] Ignazio Baldelli, 'I Morti di morte violenta: Dante e Sordello', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 115 (1997), 111 – 183 (p. 142).
[11] 'e l'un l'altro abbracciava', *Purgatorio* canto VI, l. 75.
[12] Ronald L. Martinez, 'Dante and the Two Canons: Statius in Virgil's Footsteps (Purgatorio 21 – 30), *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1995) 151 – 175 (p. 160).
[13] Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (New York: McDowell, 1959), p. 30.

towards *Purgatorio*'s and *Inferno*'s souls: this is interestingly marked by his choice of some images of light and darkness from Dante's *La Divina Commedia*. One of them is precisely that of the Purgatorial shadow: a shadow contains both light and darkness, at the same time. A shadow can be perceived as 'dark' as it does not itself shine, but, quite obviously, a shadow cannot exist without the opposition of light and darkness. It is not by chance that the souls in Purgatory should be pictured as shadows: light and darkness are very important to *La Divina Commedia*. A disquieting, smoky darkness fills the circles in *Inferno*, whereas *Paradiso* is characterized by a nearly blinding light.[14] Both darkness in *Inferno* and light in *Paradiso* are extremely still: in both places, souls have reached an unchangeable state, either damned in Hell or blessed with divine glory in Heaven. In Dante's *Purgatorio*, on the contrary, light is always changing: dawns, twilights, dusks, sunsets follow one another continuously.[15] Light marks the time souls have to spend in Purgatory in order to be admitted into Heaven, and thus it brings hope and certainty: the repentant souls *will* be saved. The passing of each sunset represents for the shadows of Purgatory one day less to salvation. At the same time, the image of the 'shadow', with its combination of light and darkness, mediates well through the pitch darkness of Hell and the blinding light of Heaven.

The vanishing souls of *Purgatorio,* in their combination of darkness and light, are representative of the whole of *Prufrock*. Eliot starts 'Portrait of a Lady' (composed 1910-11) with the light spread by four candles in a smoky surrounding: since the technological superimposition of various lightings, it is not unusual that Eliot should make use of an image of "old-fashioned" candles. As late as 1921, the English population was still recommended to use candles for bedside reading, as candlelight was softer to the eyes than electric light.[16] Even nowadays, candles are still popular for religious or romantic purposes. The first lines introduce the reader to the house of a lady visited by the poet's persona:

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[14] Umberto Bosco, 'Introduzione al Canto I', in Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia: Purgatorio* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2002), p. 2.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, p. 204.

> Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon
> You have the scene arrange itself – as it will seem to do –
> With 'I have saved this afternoon for you';
> And four wax candles in the darkened room,
> Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,
> An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb
> Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.
>
> (*CPP* 18, lines 1-7)

The atmosphere which Eliot tries to recreate is precisely that of a dead world – that of a life not actively lived, but rather spent waiting for life to actually begin. The lady of the poem lives a 'buried life' [*CPP* 19, line 53], a clear allusion to Matthew Arnold, and the darkened atmosphere, with the faint light of the wax candles, makes the lady's living room feel almost like a tomb to the poet – she is 'buried' in that same room, 'serving tea to friends' (*CPP* 20, line 67). It is perceived as a romantic tomb: the lit candles and their light on the room's ceiling should symbolize a special occasion and at the same time recreate an atmosphere of forced intimacy and vague romance, which culminates in the poet's reference to Juliet, an ironic contrast to Eliot's lady. The depiction of Juliet's tomb in Act V of *Romeo and Juliet* is effectively bleak and dreary, with Romeo describing it in these terms:

> […] Shall I believe
> That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
> And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
> Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
> For fear of that, I still will stay with thee,
> And never from this palace of dim night
> Depart again. […]
>
> (Act V, Scene III, lines 102-108)[17]

Juliet lies 'in dark' and the grave is indeed a 'palace of dim night'. Still, Juliet was defined as 'the Sun' by his lover earlier in the tragedy, in the famous balcony scene (Act II, Scene II, line 39), and so, even in her grave, she can still radiate her own beauty and light and make the atmosphere more joyful for her lover:

[17] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Methuen & Co., 1980), p. 227.

ROMEO: [...] I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave.
A grave? O no, a lantern, slaughter'd youth.
For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
This vault a feasting presence, full of light.

(Act V, Scene III, lines 83-86)[18]

A lantern here is not to be confused with what we would commonly understand nowadays, but rather means a 'turret full of windows', which could be either 'a great hall in a palace'[19] used for feasts and balls or a 'lighthouse':[20] the dreary grave where Juliet is laid turns into a desirable place to be buried, full of light. *Romeo and Juliet* revolves around oxymoronic images of light and darkness:[21] throughout the play, the reader finds continuous references to light and dark, where light is usually perceived as both a metaphor for beauty and also for knowledge.[22] Wax candles are not mentioned in the description of the Capulets' tomb, and so they make the comparison with Juliet even more ridiculous: the lady's candles are too weak to illuminate her room properly, dark for the weather conditions outside. The image of the candle in 'Portrait of a Lady' is a representation of the Lady herself and her past, and how she clings to it through them, since there is no apparent evidence of other, more modern light sources in the Lady's house. Later in the poem, the speaker eventually associates himself with a candle too, in two instances: ' 'Perhaps you can write to me.' | My self-possession flares up for a second; | *This* is as I had reckoned.' (*CPP* 20, III, lines 93-95) and a few lines later 'My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark.' (*CPP* 21, line 101). The Oxford English Dictionary has 'to flare up' as 'to burst into a sudden and temporary blaze', and 'to gutter' as: 'To melt away rapidly by its becoming channelled on one side and the tallow or wax pouring down; to sweal'.[23] The poet's self-possession is described as a candle, or a small flame, which blazes (albeit only for a moment) at the lady's suggestion of establishing an intimacy between the two of

[18] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 226.
[19] Brian Gibbons, 'Notes', in William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 226.
[20] Robert W. Walts, 'The Felicity of the Marine Imagery in *Romeo and Juliet*', *The South Central Bulletin*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1962), 16-18 (p. 18).
[21] See Leslie Thomson, '"With Patient Ears Attend": "Romeo and Juliet" on the Elizabethan Stage', *Studies in Philology*, vol. 92, no. 2 (1995), 230-247 (p. 237).
[22] Ruth Nevo, 'Tragic Form in Romeo and Juliet', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1969), 241-258 (p. 253).
[23] Oxford English Dictionary Online, <www.oed.com> [accessed 7 January 2014].

them and consequently melts at the lady's remark (that their acquaintance never developed into proper friendship). The poet's persona also associates himself with a guttering flame, and with the loss of his self-possession, there is no light of reason, no light of common sense anymore to brighten up the room, or their conversation.

In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', after seeing his head on a platter like St. John the Baptist, Prufrock states: 'I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker' (*CPP* 15, l. 84). Greatness is here imagined as a glowing light: if it starts flickering, it is shaking unsteadily, shifting continuously from very bright to very feeble. The Oxford English Dictionary has the verb 'to flicker' as meaning 'To flash up and die away alternately. Of a flame: To burn fitfully or unsteadily [...]'.[24] Similarly, Prufrock's mind in the poem is a very flickering one: fear and lack of self-confidence make his greatness waver and tremble, like a candle guttering, and like the male character in 'Portrait of a Lady'. It is interesting to remember here, how Eliot had chosen lines from Dante's *Inferno* as epigraph for 'Prufrock':

> "S'io credessi che mia risposta fosse
> a persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
> questa fiamma staria senza più scosse;
> ma per ciò che giammai di questo fondo
> non tornò vivo alcun, s'i' odo il vero,
> senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo."
>
> (*CPP* 13)

From the very beginning of 'Prufrock', the reader is thus presented with a paradoxical image of light, that of a motionless flame. Guido da Montefeltro, a fraudulent soul,[25] approaches Dante thinking that he is also damned, and so unable to report what Guido says to any living human being; but if he only thought Dante could go back to the Earth, and report what he is hearing from Guido, then 'his flame would remain motionless', and not speak at all. In Dante's *Inferno*, sinners cannot prevent their flames from burning: their punishment is eternal. J. Alfred Prufrock is a lost soul in his everyday earthly hell,

[24] Oxford English Dictionary Online, <www.oed.com> [accessed 7 January 2014].
[25] Anna Hatcher, 'Dante's Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 88 (1970), 109-117 (p. 114).

made up of constrictions, repetitions and social rituals that enchain him – like souls in Dante's *Inferno*, who continuously receive the same punishment. Interestingly, in the lines immediately preceding Guido da Montefeltro's speech, which are not included in 'Prufrock"s epigraph, Dante describes Guido da Montefeltro's flame as moving its 'sharp point to and fro' ('Poscia che 'l foco alquanto ebbe rugghiato | al modo suo, l'aguta punta mosse | di qua, di là', Canto XXVII, lines 58-60)[26] and writhes and tosses when his conversation with Dante and Virgil is finished ('Quand'elli ebbe 'l suo dir così compiuto, | la fiamma dolorando si partio, | torcendo e dibattendo 'l corno aguto.', lines 130-2)[27]. In Canto XXVI, Ulysses and Dyomed's "double" flame (who are also punished in Hell for their common fraudulent behaviour in life) moves in a similar way:

> Lo maggior corno de la fiamma antica
> cominciò a crollarsi mormorando,
> pur come quella cui vento affatica;
> indi la cima qua e là menando,
> come fosse la lingua che parlasse,
> gittò voce di fuori
>
> (Canto XXVI, lines 85-90)[28]

Guido da Montefeltro's flame (and Ulysses' and Dyomed's 'double' flame), even when flickering, is decidedly of a different state to Prufrock's — Prufrock could be imagined as a guttering candle, even though one as unsteady as Guido's flame, it is yet diminished in its 'greatness'. If Eliot is trying to compare Prufrock to Dante's sinner Guido da Montefeltro and the other fraudulent souls in Hell, it seems then reasonable to ask, what Prufrock's sin actually consists of. The sin of fraud as perceived by Dante is not only regarded as 'trickery', but more importantly as an abuse of the intellect — that same brilliant intelligence God had bestowed on Guido da Montefeltro,[29] and which he decided to misuse. Prufrock, too, is abusing of his intelligence by over-thinking and being indecisive (e.g. 'Do

[26] Alighieri, *Inferno*, p. 433. English translation: 'After the flame had roared awhile, as usual, it moved the sharp point to and fro', *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, p. 303.
[27] Alighieri, *Inferno*, p. 438. English translation: 'When he his words had ended thus, the flame, sorrowing, departed, writhing and tossing its sharp horn.', *The Inferno*, p. 307.
[28] Alighieri, *Inferno*, p. 419. English translation: 'The greater horn of the ancient flame began to shake itself, murmuring, just like a flame that struggles with the wind. | Then carrying to and fro the top, as if it were the tongue that spake, threw forth a voice', *The Inferno*, p. 293.
[29] Hatcher, 'Dante's Ulysses', p. 116.

I dare | Disturb the universe?', 'Do I dare to eat a peach?'), but he has only sinned against himself, in his thoughts, and not against others, as in Guido's case (or Ulysses', also a fraudulent in the same circle in Hell). His flame flickers with the indecision of his being, with too much thinking, and with the trickery of not letting other people see his real self, but it is in fact only a flickering candle — not a full flame of Dante's infernal sinners, whose flickering cannot be stopped nor their flames extinguished.

Light in *Inferno*'s eighth circle springs from the sinners themselves, with burning as an obvious symbol of having yielded to worldly passions and ambitions, and light hides their features ('O anima che se' là giù nascosta',[30] says Dante to Guido da Montefeltro). Self-identification with an artificial source of light is facilitated by the comparison with Dante's sinners. John Davidson (1857-1909), a recognised influence on Eliot's early compositions,[31] has his poetic self identify with flickering artificial light in poem 'A Woman and Her Son' (*New Ballads*, 1897). A son at his mother's deathbed (presumably the poet himself, whose mother passed away while he was editing *New Ballads*)[32] looks out the window and describes the scene outside, after she has just passed away:

> Outside a city-reveller's tipsy tread
> Severed the silence with a jagged rent;
> The tall lamps flickered through the sombre street,
> With yellow light hiding the stainless stars:
> In the next house a child awoke and cried;
>
> (lines 158-162)[33]

The flickering light of the 'tall lamps' mirrors the son's soul and his uncertainty, as he is left alone in the world: earlier in the poem, his mother had explained how her husband and the other seven children are waiting for her in Heaven ('Eight souls for God! In Heaven they wait for me--- | My husband and the seven.' *SPP* 71, lines 122-123). The poet's

[30] Canto XXVII, l. 36, in Alighieri, *Inferno*, p. 431. English translation: 'O soul, that there below art hidden!', in *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1932), p. 301.
[31] Robert Crawford, 'James Thomson and T. S. Eliot', *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1985), 23-41 (p. 30).
[32] John Sloan, *John Davidson, First of the Moderns: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 152.
[33] John Davidson, *Selected Poems and Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 73. Further references to this edition will be indicated as *SPP* in brackets in the text.

soul becomes unsteady and starts resembling the nocturnal, urban atmosphere around him: the flickering light of the gas lamps outside directly signifies the poet's feeling of loss and confusion after his mother has passed away.

Another connection between a light source and the way the human mind thinks and operates is suggested by the image of the magic lantern again in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock': 'It is impossible to say just what I mean! | But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:' (*CPP* 16, lines 105-6). Prufrock finds it hard to express what he really wants to say: his abused intellect and the constraint of social conventions leads him to believe that repression of his actual feelings and thoughts should be the only possible path for him. But, Prufrock continues, if it were possible to display one's interiority through 'patterns on a screen', as projected by 'a magic lantern', he could avoid the awkwardness of words, and thus express himself better.[34] The magic lantern of the poem refers to a specific object, which would have been already quite archaic for the 1910s, when 'Prufrock' was written. The magic lantern reached its popularity in the Victorian age as source of entertainment, projecting images onto a screen through a concave mirror and a light (namely a candle), and it can now be considered as a precursor of modern cinema.[35] David Trotter interestingly underlines how the source of light is placed inside the magic lantern, rather than outside (not like, for instance, certain types of kaleidoscopes):[36] this makes the magic lantern particularly suitable for Eliot's comparison of its functions with those of the human mind. Marcel Proust (1871 – 1922), in the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), *Du côté de chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*, 1913), also makes an interesting narrative use of the magic lantern, as a metaphor for the way the human mind works, contemporary with the use of the magic lantern in Eliot's 'Prufrock':

A Combray, tous les jours dès la fin de l'après-midi, longtemps avant le moment où il faudrait me mettre au lit et rester, sans dormir, loin de ma mère et de ma grand'mère, ma chambre à coucher

[34] Kenner, *The Invisible Poet*, p. 24.
[35] David Trotter, 'T. S. Eliot and Cinema', *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2006), 237-265 (p. 245).
[36] Ibidem.

redevenait le point fixe et douloureux de mes préoccupations. On avait bien inventé, pour me distraire les soirs où on me trouvait l'air trop malheureux, de me donner une lanterne magique, dont, en attendant l'heure du dîner, on coiffait ma lampe; et, à l'instar des premiers architectes et maîtres verriers de l'âge gothique, elle substituait à l'opacité des murs d'impalpables irisations, de surnaturelles apparitions multicolores, où des légendes étaient dépeintes comme dans un vitrail vacillant et momentané. Mais ma tristesse n'en était qu'accrue, parce que rien que le changement d'éclairage détruisait l'habitude que j'avais de ma chambre et grâce à quoi, sauf le supplice du coucher, elle m'était devenue supportable. Maintenant je ne la reconnaissais plus et j'y étais inquiet, comme dans une chambre d'hôtel ou de «chalet», où je fusse arrivé pour la première fois en descendant de chemin de fer.'[37]

The narrator will explain a couple of paragraphs later that the story projected by the magic lantern (Geneviève de Brabant chased by the evil Golo) only drives Marcel 'to a more than ordinarily scrupulous examination of [his] own conscience'.[38] The magic lantern is used by both Eliot and Proust as means of self-examination: the two protagonists can observe their own thoughts from a dissociated perspective, by looking at them as projections on a wall, and yet a 'willed' perspective, since the magic lantern has to be held by Prufrock/Marcel and can be manipulated.[39] In Prufrock's case, this remains only at a potential level ('But as if…'), whereas it actually occurs for the young, sensitive narrator of the *Recherche*. At the same time, the magic lantern belongs to the technological past of both authors' childhoods: Proust's narrator is remembering an episode of his childhood, whereas Eliot is deliberately choosing a Victorian object, to underline Prufrock's age and own past life in the preceding century. Eliot, like Proust, is effectively picking a pattern of his own childhood to revive more distant feelings and emotions.[40]

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[37] Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu: Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 9. English translation: 'At Combray, as every afternoon ended, long before the time when I should have to go up to bed, and to lie there, unsleeping, far from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred. Some one had had the happy idea of giving me, to distract me on evenings when I seemed abnormally wretched, a magic lantern, which used to be set on top of my lamp while we waited for dinner-time to come: in the manner of the master-builders and glass-painters of gothic days it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted, as on a shifting and transitory window. But my sorrows were only increased, because this change of lighting destroyed, as nothing else could have done, the customary impression I had formed of my room, thanks to which the room itself, but for the torture of having to go to bed in it, had become quite endurable. For now I no longer recognised it, and I became uneasy, as though I were in a room in some hotel or furnished lodging, in a place where I had just arrived, by train, for the first time.' in Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: The Modern Library, 1956), pp. 11-12.

[38] Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 12.

[39] Howard Moss, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 44.

[40] Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 8. At the same page Crawford interestingly illustrates how Eliot must have been familiar

Another image that is very reminiscent of the magic lantern is present in the third part of Eliot's 'Preludes':

> You dozed, and watched the night revealing
> The thousand sordid images
> Of which your soul was constituted;
> They flickered against the ceiling.
>
> (*CPP* 23, lines 26-29)

Unconscious thoughts, dreams, nightmares, fears — the 'sordid images' that make up the human mind — move back and forward, fitfully, on the ceiling, and can be watched by the poet as if they were projected onto the ceiling from a magic lantern. The verb 'to flicker' suggests their being unstable and fragile, vague and undefined, and also connotes potential light, although it is 'night', hence darkness, which reveals these sordid and hidden images out of the most secluded part of our subconscious.

2.2 THE (ARTIFICIAL) LIGHT OF REASON

An earlier draft of 'Portrait of a Lady' (dated November 1910, from the *Inventions of the March Hare* notebook) bears an additional reference to light, which is not present in the 1917 published version:

> '— Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,
> Admire the monuments
> Discuss the late events
> Correct our watches by the public clocks
> Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks
> And pay our reckoning and go home again
> They are lighting up the lamps, and it begins to rain.'
>
> (*IMH* 328, I, lines 36-42)

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with a picture of X-rays like a magic lantern reading the human brain as appeared in the January 1897 issue of *St. Louis Globe Democrat* (a local republican paper Eliot's father used to buy).

The lighting of the street lamps marks for the poet the moment when it is considered respectable to go home: all the actions listed before the lighting of the lamps are those which a single lady and a bachelor were able to entertain themselves in all decorum, in the 1910s in America. In this section, I seek to demonstrate that street lighting imagery can be interpreted in Eliot's early poetry as reason, logical thinking, and respectability, and to show how this is often placed in contrast with natural light as the bearer of quite opposite values.

The opposition of artificial and natural light hence naturally develops a secondary pattern in Eliot's early poetry, within the wider contrast of light and darkness: the diffusion of gas first and then electric public lighting somewhat shifted the importance of using metaphors of natural light in poetry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as it is testified by Eliot's early poetry and by the poets whom he read (Charles Baudelaire, James Thomson, John Davidson, and Arthur Symons).

In 'Conversation Galante', the poetic persona is in a supposedly romantic *rendez-vous* with a 'madam' (*CPP* 33, line 13), and while observing the moon he compares it to 'an old battered lantern hung aloft | To light poor travellers to their distress.' (lines 4-5): the romance of a stroll under the moonlight is put off by the poet's clumsy, more or less consciously humorous remarks, and by his partner's bored responses (lines 6, 11, 18). Eliot de-mythologizes the moon, and its ancient status as a lovers' companion, ridiculing it here by comparing it to an aged, ruined lantern which should make lovers' life lighter: it represents, again, something long past, and slightly archaic for the two characters in the poem. Not only is the lantern 'old', but Eliot adds the detail of its being 'battered'. Street lanterns, the precursor of street lamps as we know them now, were often perceived in France as the symbol of authority, and their smashing occurred consistently at each rebellion or rising throughout eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[41] Smashing a lantern would obviously extinguish the fire in the lantern, and this would then give the revolutionaries not only a sense of satisfaction for their protests against the institution, but also a feeling of being omnipotent, and being able to extinguish fire, together with a

[41] Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, p. 98.

symbolic release in the sound of glass breaking.[42] By transposing this to the poem 'Conversation Galante', where the moon (already Love's epitome) has been replaced by an old, half-smashed lantern, which has seen centuries of other lovers under its light, the moon cannot represent quintessential romance anymore, rather its being 'battered' marks the end of an era. The twentieth century opens with a less sentimental mood than the previous one, being much more difficult to actually see the stars and moon with the new lighting technologies. The moon here is directly transformed into an artificial source of light, rationalized and hence ridiculed by reason.

Eliot testifies this irremediable change in poetical moods as well as lighting in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (composed 1911). This poem effectively represents the poet's realization that there are new, 'gas stars' (in Stevenson's words), which can interact with him in his poetry, rather than the moon, as he juxtaposes moonlight with the light emanating from the talking street-lamp the poet encounters in his nocturnal *flânerie*. Baudelaire defines the term 'flâneur' in such terms:

> Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. Être hors de chez soi, et pourtant se sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde, tels sont quelques-uns des moindres plaisirs de ces esprits indépendants, passionnés, impartiaux, que la langue ne peut que maladroitement définir.[43]

The *flâneur* leaves his home at, or shortly before sunset, seeking the crowd, because, as Walter Benjamin points out in his study on Baudelaire and Paris, the *flâneur* is 'someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company' and 'that is why he seeks out the crowd'.[44] The *flâneur* goes out in order to observe the other inhabitants of the city, to

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[42] Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, p. 98.
[43] Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne: Il pittore della vita moderna* (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), pp. 66-68. English translation: 'For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world — such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.' in Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 9.
[44] Walter Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p. 48.

better understand both himself and the society surrounding him, thanks to the 'second day' created by gas light first, and electric light afterwards, which made it easier to roam at night, and to "observe". Similarly, at the stroke of midnight, the poet wanders in an undefined urban setting in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night':

> Along the reaches of the street
> Held in a lunar synthesis,
> Whispering lunar incantations
> Dissolve the floors of memory
> And all its clear relations,
> Its divisions and precisions.
>
> (*CPP* 24, lines 2-7)

Moonlight blurs the contours of the streets, making them appear almost enchanted and magical: in this scenario, memory is obliterated and the street lamps start talking in order to reveal the sordidness of a big city at night. As the poet walks along the streets,

> Every street lamp that I pass
> Beats like a fatalistic drum,
> And through the spaces of the dark
> Midnight shakes the memory
>
> (lines 8-11)

Street lamps mark the poet's wandering through the night and speak their fatalistic revelations. From the verbs associated with the street lamp's speech – 'beats' (line 9), 'sputtered' (lines 14, 47), 'muttered' (lines 15, 48), 'hummed' (line 49), which are of course metaphorical – it can be assumed that the kind of street lamp Eliot is encountering is a gas lamp, as electric light makes no noise, contrarily to oil and gas lamps, whose burning produced certain 'singing noises' at every pressure variation.[45] Eliot is here referring, then, to a slightly older type of street lamp, than the one he would have encountered in the

[45] 'Different forms of gas burner produced characteristic sounds, from the "singing noise" of argand burners to the "squeaking and roaring" emitted by fishtail burners when pressure varied. This noise was magnified when adjusting the light at the stopcock, which sometimes caused flames to flare and whistle "most distractingly, " drawing attention to the light itself rather than the spaces and surfaces it illuminated. Moreover, the unpredictable effects of vapor and heat on air currents could produce a heavy atmosphere, with curious sonic effects. "In electricity," wrote Slater, "the architect would probably find a valuable acoustic ally," useful for constructing concert halls.' in Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, p. 206.

1910s, and so he is recreating a slightly archaic atmosphere from the previous century. Wandering at night is for Eliot a way to reconnect himself with his poetic sources of inspiration, Charles Baudelaire and the British poets of the 1890s.

The first street lamp the poet encounters speaks out with difficulty, struggling through the flame's sputters and mutters, and concerns the poet's innermost desires and sexual urges:

> Half-past one,
> The street-lamp sputtered,
> The street-lamp muttered,
> The street-lamp said, "Regard that woman
> Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
> Which opens on her like a grin.
> You see the border of her dress
> Is torn and stained with sand,
> And you see the corner of her eye
> Twists like a crooked pin.
>
> (lines 13-22)

Eliot remarked in a letter dated New Year's Eve, 1914, sent from Oxford to his friend Conrad Aiken, how he felt lonely when alone in a big city, and how this made him wander on his own in the evening and at night:

> One walks about the street with one's desires, and one's refinement rises up like a wall whenever opportunity approaches. I should be better off, I sometimes think, if I had disposed of my virginity and shyness several years ago: and indeed I still think sometimes that it would be well to do so before marriage.[46]

The street lamp represents Eliot's own 'refinement': it warns him against his sexual instincts, and against the disposal of his virginity with the 'ladies of the night' waiting in shadows. It is not hard to imagine street lamps as a metaphor for reason, common sense, and even reality, with their tall, straight and bright features. Even C. S. Lewis, in 1939, opts for the image of the 'lamp-post' as a metaphor for the last sign of reality when Lucy

[46] T. S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot: Volume I*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), p. 75.

enters the realm of Narnia after leaving the wardrobe in her room, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*,[47] and at the same time the only possible way back into reality for her.[48] Returning to Eliot's poem, it must be noted that the light coming from the half-open door does not emphasize the woman's positive physical features, but rather seems to highlight all her faults ('the corner of her eye | Twists like a crooked pin', *CPP* 24, lines 21-22) and her social condition ('the border of her dress | Is torn and stained with sand', lines 19-20): these details subtly stress the unsuitability of a meeting with that woman (presumably an old prostitute), which would have been otherwise more inviting in darkness. At half-past three, the lamp talks again, sputtering, muttering, and humming, 'in the dark' (*CPP* 25, line 48): its light shines bright in the darkness, and once more it means to warn the poet, this time against the moon. The moon has no resentment, says the street lamp in French, which I would interpret as the moon's resentment towards these new types of lighting which have substituted her: the moon is no longer the night's protagonist, nor a symbol of romance and love anymore, since gas light and electric light have taken over. Initially, the very first street lamps were only lit in moonless nights, and often their light was put out after midnight;[49] from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, street lighting in big towns was lit at dusk, and only put out at dawn, making it nearly impossible to perceive stars from the lit streets, and thus creating the urban landscape as we know it nowadays.

This change in public lighting influenced the use of moon and star images and metaphors in poetry at the turn of the twentieth century. In 'A Plea for Gas Lamps' (1878), Robert Louis Stevenson even goes as far as to call public gas lighting 'biddable, domesticated stars' of the 'city-folk', effectively 'gas stars'.[50] 'The moon has lost her memory', too: she is turned into the poet's laughing stock, in the manner of 'Conversation

[47] 'She [Lucy] began to walk forward, crunch-crunch over the snow and through the wood towards the other light. In about ten minutes she reached it and found it was a lamp-post. As she stood looking at it, wondering why there was a lamp-post in the middle of a wood and wondering what to do next, she heard a pitter patter of feet coming towards her. And soon after that a very strange person stepped out from among the trees into the light of the lamp-post.' in C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 113-114.
[48] Patricia Craig, 'Narnia Revisited', *Irish Pages*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2006), 160-174 (p. 166).
[49] Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, p. 244.
[50] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Plea for Gas Lamps', *Virginibus Puerisque, and Other Papers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 259.

Galante'. Interestingly, the moon is now connected with 'the old nocturnal smells' (line 60): chestnuts in the streets, women in shuttered rooms, cigarettes and cocktails in bars. Again, the street lamp warns the poet against physical desires and sexual urges: a more 'natural' light source, the moon is therefore linked to man's most natural needs and desires (this combination of elements is well represented in Roman mythology by Diana, 'goddess of the moon',[51] who was mainly worshipped by the lower class —the plebeians— and was famous for her savage rites),[52][53] whereas the street lamp is an artificial, man-created light source, hence standing here for common sense and rationality. Eliot juxtaposes the two different types of light as contrasting symbols of reason, common sense (the street lamp) and nature (the moon). The last piece of advice given by the street-lamp is at the same time the most practical and the most abstract possible: sleep and prepare for life (*CPP* 26, line 77). The last image of light in the poem, 'The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.' (line 74), is also artificial, presumably a bedside table lamp, and with its light it will illuminate the poet's preparation for life through the night. It is remarkable that the poem should end with an artificial source of light, and not the moon and the stars: reason must accompany the poet in his life, and not nature.

In James Thomson's 'Insomnia', for example, the poet also uses the image of 'a little lamp of glimmering light' (*CDN* 152, line 55), which should protect him against 'the horror of the night' (line 56), but actually proves unsuccessful in preventing him from all evil nocturnal thoughts ('some dark Presence watching my bed', line 65). Thomson's despair is depicted as much greater than Eliot's 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night': Eliot may have had this particular detail from Thomson's poem in mind, but his image of the little lamp is more hopeful: like the street lamps earlier in 'Rhapsody', the little lamp symbolizes the light of reason, waiting for his return, lit against the night.

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[51] Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 163.
[52] Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 135.
[53] The image of the moon as representative of man's physicality can also be witnessed by Falstaff's speech in *King Henry IV*, Part One: 'Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed, as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal.', in William Shakespeare, *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, ed. R. P. Cowl and A. E. Morgan (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1919), p. 13.

As for Eliot's depiction of moonlight, as contrasting to the artificial light of street lamps and lamps, he drew upon earlier poets who also show a preoccupation with the new types of lighting at night, such as Davidson's dialogue between an artist and a votary, 'Eclogue: Votary and Artist', discussing the moon's status:

> *Votary*: Do you remember how the moon appears
> Illumining the night?
> [...]
> *Votary*: Call the moon to mind.
> Can you? Or have you quite forgotten all
> The magic of her beams?
> *Artist*: Oh no! The moon
> Is the last memory of ample thought,
> Of joy and loveliness that one forgets
> In this abode. Since first the tide of life
> Began to ebb and flow in human veins,
> The targe of lovers' looks, their brimming fount
> Of dreams and chalice of their sighs; with peace
> And deathless legend clad and crowned, the moon!
> *Votary*: But I adore it with a newer love,
> Because it is the offal of the globe.
> [...]
> *Artist*: [...] the outworn labourers,
> Pearls of the sewer, idlers, armies, scroyles,
> The offal of the world, will somehow be —
> Are now a lamp by night, although we deem
> Ourselves disgraced, forlorn; even as the moon,
> The scum and slag of earth, that, if it feels,
> Feels only sterile pain, gladdens the mountains
> And the spacious sea.
>
> (*SPP* 87-88)

If in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' the moon is able to dissolve memory, in Davidson's poem it is rather the last thing that human beings can possibly forget, with its essence of lovers' dreams. And yet, the moon even here loses its aura as a mythological element (it is 'the offal of the globe') and as natural source of light ('a lamp by night'). Eliot draws upon Davidson for certain images (the modern, lit metropolis) and themes (contrast between natural and artificial light), but his attitude is more one of acceptance towards modernity. For Eliot, ultimately, the moon has no resentment for its lost mythical status and the passing of times. Davidson's past nostalgia for natural light helps him observe and better understand the modern world.

Another work which must have laid the foundation of certain urban light and dark images in T. S. Eliot's work is undoubtedly *The City of Dreadful Night* by James Thomson (1834-1882). Thomson, like Davidson, used cityscapes and urbanization as a tool to describe modern experience in his poetry,[54] showing Eliot a way to represent the modern city as a city of the mind[55] through the use of light and dark imagery. During Thomson's nocturnal meanderings in the city, 'The street-lamps always burn, but scarce a casement | [...] | Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.' (lines 82-84).[56] Thomson's 'dreadful night' is empty of other human beings: the street lamps' light glows in the dark, but there is no life behind the old palaces' windows. The image of the street lamps, in particular, helps to draw a comparison between *The City of Dreadful Night* and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night':

> The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,
> Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
> Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.
>
> (*CDN* 5, lines 85-87)

> Although lamps burn along the silent streets;
> Even when moonlight silvers empty squares
> The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats;
> But when the night its sphereless mantle wears
> The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,
> The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,
> The lanes are black as subterranean lairs.
>
> (*CDN* 8, lines 175-181)

> I sat forlornly by the river-side,
> And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden stars
> Above the blackness of the swelling tide,
>
> (*CDN* 15, lines 337-339)

In Thomson's poem, the street lamps silently accompany the poet, as the only comforting presence in a town devoid of life. The use of the words 'even when' before 'moonlight' also suggests that here the natural light of moon and stars is effectively absent. The town in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' is, on the contrary, rather full of life: the alluded presence of

[54] Hynd, 'A Sense of Place', p. 498.
[55] Crawford, *The Savage and the City*, p. 45.
[56] James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems* (London: Bertram Dobell, 1899), p. 4. Further references to this edition will be indicated as *CDN* in brackets in the text.

human beings through light from half-open doors, and street lamps, changes the poem's atmosphere very much, as light illustrates the city's faults and dirtier aspects, at the same time the liveliest parts of town. The street lamps' light is made even brighter in Thomson's poem by the contrast with the black river below, and by the comparison with 'golden stars': even in Thomson's dark city, the street lamps have become stars in their own right. Thomson's depiction of the city is far from being a realistic, faithful representation of urban life: the only lit house in the city radiates not life-giving light but rather one of death, a wake for a dead girl (*CDN* 22-25, lines 489-557).[57] It is rather 'a place of the mind',[58] trying to convey one soul's displacement and despair in the modern city to the reader.

Thomson shows Eliot how to depict the modern city of the early twentieth century as a city of the mind, with street lamps showing him the way to reason, common sense, respectability. Both Thomson and Arthur Symons use at times the image of the *flâneur* as somebody who is actually in search of God and God's light in the darkness of night. In Thomson's poem 'Night', the poet begs for light, which is another way of looking for God, but gets none:

> He cried through the night:
> "Where is the light?
> Shall nevermore
> Open Heaven's door?
> [...]
> He cried out through the night:
> It spread vaguely white,
> With its ghost of a moon
> Above the dark swoon
> Of the earth [...]
> [...]
> He cried out through the night:
> No answering light,
> No syllabled sound;
>
> (*CDN* 232-3, lines 1-4, 7-11, 13, 19-21)

Similarly, in Symons' poem 'A Brother of the Battuti', the poet's persona states 'But roaming all the night awake | I think on my exceeding sin. | God knows I take no rest at all,'

[57] The dead girl of 'The City of Dreadful Night' possibly refers to Thomson's deceased fiancée Matilda Weller. Harold Hoffman, 'An Angel in the City of Dreadful Night', *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1924), 317-335 (pp. 319, 326-8).
[58] Hynd, 'A Sense of Place', p. 507.

(*P* 10, lines 32-33). The contrast between dark and light in the modern city is quite evident in both Thomson's and Symons' poems, leading to religious considerations, although this seems to be a thread of imagery which Eliot chooses not to follow in his early poetry. If for Thomson and Symons the absence of light appears to be nearly total and a reason of despair in their more religious poetry, directly linked to the absence of God, Eliot makes no use of this in *Prufrock and Other Observations*: Eliot's nocturnal darkness can still be interpreted as a darkness without God, like Thomson's, but I want to argue that it is less despairing than Thomson's. Eliot's wandering through the night is interrupted by various sources of light, which lead him through the night, and it is even concluded by the 'little lamp' which will watch over his preparation for future life: they are artificial sources of light, hence not God's supernatural light, but they do not abandon Eliot in his peregrinations. Darkness is for both poets a way to represent their inner sentiments. For Thomson, darkness proves that his being is bereft of all joys and loved ones, whereas for Eliot darkness symbolizes his own spiritual and personal confusions, not unlike from the meaning of what is for Dante a 'selva oscura'. This makes the light and darkness dichotomy for Eliot also a metaphor for self-exploration: darkness is perceived as a necessary state, as it was for the mystic St. John of the Cross — to be able to explore some more obscure parts of ourselves that cannot effectively be explored under bright daylight.

A further example of how light and darkness are used as a metaphor for self-exploration is Thomson's 'Insomnia':

> And [I] felt its Shadow on me dark and solemn
> [...]
> And then I raised my weary eyes and saw,
> By some slant moonlight on the ceiling thrown
> And faint lamp-gleam, that Image of my awe,
>
> (*CDN* 153, lines 68, 71-73)

> And [I] felt an image mightier to appal,
> And looked; the moonlight on the bed-foot wall
> And corniced ceiling white
> Was slanting now; [...]
>
> (*CDN* 155-6, lines 145-8)

> Black in the moonlight filling all the room,
> The image of the Fourth Hour, evil-starred,
> Stood over me; [...]
>
> (*CDN* 157, lines 183-5)

> Such hope or wish was as a feeble spark,
> A little lamp's pale glimmer in a tomb,
> To just reveal the hopeless deadly dark
> And wordless horrors of my soul's fixed doom:
>
> (*CDN* 158, lines 211-4)

> The Image of that Fifth Hour of the night
> Was blacker in the moonlight now aslant
> Upon its left than on its shrouded right!
>
> (*CDN* 159, 221-3)

The striking of the night hours recalls that in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', where the hours follow one another marked by the street lamp's voice, and the shadows on the sleepless person's ceiling should remind the reader of Eliot's 'Preludes', for its image of 'the night revealing | The thousand sordid images | Of which your soul was constituted; | They flickered against the ceiling.' (*CPP* 23, lines 26-29). In 'Insomnia', the poet's fears and thoughts are displayed on the walls of his bedroom, and the contrast with the lamplight on his bedside table and the moonlight entering the room is strongly in favour of darkness: lamplight is 'faint' and 'pale', and moonlight only manages to make his thoughts 'blacker'. The light in the poet's room helps him identify the various dark images on his walls, but the poet's voice is characterized with despair and excitement: Eliot borrows a similar image, but his voice in both 'Rhapsody' and 'Preludes' is precisely that of observing, exploring, and not judging harshly what he sees: the images constituting our souls may be 'sordid', but his tone is more resigned than Thomson's, witnessing what he sees, without trying to rage against it — artificial light helps understand and analyze the world surrounding him.

In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', light is again used to show the actual reality of things, instead of making them look better: 'And I have known the arms already, known them all — | Arms that are braceleted and white and bare | (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)' (*CPP* 15, lines 62-64). Middle-aged Prufrock has seen many women, with arms that at first sight appear as white and bare as those of a Greek

statue, but under the lamplight they show their real, less perfect and more human — and at the same time more sensual — features: the arms are covered with light brown hair. Prufrock may find them attractive, but the lamplight of reason shows them for what they really are, and not mythologised by natural light. These lines by Eliot are reminiscent of Arthur Symons' description of a woman in the lamplight, 'Impression. To M. C.' (*Silhouettes*, 1896):

> The pink and black of silk and lace,
> Flushed in the rosy-golden glow
> Of lamplight on her lifted face;
> Powder and wig, and pink and lace,
>
> (lines 1-4)[59]

The lamplight sheds a pink and golden tint on the woman's painted face: the mention of 'London footlights' later in the poem (line 6) makes it easy for us to imagine that the woman in the poem is an actress, hence her heavy make-up. Still, broad electric light from the stage shows this woman in all the fictitious details of her figure, including even her pathetic smile and her sad eyes. Being an actress, she exists under the artificial light of her stage; and yet, Symons' use of gas light, which makes her 'glow' in pink and gold, gives a softer tone to the image, regardless of the woman's thick make-up, or her undefined age, as well as to the whole poem, which even ends with a sunset bearing the same colours as the actress' complexion. In 'Prufrock', on the other hand, Eliot stresses the whiteness of the ladies' arms, whose light brown hair makes them appear even more so, under the lamplight: I would argue that Eliot's choice of lighting is more likely to be electric light, which gives a different chromatic appearance from gas light; electric light can make brown look lighter, and indeed less warm than gas light. Robert Louis Stevenson had already lamented the important change in feelings given by electric light:

[59] Arthur Symons, *Poems* (London: William Heinemann, 1902), vol. I, p. 25. Further references to this edition will be indicated as *P* in brackets in the text.

> Such a light [electric light] as this should shine only on murders and public crime, or along the corridors of lunatic asylums, a horror to heighten horror. To look at it only once is to fall in love with gas, which gives a warm domestic radiance fit to eat by.[60]

Electric light was favoured by concert halls, theatres, and especially museums and art galleries, as it showed colours in a less modified way than gas light, which on the contrary yellowed and covered many paintings with soot.[61] In 1917 George Ashdown Audsley (1838 – 1925) published a book to give advice on colour and light to well-bred ladies; in the early twentieth century, it was important to be aware of the difference the various co-existing sources of light made on colours:

> Under ordinary gas-, lamp-, or candle-light, which is of a yellow tint, yellow is brightened; red is lightened and inclined toward scarlet; crimson is made redder; green is made yellower; blue is darkened and rendered less pure; purple is almost destroyed; and brown is made warmer in hue.
>
> Under incandescent gas-light (inverted mantle), yellow is brightened; orange is lightened considerably; red is lightened several tints; crimson is much brightened; green is modified toward the yellow scale; blue is much darkened and injured; purple is considerably injured in hue; and brown is deepened and warmed.
>
> Under electric light (metallic filament lamp), yellow is brightened; orange is enriched; red is lightened and brightened; crimson is enriched toward red; green is darkened and made yellower; blue is inclined to violet; purple is injured; and brown is lightened and made redder in hue.[62]

Audsley's explanations are not entirely scientific, but they are indicative of 1910s British culture and taste. Because of the superimposition of various types of artificial light, people living in those years were used to seeing things under different types of light, and to the difference it made to see, and be seen, under one kind of lighting, or another. Similarly, Symons uses a smooth, warm, yellowish effect on the lady of 'Impression', whereas in 'Prufrock' Eliot has the poetic persona observe the women's hairs under what is presumably electric light, as the women's hairs are lightened, and made more evident. Light is thus here used to convey a precise kind of atmosphere: Symons glorifies the actress as if she were almost a painting to be watched under gas light, but Eliot analyses his attraction to women by looking at their arms under a cold, detached electric light.

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[60] Stevenson, 'A Plea for Gas Lamps', p. 262.
[61] Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, p. 186.
[62] George Ashdown Audsley, *Colour Harmony in Dress* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1917), p. 38.

2.3 ELIOT AS FLÂNEUR: 'THE TROUBLED MIDNIGHT AND THE NOON'S REPOSE'

I will now consider Eliot's use of light and dark imagery in *Prufrock and Other Observations* in connection to the concept of *flâneur* and his observation of the city. References to times of the day play an important role in defining when Eliot's *flânerie* takes place, as they can be linked to either light or dark, such as 'morning', 'noon', 'afternoon', and 'evening', 'night', 'midnight'. Studying these times of day is possible to realize how these are often matched by Eliot with other words which give an additional paradoxical feeling, in terms of their light and dark imagery: for example, 'Portrait of a Lady' has 'Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;' (*CPP* 21, line 115) and in the opening stanza of 'Preludes' Eliot describes how the lamps are gradually being lit in the city ('And then the lighting of the lamps.', *CPP* 22, line 13), as the winter evening comes down. Apart from the usage of light as a metaphor for the self, and for reason, light and dark are used in Eliot's early poetry as tools to recreate a specific atmosphere in his readers' minds: light and dark are always combined, as evening and night, for instance, are remarkably more connected with light than morning and afternoon, since the former are represented in combination with light (the moon, the street lamps, candles, etc.), whereas the latter are associated with fog, smoke, and dark colours.

The title of this subsection suggests a tendency in Eliot's early poetry: already in *Inventions of the March Hare*, Eliot called nights 'restless' and days 'torpid' ('Oh little voices of the throats of men', *IMH* 75, line 17). Eliot then ends 'La Figlia Che Piange', the last poem in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, with a sentence which is quite reminiscent of the *March Hare* one: 'Sometimes these cogitations still amaze | The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.' (*CPP* 34, lines 23-24). Nights are here replaced by 'midnight', and days by 'noon': still, the two images are very close to one another. Night/midnight is here a symbol for activity, with its many wanderings about the town, and day/noon instead for passivity, dedicated to the poet's necessary rest after such nights: the two moments of the

day are intermixed. In cultural history, starting the day late in the morning, and going to bed late after various evening activities marked in court society the distinction between the court and the middle class; at the end of the nineteenth century, this came to distance the middle class from the petty bourgeoise and the artisans.[63] With the diffusion of public electric lighting in the twentieth century, this is made even more possible and Eliot represents this attitude well by his getting up late and wandering in big cities until late at night.

The moment bridging the gap between day's passivity and night's activity is represented in Eliot's poetry by the image of the sunset. Sunsets in literature have often been considered as a glorious image of life decaying towards death, giving an existential emphasis to that of the day fading into night. Eliot detached his poetry from the conventional image of the sunset in poetry, which the British poets of the 1890s were still faithful to,[64] by making it acquire a new, additional meaning of discoveries, brought to the sleepless poet by an electrically lit world around him. Eliot's sunset is intrinsically reminiscent of Baudelaire's definition of the evening:

> Mais le soir est venu. C'est l'heure bizzaree et douteuse où les rideaux du ciel se ferment, où les cités s'allument. Le gaz fait tache sur la pourpre du couchant. Honnêtes ou déshonnêtes, raisonnables ou fous, les hommes se disent: 'Enfin la journée est finie!'. Les sages et les mauvais sujets pensent au plaisir, et chacun court dans l'endroit de son choix boire la coupe de l'oubli.[65]

Sunset has turned into a second dawn, for other, nocturnal activities: effectively, the ambiguous term of 'dusk' for both evening and morning light of sunset is particularly

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[63] Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, p. 140.

[64] John Davidson, for instance, makes a very conventional use of the image of the sunset, as life approaching death: in 'In Defence of Suicide', from *The Testament of John Davidson*, he states: 'when the tide of life begins to turn, | [...] | Stand out to sea and bend our weathered sails | Against the sunset, valiantly resolved | To win the haven of eternal night.' (*SPP* 151, ll. 40, 44-46). The sunset is something which is nearly impossible to avoid, but to which man necessarily will meet; night is eternal for its connotation of eternal death.

[65] Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, p. 70. English translation: 'But now it is evening. It is that strange, equivocal hour when the curtains of heaven are drawn and cities light up. The gas-light makes a stain upon the crimson of the sunset. Honest men and rogues, sane men and mad, are all saying to themselves, 'The end of another day!'. The thoughts of all, whether good men or knaves, turn to pleasure, and each one hastens to the place of his choice to drink the cup of oblivion.' in Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p. 11.

fitting here. In a lesser known *Prufrock* poem, 'The Boston Evening Transcript', the evening is represented as a bearer of life after the day's idleness, with humanizing verbs: 'When evening quickens faintly in the street, | Wakening the appetites of life in some | And to others bringing the *Boston Evening Transcript*' (*CPP* 28, lines 3-5). The near-absurd combination of the verb 'to quicken' and the adverb 'faintly' gives it an oxymoronic quality which expresses very well the mixed feelings of passivity, longing for action, and expectation, linked with early evening: some are awakened to life, others only to the local evening newspaper.

The sunset also proves to be a sort of ritual for Eliot: in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Prufrock precisely asks himself:

> And would it have been worth it, after all,
> Would it have been worth while,
> After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
> After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
> And this, and so much more?—
>
> (*CPP* 16, lines 100-4)

Eliot has here updated the ritual of the sunset and the cycle of day and night[66] to the new century: Prufrock leads a life chained in repetitions, and sunsets represent to him the divide between the day's inactivity and the night's restlessness, initiating Prufrock's 'pervigilium' (Latin for 'vigil', and the title of an excised part from 'Prufrock'), and the poet's urban wanderings at nightfall.

The sunset appears as a step towards activity, as well as a life ritual, in 'Portrait of a Lady':

> "Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall
> My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,
> I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world
> To be wonderful and youthful, after all."
>
> (*CPP* 19, lines 52-55)

[66] See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 105.

The sunset revives in the poem's "lady" memories of a more active, more joyful, more 'youthful' past, possibly partly spent travelling in Europe, with more gaiety and spontaneity than the pretended, staged cheerfulness of her house now. The sunset leads her back to her 'buried life': Eliot connects the sunset to something effectively defunct, the lady's past youth, and at the same time it performs the more active function of bringing it alive in her memory, and turning it into a topic of conversation with her male visitor. Similarly, it is possible to understand that the lady led a different, less restrictive life in Paris at or after sunset, whereas it is now her role to invite friends over for tea, who will have to leave her at 'the lighting of the lamps' in the street. The sunset has now turned into a social ritual, which on some particular occasions also reminds her of her past life, and how she used to spend evenings in a different way, in Paris.

Sunset also marks young Eliot's wanderings: he roams at night, alone, with only himself as company, and so if on the one side he draws from *fin-de-siècle* poetry for this attitude, he at the same time detaches from the topos of roaming together with somebody else: he is interested in roaming as observing, in an almost voyeuristic way, and not so much in the pleasure of roaming with another person. Arthur Symons' poem 'April Midnight', for instance, shows his joy of roaming at night with a companion:

> Side by side through the streets at midnight,
> Roaming together,
> Through the tumultuous night of London,
> In the miraculous April weather.
>
> Roaming together under the gaslight,
> Day's work over,
> How the Spring calls to us, here in the city,
> Calls to the heart from the heart of a lover!
>
> [...]
> After the heat and the fumes and the footlights,
> Where you dance and I watch your dancing.
>
> [...]
> Good to be roaming,
> Even in London, even at midnight,
>
> (*P* 54, lines 1-8, 11-12, 14-15)

Eliot must have known this poem: the 'gaslight' should remind the reader of the street lamps' light, omnipresent companion of every nocturnal wandering; the 'fumes and the footlights' as they also help to re-create an atmosphere of darkness and light; in terms of more direct referencing, line 11 recalls lines 89 ('After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,') and 102-3 ('After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets, | After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor-') in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', in spite of the two poems being clearly quite different. Eliot does not contemplate walking at night as a joyful moment with somebody, but rather as a way of self-introspection – the 'you and I' of 'Prufrock"s beginning are far from being the protagonists of a love poem.

The solitude of Prufrock roaming about a city at dusk is linked to smoke and fog: 'Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets | And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes | Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?...' (*CPP* 15, lines 70-72). The scene of watching people observing the city from a window recalls Baudelaire's scene of 'Le Balcon' (previously analysed in Chapter One), in a displaced perspective, where the poet looks at the sunset and lighting of the lamps from a balcony: in the span of half a century, not much has changed – the man looking out of his window, or balcony, is still a very lonely one; the poetic persona of 'Le Balcon' recalls the happy times with his lover, alone (*FDM* 72-3), and both Eliot's men and Prufrock are looking out in solitude. In Eliot's cities smoke is also due to chimneys' pollution and particular weather conditions, such as mist and rain, similar to the representation of London in many nineteenth-century novels: Eliot's fog is indeed a blend of the fog of St. Louis factory chimneys and the London fog, reminiscent of Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* and Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.[67] For Eliot, smoke and fog highlight the feeling of human solitude, and yet they also fill the city at dusk as a nearly comforting presence: in 'Prufrock', fog even brightens the cityscape somewhat as it is turned into 'yellow' because of the street lamps' light. It is possible to recognize here the typical light effect created by gas:

[67] Crawford, *The Savage and the City*, p. 11.

> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
> The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
> [...]
> And indeed there will be time
> For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
> Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
>
> (*CPP* 13, lines 15-16, 23-25)

The 'yellow smoke' continues the contrastive imagery between light and darkness, with its double connotation of grey, hence dark, turned into yellow through light. Gas light in particular had actively contributed to the colouring of towns in the nineteenth century, by blackening surfaces with soot, and giving out a yellow light on all things.

Apart from Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, fog is an essential element in many descriptions of nineteenth-century London. In Davidson's 'Fleet Street', the poet, always preoccupied with modernity, urban life and the changing poetic landscape,[68] describes the past of this London street, before the arrival of modernity and electricity:

> And more remote, from centuries unknown,
> Rumour of battle, noises of the swamp,
> The gride of glacial rock, the rush of wings,
> The roar of beasts that breathed a fiery air
> Where fog envelops now electric light,
> The music of the spheres, the humming speed
> Centrifugal of molten planets loosed
> From pregnant suns to find their orbits out,
> The whirling spindles of the nebulæ,
> The rapture of ethereal darkness strung
> Illimitable in eternal space.
>
> (*SPP* 127, lines 42-52)

Light and fog are the signs of imposing modernity: fog here also underlines the scene's solitude, filling London with its presence. Fog envelops everything in its grey forgetfulness, but nature and man seem to struggle to find their own place in this modern world. Eliot is very much indebted to Davidson's decadent, urban atmospheres, which taught him how to

[68] Hazel Hynd, 'A Sense of Place: Landscape and Location in the Poetry of John Davidson', *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2005), 497-512 (p. 499).

reveal his own 'dingy urban images',[69] and the solitude of the modern city. In Symons' 'City Nights – In the Train', the presence of smoke emphasizes the roaring modernity of the trains and their 'red, yellow, and brown' lights in a black town, and how this is welcomed by flashing lights from the streets:

> The train through the night of the town,
> Through a blackness broken in twain
> By the sudden finger of streets;
> Lights, red, yellow, and brown,
> From curtain and window-pane,
> The flashing eyes of the streets.
>
> Night, and the rush of the train,
> A cloud of smoke through the town,
> Scaring the life of the streets;
>
> (*P* 66, lines 1-9)

The streets and fog are almost personified, as in Eliot's poem, but here completely devoid of human presence. Smoke and fog are also used by Eliot to underline the lady's solitude recur in 'Portrait of a Lady': 'Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon' (*CPP* 18, line 1) and 'Afternoon grey and smoky' (*CPP* 21, line 115). Her afternoons are everything but bright as they are spent in the usual, monotonous way, 'serving tea to friends'.

In 'Preludes', Eliot defines the street at six o'clock in the evening again in humanizing terms, as 'The conscience of a blackened street | Impatient to assume the world.' (*CPP* 23, lines 46-47): the city streets are blackened, partly because of the pollution due to the smoke and fog, but partly also because of the people inhabiting the city, mainly 'lonely men' like J. Alfred Prufrock, and souls constituted by a 'thousand sordid images' (line 27). 'Conscience' is though a term which is better applicable to human beings, rather than a street. The *flâneur* feels at ease in the street: in Baudelaire's words, 'the whole world' is 'his family', and the *flâneur* has an 'I' with a tendency to become a non-I, assuming the street, the crowd, and the world.[70]

[69] Hynd, 'A Sense of Place: Landscape and Location in the Poetry of John Davidson', p. 498.
[70] Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p. 9.

What catches the eye of the *flâneur* observing the city streets at night is lit shutters: they are used by Eliot as an additional device to emphasize the urban side of the contrasting relationship between light and darkness, and at the same time they develop the more 'voyeuristic' side of his soul. In 'Preludes', the night reveals the dirty images of which every human being is made up, and thus 'when all the world came back | And the light crept up between the shutters' (*CPP* 23, lines 30-31): daylight restores the order in the sleeping person's life, hiding again what night and darkness manage to uncover. The perspective of seeing light breaking into tight shutters is somewhat inverted in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night': 'I have seen eyes in the street | Trying to peer through lighted shutters' (*CPP* 25, lines 41-42). The verb 'to light' is here interestingly applied directly to shutters: the light behind them attracts the poet's eyes, and enhances his curiosity for what is hidden behind them. Earlier in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', the old prostitute had also been positioned in a lit house: the act of peering can be easily connected with some voyeuristic curiosity, and even with the poet's own sexual urges. Sight and light are remarkably intertwined here: in the city's solitary darkness, eyes are drawn to the light inside the house. Much has changed from Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*, where the poet's eyes were only drawn to the lights of a funeral wake, and 'In the Room',[71] where a room spied on through curtains and shutters is screening a dead body.

These acts of watching were, it should be remembered, mainly masculine:[72] men wander about the street and watch, whereas respectable women can only be watched, and the only women who can actively look back are presumably prostitutes, as in Eliot's 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (*CPP* 24, lines 13-22). The poet, and the other wandering 'eyes' in the street, are drawn to light like a moth to the flame. In this exchange of visions, in and out of the street, the *flâneur* transforms the street in an *intérieur*,[73] where each quarter of the city is a room, and the *flâneur* feels enclosed by it as if he were in his own

[71] 'The sun was down, and twilight grey | Filled half the air; but in the room, | Whose curtain had been drawn all day, | The twilight was a dusky gloom: | Which seemed at first as still as death, | And void; […]', *CDN* 162, ll. 1-6.
[72] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity, and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 94.
[73] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 443.

room.[74] Lit boulevards at night could in fact appear 'like an interior out of doors':[75] the area lit by street lamps is perceived almost as enclosed by walls protecting it from the otherwise surrounding darkness, hence an interior.[76] From this privileged perspective, Eliot the *flâneur* observes. In 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', we find 'female smells in shuttered rooms' (*CPP* 25, line 66): these are the women Eliot would like to approach but fails to, closed in rooms with tight shutters. I would argue here that the 'shutters' refer to both real ones, as the women the poet's persona is trying to watch are clearly situated indoors, and psychological ones: the women are not really 'shuttered' in 'rooms', but rather they symbolize Eliot's own moral preoccupations, and the rooms of his own mind, which lock up his most secret, and forbidden thoughts. A similar perspective on shutters is shared by Proust's narrator in *La Prisonnière* (*The Captive*, 1923):

> Du trottoir je voyais la fenêtre de la chambre d'Albertine, cette fenêtre,autrefois toujours noire, le soir, quand elle n'habitait pas la maison, que la lumière électrique de l'intérieur, segmentée par les pleins des volets, striait de haut en bas de barres d'or parallèles. [...] La voiture partit. Je restai un instant seul sur le trottoir. Certes, ces lumineuses rayures que j'apercevais d'en bas et qui à un autre eussent semblé toutes superficielles, je leur donnais une consistance, une plénitude, une solidité extrêmes, à cause de toute la signification que je mettais derrière elles, en un trésor insoupçonné des autres que j'avais caché là et dont émanaient ces rayons horizontaux, trésor si l'on veut, mais trésor en échange duquel j'avais aliéné la liberté, la solitude, la pensée. [...] De sorte qu'en levant une dernière fois mes yeux du dehors vers la fenêtre de la chambre dans laquelle je serais tout à l'heure, il me sembla voir le lumineux grillage qui allait se refermer sur moi et dont j'avais forgé moi-même, pour une servitude éternelle, les inflexibles barreaux d'or.[77]

The slats of the shutters represent for Marcel those 'inflexibles barreaux d'or': he is looking at his lover's lit window from the street, and yet the narrator feels a sense of

[74] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 544.
[75] Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, p. 148.
[76] Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, p. 149.
[77] Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu: La Prisonnière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), pp. 833-834. English translation: 'From the pavement, I could see the window of Albertine's room, that window, formerly quite black, at night, when she was not staying in the house, which the electric light inside, dissected by the slats of the shutters, striped from top to bottom with parallel bars of gold. [...]The carriage drove on. I remained for a moment alone upon the pavement. To be sure, these luminous rays which I could see from below and which to anyone else would have seemed merely superficial, I endowed with the utmost consistency, plenitude, solidity, in view of all the significance that I placed behind them, in a treasure unsuspected by the rest of the world which I had concealed there and from which those horizontal rays emanated, a treasure if you like, but a treasure in exchange for which I had forfeited my freedom, my solitude, my thought. [...] So that as I raised my eyes to look for the last time from outside at the window of the room in which I should presently find myself, I seemed to behold the luminous gates which were about to close behind me and of which I myself had forged, for an eternal slavery, the unyielding bars of gold.', in Marcel Proust, *The Captive*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), pp. 449-451 .

imprisonment and confinement,[78] as in his imagination the shutters enclose him within the street, leaving Albertine outside. Shutters in both Eliot and Proust enclose women behind them, but it is effectively the two authors they are locking up. They encapsulate their own preoccupations on life, both Eliot and Proust are blocked by their own shutters of the mind. Their act of watching proves also to be similar: the light in Proust's *La Prisonnière* 'dissects' Albertine, she is thus deprived of her personality and identity; similarly, in Eliot it is 'female smells', with the women behind the shutters being left without their integrity as 'women'. Arthur Symons also describes a woman by dissection, in 'Maquillage':

> A voice of violets that speaks
> Of perfumed hours of day, and doubtful night
> Of alcoves curtained close against the light.
>
> (*P* 24, lines 4-6)

The woman in this poem is defined by her scent and make-up: she must be one who makes an important use of both; and the mention of her 'doubtful night' and of 'alcoves' should clear all suspicions of this woman's profession. In this case, though, 'shutters' are replaced by 'curtains', and the more psychological side of it is apparently absent: the kind of woman described by Eliot and Symons may be the same, but their attitude is very different. Symons may depict his 'Maquillage' woman as all artifice and decadence,[79] but he, contrarily to Eliot, has no shutters of the mind to divide him from her, and her world.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have considered Eliot's use of light and dark images in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, and how these are much influenced by cultural and technological

[78] Adam Watt, *The Cambridge Introduction to Marcel Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 85.
[79] Russell M. Goldfarb, 'Arthur Symons' Decadent Poetry', *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 1, no.3 (1963), 231-234 (pp. 231-2).

factors of the age, as well as Eliot's personal readings. I have examined how Dante's initial epigraph is an important intertext that helps to clarify Eliot's use of light imagery: the image of the 'solid shadow' from *Purgatorio* XXI consolidates a pattern in Eliot's poetry of self-identification with darkness and light. 'Portrait of a Lady', for instance, sees the use of candles as a representation of both poetic characters, the poet and the lady, as well as an ironic comparison with William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The metaphor of flames in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is also directly linked to the Dantean epigraph from *Inferno* XXVII, and I have considered ways in which the context of the fraudulent souls in Hell (*Inferno* XXVI – XVII) can help us better understand Prufrock's personality. I then drew a comparison with more recent sources, such as John Davidson's metaphor of street lamps for the human soul, and the image of the magic lantern in Eliot's 'Prufrock' and 'Preludes' and Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* as a way of self-examination as well as a return to late nineteenth-century childhood for both authors. In the second part of this chapter, I have argued how Eliot also uses images of light to symbolize reason, common sense, and respectability, by drawing a distinction between natural light (sun, moon, stars) and artificial light (lamps, street lighting). Examples of this are 'Conversation Galante', 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', which I have compared and contrasted with the poetry of some *fin-de-siècle* authors, notably James Thomson, John Davidson, and Arthur Symons. In the final part of this chapter, I have explored three images which I consider related to the *flâneur*: sunset, smoke (and fog) and shutters. Eliot reverts the stereotypical idea of the sunset by turning it into a moment towards activity, and the second day that night is now become, especially in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady'. Smoke and fog then symbolize human solitude admist the new technologies of the century, in 'Prufrock', 'Portrait of a Lady', and 'Preludes', which I compare with the use of the fog in Davidson's 'Fleet Street' and Symons' 'City Nights'. Finally, I have explored the use of shutters as a physical representation of psychological boundaries, in 'Preludes', 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', Proust's *La Prisonnière*, and Symons' 'Maquillage'. These images also build up a poetic sensitivity toward light and darkness metaphors which will reach full maturity in Eliot's later works such as *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. It is also important to underline again how

Eliot's use of light and dark imagery in *Prufrock* is more dispersed, but leads to a thoughtful recreation of specific *fin-de-siècle* urban atmospheres. Light and dark in *Prufrock*, despite being often overlooked by critics, are essential for a full understanding of Eliot's 'observations', both as a man and as a poet.

Chapter Three

The violet hour:

TWILIGHT

'Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark;
let it look for light, but have none;
neither let it see the dawning of the day;'
Job 3, 9[1]

If one considers the term 'twilight' carefully, it is easy to see how it conveys in itself a sense of ambiguity, determined by the prefix 'twi', which suggests either a double form, or something occurring twice. Similarly to the previously examined 'dusk', the term indicates two opposite moments of day, early morning and early evening: it is used to refer to both the beginning and the end of the day. The Oxford English Dictionary describes the light phenomenon at 'twilight' precisely as 'The light diffused by the reflection of the sun's rays from the atmosphere before sunrise, and after sunset', and also as 'the period during which this prevails between daylight and darkness'.[2] The word itself might have derived from Middle High German *zwischenliecht* and Low German *twêdustern*, converging then in English on the word 'twilight'. It is not surprising that this term should start being used in the Middle Ages, where life naturally followed light's rhythm: morning twilight marked the beginning of everyday for peasants and manual workers, and evening twilight its end.

[1] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 609.
[2] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <www.oed.com> [last accessed 25 August 2012].

The common use of the word 'twilight' as referring to both the light before sunrise and the one after sunset is especially significant in the English language. Other European languages make effective distinctions between the two moments in their vocabulary: German, for instance, divides between 'Morgendämmerung' (morning twilight) and 'Abenddämmerung' (evening twilight); Italian has 'aurora' for the morning twilight and 'crepuscolo' for the evening twilight; Spanish similarly has 'amanecer' and 'crepúscolo'.

I have thus entitled this central chapter after a balanced presence of light and darkness in the sky, repeating itself in the morning and in the evening. The image of twilight is particularly evocative of *The Waste Land* atmosphere: its inhabitants do not live under bright daylight or night's darkness, but rather they are a crowd of in-betweens, neither living nor dead, under constantly setting suns, dusks, and twilights. The twilight synthesizes the whole world of *The Waste Land* well, and its surreal qualities are stressed by light, which is made unnatural by such colours as violet, brown, red, and green. Twilight makes *The Waste Land* a poem of transition, signifying a specific moment in humanity (*entre-deux-guerres*) as well as a perception of the poet's personal life.

In this chapter, I will deal with images of light and darkness in *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925), showing how these often converge on images of twilight, and how this is an intentional recreation of Dante's purgatorial atmospheres, rather than more infernal ones (as some critics have argued), by means of three main details, the colour violet, fire and flames, and shadows. It is interesting to notice how in *The Waste Land*, for instance, the occurrence of light and dark images revolve mainly around words such as 'light', 'fire', and 'flame', and colours such as 'red', 'brown', 'violet', 'black', 'white', as well as declinations of the word 'shadow'. Artificial sources of light, such as the ones seen in Chapter 1 and 2, recur less often, and in a less meaningful way, in *The Waste Land*; Eliot here has partly distanced himself from the *fin-de-siècle* atmospheres of his earlier poetry (although James Thomson remains an important influence for *The Waste Land*), and moved on towards what I would argue is a more symbolical use of colour in his poetry, which carry in themselves a combination of light and darkness. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe stated in his famous study on colours *Die Farbenlehre*

(*Theory of Colours*), that 'Die Farbe selbst ist ein Schattiges':[3] colours contain darkness in themselves, and this has an important significance for Eliot, especially in his 1920s works. The way light and darkness can change the appearance of material objects is called by Goethe precisely 'Helldunkel' (*chiaroscuro*), which also provides objects with a definite density:[4] in the poems analyzed in this chapter, Eliot seeks a more precisely balanced mixture of light with dark, which is evident in his use of colours. This will also support my thesis of *The Waste Land* as in dialogue with Dante's *Purgatorio*, where light and dark are present in a combined way, through the use of certain colours, as well as the image of twilight.

In section 3.1 of this chapter, I will analyze Eliot's use of the colour 'violet' applied to light, air, and a certain hour in three different sections of *The Waste Land*, with the meaningful association of 'twilight'. I will then compare and contrast the three twilight moments of *The Waste Land*, with the three sunsets that mark the time in Dante's *Purgatorio*. I will thus argue that by looking at these moments, *The Waste Land*'s atmosphere can be interpreted as one of purgation and expiation rather than eternal damnation, as previously suggested by certain critics, such as Eloise Knappy Hay, Robert Crawford and Steve Ellis.[5] Here I will also briefly look at the later poem *The Hollow Men* and Eliot's usage of 'twilight' to stage again the world of Purgatory. In section 3.2, I will consider the importance of the image of the shadow first in relation again to the theme of vision and truth, in *The Waste Land*, and secondly as a representation of guilt and remorse in *The Hollow Men*, also in support of Eliot's likening himself to the souls in Purgatory. In section 3.3, I will study the image of fire (also burning and flames), as both a physical representation of the characters' past sins (burning with the fire of one's physical desire), and the sign itself of their repentance and attempt at achieving salvation through fire. In particular, I will consider the presence of flames, candles, self-induced blindness

[3] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1989), p. 47. English translation: 'Colour itself is a degree of darkness', in Goethe's *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1967), p. 31.
[4] Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre*, p. 248.
[5] See Eloise Knapp Hay, *T. S. Eliot's Negative Way* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 61; Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 46-7; Steve Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 221.

against temptations of the flesh, and more generally the image of burning. In this last section I will also consider and compare Dante's and St. Augustine's conception of Purgatory, as well as the importance of the figure of Arnaut Daniel as depicted in *Purgatorio*.

3.1 The Light of Penitence

An important characteristic chosen by Eliot for light in *The Waste Land* is the colour violet. "Violet" is associated twice to 'hour' (*CPP* 68, lines 215, 220), once to 'air' (*CPP* 73, line 373) and once to 'light' (*CPP* 73, line 380). Although violet is directly linked to light in only one instance in *The Waste Land*, its combination with such words as 'hour' and 'air' makes the association with the overall atmosphere in *The Waste Land* inseparable from the colour violet.

Five years after his first collection of poetry, T. S. Eliot turns J. Alfred Prufrock's 'evening spread out against the sky' (*CPP* 13, line 2) into a violet evening:

> At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
> Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
> Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
> I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
> Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
> At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
> Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
> The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
> Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
> Out of the window perilously spread
> Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
> On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
> Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
>
> (*CPP* 68, III, lines 215-227)

The colour violet identifies a specific hour of the evening, when workers head home, and start turning to other occupations – as described by Baudelaire in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne (The Painter of Modern Life*). At the end of the nineteenth century, on

Continental Europe the designation 'l'heure mauve' ('the violet hour') was a more refined way to refer to late afternoon and twilight.[6] Twilight is mostly perceived as an hour of waiting and expectation, when most people move from their daytime activities to their evening ones: violet colours this transition, and it must be identified precisely with the hour of 'twilight'.[7] Violet, and twilight, is used in this passage twice to mark what could well be considered one of the most telling passages in *The Waste Land*, containing some of the most important themes within the poem (the modern city, sex without love, blindness), and thus associates them with a specific degree of light. Sarah Cole comments on these lines from *The Waste Land* in such terms:

> Yet the word "violet" does add luster and shine to the sordid occasion, if only momentarily. Its use is partly mock-heroic and ironic, but it is also real; its beauty and resonance transform the lines, enhancing the sense of both anticipation and tragedy in the scene. When air and light and the hour are violet – the color of sorcery in *The Odyssey*, of Mary's poignant humility in Christian iconography, of both mourning and royalty in the modern world, and of brilliant flowers prevalent in springtime throughout the northern hemisphere – they seem piercing, aesthetic, saturated, deepened.
>
> Perhaps most importantly, the word "violet" is so close to "violent" as nearly to become it, and certainly to suggest it. [...] each time "violet" is used, it is at an instant in the poem when violence impends. [...] For *The Waste Land*, the nature of violet is to usher in violence, to herald or represent it; but it is also to soften and beautify it.[8]

While Cole's elaboration on the association of 'violet' with the theme of violence in *The Waste Land* deserves some consideration, I would like to argue that if this may be true with regard to the Tiresias passage, it is less so for other passages in *The Waste Land*. As Cole herself acknowledges, other moments of violence in *The Waste Land* lack any association with the colour violet.[9] For this reason, although the violet light is indeed used as a background to some violent actions in *The Waste Land*, I would seek to complicate Cole's argument. The violet light used by Eliot to set the atmosphere of *The Waste Land*'s city was chosen for its symbolic connotations, rather than for its proximity to the word

[6] Eva Heller, *Wie Farben auf Gefühl und Verstand wirken* (München: Droemer Verlag, 2000), p. 211.
[7] Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 74.
[8] Cole, *At the Violet Hour*, pp. 74-5.
[9] Cole, *At the Violet Hour*, p. 75.

'violent'. The colour violet is the highest colour of the visible spectrum,[10] and in cultural history it has always been linked (and, at times, confused) with the term, and colour, 'purple'.[11] Violet is made up of a mixture of red and blue, two primary colours, and in colour symbolism this juxtaposition of red and blue in the colour violet would support the contradictions of violet symbolism itself: violence and power (linked to royal purple),[12] as well as humility in Christian symbolism.[13] In the Roman Catholic Church, violet is worn at Advent on days of intercession, as well as masses of the Passion and penitential masses; the violet stole is worn by Catholic priests when giving absolution and administering extreme unction.[14] Violet is also the colour of fasting during Advent and Lent, symbolising repentance and expiation of sins, as well as being the colour used at Requiem masses.[15]

Eliot is here using both the colour 'violet' and the moment of twilight in association with purgation, and Purgatory, following the pattern set by Dante in *La Divina Commedia*. Violet, as I have shown, is linked to purgation in modern Catholic liturgy, and Dante, for instance, makes use of this colour only once in the whole *Commedia*, unsurprisingly in *Purgatorio*. In Canto XXXII, Dante encounters the 'mystic tree', blooming of flowers whose hue is 'less than of roses and more than of violets'[16] with violet often referring to the four cardinal virtues:[17]

> men che di rose e più che di viole
> colore aprendo, s'innovò la pianta,
> che prima avea le ramora sì sole.
>
> (XXXII, lines 58-60)[18]

[10] Ellen Conroy, *The Symbolism of Colour* (London: William Rider & Son, 1921), p. 36.
[11] Heller, *Wie Farben auf Gefühl und Verstand wirken*, p. 196.
[12] Heller, p. 195.
[13] Heller, p. 201.
[14] Don Pavey, *Colour Symbolism: From Prehistory to Modern Aesthetics, Psychology & IT* (Great Britain: D. A. Pavey, 2009), p. 58.
[15] Heller, *Wie Farben*, p. 201.
[16] *The Purgatorio*, p. 409.
[17] Reggio, 'Note al Canto XXXII', *Purgatorio*, p. 595.
[18] Dante, *Purgatorio*, p. 595. English translation: 'opening out into a hue, less than of roses and more than of violets, the tree renewed itself, which before had its boughs so naked.', in Dante, *The Purgatorio*, p. 409.

The light of Paradise shines on the tree blooming with the flowers of God, humility and purgation: the souls of Purgatory will be finally admitted into Heaven through the flowers of their expiated sins. Again at the opening of *Purgatorio*, Dante finds himself on the shore east of Purgatory (namely 'Antipurgatorio'), and describes the sky above him at dawn (or, indeed, probably morning twilight):

> Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro,
> che s'accoglieva nel sereno aspetto
> dell'aer puro infino al primo giro,
> agli occhi miei ricominciò diletto,
> tosto ch'i' uscii fuor dell'aura morta,
> che m'avea contristati gli occhi e il petto.
>
> (I, line 13)[19]

The colour given to the sky by Dante has been widely interpreted as light blue, or azure,[20] and the adjective 'oriental' might be linked to the fact that the Purgatory is located east of Italy, but 'oriental sapphire' also indicates a variety of the 'true sapphire', which was originally thought to have come from the Orient.[21] 'Oriental' in geological terms also indicates the brightness of these gems:[22] the sky described by Dante is hence of a bright blue, and in Dante's age sapphire was believed to lead one to piety and devotion to God.[23] Bright blue is indeed very close to violet, and a variety of purple sapphires is amethyst, which the Dantean scholar Parodi has argued is linked to the violets of the mystic tree.[24] Whether Dante meant precisely blue or a more violet shade is of little importance: what Dante and Eliot are doing is similar, and I believe Eliot is being influenced by Dante in this particular respect. The colour of the sky in the Antipurgatorio must prepare the repentant souls ready for their path of expiation, and thus is compared to sapphires; the colour of the sky in *The Waste Land* also gives an indication of what these wretched souls are going

[19] Dante, *Purgatorio*, p. 15. English translation: 'Sweet hue of orient sapphire which was gathering on the clear forehead of the sky, pure even to the first circle, to mine eyes restored delight, soon as I issued forth from the dead air which had afflicted eyes and heart.', in *The Purgatorio*, p. 3.
[20] Reggio, 'Note al Canto I', *Purgatorio*, p. 15.
[21] *A Dictionary of Mining, Mineral and related Terms*, ed. Paul W. Thrush and the Staff of the Bureau of Mines (Washington: Department of the Interior, 1968), pp. 774-5.
[22] Ibidem.
[23] Brenda Deen Schildgen, 'Wonders on the Border: Precious Stones in the Comedy', in *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 113 (1995), 131-150 (p. 140).
[24] Reggio, 'Note al Canto XXXII', *Purgatorio*, p. 595.

through in their own earthly life. They are ordinary sinners, waiting for salvation, living in a sort of Purgatory, which is what Eliot thinks modern life to be in the 1920s.

Twilight is also tightly linked to *Purgatorio* as in itself it symbolizes one of the main features of time passing. Dante's journey through Hell, accompanied by Virgil, lasts only twenty-four hours; besides, Dante enters Hell at twilight, but whilst in Hell he does not mention any stars, or sun, as indications of the time of the day.[25] As one Dante scholar states:

> The Inferno was like one dark night, Paradise will be one brilliant day; in Purgatory the sun rises four times and sets three times, before Dante reaches the summit, and thence rises to Paradise with Beatrice.[26]

Dante spends the longest time here, with the sun setting three times marking the duration of his stay in the mountain of purgation: if darkness and light are still in *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, Dante makes a conscious choice by giving his readers detailed information about the light in *Purgatorio*; the narration is constantly punctuated by sunlight (and its absence) as a time-giver, because the sunsets mark the time the repentant souls have left in order to be saved, and to be admitted into Heaven. Light and dark imagery in Purgatory is interlinked to terrestrial time: it is a balanced combination of both, precisely like that on earth. Sunsets, or twilights, in particular also mark Dante's own approaching Heaven, and the end of his journey. Jacques Le Goff interestingly defines Dante's *Purgatorio* as 'a study in chiaroscuro', between 'the darkness of Hell and the illumination of Heaven'.[27] Time in *Purgatorio* is pure movement: time is only truly appreciated here, as the repentant souls have to restore their life in Purgatory,[28] always merging the past of their sins with the continuous thought of their future salvation.[29] Memory, together with the passing of time,

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[25] Mary Ackworth Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers* (London: Kennikat Press, 1913), p. 245.
[26] Ackworth Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, p. 249.
[27] Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 354.
[28] Franco Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo nella* Commedia (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1976), p. 105.
[29] Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo nella* Commedia, p. 107.

plays an important role in the soul's own repentance:[30] they need to continuously draw on the memory of their sins in order to reach salvation, and fully expiate their sins.

Interestingly, the twilights in *Purgatorio* are three, the same number as the moments of 'violet light' in *The Waste Land*. Eliot found in *La Divina Commedia* a pattern which suited him best. I will now try to make a brief comparison of the three sunsets or twilights in *Purgatorio* and *The Waste Land*, and how I believe they help us understand Eliot's poem better. Again in the Antipurgatorio, in Canto VIII, Dante describes the sunset of the first day in Purgatory in such terms:

> Era già l'ora che volge il disio
> ai navicanti, e 'ntenerisce il core
> lo dì c'han detto ai dolci amici addio;
> e che lo novo peregrin d'amore
> punge, se ode squilla di lontano
> che paia il giorno pianger che si more;
>
> (VIII, lines 1-6)[31]

The hour is the same as that described by Eliot, indeed the 'violet hour' that brings the sailors (*navicanti*) home, but something has obviously changed in the transfer of this image from Dante to Eliot. This first Purgatorial sunset for Dante has a twofold meaning: on the one hand, it arouses in him the memory of his life on earth, which seems so distant to him now in his otherworldly journey, and on the other hand the sunset also represents a temptation which Dante must not yield to in order to turn his mind to God, and continue with his journey. The image of the sun setting binds the Purgatorial souls (Dante included) to the earth, and to their earthly memories. The souls will thus help their focussing on their own expiation of sins by singing the hymn 'Te lucis ante' (line 13), which was a song sung in the Middle Ages to ask for God's help against the night's temptations.[32] Eliot's twilight partly follows this Dantean pattern: the violet hour is the time preceding night,

[30] Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo nella* Commedia, p. 106.
[31] Dante, *Purgatorio*, p. 147. English translation: ' 'Twas now the hour that turns back the desire of those who sail the seas and melts their heart, that day when they have said to their sweet friends adieu, | and that pierces the new pilgrim with love, if from afar he hears the chimes which seem to mourn for the dying day;' in *The Purgatorio*, p. 93.
[32] Reggio, 'Note al Canto VIII', *Purgatorio*, p. 148.

and thus it may be a time of distraction, as for Dante from God; and yet, it should be the prelude to some exceptional event, like Dante's journey through Purgatory, but in *The Waste Land* this will effectively only lead to more sordid (and far from exceptional) events. The violet hour will bring the typist home, but there seems to be no God to turn to; Tiresias foresees and witnesses everything, but can barely help. Eliot's city is full of souls who are struggling with their lives, and I perceive the poet's eye to be rather sympathetic: Eliot feels as sinful as the other souls living in *The Waste Land*; he has their same desire for purgation. The Purgatorial sunset highlights Dante's own pains and preoccupations, and sins, and at the same time makes them universal: similarly, Eliot uses the figure of Tiresias as a representation of somebody who keeps suffering and enacting other people's pain by observation at 'the violet hour'.

After this first description of the sun setting in *Purgatorio* VIII, Dante meets an old friend, Nino Visconti, in the Antipurgatorio. His friend is waiting to be admitted into Purgatory, and since he learns that Dante is alive and can go back to earth and report his message, he asks him to beg his daughter Giovanna to pray for him, because his wife got re-married immediately after his death and seems to have forgotten him:

> Non credo che la sua madre più m'ami,
> poscia che trasmutò le bianche bende,
> le quai convien che, misera!, ancor brami.
> Per lei assai di lieve si comprende
> quanto in femmina foco d'amor dura,
> se l'occhio o'l tatto spesso non l'accende.
>
> (VIII, lines 73-78)[33]

The whole of Purgatory lays its foundations on love, and the repentant souls there expiate various degrees of failed love. Years after *The Waste Land*, in 1953, Eliot had already made clear his opinion on the difference between Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *La Divina Commedia* in terms of light and love, in his essay 'Vergil and the Christian World':

[33] Dante, *Purgatorio*, pp. 152-3. English translation: 'I do not think her mother loves me more, since she hath changed her white wimples, which hapless she must long for once again. | By her right easily may be known, how long the fire of love doth last in woman, if eye and touch do not oft rekindle it.', in Dante, *The Purgatorio*, p. 97.

> What key word can one find in the *Divine Comedy* which is absent from the *Aeneid*? One word of course is *lume*, and all the words expressive of the spiritual significance of light. But this, I think, as used by Dante, has a meaning which belongs only to explicit Christianity, fused with a meaning which belongs to mystical experience. And Vergil is no mystic. The term which one can justifiably regret the lack of in Vergil is *amor*. It is, above all others, the key word for Dante. I do not mean that Vergil never uses it. [...] The use of the word *amor* in the *Eclogues* is not illuminated by meanings of the word in the *Aeneid*; in the way in which, for example, we return to Paolo and Francesca with greater understanding of their passion after we have been taken through the circles of love in the *Paradiso*. [...] it is not Love that causes *fatum*, or moves the sun and the stars. Even for intensity of physical passion, Vergil is more tepid than some other Latin poets, and far below the rank of Catullus. If we are not chilled we at least feel ourselves, with Vergil, to be moving in a kind of emotional twilight.[34]

Love is indeed the principle that governs the realm of Purgatory:[35] as Virgil himself will explain to Dante later in canto XVII, Purgatory is divided into the three main sins the souls have to expiate, the first one being *amor per malo obietto* (love for evil, i.e. pride, envy, ire), *amore per troppo di vigore* (excessive love, i.e. avarice, gluttony, lust), or *amore per poco di vigore* (negligence towards real love, i.e. sloth). In his essay on Vergil, Eliot lets us understand that he himself makes an equation that love and light are inextricably linked in the *Comedy*, whereas they are not and could not possibly be in the *Aeneid*, a pre-Christian work. *The Waste Land*, too, tries to link the light of purgation with its various degrees of failed love. Nino Visconti's wife (Beatrice d'Este) lacked enough love for her dead husband, and Nino is now accusing women in general of being only capable of fickle love: their feelings for men stop if they cannot be constantly revived by the senses. Quite interestingly, in the first twilight scene of *The Waste Land*, Eliot stages a similar, everyday tragedy of failed love, between the typist and 'the young man carbuncular' (*CPP* 68, line 231), under Tiresias' supervision, a misery of unwanted (for the woman) and lustful (for the man) sex. Eliot is following Dante's pattern of light and dark in *Purgatorio* for *The Waste Land*, and he is linking each twilight scene with similar episodes of failed love in Dante's work, albeit pushed to a further extreme. If Dante's twilight is followed by Nino's accusations towards his fickle wife, together with his anxiety about his progression through Purgatory, then Eliot's 'violet hour' brings forth revelations of the typist's sensual yet loveless relationship with the carbuncular clerk in the modern Purgatorial city.

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[34] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Vergil and the Christian World', *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 61, no. 1 (1953), 1-14 (p. 14).
[35] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 339.

The second twilight moment in *The Waste Land* brings connections which support the idea that Eliot is drawing from Dante's *Purgatorio*:

> What is the city over the mountains
> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London
> Unreal
>
> (*CPP* 73, lines 372-7)

The colour violet here refers to the air rather than an hour, as it does not specify a particular time of the day. It is almost as if produced by the cities' inner turmoil itself: destruction, change and revolution is what is foreseen by Eliot for these capital cities, Purgation is now applied to the cities which are to be identified with both Western and Eastern civilizations, Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London. The perception of 'the city over the mountains' at twilight is reminiscent of Dante's vision at the second sunset and twilight over the realm of Purgatory:

> Ricorditi, lettor, se mai ne l'alpe
> ti colse nebbia per la qual vedessi
> non altrimenti che per pelle talpe,
> come, quando i vapori umidi e spessi
> a diradar cominciansi, la spera
> del sol debilemente entra per essi;
> e fia la tua imagine leggera
> in giugnere a veder com'io rividi
> lo sole in pria, che già nel corcar era.
> Sì, pareggiando i miei co' passi fidi
> del mio maestro, usci' fuor di tal nube
> ai raggi morti già ne' bassi lidi.
>
> (XVII, lines 1-12)[36]

At the end of their second day in Purgatory, Virgil and Dante are climbing the mountain of Purgatory, and have just crossed a thick cloud of mist, and so they find themselves in a

[36] Dante, *Purgatorio*, pp. 318-9. English translation: 'Reader, if ever in the mountains a mist hath caught thee, through which thou sawest not otherwise than moles do through the skin, | remember how, when the damp and dense vapours begin to melt away, the sphere of the sun enters feebly through them: | and thy fancy will lightly come to see how first I beheld the sun again, that now was at the setting. | So, measuring mine with the trusty steps of my Master, I issued forth from such a cloud, to the rays already dead on the low shores.', in Dante, *The Purgatorio*, pp. 203-5.

higher circle. In contextualizing *The Waste Land* critics of Eliot tend to forget that Purgatory itself is described by Dante as a mountain: a mountain which must be climbed gradually, and which can lead to the sorts of visions which one can experience on high mountains. *The Waste Land*'s 'violet air' now shows a 'city over the mountains'. The images that follow here appear as some of violence and destruction: all civilizations (represented by the cities of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London) have already fallen, or are doomed to fall. And yet, I think Eliot is referring to our own personal destruction: the steps the penitent has to climb in order to purify him/herself (with 'violet' stressing once more repentance). In Dante, 'the city over the mountain' is Earthly Paradise, another in-between space before the beginning of actual Heaven.[37] In Canto XVII, as soon as Dante is released by the Purgatorial mist, he has visions of punished anger (which, in Dantean terms, is that of those who have acted for love of evil), and the first image he sees is precisely Procne, in Greek mythology Philomela's sister ('De l'empiezza di lei che mutò forma | ne l'uccel ch'a cantar più si diletta, | ne l'imagine mia apparve l'orma', XVII, lines 19-21).[38] According to the Greek myth, Philomela was raped by Procne's husband, who also cut out her tongue so that she could not speak to anybody: she eventually manages to let Procne know about her violation by weaving a tapestry about the event, and the latter takes revenge on her husband by killing their son Itys and serving him as a meal for her husband. When Tereus finds out, the two sisters pray to the gods to turn them into birds, Procne into a swallow and Philomela into a nightingale.[39] Procne's and 'rudely forced' Philomela's myth recurs throughout *The Waste Land*: Dante also used this myth, as it is mentioned twice in *Purgatorio* (IX lines 13-15, XVII lines 19-21). Interestingly, in the lines immediately preceding the passage just mentioned in *The Waste Land* it is possible to trace a hint of Procne's myth:

[37] For more on Earthly Paradise at the summit of Purgatory, please see Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 335.
[38] Dante, *Purgatorio*, p. 320. English translation: 'The traces of her impiety, who changed her form into the bird that most delights to sing, appeared in my fancy;' in Dante, *The Purgatorio*, p. 205.
[39] Mary Gislon and Rosetta Palazzi, *Dizionario di Mitologia e dell'Antichità Classica* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1997), pp. 199-200.

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only

(*CPP* 73 lines 366-370)

As for the image of the 'cracks in the violet air', and 'cracked earth' in the second passage, Eliot is drawing here not only from Canto XVII, but also Canto XX of *Purgatorio*. Procne's 'maternal lamentation' echoes Philomela's 'twit twit' earlier in the poem and the invocation to the swallow at the end of *The Waste Land*; apart from being for Dante an example of punished anger, she also represents a woman who cannot love and who is not loved by her husband, indeed another example of 'failed love'. Not only is Purgatory represented as a mountain, but it is also a land shaken by rather frequent earthquakes: Dante experiences an earthquake in Canto XX, accompanied by the spirits singing ('quand'io senti', come cosa che cada, | tremar lo monte; onde mi prese un gelo | qual prender suol colui ch'a morte vada.' XX, lines 127-9). The earthquake's nature will be then explained by Statius in Canto XXI: earthquakes occur in Purgatory every time one of the repentant souls completes purification and leaves Purgatory for Heaven ('Tremaci quando alcuna anima monda | sentesi, sì che surge o che si mova | per salir sù; e tal grido seconda.' XXI, lines 58-60). This is also another way for souls in Purgatory to mark the time,[40] as well as obviously rejoice for every purified soul. This could give a suggestive explanation of the 'cracked earth' of *The Waste Land*, as well as support my thesis that Eliot imagined the world of *The Waste Land* as a modern Purgatory.

'Violet' is thus the colour of vision as well as repentance for Eliot. Later in Part V, it is directly associated to 'light':

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall

(*CPP* 73, lines 378-382)

[40] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 353.

Earlier drafts of *The Waste Land* show how this supernatural, and disturbing, image could be in fact a vision of a highly distressed mind:

> So through the evening, through the violet air
> One tortured meditation dragged/led me on
> Concatenated words wherefrom/from which/whereof the sense
> had/seemed/was gone —
> —When comes, to the sleeping or the wake
> [...]
> Oh, through the violet sky, through the evening air
> A chain of reasoning whereof the thread was gone
> Gathered strange images through which we walked alone/along:
> A woman drew her long black hair out tight
> And fiddled whisper-music on those strings
> The Shrill bats quivered through the violet air
> Whining, and beating wings.[41]
>
> (lines 1-4, 10-16)

Violet here is again linked to the air, and then to the sky: in both cases, it is drawn near to the word 'evening', as if to specify that violet is considered as an atmospheric colour. The narrative persona is again described as wandering somewhere; when following (and, indeed, sometimes losing) the trail of his convoluted thoughts, showing more in common with Eliot's earlier poetry. In the sequence where the woman is playing the fiddle, violet is combined with 'air' again rather than 'light' as it appears in *The Waste Land* instead. Hence the moment of time when the bats 'quiver', that is, night, suggesting at the same time artificial light (the combined effect of streetlamps, and, for instance, urban pollution), and the colour indicating visions of the mind. In *The Waste Land*, this is the third time Eliot refers to twilight, and the supernatural vision of the black-haired woman surrounded by 'bats with baby faces' could be de-mythologizing Dante's vision after the third sunset in *Purgatorio* XXVII. Dante crosses the wall of fire in order to start climbing the earthly Paradise, and he sees a beautiful woman singing, Leah, while picking flowers:

> giovane e bella in sogno mi parea

[41] Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript,* p. 45.

donna vedere andar per una landa
cogliendo fiori; e cantando dicea:
"Sappia qualunque il mio nome dimanda
ch'i' mi son Lia, e vo movendo intorno
le belle mani a farmi una ghirlanda.

(XXVII, lines 97-102)[42]

Leah and Rachael are two biblical characters symbolizing active and contemplative life respectively, as well as fertility and sterility. Married to the same man, Jacob, only Leah was able to bring Jacob children (Genesis 29:16-35). Leah and Rachael are not explicitly mentioned in *The Waste Land*, but the idea that women had to generate, in order to be seen as 'productive', and having an 'active' part in human history, comes up continuously in *The Waste Land*, especially with regard to the 'A Game of Chess' episode of Lil taking abortive pills, or the theme of fertility/sterility of the 'waste' land where these souls are roaming haplessly. The 'bats with baby faces' surrounded, and possibly produced, by the black-haired woman are likely to be Eliot's own thoughts, the production of a distressed mind (similarly to the 'papillons noirs' of the early poem 'The Burnt Dancer'). The violet light at twilight over the woman playing the fiddle stresses her own sinfulness, for producing 'bats with baby faces', probably being too fertile, like Lil, or sinning with a Dantean excess of love.

In support of my argument that *The Waste Land* is an exploration of modern life as a Purgatory, using twilight references, I would like to consider *The Hollow Men* (1925) too, as composed by Eliot with a similar intention:

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

(*CPP* 84, II, lines 19-20)

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness

[42] Dante, *Purgatorio*, p. 509. English translation: 'meseemed to behold in a dream, a lady, young and fair, going along a plain gathering flowers; and singing she said: | "Know, whoso asketh my name, that I am Leah, and go moving my fair hands around to make me a garland.', in Dante, *The Purgatorio*, p. 341.

Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

(III, lines 7-13)

In the last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

(IV, lines 6-16)

Death's twilight kingdom hosts the 'final meeting' and is indeed 'the last of meeting places': this could obviously refer either to Hell or Heaven, but as we have seen earlier, even though Dante enters Hell at twilight, it is Purgatory which is generally associated with twilight, and continuously changing lights, and time references. Besides, Purgatory was often called the 'other world'[43] as it was neither Hell (hence damnation) nor Heaven (eternal bliss). It has been argued that Eliot draws here from *Inferno*'s Canto III, with the limbo of souls who did neither good nor evil, and the river Acheron ('tumid river').[44] And yet, the river Acheron is still not the only river mentioned by Dante during his otherworldly journey (there are two at the end of Purgatory: the Lethe and the Eunoe), and also the limbo of the *ignavi* does not coincide with the crowd of people waiting to cross the Acheron. The people who are gathered by the river Acheron are indeed damned in Hell: they are waiting to cross the river to reach Hell, and so their final damnation; the *ignavi* will never cross the Acheron, hence they are not described by Dante as waiting on its beach. Erik Svarny correctly senses a motif of guilt and remorse in *The Hollow Men*:[45] the men's emptiness may represent the emptiness of the soul as described by St. John of the Cross, 'a spiritual state of absolute quiescence — even of hope'.[46] If the 'hollow men' were really in limbo, it would also surprise us that they should have even the slightest

[43] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 1.
[44] Everett A. Gillis, 'Hope for Eliot's Hollow Men?', *PMLA*, vol. 75, no. 5 (1960), 635-638 (p. 636).
[45] Erik Svarny, *'The MEN of 1914': T. S. Eliot and early Modernism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), p. 220.
[46] Gillis, 'Hope for Eliot's Empty Men?', (p. 635).

hope of seeing the 'multifoliate rose' of Paradise, indeed 'the hope', the purpose, the ultimate end of the souls waiting in Purgatory, who cannot be distracted by anything else. The 'multifoliate rose' can be waited for by the penitent souls in *Purgatorio*, but not by the sinners in *Inferno*, let alone the *ignavi* of the *Anteinferno*. The 'empty men' effectively equal the 'hollow men': they live in a 'dead land', which is also a 'cactus land' though, the cactus being famously a plant which grows in dry, arid conditions — life may be a barren waste land according to Eliot, but it is not a completely hopeless one, as Eliot represents it as something not entirely sterile, as cacti can grow there and thrive. The hollow men's life is of little but certain hope. The image of the twilight is used here by Eliot to symbolize again an intermediary, purgatorial state of transition.

3.2 THE TWILIGHT OF SHADOWS

We can speak of 'twilight' even in Eliot's usage of shadows, as the two images can barely be separated in *The Waste Land*. Even when he does not mention both in the same passage, or scene, he always tries to recreate almost a painting-like impression of *chiaroscuro*: shadows would not exist without light, and light always produces shadows.

The first important image of shadow in *The Waste Land* appears precisely in the first part, 'The Burial of the Dead':

> [...] Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, [...]
> [...]. Only
> There is shadow under this red rock,
> (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
> And I will show you something different from either
> Your shadow at morning striding behind you
> Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
> I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
>
> (*CPP* 61, lines 20-30)

The Waste Land's setting is again described as almost a desert: bright sunlight and no relief in the shadows. The image of the shadow is here going astray from Dante's purgatorial shadows, like Statius's in the epigraph to *Inventions of the March Hare* and *Prufrock and Other Observations*: shadows here represent man's half truths, and half revelations. In spite of the sun beating, man can only perceive 'broken images' of reality. And yet, that is perhaps all man can ever wish to know. This passage appears to be a synthesized, and arguably even ironic version of Plato's myth of the cave in *The Republic*. Like the prisoners in the cave imagined by Socrates, the souls in *The Waste Land* cannot see reality, and they mistake the shadows of artificial objects for real human beings.[47]

Later in Part I, the reader finds the astonishing revelation 'Looking into the heart of light, the silence' (*CPP* 62, line 41): at first glance, even the heart of light, a reference to Dante's *Paradiso* as I shall argue in chapter five of this thesis, could be perceived as disappointing as the rest of human experience. Effectively, the 'heart of light' is silent in its perfection; its mention in *The Waste Land* would lead one to think that Eliot had Dante once again in mind. The souls in *Purgatorio* naturally move towards the 'heart of light', whereas the souls in *Inferno* are not allowed to move, or to look at Paradise, or anything that would distract them from their punishment. The 'broken images' revealed by the sun beating on the rocks are indeed the half experience which the souls experience far from Heaven, and even the pieces of their own memory which the souls have to put back

[47] 'Next, said I, here is a parable to illustrate the degrees in which our nature may be enlightened or unenlightened. Imagine the condition of men living in a sort of cavernous chamber underground, with an entrance open to the light and a long passage all down the cave. Here they have been from childhood, chained by the leg and also by the neck, so that they cannot move and can see only what is in front of them, because the chains will not let them turn their heads. At some distance higher up is the light of a fire burning behind them; and between the prisoners and the fire is a track with a parapet built along it, like the screen at a puppet-show, which hides the performers while they show their puppets over the top. | I see, said he. | Now behind this parapet imagine persons carrying along various artificial objects, including figures of men and animals in wood or stone or other materials, which project above the parapet. Naturally, some of these persons will be talking, others silent. | It is a strange picture, he said, and a strange sort of prisoners. | Like ourselves, I replied; for in the first place prisoners so confined would have seen nothing of themselves or of one another, except the shadows thrown by the fire-light on the wall of the Cave facing them, would they? | Not if all their lives they had been prevented from moving their heads. | And they would have seen as little of the objects carried past. | Of course. | Now, if they could talk to one another, would they not suppose that their words referred only to those passing shadows which they saw? | Necessarily. | And suppose their prison had an echo from the wall facing them? When one of the people crossing behind them spoke, they could only suppose that the sound came from the shadow passing before their eyes. | No doubt. | In every way, then, such prisoners would recognize as reality nothing but the shadows of those artificial objects.', Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Francis Macdonald Cornford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), pp. 228-9.

together, in order to have fully expiated their sins. Memory is the key to their sins' expiation.[48] The only place which can show revelations to the lost human being is the red rock: the colour red can of course be associated with some particular stone (for instance, sandstone), but at this point it is interesting to notice how red was not the colour originally envisioned by Eliot. In his drafts of *The Waste Land*, the reader will find the same passage, unaltered, in Part I, 'He Do the Police in Different Voices: The Burial of the Dead',[49] but it appears again in what must have been the first draft of a poem entitled 'The Death of St. Narcissus' as:

> Come under the shadow of this grey rock
> Come ~~(and sit)~~ under the shadow of this grey rock
> And I will show you a shadow different from either
> Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak, or
> Your shadow huddled by the fire against the redrock.
> I will show you his bloody ~~cloth~~/coat/cloth and ~~green/bloodless~~ limbs
> And the ~~blue~~/grey shadow between his lips.[50]
>
> (lines 1-7)

The red rock from the first lines was initially grey, as it is after all the most obvious colour for a rock: at line 5, though, the grey rock has already become red, presumably due to its closeness to the fire. This could suggest that the rock in the final version could also be grey, but made red because of the nearby fire. The shadow under the rock could be given either by the sun in the desert, creating shadowy images between the rocks, or by a fire set near the rock by some travellers across that region, in order to last longer, sheltered by the rock, which would stress again the similarity with Plato's myth, where the fire is taken for sun by the souls hidden in the cave.[51]

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[48] Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo*, p. 107.
[49] Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript*, p. 7.
[50] Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, p. 91.
[51] 'Every feature in this parable, my dear Glaucon, is meant to fit our earlier analysis. The prison dwelling corresponds to the region revealed to us through the sense of sight, and the fire-light within it to the power of the Sun. The ascent to see the things in the upper world you may take as standing for the upward journey of the soul into the region of the intelligible; then you will be in possession of what I surmise, since that is what you wish to be told. Heaven knows whether it is true; but this, at any rate, is how it appears to me. In the world of knowledge, the last thing to be perceived and only with great difficulty is the essential Form of Goodness. Once it is perceived, the conclusion must follow that, for all things, this is the cause of whatever is right and good; in the visible world it gives birth to light and to the lord of light, while it is itself sovereign in the

Apart from the 'shadow under the red/grey rock', the inhabitants of *The Waste Land* also have shadows of their own, interestingly also divided in two: a morning shadow and an evening shadow, resembling twilight's duplicity. Here it is underlined again how the shadow is only present during the day – to suggest that the shadow is a symbol for man's fears, temptations, and insecurities, which take over during the night, but which also do not abandon us completely during the day either. Hence the indication of 'fear in a handful of dust': dust and ashes have always been linked in Christianity with man's mortality.[52] The shadow shown at morning and at evening reconnects the souls of *The Waste Land* with their life on earth and their memories: it is that 'other side' which does not belong to them anymore.

In *The Hollow Men*, the shadow is used again by Eliot, but with a capital 'S':

> Between the idea
> And the reality
> Between the motion
> And the act
> Falls the Shadow
>
> *For Thine is the Kingdom*
>
> Between the conception
> And the creation
> Between the emotion
> And the response
> Falls the Shadow
>
> *Life is very long*
>
> Between the desire
> And the spasm
> Between the potency
> And the existence
> Between the essence
> And the descent
> Falls the Shadow
>
> *For Thine is the Kingdom*'
> (*CPP* 85, V, lines 5-24)

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intelligible world and the parent of intelligence and truth. Without having had a vision of this Form no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life or in matters of state.', in Plato, *The Republic*, p. 231.

[52] Men came from dust — 'And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.', *Genesis* 2:7, and to it they shall return — 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.', *Ecclesiastes* 12:7.

The line 'Falls the Shadow' is clearly an allusion to Ernest Dowson's poem 'Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae':[53]

> Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
> There fell thy shadow, Cynara!
> [...]
> But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
> Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! The night is thine;
>
> (lines 1-2, 20-21)[54]

This poem's lines were necessarily in Eliot's mind: they were reprised in his early poem 'Suite Clownesque IV', too: 'But through the painted colonnades | There falls a shadow dense, immense | [...] | It's the comedian again' (*IMH* 38, lines 11-13). Although the words, the rhythm may be similar, the meaning is quite different, and indeed it has changed significantly from *The Waste Land* episode: Eliot has 'personified the reality of the shadow that terrifies his personae in "The Hollow Men"'.[55] To Ronald Schuchard, the 'Shadow' of *The Hollow Men* is an 'umbral image of the Holy Spirit',[56] although it could also be the physical representation of the 'dark angel' of Schuchard's title: a mental shadow[57] keeping Eliot, and the 'hollow men' from action. Earlier in the poem, the hollow men had already been defined as 'Shape without form, shade without colour | Paralysed force, gesture without motion' (*CPP* 83, I, lines 11-12). In the earlier collections *Prufrock and Other Observations*, as well as *Inventions of the March Hare*, I had already examined how Eliot used an epigraph from *Purgatorio* XXI, of failed embraces between souls, namely the two poets Statius and Virgil. The hollow men are guilty souls without physicality, and amongst them falls the Shadow, which could with its capital 'S' lead us to think it is indeed a 'darker' representation of the Holy Spirit. Whether the reference acknowledged by Eliot to the

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[53] Robert F. Gleckner, 'Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar', *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 75, no. 1 (1960), 26-28 (p. 27). Dowson's and Eliot's line could also allude to Shelley's poem 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', which has a similar line ('Sudden thy shadow fell on me', l. 59), in *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature: 1800 to the Present*, vol. II, ed. Frank Kermode and John Hollander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 409.
[54] Ernest Christopher Dowson, *Poetical Works*, ed. Desmond Flower (London: Cassell and Co., 1934), p. 22.
[55] Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 14.
[56] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*, p. 125.
[57] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, p. 86.

Emmaus episode from Luke's Gospel with Jesus walking beside the two disciples were accurate or not, I would argue that 'the third who walks always beside you' is, indeed, also the Shadow which falls among *The Hollow Men*: a more spiritual image than the shadows of Dowson's poem, or even Eliot's early "Clownesque" poem, bridging the divide between *The Waste Land* and Eliot's post-conversion poetry.

3.3 BURNING BURNING BURNING BURNING

The second important light element of *The Waste Land* which would support the image of Purgatory and purgation is the use of fire and flames imagery, and more generally of 'burning'.

Part II, 'A Game of Chess', opens with a luxuriant scene full of light: Eliot's own notes to the poem direct us to William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the female figure responds to familiar representations of Cleopatra and Dido, with the imagery of light here showing her grandeur.

> The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Glowed on the marble, where the glass
> Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
> From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
> (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
> Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
> Reflecting light upon the table as
> The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
> From satin cases poured in rich profusion.
> In vials of ivory and coloured glass
> Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
> [...]
> [...] stirred by the air
> That freshened from the window, these ascended
> In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
> Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
> [...].
> Huge sea-wood fed with copper
> Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
> In which sad light a carvèd dolphin swam.
>
> (*CPP* 64, lines 77-87, 89-96)

Nearly every line of this long description contains a reference to light, or at least to a bright colour, from the furniture in the room (her 'Chair' is a shining, glowing throne) to the decorations of glass and gold (the two golden Cupidons adorning the room suggest a mixture of pretended baroque architecture, presumed wealth, and astute coyness). The seven-branched candelabra's light is even doubled by all the glass and gold present in the room: light flows as if it were a cascade, or 'a kaleidoscopic intermingling of light',[58] without producing any shadows. Even the fabric of the cases is chosen in order to reflect and produce light, as satin is indeed a cloth which is very glossy on the surface and dull on the back. Burnt copper results in a mixture of green and orange flames, which is described as a 'sad light', in spite of its bright flames. When describing the whole scene, Eliot is clearly evoking Cleopatra's representation in Shakespeare's play, as in fact there is a very similar passage in Act II (Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra at her first meeting with Antony in Egypt):

> The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water; the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggared all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
> O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature. On each side her
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling cupids,
> With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did.[59]

The scene represented by Shakespeare lavishly describes the kind of splendour that must have attracted Mark Antony towards Cleopatra. Eliot borrows much from this scene, but there is an element I find missing in Shakespeare's description of Cleopatra but which is instead present in the 'boudoir' of Eliot's lady: flames. Artificial sources of light such as candles appear in this scene as 'sevenbranched candelabra', 'the prolonged candles-flames',

[58] A. J. Wilks, *A Critical Commentary on T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971), p. 46.
[59] Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, pp. 139-140 (ll. 201-215).

and 'Huge sea-wood [...] | Burned green and orange': this choice does not seem casual to me, especially after having considered the importance of flames and candles as self-representation in *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Eliot hides these sources of light between the lines of Cleopatra's luxury, and of course the reference to the couple Antony and Cleopatra (as well as Dido and Aeneas) is in perfect harmony with the theme of physical and failed love in *The Waste Land*: Antony and Cleopatra's story is one of power, sexuality and betrayals; so is Aeneas and Dido's in the *Aeneid*. Cleopatra and Dido both burn with the physicality of their new loves for Antony and Aeneas, both having been married to other men. Dante precisely situates both Dido and Cleopatra in Canto V of *Inferno* with the other lustful souls ('L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa, | e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo; | poi è Cleopatràs lussurïosa.' V lines 61.63),[60] as they both lived in pre-Christian times, and could not have thought of repenting, and were also both suicidal after their failed relationships. While the furniture in the opening of 'A Game of Chess' reflects the lady's own status and even sensuality, the flames mirror her own burning with lust and desire for power. It would be unclear whether the lustful lady also burns with a refining fire, like Arnaut Daniel later in the poem: two more details in the poem could lead us to think of her in such terms.

The first one is again a reference to light which uncovers the lady's actual personality: her hair almost resembles that of the mythical creature Medusa, 'Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair | Spread out in fiery points | Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.' (*CPP* 64-5, lines 108-10)– her hair glows even more in the bright atmosphere of her room, near the fire, almost as if it had a life of its own.[61] This same image recurs again in another poem which shares some parts with the final version of *The Waste Land*, 'The Death of the Duchess':

We should have marble floors

[60] English translation: 'That other is she who slew herself in love, and broke faith to the ashes of Sichaeus; next comes luxurious Cleopatra.', in *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, p. 53.
[61] Wilks, *A Critical Commentary*, p. 46.

And firelight on your hair[62]
[...]
My thoughts tonight have tails, but no wings.
They hang in clusters on the chandelier
Or drop one by one upon the floor.
Under the brush her hair
Spread out in little fiery points of will
Glowed ~~like~~/into words, then was suddenly still.
[...]
[...] her hands behind her hair
And the firelight shining where the muscle drew.

Firelight reflected in the woman's hair also renders her whole figure quite intimidating, making it harder for the man to understand her, or even interact with her, as in both instances the scene is followed by a failed dialogue between a man and woman. This follows the description of 'the change of Philomel' (line 99) on the wall of the lady's room, turned into a nightingale, and trying to communicate with her tongue cut out but effectively managing only to make the noise of 'Jug Jug' (line 103), the sound of the nightingale. The presence of Philomel's myth on the wall would underline the lady's connection with that same story: the lady, too, barely manages to successfully communicate with her partner, and her burning also represents her own relationship of physical sensuality without love.

The second element that should be considered is the later episode of the typist, which also happens to contain a reference to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, helping us to a more profound contextualization of both the typist episode and the Cleopatra episode in *The Waste Land*. Before abandoning the house completely, the sun shines on that ultimate association with sex which is the typist's underwear ('touched by the sun's last rays', line 225): almost a premonition of what is indeed bound to happen. The 'young man carbuncular' (*CPP* 68, line 231) quickly 'assaults' the passive woman (lines 239-40), 'finding the stairs unlit' (*CPP* 69, line 248), upon leaving her house. Remarkably, the whole description of the encounter between the typist and the clerk is characterized by contrasts of light and darkness. The sex act is finished before night, as the 'stairs unlit' would suggest there is still enough natural light out and the lamps on the staircase have not yet been lit. The adjective 'carbuncular' also carries an important

[62] Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript*, pp. 105-107 (ll. 27-28, 32-37, 41-42).

reference to light: 'carbuncular' itself means 'Of the nature of or resembling a carbuncle'.[63] A 'carbuncle' is usually an infected sore, but the term may also mean a particular kind of gemstone, 'of a deep-red color, inclining to scarlet', and which 'loses its deep tinge and becomes the colour of burning coal' if held against sunlight, and believed to have the mythical power of 'shining in darkness'.[64] Thus, figuratively, the word has come to acquire the meaning of 'person or thing resembling a carbuncle in colour, brilliance or precious quality'.[65] Strikingly, the word appears in Shakespeare's play, scene VIII, Part IV, when Cleopatra commends Scarus, one of his bravest soldiers, who has just got wounded during a battle, at Antony's request:

> CLEOPATRA: I'll give thee, friend,
> An armour all of gold. It was a king's.
> ANTONY: He has deserved it, were it carbuncled
> Like holy Phoebus' car. [...][66]

Shakespeare critics have commented on the word 'carbuncled' as 'embossed with jewels. The name *carbuncle* is given to various precious stones, chiefly red ones.'[67]: Scarus' great value is rewarded with a precious armour of gold, which, in spite of belonging to a king, would have more effectively matched the soldier's own value, if it had been embossed with jewels, and particularly carbuncles, as they beam in the dark, showing all the owner's valour at war. The young clerk becomes the carrier of an ambiguous meaning, he is almost an infection for society, as he represents for Eliot the average man, without any better aspirations to move him than sex and food, at the same time thinking very highly of himself, as if he were a stone glowing in the dark (the lines 'One of the low on whom assurance sits | As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire', *CPP* 68, lines 234-5, also confirm the carbuncular clerk's pretended self-assurance).

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[63] Oxford English Dictionary online, <www.oed.com> [accessed 27 August 2012].
[64] *A Dictionary of Mining*, p. 176.
[65] Oxford English Dictionary online, <www.oed.com> [accessed 27 August 2012].
[66] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 244 (ll. 26-9).
[67] Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, p. 244.

At the end of Part III, 'The Fire Sermon', the image of flames is offered once again with the verb 'burning':

> Burning burning burning burning
> O Lord Thou pluckest me out
> O Lord Thou pluckest
>
> burning
>
> (*CPP* 70, lines 308-311)

The third section of *The Waste Land* thus concludes with an image of fire, and destruction, here accompanied by a line from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which is then half-repeated, suggestive of the speech being interrupted by the fire of Carthage.

Burning, as well as suggesting yielding to physical desire, is also linked to Saint Augustine's early conception of expiation in Purgatory. St. Augustine of Hippo was indeed one of the first to theorize 'Purgatory' as such, and the first author to clearly state the link between 'penitence' and 'purgatory'.[68] He also made a clear distinction between the fire of purgation and damnation itself: 'et post hanc vitam habebit vel ignem purgationis vel poenam aeternam.'[69] According to Augustine's thought, 'earthly tribulations' would be the first step of purgation:[70] Purgatory would thus start on earth for him and then continue in the fire of purgation, or in the eternal punishments of Hell. With the exception of few holy souls who are admitted directly into Heaven, salvation for Augustine would happen mainly through fire, in Purgatory.[71] Directing himself to God, in his *Confessions* Augustine quotes Psalm 18 saying how it is impossible to escape God's punishment, as 'none can escape [God's] burning heat'.[72] God's punishment is thus compared to a 'burning heat' which thus connects to the fire consuming the sinners in Hell and refining those in Purgatory. Augustine's *Confessions* interestingly revolves around light and dark images: in the passage used by Eliot for *The Waste Land*, from Book X, 34, Augustine describes,

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[68] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 69.
[69] 'and after this life there will be either the fire of purgation or eternal pain.', *Commentary on Genesis Against the Manichaeans*, in Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, pp. 67-8.
[70] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 70.
[71] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 71.
[72] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 91.

remarkably, how temptation through sight was one of the most difficult for him not to yield to. Eyes are distracted by various kinds of light, which is not the Light of God:

> The eyes delight in beautiful shapes of different sorts and bright and attractive colours. I would not have these things take possession of my soul. Let God possess it, he who made them all. He made them all very good, but it is he who is my Good, not they. All day and every day, while I am awake, they are there before my eyes. They allow me no respite, such as I am granted in moments of silence when there is no singing and sometimes no sound at all to be heard. For light, the queen of colours, pervades all that I see, wherever I am throughout the day, and by the ever-changing pattern of its rays it entices me even when I am occupied with something else and take no special note of it. [...]
>
> But the true Light is the Light which Tobias saw when, though his eyes were blind, he taught his son the path he should follow in life, and himself led the way, charity guiding his steps so that he did not stray.[73]

Vision is the sense with which Augustine struggles the most: his eyes are distracted by earthly beauty and thus cannot focus on the light of God. Augustine wishes his eyes could take him nearer to God: vision and blindness recur throughout *The Waste Land*, too, and the souls of *The Waste Land* are not blessed enough to see the blinding lights of Paradise, and have to go through the temptation of the eye on earth, as a pre-purgatorial tribulation, and are unable to see the Light of God. Indeed, Augustine even describes his past as a sinner as having his 'back to the light' and his 'face turned towards the things which it illumined, so that [his] eyes [...] were in darkness.'.[74] Souls in *The Waste Land* wait for death 'pressing [their] lidless eyes' (line 138): this image comes certainly from James Thomson's poem 'To Our Ladies of Death', describing Death as with 'lidless tenebriously bright' (*CDN* 145, line 102). Eliot applies the lidless eyes to the people of *The Waste Land*, waiting for death, rather than Death herself: they cannot possibly turn from temptation, as their eyes are always open, always 'lidless', and so pressing their lidless eyes equals blinding oneself, as in the Augustinian example, as a self-imposed punishment, to focus on one's current sins to expiate. The other line from *Confessions* used by Eliot in the same passage of *The Waste Land*, 'To Carthage then I came', is taken from Augustine's description of his main deadly sin, lust: 'I went to Carthage, where I found myself in the

[73] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 239-40.
[74] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 88.

midst of a hissing cauldron of lust.'[75] Augustine, albeit a saint, is thus in great harmony with the other inhabitants of *The Waste Land* precisely for his past lustful life, which he managed to expiate by controlling his senses to see the Light of God.

Eliot chose Augustine's confession of his unholy loves and purification by fire for the final of 'The Fire Sermon'. He continues this theme at the end of 'What the Thunder Said', by directly quoting a line from Dante's *Purgatorio* XXVI: 'Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina' (*CPP* 75, line 428). Again, this is an image of flames wrapping a soul from *La Divina Commedia*: then what has changed, if anything, from 'Prufrock"s epigraph? In this canto, Dante meets the penitents who committed sins of lust during their earthly life: one of them is Arnaut Daniel, an Occitan troubadour much admired by Dante.[76] The main difference with the lines from 'Prufrock' regards, of course, the condition of Arnaut Daniel, a repentant soul, who will thus eventually see the light of Paradise, whereas Guido da Montefeltro (*Inferno*, Canto XXVII) cannot – and probably does not even want to – hope to be admitted into Paradise. The atmosphere in Purgatory is generally perceived as full of hope: souls are repenting, with the absolute certainty that they will join the host of blessed souls in Paradise. Of all the sinners in *Purgatorio*, interestingly Eliot chooses Arnaut Daniel: the lustful penitents are the only ones characterized by flames. Whereas flames and ashes are constant features of Dante's *Inferno*, fire in *Purgatorio* is not as frequent and has a purifying function, rather than a punishing one (similar function has the 'Wall of Fire' at the junction between Purgatory's seventh circle and Earthly Paradise, which the purified souls must cross in order to reach Paradise). I would argue here that light imagery in Eliot's *The Waste Land* has changed from that of his early poetry, and its meaning with it: in his earlier poetry, darkness had taken over light, and fire itself was seen as a hellish torment, whereas in *The Waste Land* fire is seen as both a reminder of one's actions, as well as a means of purification. The choice of that specific line from *Purgatorio*, at the very end of *The Waste Land*, should direct us towards a more hopeful understanding of the whole poem. The world recreated here by Eliot is one of people living —to an extent— between life and death, and most certainly, between good and evil. In another poem from

[75] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 55.
[76] Reggio, 'Note al Canto XXVII', in Dante, *Purgatorio*, p. 495.

the drafts of *The Waste Land*, 'Exequy', the poet describes Arnaut Daniel and the lustful souls in Purgatory more at length, with again words pronounced by the Occitan poet and mentions of 'Italian air' (line 7), and 'flowers of deflowered maids' (line 11, a clear reference to lust), as well as references to the 'constant flame' and 'bloodless shade', all leading the reader to think of Daniel.

> The constant flame shall keep me warm,
> A bloodless shade among the shades
> Doing no good, but not much harm.
> [...]
> One soul, disdainful or disdained,
> Shall come, his shadowed beauty stained[77]
> The colour of the withered year,
> [...]
> ~~SOVEGNA VOS AL TEMPS DE MON DOLOR~~.
> ~~Consiros vei la pasada folor~~. [78]

Eliot interestingly describes Arnaut Daniel as a 'bloodless shade [...] doing no good, but not much harm'. Purgatory is the world where Dante seems to feel more at ease — he knows that that is the place where he will have to go back after death —,[79] identification with the souls in Purgatory is easier than with those in Hell or Paradise, as the former have sinned far too much than the average human being, and the latter, on the other hand, have had a life of moral perfection which is hardly ever equalled by common men. Augustine, too, was clear about the kind of sinners who could be purified in Purgatory: those who are neither altogether bad nor altogether good.[80] In much the same way, in the 1920s Eliot feels part sympathy, part self-identification with the repentant souls. Arnaut Daniel is the ultimate representation of the sinners in *The Waste Land*, and of the poet himself: a literate, and a moderate sinner too. In Canto XXVI, both Arnaut Daniel and Guido Guinizzelli are placed among the lustful souls because in life they were poets singing the sensual love: this must include Dante himself too — he, too, wrote love poems

[77] Interestingly, Eliot's rhyme 'disdained/stained' chimes with Shelley's line on Rousseau in *The Triumph of Life*, 'Stained that within which still disdains to wear it—'. (l. 205), in *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature: 1800 to the Present*, p. 484.
[78] Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript*, p. 101 (ll. 12-14, 23-25, 29-30).
[79] Bosco, 'Introduzione', p. 2.
[80] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 84.

and he knows he will have to come back to that specific circle of Purgatory, after death.[81] Guinizzelli's soul also disappears within his fire ('disparve per lo foco, | come per l'acqua il pesce andando al fondo.' *Pg* XXVI 134-5), like Daniel's at the end of his speech: Eliot opts for Daniel's description, because its fire 'affina' (refines). Eliot is interested in Arnaut Daniel as a personage, as imagined by Dante: the refining fire which will purify Daniel's (and Gunizzelli's, too) sin of lust, and the proximity of these souls to the wall of fire, another image of light referring here to earthly love, which they have to cross in order to get to the Earthly Paradise, completely purified and leaving their earthly loves behind in Purgatory, and which Dante also in his journey must cross if he wants to see Beatrice. Fire is for Dante and Eliot both a reminder of their earthly sins which led them there, as well as an important means of purification, which cannot be avoided.

In another, scripturally inspired, unpublished draft, the poet declares to be both 'the victim and the sacrificial knife',[82] 'the fire, and the butter also'[83]: if the fire can destroy and melt butter with its heat and power, easily shaping it into new forms. The butter can thus symbolize the status of the repentant souls, who were easily tempted during life, but now will be tempered by fire: in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, he acknowledges how the heat of the Holy Spirit does melt the souls who want to get closer to God (Book IX, chapter 7).[84] Eliot represents here fire's double image as burning with both sin and expiation. The unpublished poem, 'Elegy', which was collected among the drafts of *The Waste Land*, shows an even more religious passage concerning fire:

> God, in a rolling ball of fire
> Pursues by day my errant feet.
> His flames of ~~pity/horror/~~anger and ~~of ire/passion/~~desire
> Approach me with consuming heat.[85]

[81] Bosco, 'Introduzione al Canto XXVI', *Purgatorio*, pp. 478-9.
[82] Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript*, p. 111 (l. 4).
[83] Ibidem, (l. 5).
[84] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 191.
[85] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 117 (ll. 21-24).

Here Eliot's passage in this poem is much reminiscent of St. Augustine's *Confessions*: the same part cited by Eliot earlier in *The Waste Land* ('O Lord Thou pluckest me out') reappears here, slightly modified. Augustine describes how his feet may err and end up in a trap, or a snare, and need God's hand to be freed from the traps onto which they have fallen (Book X, chapter 34).[86] God is represented as an unstoppable ball of fire, burning with anger and desire, consuming the souls of those who sin: the flames here are God's direct agents, and, as stated by Augustine, 'none can escape [God's] burning heat'.[87]

3.4 CONCLUSION

Early in this chapter, section 3.1, I have considered how Eliot's use of the colour 'violet' applied to light, air, and hour in three different sections of *The Waste Land*, can be associated to the moment of 'twilight', a moment of expectation which brings forth important discoveries. I have also compared this moment, used by Eliot in *The Waste Land* with Dante's use of the three sunsets punctuating the time for the souls in *Purgatorio* as well as leading to the poet's visions in the other world. Through this comparison, it is possible to gauge the studied importance given by Eliot to the 'violet hour'. Hence the world of *The Waste Land* is turned into one of waiting for God, and expiation of one's sins, and thus of a word denoting hope, as can be seen in *The Hollow Men* as well. In section 3.2, I have looked at the 'shadow' in more religious (and even, to an extent, Purgatorial) terms, firstly in relation to the theme of vision and truth in *The Waste Land*, and consequently as a representation of the guilt and remorse of the 'empty men' in *The Hollow Men*. In section 3.3, I have taken into consideration the image of burning (as well as fire and flames), as both a physical and visual reminder of the poetic characters' past sins (i.e. Cleopatra), and the vivid symbol of their having to expiate their

[86] 'I resist the allurements of the eye for fear that as I walk upon your path, my feet may be caught in a trap. Instead, I raise the eyes of my spirit to you, so that you may save my feet from the snare. Time and again you save them, for I fail to escape the trap.', in Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 240.
[87] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 91.

sins, as in Dante's and St. Augustine's writings, and, thereby, reaching salvation through purgatorial fire.

Examining Eliot's use of light sources as a way of self-identification in his early poems (chapter two), in *The Waste Land* he has developed his poetic sensitivity for images of light and darkness, reaching a further stage of signification. This study of light and dark in *The Waste Land* provides the reader with a new interpretation of purgatorial aspects of this poem, which are made more evident by Eliot's use of this imagery. Eliot makes Dante's lesson his own, and recreates a world of expiation amid the modern world. Contrary to some critics' infernalization of Eliot's poem, I argue *The Waste Land* is rather an in-between world, a 'twilight kingdom', an 'other world', situating itself between eternal damnation and God, which is also this very world.

Chapter Four

Fiat Lux:

INVISIBLE LIGHT

'puro e disposto a salire a le stelle.'
Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, XXXIII, line 145[1]

T. S. Eliot became an Anglo-Catholic in 1927, receiving his baptism on 29th June that year and his confirmation the day after.[2] This important point in Eliot's life cannot be ignored when considering his use of light and dark imagery in his works of the 1930s. As 'a poet who was an Anglo-Catholic', and not 'an Anglo-Catholic poet',[3] Eliot's use of light and dark in the 1930s is even more consciously Christian, and mystical. In this chapter I will consider his post-conversion poetry and drama, in particular *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), Choruses from *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), and *The Family Reunion* (1939), and how development of the light and dark imagery within each of these works shows specific dynamics which can help us towards a new understanding of certain aspects of these poems. Frank Morley, a friend of Eliot's and fellow director of Faber & Faber, later remembered how Eliot, while writing *The Rock*, was climbing his own private Purgatory.[4] His attempts at a spiritual self-improvement, as well as the crisis with his wife Vivien, all led him to look for a way of writing that explored his need for purgation. In

[1] Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, p. 623. English translation: 'pure and ready to mount to the stars.', *The Purgatorio of Dante Alighieri*, p. 429.
[2] Barry Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010), p. 111.
[3] Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T. S. Eliot and Christianity*, p. 214.
[4] Berg Coll MSS Morley — Frank Vigor Morley Collection of Papers 1921-1980, 'A few recollections of Eliot, Typescript of essay' (Berg Collection, New York Public Library).

another instance, when lecturing on Yeats, Eliot displayed his dislike of Yeats' play *Purgatory*, mainly for its misleading title, since it represented, according to Eliot, a purgatory without any emphasis on the very act of purgation:[5] the idea and concept of purgation was of the utmost importance for him at the time.

In this chapter I will consider all four works in different subsections, to show how the complex nature of allusions of Eliot's light and darkness imagery is an important line of interpretation for all of these works. Light and darkness are perceived in Eliot's 1930s poetry as complementary opposites, after Meister Eckhart's commentary on John's gospel. This, I argue, can be found in all the works considered in this chapter. In section 4.1, I will study *Ash-Wednesday*'s references to the colour white as a symbol of purification, also leading to an interpretation of the 'Lady' of the poem as a Beatrice-like figure, and the poem's location as akin to the Earthly Paradise, as represented by Dante's episode at the end of *Purgatorio*. In section 4.2, I study the duality of visible and invisible light in *The Rock*, with Eliot bringing further the opposition of light and darkness with a split perception of physical and spiritual light in the mystic's experience. In section 4.3 and 4.4, I argue that the imagery of light and dark is used in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* respectively, as means of showing this complementary opposition, also symbolizes the contrast of day and night, light and dark, as that of good and evil. In section 4.4, I also argue how Harry's expiation, apart from drawing on Aeschylus's character Orestes who also needs to expiate his family's sins, is derived from the mystical concept of the 'dark night of the senses'.

4.1 THREE WHITE LEOPARDS: *ASH-WEDNESDAY*

Ash-Wednesday (1930) is a poem that shows its complexity especially in the abundance of religious elements and metaphorical images from other works of literature. In the last

[5] Berg Coll MSS Yeats, WB — William Butler Yeats Collection of Papers 1865-1939, 'Eliot, Thomas Stearns. The Poetry of W. B. Yeats. Typescript of lecture' (Berg Collection, New York Public Library).

fifteen years, two critics have offered new understanding to this watershed poem of Eliot's corpus, reaching quite different conclusions. In 1999, Ronald Schuchard argued in *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* that years of criticism studying *Ash-Wednesday* as a 'conversion poem' are to be considered false and misleading, as it should be seen instead as 'an extraordinary love poem of great personal intensity and spiritual discipline',[6] almost a missing piece in Eliot's poetic narration of his personal life, between his first wife Vivien and close friend Emily Hale, as also suggested by Lyndall Gordon in *Eliot's New Life*.[7] On the other hand, Barry Spurr has argued forcefully in his book *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T. S. Eliot and Christianity* that *Ash-Wednesday* is, together with Choruses from *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral*, an Anglo-Catholic poem, namely the 'most Marian poem in English of the twentieth century'.[8] I will argue that both Spurr's and Schuchard's arguments are incomplete, and misleading in their extreme definitions of this poem. Examination of Eliot's use of light imagery will show how this can provide the reader with a better understanding of the poem.

The opening of *Ash-Wednesday*, and actually the whole first section, lacks images of either light or darkness. The first reference to light in the poem occurs only at the beginning of Section II, with the image of the 'three white leopards' (line 1, *CPP* 91): the colour white has a great importance in defining and shaping this second section. The leopards under the juniper-tree are white and have fed on the poet's flesh; white are the bones, shining in their own whiteness and contentment; and the 'Lady of silences' also appears dressed in white. The choice of the leopard is allusive to Dante and Virgil: Dante encounters a 'lonza leggiera e presta molto, | che di pel macolato era coverta;' (I, lines 32-3),[9] which critics have argued should be a type of lynx, quite similar to the panther, commonly found in the *bestiaria* of his times.[10] Dante's 'lonza' is most likely after Virgil's 'maculosae tegmine lyncis'[11], a lynx with spotted hair, (literally, 'cover'), from Liber I of the

[6] Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 150.
[7] Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 146.
[8] Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion'*, p. 157.
[9] Alighieri, *Inferno*, p. 10.
[10] Reggio, 'Commento al Canto I', *Inferno*, p. 10.
[11] Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, l. 323.

Aeneid. Interestingly, the Temple Classics edition that Eliot read of Dante's *Divina Commedia* translates 'lonza' with 'leopard': 'And behold, almost at the commencement of the steep, a Leopard, light and very nimble, which was covered with spotted hair.'[12] The commentator of that edition describes the Leopard as 'beautiful' and 'which keeps distracting [Dante's] attention'[13] in his brief introduction to Canto I, and then in his endnotes he links the Leopard to 'Worldly Pleasure' and 'politically, Florence'.[14] Medieval commentators often linked 'lonza' to lust,[15] and so the three leopards of *Ash-Wednesday* introduce the theme of lust and sexual desire into the poem: the earlier reference in Section I to Guido Cavalcanti's ballad 'Perch'i' no spero di tornar giammai' and the unavoidable penitential connotations of the title and the poem's contents[16] lead us once again to a Purgatorial atmosphere of lustful souls trying to save themselves, bearing an implicit reference to Arnaut Daniel, both as a poet, and at the same time a penitent soul in Purgatory (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXVI).[17] Interestingly, the manuscript version of *Ash-Wednesday* bore a title for each section of the poem. Section II is entitled 'Jausen Lo Jorn', and section III 'Som de l'escalina',[18] both excerpts of Arnaut Daniel's speech in *Purgatorio* XXVI. Indeed, the original title of section II refers to the joyful day when Daniel's soul will be completely purified. The presence of spots on the leopards' skins thus mark them as sinful, but at the same time the purity of the colour white should represent their purifying role within *Ash-Wednesday*: by feeding on the poet's flesh, they purge him, leaving him as bones – which symbolizes the poet's human essence. The reference to Ezekiel 37 and the 'valley which *was* full of bones'[19] here is obvious, but the peculiar aspect of this is that there is no mention of colours or light in the Biblical passage. In Eliot's poem, bones 'shine with brightness' (*CPP* 91, line 11) and their 'whiteness' will 'atone to forgetfulness' (line 18). Eliot's insistence on the bones' brightness and whiteness may mean that the bones (and

[12] *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: Dent & Sons, 1932), p. 5.
[13] *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, p. 2.
[14] *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, p. 11.
[15] Reggio, 'Commento al Canto I', p. 10.
[16] Alessandro Serpieri, *T. S. Eliot: le strutture profonde* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1973), p. 58.
[17] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, p. 151.
[18] HB/V/6A, Manuscript of *Ash-Wednesday* (King's College Archive, Cambridge). English translation: 'joy the day' and 'summit of the stairway', in *The Purgatorio*, p. 331.
[19] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 950.

thus the poet) have been purified, and are now waiting for resurrection, or, in Dantean terms, to be moved from Purgatory to Paradise. At this point of the poem, it is interesting to consider that the Biblical passage is actually the opposite of what happens in Eliot's poem: God creates the tribe of Israel by putting sinews and flesh to dry bones, and then sends the new people of Israel onto the Earth,[20] whereas bones in *Ash-Wednesday* are dry because the flesh has been taken off them after death. Besides, there is no mention of flesh possibly returning to the bones. The bones sing happily under a juniper-tree, and atone for the sins their flesh committed when they were a whole body. Similar to the souls in Purgatory, or in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the bones are waiting –even though sex and the sin of lust are still present in *Ash-Wednesday*, hope has indeed made its way through the poet's mind.

The obsessive image of the juniper-tree in this poem could be reminiscent of a fairy-tale of the Grimm Brothers, 'Vom Machandelbaum', translated into English as 'The Juniper Tree', where a juniper-tree is the witness of a sterile woman's granted wish of having a child 'white as snow and red as blood';[21] the tree would then protect that very child's bones, murdered by his stepmother, and laid under the same tree. A bird then sings the presence of the child's bones under the juniper tree and his stepmother's crime (she murdered him), and Eliot has the bones allusively associated with birds, as they 'chirp' (lines 7, 23, *CPP* 91). This gruesome tale by the Grimm brothers combines important colour references (white/red) with themes of sterility, sinning, and cruelty, which have important links with *The Waste Land* as well.[22]

Eliot might have had in mind this fairy-tale when he was about to create the atmosphere of *Ash-Wednesday*'s Section II, but I would tend to disagree with one critic's

[20] 'The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which *was* full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, *there were* very many in the open valley; and, lo, *they were* very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. [...] Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.' Ezekiel 37:1-3, 5-6, in *The Bible*, p. 950.
[21] *Grimm's Fairy Tales: Complete Edition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 226.
[22] The Grimm's tale has interesting links with Procne's myth, also used in *The Waste Land*: the importance of birds in both stories, as well as the evil stepmother giving her stepchild to eat to her husband (like Procne did with her own son, as revenge against Tereus her husband).

association of this fairy-tale figure with Eliot's own mother, Charlotte Eliot, as the Lady of *Ash-Wednesday*.[23] The Lady of the poem is reminiscent of the barren woman of the beginning of the Grimm's tale ('a beautiful and pious wife'):[24] a beautiful, pure lady all dressed in white – 'lovely' (*CPP* 91, line 9) and 'She honours the Virgin in meditation' (l. 10), very much like Beatrice and Saint Lucy in Canto II of *Inferno* (Dante's supernatural journey to Hell, Purgatory and Heaven is blessed and supervised by 'three blessed Ladies',[25] Beatrice, St. Lucy and the Virgin Mary, 'noble Lady in Heaven').[26] Eliot's Lady in *Ash-Wednesday* cannot thus be the Holy Mary herself, but some other more earthly lady – it is not impossible that he were referring here to his old friend Emily Hale, as Ronald Schuchard and Lyndall Gordon suggest.[27] Still, the Lady wearing the white gown is also a 'Lady of silences | Calm and distressed | Torn and most whole' (*CPP* 91, lines 25-27), features that might fit perhaps Dante's Beatrice, but how could they possibly refer to a living woman, whom Eliot in 1930 (when *Ash-Wednesday* was published) was still corresponding with? The identification of the 'lady of silences' with Emily Hale seems odd to me, especially considering that the poem was first printed with the dedication "To My Wife".[28] This, together with the image of the mother-figure of the Grimm fairy tale is also a wife, and her cruel behaviour could take us to identify her with Eliot's wife, or indeed a complex figure blending his (then) idealized lover Emily Hale, Eliot's mother, and his wife – which is not too far from Dante's own conception of the three blessed ladies supervising his otherworldly jouney.

Northrop Frye also argues that Eliot is following a Dantean pattern in *Ash-Wednesday*: the first two sections would be modelled on Dante's Eden, the two central ones on Purgatory, and the two last ones on the Sea.[29] Rather than Eden, I believe that the first two sections of *Ash-Wednesday* are modelled on the *Inferno*'s first two cantos: while

[23] Elizabeth Däumer, 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and *Ash-Wednesday*'s Lady of Silences', *ELH*, 65.2 (1998), 479-501 (pp. 486-7).
[24] *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, p. 226.
[25] *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, p. 23.
[26] *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, p. 21.
[27] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, p. 151.
[28] Ibidem.
[29] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1982), p. 174.

the juniper tree does not quite resemble Dante's Infernal limbo, the leopards and the Lady would confirm their pertinence to Cantos I and II of the *Inferno*.

Section III of *Ash-Wednesday*, begins with a scene which looks back to Eliot's earlier poetry: in 'Prufrock', the poetic persona is tempted to 'turn back and descend the stair' (*CPP* 14, l. 39), rather than climb it and meet whatever he is expected to meet. In *Ash-Wednesday*, on the contrary, the poetic persona is *climbing* the stairs (*CPP* 93, line 21), in a rather dark atmosphere:

> At the first turning of the second stair
> I turned and saw below
> The same shape twisted on the banister
> Under the vapour in the fetid air
> Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
> The deceitful face of hope and of despair.
>
> At the second turning of the second stair
> I left them twisting, turning below;
> There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
> Damp, jaggèd, [...]
>
> (*CPP* 93, lines 1-10)

The fetid air, the devil of the stairs and the face of hope and despair may lead to a Dantean hell of lost souls, with devilish monsters such as Charon ('Caron dimonio', III, line 109),[30] Minos ('Stavvi Minòs orribilmente, e ringhia: | essamina le colpe ne l'intrata; | giudica e manda secondo ch'avvinghia.' V, lines 4-6)[31] or Cerberus ('Cerbero, fiera crudele e diversa, | con tre gole caninamente latra | sovra la gente che quivi è sommersa.' VI, lines 13-15)[32] controlling them, whom the poetic persona leaves below, climbing higher. If in 'Prufrock' Eliot showed the uncertainties of the age and of his own personality, in *Ash-Wednesday* he represents a poetic persona as a man who at least has tried and experienced many things, and is repenting, purging himself in a sort of earthly Purgatory — as I mentioned earlier, the original title of this section leads us again to Arnaut Daniel, and *Purgatorio* XXVI.

[30] Dante, *Inferno*, p. 48. English translation: 'Charon the demon', in *The Inferno*, p. 33.
[31] *Inferno*, p. 78. English translation: 'There Minos sits horrific, and grins: examines the crimes upon the entrance; judges, and sends according as he girds himelf.', in *The Inferno*, p. 49.
[32] Ivi, p. 97. English translation: 'Cerberus, a monster fierce and strange, with three throats, barks dog-like over those that are immersed in it.', in *The Inferno*, p. 61.

Section IV begins with the line 'Who walked between the violet and the violet', which again indicates penitence: violet reminds the poet of his purgatorial repentance, and the memory of his past sins – who walks between the violet and the violet is indeed climbing their own Purgatory. Eliot quoting again from Arnaut Daniel's speech, 'Sovegna vos' (line 11, *CPP* 94), in the same section of *Ash-Wednesday,* would support this argument. This mention of Daniel's words links the speaking persona to Purgatory with the lustful souls one more time, and just a line before, the mention of a different flower – larkspur – immediately associates it with the Virgin Mary ('blue of Mary's colour', line 10), and thus with the 'Lady in Heaven' who is protecting Dante throughout his journey. And yet, the 'violet' here could also refer, more simply, to flowers, and thus the 'who' could be referred to the unspecified female character of the following lines, the Lady 'wearing | White light folded, sheathed about her, folded.' (lines 14-15). The lady appears covered in light: the light is 'folded', and 'sheathed', like a dress, lifting her to a status of near-holiness, creating distance between her and the poet. Although this feminine presence is perceived by the poet as holy and purifying in her whiteness, she is not the Virgin Mary, but rather a Beatrice-like figure, an earthly, yet idealized woman whom Eliot looks upon with much respect and adoration, very much like Dante did with his own Beatrice. Interestingly, section IV bore the original title of 'Vestita di color di fiamma'.[33] This is once again a direct reference to from Dante's *Purgatorio* XXX: in the Earthly Paradise, Beatrice finally appears to Dante as 'sotto verde manto, | vestita di color di fiamma viva.' (lines 32-33),[34] in 'a nuvola di fiori' (line 28),[35] with the angels throwing flowers toward her, and saying 'Manibus o date lilia plenis' (line 21),[36] a sentence from the *Aeneid* meaning 'Give plenty of lilies'. Thus the presence of flowers (violets in Eliot's poem) may also connect the 'who' of the first lines of section IV to the lady — it is the lady, who walks amongst flowers, dressed with white light, and green. The poet shows a degree of affection for this person, but has been purified by the three white leopards of the beginning, and so every excessively sensual emotion has been repressed, which would confirm again identification with a

[33] HB/V/6A, Manuscript of *Ash-Wednesday* (King's College Archive, Cambridge).
[34] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 563. English translation: 'clad, under a green mantle, with hue of living flame', in *The Purgatorio*, p. 381.
[35] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 562. English translation: 'a cloud of flowers', ibidem.
[36] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 562.

Beatrice-like figure. A few lines later, he even describes her as 'The silent sister veiled in white and blue' (line 22): white and blue are again Mary's colours, but she is not to be identified with the Virgin Mary herself. The term 'sister' shows again affection for her on the poet's side, albeit confined to a sexless relationship, perhaps a profound friendship, as the presence of a passive Priapus ('the garden god, / Whose flute is breathless', lines 23-24) would suggest.

In Section V, the light is not part of the woman's dress, but is rather shifted onto a more divine level, as 'the light shone in darkness' (*CPP* 96, line 7). Eliot openly quotes St. John's Gospel (John 1:5: 'And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.')[37] here and in the next stanza, 'For those who walk in darkness | Both in the day time and in the night time' (John 8:12 and 12:35: 'Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'[38] and 'Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth').[39] Eliot considers the biblical juxtaposition of light and darkness, with light as bearer of life and knowledge, and darkness as the condition which sinners find themselves in: lack of knowledge, hopelessness and despair. Eliot's added line 'Both in the day time and in the night time' stresses the point that his darkness is a metaphorical one, which can reach us at any time, a spiritual darkness. In a BBC broadcast for *The Listener*, dated 28th March 1930, Eliot mentioned the importance of light and darkness imagery in Christian mysticism, and how especially in St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart it is a light which is also, simultaneously, a darkness.[40] Eliot is here referring to the mystical[41] notion of the necessity of souls to enter a 'dark night' in order to be divinely united with God:[42] it is a

[37] *The Bible*, New Testament, p. 114.
[38] *The Bible*, p. 126.
[39] *The Bible*, p. 134.
[40] 'Vaughan, Traherne, Marvell', Donald Clifford Gallup Papers (YCAL MSS 838 22), Beinecke Rare Books Library, Yale University.
[41] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, p. 160.
[42] San Juan de la Cruz, *Noche Oscura* (Ciudad de México: Porrúa, 1973), p. 183, 'Cuenta el alma en esta primera canción el modo y manera que tuvo en salir según la afición de sí y de todas las cosas, muriendo por verdadera mortificación a todas ellas y a sí misma, para venir a vivir vida de amor

spiritual night of contemplation and purgation for the soul.[43] 'Those who wait in darkness' would then be for St. John of the Cross those people who have entered this difficult path towards spiritual perfection. Eliot must have also wanted to allude to Meister Eckhart's 'Commentary on John', which analyses precisely the same lines alluded to by Eliot:

> The word, the idea and art itself, shines as much by night as by day. It illuminates things hidden within as much as those manifested without. This is what follows: 'And the light shines in the darkness,' to distinguish it from corporeal light, which is not life, nor properly the light of men, and which does not shine at night or illuminate things hidden within. Further, it is more correct to say that in the case of created things only their ideas shine. 'The idea of a thing which the name signifies is its definition,' as the Philosopher says. The definition is the way of proving, or rather the entire proof that brings about knowledge. The conclusion is that in created things nothing shines except their idea alone. This is what is said of the Word here — that it is 'the light of men,' namely their Idea. So too the text, 'And the light shines in the darkness,' as if to say that among created things nothing shines, nothing is known, nothing brings about knowledge besides the 'what-it-is,' definition and idea of the thing itself.[44]

Meister Eckhart makes a distinction between the word of God, hence the light of God shines both by night and by day, and 'corporeal light', natural light, which does not shine at night, but only by day, hence does not come from within. Eliot in *Ash-Wednesday* alludes to both the Bible and Meister Eckhart's commentary, describing spiritual darkness as falling on human beings both during the day and at night, as it is the darkness of God, and not earthly darkness. Eliot makes a very conscious use of these images of light and darkness: it is precisely the 'veiled sister', who was described as dressed in white and blue in Section IV, who is praying for 'those who walk in darkness' (*CPP* 96, lines 20-1) – a lady dressed in the colours of purity prays for the people who are, on the other hand, struggling to find the light of God. The word of God is always shining, but it remains hidden to those

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dulce y sabrosa con Dios. Y dice que este salir de sí y de todas las cosas fue *una noche oscura* que aquí entiende por la contemplación purgativa, come después se dirá, la cual *pasivamente* causa en el alma la dicha negación de sí mismo y de todas las cosas.'. English translation: 'In this first song the soul narrates how it had to leave self-interest and interest in all things, dying by actual mortification for all of them and itself, in order to live a life of sweet and flavourful love with God. It also says that this leaving oneself and all things was a dark night which we understand here as purgative contemplation, like it shall be said later, which passively provokes in the soul the already stated negation of oneself and of all things.' (my translation).

[43] San Juan de la Cruz, *Noche Oscura*, p. 194, 'la otra es noche o purgación espiritual, con que se purga y desnuda el alma según el espíritu, acomodándole y disponiéndole para la unión de amor con Dios.'. English translation: 'the other one is night or spiritual purgation, through which the souls expurgates and becomes naked according to the spirit, adjusting it and preparing it for the union of love with God.' (my translation).

[44] Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, translated by Edmund College and Bernard McGinn (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 125-6.

who go through the path of expiation. A couple of lines below, Eliot namely changes the action of the verb from 'to walk' to 'to wait': the image of people waiting in darkness again brings back memories of Dante's *Purgatorio*, and Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as the souls' movement is only another way of waiting and expiating sin.

Section V ends with imaginary 'blue rocks' (*CPP* 97, line 32) that take us back to the theme of the sea in the last section: as correctly pointed out by Frye, the last section of the poem is set on the coast, by a sea which is very reminiscent of 'The Dry Salvages', with the presence of a statue of Mary on top of a Marian church in Gloucester, Massachusetts,[45] where young Eliot used to spend his summer holidays. The most important reference to light in this section is 'The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying' (*CPP* 98, line 6): twilight, theme of this third chapter, making up the atmosphere of Eliot's central poetic production, is turned here into an extreme representation of human life as an ambiguous, dreamy moment between birth and death of waiting and the beginning of expiation on earth. *Ash-Wednesday* is a continuation of the theme of purgation and expiation, from *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, now more loaded with images of purity and purification, such as the white leopards and the Lady dressed with white light.

4.2 THE TRIUMPH OF INVISIBLE LIGHT: *THE ROCK*

Seven years after his conversion, T. S. Eliot wrote the pageant play *The Rock*, his work that arguably most explicitly addresses Christian themes, deeply intertwined as it is with Biblical references, and more contemporary hints at conversion through various light and dark images. References to light greatly outnumber those to darkness, especially in the final Choruses, IX and X.

The Rock begins with an image of stars, endlessly revolving and thus determining the continuous seasonal change, which only brings more birth and death: 'O perpetual

[45] Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion'*, p. 159.

revolution of configured stars, | O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons, | O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!' (*CPP* 147, I, lines 3-5). The epigraph of this chapter should remind the reader of the importance of stars in Dante's work: the stars mark the end of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, and so they mark the passing of time for the poet, as well as his getting closer to the end of his journey, and indeed closer to God. The final line of *Purgatorio* namely says that Dante is now 'pure and ready to mount to the stars':[46] the stars coincide with Heaven, Paradise, and of course Beatrice and purification.

In Choruses II and III, the scenery shifts to modern cityscapes which are linked by Eliot to the darkness of industrialization, which also causes a darkness of the soul:

> Exporting iron, coal and cotton goods
> And intellectual enlightenment
> And everything, including capital
> And several versions of the Word of GOD:
>
> (*CPP* 151-2, II, ll. 19-21)

Light is here hidden within the word 'enlightenment', contrasting with the words 'iron' and 'coal': literature and philosophy of civilized societies are equalled by Eliot to their production of far less intellectual goods. Other countries import the cultural yet superficial enlightenment produced by another, 'superior' one:

> The Word of the LORD came unto me, saying:
> [...]
> O wretched generation of enlightened men,
> Betrayed in the mazes of your ingenuities,
> Sold by the proceeds of your proper inventions:
>
> (*CPP* 154, III, lines 1, 3-5)

Here the light contained within the word 'enlightened' is used in an uncommon way: it is not the light of God, nor the light of Faith, but the light of so-called intellectuals, who want to 'make' light, rather than 'find' it. Their light is mainly artificial, as the past participle of the verb 'to enlighten' suggests: it is a light of the mind which has been created by man,

[46] *The Purgatorio of Dante Alighieri*, p. 429.

and not a light of faith given by God. The world of these 'wretched' but 'enlightened men' is once again matched in Chorus III with an atmosphere of darkness, obscurity and industrialization:

> A Cry from the East:
> What shall be done to the shore of smoky ships?
> [...]
> There shall be left the broken chimney,
> The peeled hull, a pile of rusty iron,
> In a street of scattered brick where the goat climbs
> Where My Word is unspoken.
>
> (*CPP* 154, lines 20-1, 24-7)

The smokiness of the ships approaching the Eastern shores gives way to an image of a near-destructive industrialization, which mirrors the lack of faith and of God's Word of these places. Some of Eliot's earlier poems re-create a remarkably similar atmosphere to that of the above mentioned lines from *The Rock*. In *Inventions of the March Hare*, poems 'First Caprice in North Cambridge' and 'Second Caprice in North Cambridge' describe the squalor of North Cambridge, Massachusetts, as a highly industrialized, somewhat uncivilized, sordid town:

> Bottles and broken glass,
> Trampled mud and grass;
> And a crowd of tattered sparrows
> Delve in the gutter with sordid patience.
>
> ('First Caprice in North Cambridge', lines 5-8)[47]

> This charm of vacant lots!
> [...]
> With ashes and tins in piles,
> Shattered bricks and tiles
> And the débris of a city.
>
> ('Second Caprice in North Cambridge', *IMH* 15, lines 1, 6-8)

[47] Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, p. 13.

These descriptions depict modern towns as 'broken', 'scattered', and 'shattered': they are not a whole city, but rather 'the débris of a city', what remains after historical, natural and moral degradation.

The corruption and moral decadence of modern towns is linked to the Biblical fall of Jerusalem (as reported, for instance, by the prophet Jeremiah), and to its consumption by fire. In Choruses II and IV fire is seen as a possible source of salvation through purification: 'Much to cast down, much to build, much to restore; | [...] | Let the fire not be quenched in the forge.' (*CPP* 153, II, lines 52-5) and 'Jerusalem lay waste, consumed with fire;' (*CPP* 157, IV, line 13). Fire, and so light, must prevail over the world: fire must destroy in order to be able to rebuild, as the lines on Jerusalem would confirm. Eliot here is referring to a passage from prophet Nehemiah:

> And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. [...] Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.
>
> (Nehemiah 2:13, 17)[48]

Jerusalem is destroyed by fire in order to be rebuilt: the appeal of fire for Eliot is again represented by its purifying flames, as in the passage after St. Augustine in *The Waste Land*. In another Biblical passage, fire represents the people of God, and the forge is the city of Jerusalem: 'saith the LORD, whose fire *is* in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.' (Isaiah 31:9).[49] Fire is both cathartic, purging corruption and sins through destruction, and symbolizing faith – 'Let the fire not be quenched in the forge' says Eliot, let the purification continue and let pure faith resist through time, and not be extinguished.

Eliot consequently needs to use darkness to represent lack of faith and hope, in a world that preferred modernity and economic profit over spirituality and common sense,

[48] *The Bible: King James Version*, p. 580.
[49] *The Bible: King James Version*, p. 793.

giving way to a consistent theme of light and darkness that will become the leitmotif of the second half of the Choruses. In Chorus VI, we read:

> [Men] constantly try to escape
> From the darkness outside and within
> By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.
> But the man that is will shadow
> The man that pretends to be.
>
> (*CPP* 159, VI, lines 17-25)

Before this passage, Eliot had listed possible reasons why men should not love the Church: mortality, suffering, sin and the sense of guilt, punishment but also forgiveness. Eliot argues that the Church cannot possibly appeal to modern generations, with her series of prohibitions and inhibitions — this is perhaps one of the most autobiographical considerations in *The Rock*. His questions and his concise but effective descriptions of the Church mirror the feelings of a modern man considering joining the Church, and in the end deciding not to. Interestingly, Eliot stated, with regard to poetry and religious emotion, in *After Strange Gods* (1934, published in the same year as *The Rock*) that '[t]he capacity for writing poetry is rare; and it is to be expected that the existence of both capacities in the same individual should be rarer still. People who write devotional verse are usually writing as they want to feel, rather than as they do feel.'[50] In Chorus VI, Eliot thus seeks to express the doubts and perplexities he went through before 1927, the year of his conversion, with the image of a man who wants to escape a reality of darkness which is both of the soul (the darkness 'within') and of the environment surrounding him, a combination of unreal Cities and lost souls (the darkness 'outside'), at the same time aware of the limitations of his religious experiences, and of poetry itself. Man's attempt at escaping reality results unsuccessful, and ultimately men cannot escape their own personality and nature: counter-intuitively, where Eliot had stated humanity's struggle to expose a true self in modernity, man's real shadow will finally overcome, and shadow man's pretended nature.

[50] Thomas Stearns Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 29.

Shadow is, by definition, a 'comparative darkness': it cannot be considered a complete darkness, as a shadow can only exist in nature when a body is intercepted by light.[51] In Chorus VII, Eliot describes shadow as a degree of darkness:

> In the beginning GOD created the world. Waste and void. Waste and void.
> And darkness was upon the face of the deep.
> And when there were men, [...] they struggled in torment towards GOD
> Blindly and vainly, [...].
> They followed the light and the shadow, and the light led them forward to light and the shadow led them to darkness,
> (*CPP* 160, VII, lines 1-4)

The Rock is not so much a work of art, but an 'act of faith', as the frequent mention of the words 'GOD' and 'LORD' written throughout the work in small capitals, typical of Victorian bibles, would show a more devotional choice for Eliot's pageant play, if compared with the more common written forms "God" and "the Lord".[52] That Choruses from *The Rock* can be interpreted as an autobiographical act of faith is also identifiable from many hints at faith lost, and at faith regained. In this specific passage, Eliot suggests dividing humanity into two kinds: those following the light to find more light, and those following the shadow, leading them down to more darkness. Men cannot be the light, but they can 'bear witness to the light' (Jn 1:7): in his commentary on John, Meister Eckhart applies St. Augustine's argument that the 'soul of man, although it bears testimony to the light, is not the light itself', to the idea that likewise the just man can participate in justice, but is not justice, despite being 'sent and begotten by it'.[53] To follow light is indeed a synonym for 'bearing witness to the light': it indicates precisely those people who decide to believe in God, and purge their sins, in order to find more light of God. And yet, they follow 'the light and the shadow': what Eliot presents the reader with is not a direct opposition, but rather an union of opposites. As in the line from Genesis quoted earlier, 'the light shines in the darkness', God is perceived as both light and darkness, with one necessary to the other, as '"The light shines in the darkness" because evil always exists in something good and is neither seen

[51] Oxford English Dictionary Online, <www.oed.com> [last accessed 3 January 2013].
[52] M. Serena Marchesi, *Eliot's Perpetual Struggle: The Language of Evil in* Murder in the Cathedral (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009), p. xxxi.
[53] Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons*, p. 154.

nor known nor visible without the form of something good. [...] Thus good shines in what is evil, truth in falsehood, and possession in privation.'.[54] Eliot continues thus in the same Chorus:

> And men who turned towards the light and were known of the light
> Invented the Higher Religions; and the Higher Religions were good
> And led men from light to light, to knowledge of Good and Evil.
> But their light was ever surrounded and shot with darkness
> (*CPP* 160, VII, lines 8-11)

The Higher Religions are 'good', as they were created by the men drawn to the light, bringing them to more light, and a better knowledge of God, and Good and Evil: light is encircled with darkness, as in the lines earlier it was a combination of opposites, Eliot now reaffirms Meister Eckhart's concept of light and darkness as 'opposites placed within each other',[55] indivisible and both necessary for God's glorification. Light is for both Meister Eckhart and Eliot 'the light of the Word' (*CPP* 161, line 21), as in John's Gospel.

In Chorus IX, Eliot ultimately makes a distinction between the darkness of God, and that which is not blessed by God, between even his early poetry and life and his current, renewed situation of purgation in the light of God:

> Who is this that has said: the House of God is a House of Sorrow;
> We must walk in black and go sadly, with long-drawn faces,
> We must go between empty walls, quavering lowly, whispering faintly,
> Among a few flickering scattered lights?
> [...]
> Let us mourn in a private chamber, learning the way of penitence,
> And then let us learn the joyful communion of saints.
> (*CPP* 164, lines 3-6, 14-15)

Eliot's description of the House of the Lord as 'a House of Sorrow' (line 3), where everybody wears mourning clothes, repents and is silent in the dark, with only a few

[54] Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons*, p. 149.
[55] Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons*, p. 152.

weak and flickering lights, recalls James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*. Here the poet was wandering in a dark, poorly lit city, only to find light at the wake of his dead fiancée: the city and its lack of light mirror his atheism, and his depression following the death of his beloved, and similarly in the lines from the Choruses quoted above, Eliot describes an apparent, visible self-denial and repentance, which is not the real penitence of the soul. The real repentance happens behind closed doors, 'in a private chamber', inspired by the saints, and their mystical experiences.

Chorus IX is relevant to the rest of Eliot's work for its notion of purgation and repentance as essential to see the Light of God, as it becomes clear in its final lines:

> Visible and invisible must meet in His Temple;
> You must not deny the body.
>
> Now you shall see the Temple completed:
> After much striving, after many obstacles;
> For the work of creation is never without travail;
> The formed stone, the visible crucifix,
> The dressed altar, the lifting light,
>
> Light
>
> Light
>
> The visible reminder of Invisible Light.
>
> (*CPP* 165, IX; lines 35-44)

The 'travail' of both spirit and body permits Man to create a Temple of perfection, where God and Man interact, a human work of creation that mirrors the Biblical act of God creating the World, where all the visible objects inside (stone, crucifix, altar, and even light) tend to the invisible presence of God in His Temple. Visible light within the Temple is defined by Eliot as 'lifting': a light which should make men even closer to God. In the last lines of Chorus IX Eliot creates a visual *crescendo* on the page, by distancing the four words 'Light', as if light were filling every empty space in the Temple envisioned here by the poet. Most churches in the Western world have a specific architecture of light, created by rose windows and glass walls filtering light into different colours: light becomes thus

'visible', the earthly, perceivable reminder of the Light of God, the 'Invisible Light' as described by Eliot.

The last Chorus for the pageant play *The Rock*, Chorus X, represents the triumph of Eliot's newly acquired faith, as for poetic content, and that of the Invisible Light, mentioned for the first time at the end of Chorus IX and gaining full attention from the very beginning of Chorus X. Eliot takes up again the theme of the new Temple, which is now enriched with more details:

> You have seen the house built, you have seen it adorned
> By one who came in the night, it is now dedicated to GOD.
> It is now a visible church, one more light set on a hill
> In a world confused and dark and disturbed by portents of fear.
> (*CPP* 166, X, lines 1-4)

The house —now a church— is again characterized mainly by light, against the background of the dark world at line 4, and 'adorned' by somebody that came at night, and so again in the dark. The image conjured up by Eliot here produces a powerful contrast of light (the Light of God, the Light of Faith) and darkness (the evil, corrupted world around the poet). This evokes the image of a lighthouse, guiding the ships back to the mainland with its light in the midst of the dark: 'But be ye satisfied that you have light | Enough to take your step and find your foothold. | O Light Invisible, we praise Thee!' (*CPP* 166, X, lines 15-17). The Light of God will guide Man on the right path – the light guiding us everyday though, is not blinding with absolute certainty and faith: it is just 'enough' to light Man's everyday steps through the dark of life (borrowing an image of St. Augustine's — 'My faith, the lantern which you have lighted to guide my feet in the dark, speaks to my soul and asks *Are you still downcast? Will you never be at peace? Wait for God's help.* [Ps 41:6] *No lamp like his word to guide your feet?* [Ps 118:105]).[56]

In the final Chorus, Eliot builds up images of light, in praise of 'Light Invisible':

[56] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 321.

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

(*CPP* 166, X, lines 17-25)

The Light of God, in spite of its being invisible, far too intense for mortal eyes, can only be praised for its being present without actually showing: if it were visible to human beings, it would blind them. Eliot is reminiscent of various moments in *La Divina Commedia* when Dante's eyes fail him, especially in his getting closer to the heart of Paradise and God. In Canto XXV of *Paradiso*, Dante is blinded by St. John's light, which is too strong, and too holy for his mortal eyes ('Ahi quanto ne la mente mi commossi, | quando mi volsi per veder Beatrice, | per non poter veder, benché io fossi | presso di lei, e nel mondo felice!', lines 136-139),[57] a necessary stage in the mystical experience of 'illumination'.[58] In this passage Eliot is clearly also highly reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as the expression 'Light Invisible' itself appears moulded onto that of Satan's first impression of Hell, 'darkness visible' ('A dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible', Book I, lines 61-63).[59] Eliot, on the other hand, always remained rather ambiguous in defining Milton's influence on his own poetry. In his 1948 Milton essay, Eliot discusses Milton's ability to only give an 'impression of *light*—a daylight and a starlight, a light of dawn and of dusk, the light which, remembered by a man in his blindness, has a supernatural glory unexperienced by men of normal vision. | We must, then, in *Paradise Lost*, not expect to see clearly; our sense of sight must be blurred, so that our *hearing* may become more acute'.[60] Yet, later in the same essay, Eliot acknowledges Milton's 'power in the use of imagery of light', quoting the

[57] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia: Paradiso*, ed. Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2002), p. 458. English translation: 'Ah! How was I stirred in my mind, turning to look on Beatrice, for that I might not see her, albeit I was nigh to her and in the world of bliss!', in *The Purgatorio of Dante Alighieri* (London: J. M Dent & Co., 1900), p. 311.
[58] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977), p. 477.
[59] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 63-64.
[60] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Milton', *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 56, no. 2 (1948), pp. 185-209 (p. 199).

opening of Book III of *Paradise Lost* ('Hail holy light, offspring of Heaven first-borne, | Or of th'Eternal Coeternal beam | May I express thee unblam'd? Since God is light, | And never but in unapproached light | Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee, | Bright effluence of bright essence increate.').[61] Eliot's praise of 'Light Invisible' in Chorus X is most definitely reminiscent of this Miltonic passage, too, and yet Eliot's imagery in this Chorus is somewhat more specific, and less imprecise than Milton's: Eliot describes with extreme care for detail various types of light, whereas Milton mainly uses the generic word 'light'. It can be argued that Eliot, like Dante, wanted us to *see*, and take part in a partial mystical vision, while Milton is possibly reminiscing the use of his own sight, his vision is the memory of vision and sight, before his blindness.

In Choruses from *The Rock*, Eliot had already joined the Anglican Church and worshipped in the Anglo-Catholic manner, and so all the three works considered in this chapter of my thesis, *Ash-Wednesday*, *The Rock*, and *Murder in the Cathedral*, have been associated by critics with Eliot's 'Anglo-Catholicism'.[62] Still, none of these can be effectively considered devotional poetry. In his own essay 'Religion and Literature' (1935), Eliot describes religious poetry for most poetry lovers as 'a variety of *minor* poetry', and the religious poet as 'a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject matter', 'leaving out what men consider their major passions, and thereby confessing his ignorance of them.'[63] Eliot also states that he is 'not concerned primarily with Religious Literature',[64] but he is only 'concerned with what should be the relation between Religion and all Literature':[65] 'All [Eliot] want[s] is a literature which should be *un*consciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian'.[66] *Ash-Wednesday*, *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral* are perhaps not so 'unconsciously Christian' as Eliot would have wished them to be, but his religious conversion as a watershed in 1927 helps us mark them as naturally Christian. His continuous references to light show the most felt images by the poet,

[61] Eliot, 'Milton', p. 202.
[62] Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion'*, pp. 217-8.
[63] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Religion and Literature', *Essays Ancient and Modern* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 93-112 (p. 97). Instances of religious poets mentioned in Eliot's essay are Vaughan, Southwell, Crashaw, George Herbert, and Gerard Manley Hopkins.
[64] Eliot, 'Religion and Literature', *Essays Ancient and Modern*, p. 98.
[65] Ibidem.
[66] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Religion and Literature', p. 99.

describing his attitude to God: in the above mentioned passage from Chorus X, Eliot lists the various kinds of light which man may encounter by day and by night. The eastern light at sunrise, the western one at sunset, twilight, moonlight and starlight, and even owls, moths and glow-worms display light. These are natural and spiritual lights at the same time; those who believe in the 'Light Invisible' will never be left in the darkness. In this particular instance of the list of different lights, it is interesting to see how Eliot decides to use the term 'moth light' to indicate nocturnal light, with almost a hint at the temptations the night can bring: Eliot's fascination for moths from his very early poems ('The Burnt Dancer', *IMH*, Chapter One), almost forgotten in his more mature works, reappears here. Still, if in 'The Burnt Dancer' the black moth was drawn to the fire that would have burnt it, in Choruses from *The Rock* it does not have the connotation of the sinner being punished, but it is just one of the many lights in the environment surrounding man.

If Eliot recreates an atmosphere of natural lights surrounding man through days and nights, in the next stanza he lists artificial lights, which still bring man closer to the Light of God:

> We thank Thee for the lights that we have kindled,
> The light of altar and of sanctuary;
> Small lights of those who meditate at midnight
> And lights directed through the coloured panes of windows
> And light reflected from the polished stone, [...].
> [...] our eyes look upward
> And see the light that fractures through unquiet water.
> We see the light but see not whence it comes.
> O Light Invisible, we glorify Thee!
>
> (*CPP* 166-7, X, lines 26-30, 32-35)

Eliot makes clear that these lights have been kindled by men: artificial lights, accompanying everyday lives spiritually, reminding them of the Light Invisible, whose presence can be felt but whose origin cannot be traced if not in God. Artificial lights here still represent the poetic self, and other people like him, in the instance of 'Small lights of those who meditate at midnight', but they have now been charged with the meaning of

'faith': these are hopeful souls that have found the light of God and have turned into souls themselves.

And yet, 'In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light' (*CPP* 167, line 36) — tiredness of light is here bound to that of day and thus work – earthly darkness is welcome as it brings rest after work, sleep when one is tired, distraction after concentration during the day. Even religious 'ecstasy is too much pain' (line 37), and can only be experienced in brief instances of time. Eliot continues thus: 'And we must extinguish the candle, put out the light and relight it; | Forever must quench, forever relight the flame.' (*CPP* 167, X, lines 40-41). The image of the candles being continuously extinguished and then relit contrasts with the flickering candles of Eliot's early poetry: it represents here life's repetitiveness – everyday man must repeat the simple actions of turning on and off the light, equated with waking up and going to sleep. Life is repetitive, but if in Eliot's earlier poetry there was a sense of ennui in life's monotony, in his later poetry this is turned into a milder acknowledgement that life's repetitiveness is inescapable, and must be accepted. The fact that both lines end with the lighting of a flame, rather than with its extinguishing, is symbolic of death and eternal life: 'forever relight the flame'.

Human life is again described by Eliot through a metaphor of light and dark: 'we thank Thee for our little light, this is dappled with shadow.' (*CPP* 167, line 42). God is both light and darkness, and man has both light and shadow in himself: both elements cohabit in humanity, in their conscious and unconscious, and in their knowledge of Good and Evil. The very final lines of Chorus X read: 'And when we have built an altar to the Invisible Light, we may set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision is made. | And we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light. | O Light Invisible, we give Thee thanks for Thy great glory!' (*CPP* 167, lines 44-6).

4.3 DARKENED NOVEMBER: *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*

Despite *Murder in the Cathedral* having an explicitly Christian setting in Canterbury Cathedral, the use of light and dark images in the whole play are quite limited. I will analyze here only a few of these instances, which I consider relevant to the rest of this chapter, and more generally to my larger thesis.

In the first lines of the play, the spectator will hear the Women of Canterbury cry in a chorus of voices such words:

> Since golden October declined into sombre November
> And the apples were gathered and stored, and the land became brown sharp points
> of death in a waste of water and mud,
> The New Year waits, breathes, waits, whispers in darkness.
> (*CPP* 239, I, lines 9-11)

The weather itself is for Eliot a way of representing Canterbury's, and Thomas Becket's spiritual conditions and feelings. Throughout Eliot's poetry, months and names of seasons had often been used to indicate an atmosphere predominant of either light or darkness.[67] In the passage above from *Murder in the Cathedral*, the Women of Canterbury complain about their poverty and the passing of seasons: October is defined as 'golden', as it is still bearer of fruits, mild temperatures and autumnal (indeed, golden) colours in Nature, whereas November is naturally described as 'sombre', for its typical darker colours, fogs, sterility of land, and colder weather. Winter's barren land is expressed even further by joining it with the terms 'brown' and 'death', leading to the time before New Year which cannot be anything but a waiting in darkness. It is to be noted that the verb 'to wait' is even repeated twice on the same line: is it really the New Year waiting in darkness, or is it rather the people in Canterbury, waiting for the Spring to come and to the 'danger' of the first line to happen and leave them as soon as possible? Interestingly, the first line of *Murder in the Cathedral* appeared slightly different in an early draft version: 'When

[67] An instance of this is Eliot's early poem 'Portrait of a Lady', with such expressions as - 'smoke and fog of a December afternoon' (*CPP* 18, l. 1), 'these April sunsets' (*CPP* 19, l. 52). 'Paris in the Spring' (l. 53), 'August afternoon' (l. 57), and 'the October night' (*CPP* 20, l. 84).

golden October declines into darkened November'.[68] November was not 'sombre' initially, but rather 'darkened': it contains darkness in itself even more explicitly, and preludes to the darkness of the New Year. In the space of one month only, November has lost October's golden light, and has darkened, and leaned towards evil, and the events which will occur at the end of the year. Eliot also changed the tense 'declines' into 'declined': it is not simply a repetition of the seasons, it is set in time, the shift from October to November giving way to Thomas Becket's murder is a historical occurrence, hence the changed past tense.

The mention of months and seasons in *Murder in the Cathedral* is mostly spoken by the Women, as they follow the rhythms of natural light and time. The only other person using the same kind of language as the women in the chorus is the First Tempter, albeit usually with regard to debauchery. The First Tempter reminds Thomas Becket of an 'evening on the river' when he was friends with the King (*CPP* 246, lines 31-32), and finally translates the expression 'summer's over' with 'the good time cannot last' (mostly parties and events happening at night). This is sanctioned by the lighting of fire indoors:

> Singing at nightfall, whispering in chambers,
> Fires devouring the winter season,
> Eating up the darkness, with wit and wine and wisdom!
> (*CPP* 246-7, I, line 39, lines 1-2)

The image of fires here is not concerned with any religious meaning, but rather is used by Eliot to indicate the way the Archbishop used to spend his past life in more trivial, frivolous entertainments: the 'fire *devouring*' and '*eating up* the darkness' gives it a more voracious, sensual meaning. Darkness is consumed, and not by the prayers or faith, more appropriate for an Archbishop. The Tempter continues his persuasive speech to Becket saying that a new season will come, spring will come in winter, detailing a happier, more cheerful scene of snow melting in sunlight (*CPP* 247, I, lines 9-12), but Becket, refusing, will thus never give way to this new, morally 'brighter' season. After his murder in

[68] YCAL MSS 523 - T. S. Eliot collection, 1920-1972, II. Writings, autograph manuscript of 'Murder in the Cathedral' (Beinecke Rare Books Library, Yale University).

Canterbury Cathedral, the Chorus shouts, in fear: 'Night stay with us, stop sun, hold season, let the day not come, let the spring not come.' (*CPP* 275, II, line 31). The Women of Canterbury prefer being held in a darkness they are familiar with, and they fear the new seasons that might come — the future: even the new day is impossible to be looked at, full of Becket's blood and human suffering (line 32).

Throughout the play, day and night are often used to represent spiritual light and darkness. The Chorus at the beginning of Part One talks about God, and destiny, and revelation in such terms: 'Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen: | I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.' (*CPP* 240, I, lines 17-18). Sunlight brings forth revelations, like it did in *The Waste Land*: the Women of Canterbury express thus their realization of some foreboding, and that they -and thus, man- can only wait, for Destiny and God's action, without being able to do much else. Towards the end of Part One, when the spectator can take silent part in a bursting triumph of words between three choruses, the Women of Canterbury, the Four Tempters, and the Three Priests, the latter try to advise Becket to be cautious and wise, and not act thoughtlessly:

> […] in the storm,
> Should we not wait for the sea to subside, in the night
> Abide the coming of day, when the traveller may find his way,
> The sailor lay course by the sun?
>
> (*CPP* 256, I, lines 25-28)

The Three Priests correctly suggest to Becket, in metaphorical terms, that he should wait for sunrise, and thus the new day, before making any decisions: this is also meant as a warning against spiritual and moral darkness. Becket should get clear of the darkness surrounding him, hence the Four Tempters and his dubious past, and wait for sunlight, the light of God, to face the 'storm' against Evil. Spiritual darkness is again expressed in more physical terms in the lines:

> CHORUS. A man may walk with a lamp at night, and yet be drowned in a ditch.

THE THREE PRIESTS. A man may climb the stair in the day, and slip on a broken step.
(*CPP* 257, I, lines 3-4)

These lines of similar meaning are pronounced first by the Women of Canterbury and then by the Three Priests together: light and darkness are here represented by physical conditions; a lamp in the night and then broad daylight. Earthly light cannot help us towards our spiritual salvation: Eliot here detaches himself from metaphorical meanings for earthly light, and rather stresses the importance of finding the light of God, in order not to 'be drowned in a ditch' of temptations and immorality. There is also an element of destiny and fatality in these lines: Thomas Becket will fall on the stairs and be murdered because it is God's will. Here Eliot is drawing directly on Greek tragedy, in which the protagonists would make their dialogues faster and more excited through the use of 'stichomythia', a kind of dialogue where each character can only say single lines. Eliot thus manages to give *Murder in the Cathedral* a more distinct rhythm, and similar feeling of the classical conception of a destiny that cannot be changed.

In Part II of *Murder in the Cathedral*, day and night are often drawn together as complementary opposites. When the Three Priests, less in harmony with the Archbishop than his own people, the Women of Canterbury, deny that that day (29th December) should be particularly remarkable, they state:

FIRST PRIEST. To-day, what is to-day? but another day, the dusk of the year.
SECOND PRIEST. To-day, what is to-day? Another night, and another dawn.
(*CPP* 265, II, lines 1-2)

The end of the solar year, late December, is marked by the First Priest with the word 'dusk': it is both the actual end of day ('To-day, what is to-day? For the day is half gone.' *CPP* 264, II, line 28) and the end of the year, with still a couple of days before the year's final sunset. Day is here associated with the coming of dusk, and night with that of dawn: as in *The Rock* earlier, light will remind us of darkness, and vice versa. Evil, in the shape of the Four Knights, will soon take over Good, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The lines

pronounced by the First and Second Priest suggest everyday life repetitiveness as it is 'another day', and 'Another night, and another dawn': the second line ultimately ends with dawn – there will be another light, another hope.

In one of the last speeches pronounced by the Chorus, immediately following Thomas Becket's murder, the Women are crying:

> The terror by night that ends in daily action,
> The terror by day that ends in sleep;
> [...]
> The night-time heaping of the ashes,
> The fuel laid on the fire at daybreak,
>
> (*CPP* 276, II, lines 3-4, 6-7)

The perennial cycle of night and day is here reaffirmed once again: the 'terror by night' will bring action during the day, and the 'terror by day' will bring sleep by night. The Women of Canterbury are now dealing with a more private terror, their own terror dealing with everyday reality. With these lines, Eliot partially goes back to his early poetry with images of nights causing lack of sleep, and feverish activity, and days bringing to exhaustion.

Since *Murder in the Cathedral* is set in December 1170, fire is the only actual source of artificial light. From the very beginning, the Women of Canterbury say:

> While the labourer kicks off a muddy boot and stretches his hand to the fire,
> The New Year waits, destiny waits for the coming.
> Who has stretched out his hand to the fire and remembered the Saints at All Hallows,
> Remembered the martyrs and saints who wait? and who shall
> Stretch out his hand to the fire, and deny his master? who shall be warm
> By the fire, and deny his master?
>
> (*CPP* 239, I, lines 12-17)

The straightforward image of an everyday working reality contrasts quite strikingly with the personification of the New Year. A simple action such as that of stretching out one's hands towards the fire, a source not only of light but also of warmth and comfort, is transformed into an accusation: who, after a day's work and exhaustion in the fields, in the

rain and mud, looks at the fire and remembers God and the Saints? The Women of Canterbury remark how human beings should remember God and give thanks to their master and creator, because they can enjoy the advantages of a privileged life, with warm houses they can return to, after a hard day's work.

Fire, with only a few exceptions, is indeed represented mostly as a commodity here, and less in metaphorical terms. The Chorus preceding Thomas Becket's arrival at Canterbury remembers how that year people 'Gathered wood against the winter, | Talked at the corner of the fire, | Talked at the corners of the streets,' (*CPP* 244, I, lines 6-8): the people of Canterbury went on doing the same, usual actions throughout the year, in spite of their poverty and discontent. Upon Becket's arrival in Canterbury, the Second Priest welcomes him and says he 'will have fires laid in all [the Archbishop's] rooms | To take the chill off our English December' (*CPP* 245, I, lines 33-34). The Church's wealth tries to recreate the French customs and possibly weather, which Thomas Becket should have been accustomed to. Later on in the play, after Thomas has been tempted by each of the Four Tempters, the Chorus perceives the forthcoming danger, and cries: 'Does the torch flame in the hall, the candle in the room? | [...] | Death has a hundred hands and walks by a thousand ways.' (*CPP* 256, I, lines 32, 35). The foreboding of some misfortune about to happen to the Archbishop makes the Chorus look for lights lit indoors: torches and candles, as sources of light, must be lit within the Cathedral and in its annex buildings, in order to protect Becket from darkness, and thus evil. If in his earlier poetry, nocturnal wanderings were allowed by the addition of electric light in the streets, giving man enhanced freedom and safety while roaming about the streets at night, now in Murder in the Cathedral this security is given by fire.

The Chorus of the Women of Canterbury ends the play, and in its final words fire is still present, as a twofold entity, which can bring about both life and death, which is to be blessed and feared, thus resembling Divinity:

> Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as the type of the common man,

> Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire;
> Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of God, the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted;
> Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of God;
> Who fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,
> Less than we fear the love of God.'
>
> (*CPP* 282, II, lines 6-11)

I would like to argue this is in harmony with Eliot's statements on religious poetry: religious poetry, and drama, will deal with 'the loneliness of the night of God', 'deprivation inflicted', and 'the justice of God', but these are not major human feelings. Men and women will often sit next to the fire, and forget God who made it possible; most men and women will fear most common, everyday realities less than they fear God and mystical experience. Fire would thus symbolize the love of God, to be blessed, and feared, at the same time.

At the end of Part One, the Chorus perceives the danger of 'a new terror' (*CPP* 257, I, line 23) and is frightened that God might leave them:

> Sweet and cloying through the dark air
> Falls the stifling scent of despair;
> The forms take shape in the dark air:
> Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear,
> Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyaena waiting
> For laughter, laughter, laughter. The Lords of Hell are here.
> They curl round you, lie at your feet, swing and wing through the dark air.
>
> (*CPP* 257, I, lines 26-33)

The 'dark air' introduces the coming of the Four Tempters, issuing from Hell, very much resembling the Dantean 'aere bruno'.[69] Eliot mentions again the 'leopard', which in *Ash-Wednesday* appeared in the number of three specimens, and was given the colour white: here, it probably refers to the First Tempter (the animals listed by the Chorus are four, just as many as the Tempters), as this is the one reminding Becket of his friendship with the King, and of the most worldly pleasures they used to be fond of together. This would confirm Eliot's knowledge of the medieval notion of the Leopard

[69] Dante, *Inferno*, p. 23 (Canto II, l. 1).

representing worldly pleasure: if a white leopard can purge the poet from his sins, the one without colour connotation in *Murder in the Cathedral* takes part in the Chorus' brief but intense recreation of Hell. The dark air calls back the Lords of Hell, whereas the Light should provide comfort and revelation to the people of Canterbury. Light and darkness are perceived as two complementary entities: if Eliot ended Choruses from *The Rock* with the line 'we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light' (*CPP* 167, X, line 45), it is no wonder that one of the first lines in the concluding passage of *Murder in the Cathedral*, once again pronounced by the Chorus, should be 'Only in Thy light, and Thy glory is declared even in that which denies Thee; the darkness declares the glory of light.' (*CPP* 281, II, line 8).

4.4 Flickering Intervals of Light and Darkness: *The Family Reunion*

After the medieval atmospheres of *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), Eliot brings his audience back to twentieth-century England and to a story of purgation and expiation in *The Family Reunion* (first published and performed in 1939), a play perhaps even more indebted to Greek Tragedy than he was for his first one. This search for purification within the play links *The Family Reunion* more closely to Eliot's 1930s poetry (especially *Ash-Wednesday*) and his pageant play *The Rock*, than to *Murder in the Cathedral*. One of the first reviews of *The Family Reunion* stated:

> No one should miss reading this play, if it happens, as may well be, to prove a failure on the stage. As an imaginative work of art, a book to read, it compares with the most sensitive of the short novels by Henry James.[70]

[70] '*The Family Reunion*. A Play by T. S. Eliot', *Listener* 21 (6 April 1939), in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 384.

The Family Reunion is later defined by the same, anonymous reviewer as a piece of 'narrative poetry'.[71] What I intend to show is how Eliot in this play makes a contrastive use of light and darkness images, as in most of his poetry, and this is sometimes used in order to recreate a purgatorial environment in modern life, as it did in *Ash-Wednesday* and in *The Rock*.

Part I, Scene I, precisely starts with Amy, the dowager of Wishwood, the historical mansion at the core of *The Family Reunion*, crying out:

> [DENMAN enters to draw the curtains]
> AMY. Not yet! I will ring for you. It is still quite light.
> I have nothing to do but watch the days draw out,
> Now that I sit in the house from October to June,
> [...].
> O Sun, that was once so warm, O Light that was taken for granted
> When I was young and strong, and sun and light unsought for
> And the night unfeared and the day expected
> And clocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured
> And time would not stop in the dark!
> Put on the lights. But leave the curtains undrawn.
> Make up the fire. Will the spring never come? I am cold.
>
> (*CPP* 285, I, lines 1-3, 6-12)

Eliot decides to open *in medias res* with a scene centred on light: here Amy, an old, strong, stubborn woman, about to die, fights against the fading of the day. The parlourmaid, Denman, is about to draw the curtains, as she does every day at sunset, but is stopped by her mistress, who fiercely forbids her to do so. Amy perceives her death approaching, but is resistant to it: she still wants as much light as possible, trying to benefit from both the last beams of natural light coming through the windows and the artificial ones from her house, as she asks for them to be put on during daylight. Amy then makes a comparison between her present age and the past one, by continuing the thread of imagery of light and darkness. Sun has become cold for her now, and throughout the play Amy continuously complains about being cold: the play takes place on a winter's gloomy night and her age makes her perceive herself as drawing closer to death. Fear of death is also paralleled by the other fear of a clock stopping in the dark: this image possibly came to Eliot by talking

[71] '*The Family Reunion*. A Play by T. S. Eliot', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 384.

to Faber & Faber director Frank Morley, as in a much later letter to Eliot (4th September 1948), Morley mentions his aunt Margaret's health conditions, and how she is always the same, waiting for the clock to stop in the dark.[72] The night ultimately represents for Amy the passing of time and the lack of certainty as to whether she will be given another day of life.

It is no wonder that at the end of the play (Part II, Scene III), Amy should cry, off stage, a few instants before dying:

> AMY'S VOICE. Agatha! Mary! come!
> The clock has stopped in the dark!
> [*Exeunt* AGATHA *and* MARY. *Pause. Enter* WARBURTON]
> WARBURTON. Well! it's a filthy night to be out in.
>
> (*CPP* 347, lines 28-30)

These are the last words spoken by Amy in the play: her fears have come true, and time has indeed stopped in the darkness for her (she had reiterated her fear at *CPP* 287, line 24 'I do not want the clock to stop in the dark.'). The clock stopping in the dark symbolizes the climax of all her fears, and thus her death cannot even be blessed with the light of the Sun, as Amy dies on a 'filthy night'.

The theme of light and darkness is explored in many ways within *The Family Reunion*, resembling to an extent the images used by Eliot in his earlier poetry. In Part I, Scene I, the spectators understand that the reunion which is about to happen is of high importance, as it should reunite elderly dowager Amy with her three sons, in their old house Wishwood, in Yorkshire: her role is to 'keep the family alive' by living there, but only old relatives keep her company, and her children have long forsaken her, and moved faraway from Wishwood. Amy's younger sister Ivy, by using a line which is borrowed directly from *The Waste Land*, declares that if she were Amy, she 'would go south in the winter' and 'follow the sun, not wait for the sun to come here' (*CPP* 285, lines 15-16). If in *The Waste Land*'s 'The Burial of the Dead', the first voice proclaims how they always read

[72] Berg Coll MSS Morley – Frank Vigor Morley Collection of Papers 1921-1980, Correspondence with T. S. Eliot, 1930, 1949 (Berg Collection, New York Public Library).

at night and move from presumably Germany to Southern Europe in the winter ('I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.', *CPP* 61, line 18), the line merely indicates the speaker's social status. In *The Family Reunion* Eliot endows the whole sentence with much deeper connotations. Going south in the winter is here explicitly linked to following the sun: although it is still bound to social status ('if I could afford it', says Ivy, line 17), the highest reference here is exactly that to light, especially after what Amy stated at the very opening of the play. All of Amy's sons have moved south of Wishwood: the sun has thus been turned into a symbol of family affections as well, who she should reconcile herself with, by following the sun actively. Her stubbornness keeps her in Wishwood though, isolated from the rest of the country, and from her family. Remarkably, Wishwood is represented as particularly foggy: at her son Harry's arrival, Amy comments how he is now 'unused to our foggy climate | And the northern climate.' (*CPP* 295, I, lines 33-34). Again later in the play, Amy, impatient for her two other sons' arrival, bursts out saying: 'It is more vexing. What can have happened? | I suppose it's the fog that is holding them up.' (*CPP* 313, I, lines 26-7). Throughout the play, it is Amy and her relations' rigidity of feelings that have caused Harry and his cousin Mary to become orphans of a lost childhood, and the physical fog surrounding Wishwood (in spite of its well-wishing name) is one which is almost produced by its own inhabitants. The other two Monchenseys, Arthur and John, are being effectively kept from getting to Wishwood by Amy herself, and her resistant attitude which has wrapped up the family in a fog both tangible and of the mind. As a reviewer correctly argued, such a wealthy family could have sent a servant, or another relative to pick up their sons:[73] the fog thus becomes necessary for Eliot to recreate an atmosphere of passivity, and reluctance to change the way things are, much reminiscent of his earlier poetry – such as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', for instance, where a yellow fog envelops everything, revealing the protagonist's ineptitude and tendency towards inaction.

Harry even describes his life, and his experience as:

[73] Fenwick Gaye, *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 381.

The sudden solitude in a crowded desert
In a thick smoke, many creatures moving
Without direction, for no direction
Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapour –
Without purpose, and without principle of conduct
In flickering intervals of light and darkness;
The partial anaesthesia of suffering without feeling
And partial observation of one's own automatism
[...]
[...] One thinks to escape
By violence, but one is still alone
In an over-crowded desert, jostled by ghosts.

(*CPP* 294, I, lines 15-22, 27-29)

The thick smoke of inactivity wraps itself around Harry's mind, as if he were in a 'crowded desert' inhabited by the many shadows of his thoughts. Light and darkness appear in the desert in 'flickering intervals': light and darkness, good and evil instincts, appear at intervals in Harry's anaesthetized mind. He thinks an act of violence will put an end to all his inner torments, wake him up from his anaesthesia, and free him from the ghosts of his past life and lost childhood tormenting him. Intervals of light and darkness occurring in Harry's mind are also a prelude to his initiation to the mystical experience, and the Dark Night of the Soul of the play's end. Evelyn Underhill, whose book Eliot had been familiar with since his Harvard days,[74] noted how the mystic's progress is marked by 'an alternation of light and shade: of "dark contemplation" and sharp intuitions of Reality'.[75] This state of alternating light and darkness, according to Underhill, is what occurs between the 'dark night', the deprivation of senses, and the state of bliss which is 'illumination',[76] creating a state of rapid and sharp coexistence of mystical light and darkness.[77]

When Harry meets again Mary, his cousin, guest at Wishwood, they begin discussing their unhappy childhood, and Harry in particular remarks:

It seems I shall get rid of nothing.
Of none of the shadows that I wanted to escape;

[74] "A. MS. notes on philosophy [1907]", T. S. Eliot Papers 1878-1958 (MS Am 1691 129), Houghton Library (Harvard University).
[75] Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 457.
[76] Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 458.
[77] Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 457.

> And at the same time, other memories,
> Earlier, forgotten, begin to return
> Out of my childhood. I can't explain.
>
> (*CPP* 306, I, lines 13-17)

The shadows here represent, on the one hand, the ghosts of the dead from his important and difficult family, impossible to escape, even after moving abroad, and, on the other hand, the unhappy memories of a lost childhood: Wishwood's fog thus still haunts him - even from faraway. And again, he calls his past an opaque shadow in Part II:

> Here I have been finding
> A misery long forgotten, and a new torture,
> The shadow of something behind our meagre childhood,
> Some origin of wretchedness.
>
> (*CPP* 331, II, lines 10-13)

Harry will later ask his aunt Agatha about his father's story: he was about to murder his wife, Amy, shortly before Harry's birth, but was then stopped by Agatha, who killed him instead. The 'origin of wretchedness' is thus Harry's feeling of responsibility for his own wife's death, and finding a nearly 'genetic' reason for his actions in his father's hatred for his mother. The shadow here is the origin of all family evil, the 'evil in the dark closet' (*CPP* 296, I, line 9), and the 'agony in the dark' (*CPP* 310, I, line 3): Harry, like Orestes, tries to find a justification for his actions, and his unhappiness in his own family history, together with the necessity of expiating for the whole family.

Expiation and purgation are, once more, the most important theme of this play.[78] In contrast to *Ash-Wednesday*, which explores purification and salvation, *The Family Reunion* shows little hope. When Agatha explains Harry his family's (and her own) sins, she uses the following words:

> AGATHA. There are hours when there seems to be no past or future,

[78] E. Martin Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays* (London: Syndics of Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 93.

Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn. When you stretch out your hand
To the flames. They only come once,
Thank God, that kind.

(*CPP* 332, II, lines 22-25)

Critics have argued how Agatha's speech should hide a relationship of asexual love, spiritual connection between her and Harry's father, which is represented by the 'pointed light' and the image of burning.[79] Burning, though, has normally been associated, in Eliot's poetry, with sin and expiation, from the black moth being burnt in its circle of desire in 'The Burnt Dancer' to the burning of Carthage (and other 'unreal' cities) and to the purgatorial flames wrapping Arnaut Daniel and the lustful souls in Dante's *Purgatorio* and in *The Waste Land*. Considered within this frame, Agatha's burning pointed light reminds us of the souls wrapped up in flames from Dante's *Inferno*, for instance Ulysses' and Diomed's double, 'horned' flame.[80] Agatha's words could thus be interpreted to indicate some desire of expiation on her side, as she is guilty of her brother-in-law's murder, and wishes to be forgiven by her sister Amy. Burning in the sense of purification and expiation is further exemplified by the lines, 'When you stretch out your hand | To the flames.': like the moth, and like sinners in Dantean Hell and Purgatory, she is irreparably drawn to the flames. The adjective 'pointed' referring to light also gives an additional meaning of 'sharp', 'acute', 'reaching a climax': the light is so strong, the attraction to the flames is so irresistible for Agatha that it is 'pointed'. She continues her speech thus :

It is possible that sin may strain and struggle
In its dark instinctive birth, to come to consciousness
And so find expurgation. It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.
Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,
Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen
To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.

(*CPP* 333, II, lines 28-35)

[79] Martha C. Carpentier, 'Orestes in the Drawing Room: Aeschylean Parallels in T. S. Eliot's "The Family Reunion"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1989), 17-42 (p. 39).
[80] Canto XXVI, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, p. 291.

The sense of guilt and family curse Harry feels is, according to Agatha, the result of too many unhappy and resentful sentiments amongst the Monchensey members. Whether he killed his wife or not, he has to expiate many of the sins of his family. At this stage of the play, it is almost impossible not to draw parallels with Eliot's private life (Lyndall Gordon suggests a likeness between Vivien and Harry's wife quoting *The Family Reunion*' s line 'A restless shivering painted shadow', referring to Harry's wife),[81] and his sense of responsibility for his wife: at the same time, the story in *The Family Reunion* is more complex than a man feeling guilty for his wife's death. It is about a family curse, a family incapable of loving, and of normal affections: the character of Harry undoubtedly mirrors some of Eliot's own feelings and fears, and Amy is an important mother figure, as Charlotte Eliot was for her family, with a similar inflexibility in accepting his son's marriage and permanent settlement in the United Kingdom. Still, although Eliot's family surely played a vital role in his own feelings of guilt, it could have hardly put such a curse on him, and the similarities end here, as his father allegedly did not attempt at killing his mother, nor was he killed by his sister-in-law. With Harry's character, Eliot may have seen his personal situation from a different point of view, and realized what a curse it would be to have children, from such a chaotic and unhappy marriage. Harry is the 'consciousness' of an 'unhappy family', a 'bird sent through the purgatorial flame'. The purgatorial flames of ice recall again Arnaut Daniel, and the 'frigid purgatorial fires' of 'East Coker' (*CPP* 181, IV, line 19). The juxtaposition of 'bird' and 'fire', though, also leads the reader to think of the mythological creature of the Phoenix, periodically regenerating through fire: Harry should expurgate his family's curse through fire, and thus be reborn. Harry, like Orestes in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, shall expiate his family's sins and lack of love, not his family members who brought the curse upon themselves. The oxymoron of 'flames of ice' shows the necessity of expiation through burning, which will be finally resolved with its opposite — flames which cannot glow with fire anymore, but acquire the solidity of ice instead.[82] As aunt Agatha states at the beginning of the above-mentioned passage, sin is born 'dark', and thus it can only be expiated through the

[81] Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 67.
[82] See also 'East Coker', 'frigid purgatorial fires' (*CPP* 181, IV, line 19), as discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

painful suffering through light – first through that of burning fire, and then through the coldness of ice flames. 'The heat of the sun and the icy vigil, / [...] / Such things are possible.' (*CPP* 339, II, lines 9, 12), as a part of Harry's process of self-knowledge and purification.

At the very end of the play, after Amy's death, the Chorus of the other Monchensey family members perceives they have lost their guidance, and the loss of Amy's rather cumbersome presence makes them cry: 'We have suffered far more than a personal loss – | We have lost our way in the dark.' (*CPP* 349, II, lines 6-7). Amy is here indirectly referred to as light: her brothers and sisters cannot go on with their own lives without her, like Dante without guidance in the dark wood at the opening of *Inferno*. Amy lost, the driving force of the whole Monchensey family, the Chorus is plunged into the darkness.

Eliot decides thus to end *The Family Reunion* precisely with pitch darkness. The last stage directions given by Eliot in the play are very detailed:

> [*Enter, from one door,* AGATHA *and* MARY*, and set a small portable table. From another door, enter* DENMAN *carrying a birthday cake with lighted candles, which she sets on the table. Exit* DENMAN. AGATHA *and* MARY *walk slowly in single file round and round the table, clockwise. At each revolution they blow out a few candles, so that their last words are spoken in the dark.*]
> (*CPP* 349, II)

Such ending for this play is certainly a conscious choice of Eliot's. Martin Browne recalls how Eliot, while writing *The Family Reunion*, had contacted him to ask whether the theatre would let him have naked flames on stage for the final scene.[83] This shows how important it was for Eliot for the play to come full circle: 'The *cake* should be carried on, unlit, on p. 93 (Charles' speech): the candles lit during the Chorus p. 97. So we get *time* to appreciate its significance.'[84] Amy's fear of darkness is so strong that she never thinks the time is suitable to have her birthday cake – throughout the play, she postpones it; until it is too late, and somebody else must do it for her. Simple birthday-cake candles

[83] Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays*, p. 101.
[84] Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays*, p. 104.

acquire a more powerful meaning here: blowing out candles would have been for Amy another refusal of light, contrary to her beliefs, as stated at the very beginning of the play. Blowing out light would lead her to darkness, which is what she dreads the most. She lives a life of passivity and discontent, only to keep Wishwood alive, but then when Harry refuses to take over Wishwood, she understands that her life has been pointless: as she cries in her last words in the play, darkness has come for her – and so has death. Similarly, with the stage symbolically darkened, Harry can finally enter the 'Night of the Soul', thus begin his path of expiation and acting with a purer soul.[85]

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the transition from *The Waste Land*'s perception of modern life as earthly purgatory toward *Four Quartets*' more explicit mystical journey in search of God in the darkness of World War II. By contrast to the other chapters in this thesis, where the sections are usually ordered according to imagery, here I have analysed the four works taken into consideration individually, and in chronological order: *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), and *The Family Reunion* (1939). It is essential to consider them together, as in their different typology of text (poetry and drama) they cover an essential decade for T. S. Eliot, both for his turn to drama, and to religion. His post-conversion works also show the importance of Eliot's exploration of the light theme as a search for purgation and God. In section 4.1, I have demonstrated how Eliot's use of the colour 'white' and of 'white light' as indicative of the Dantean atmosphere intended by the poet: the Lady of *Ash-Wednesday* is a Beatrice-like figure leading the poet towards Earthly Paradise. Eliot's use of allusions in *Ash-Wednesday* shows again a mixture of the most disparate sources, from the Grimm's fairytales to Meister Eckhart's commentary on St. John's gospel, which all play an important role in the reader's deeper understanding of this text. In section 4.2, I have

[85] Leo Hamalian, 'The Figures in the Window: Design in T. S. Eliot's "The Family Reunion", *College Literature*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1977), 107-121 (p. 116).

explored Eliot's opposition between physical light and mystical light in *The Rock* (mainly in the 'Choruses'): Eliot makes use of this dichotomy to start approaching mystical experience, with the ultimate realization that God is both shadow and dark, visible and invisible light. In section 4.3, I have considered Eliot's use of light and dark, day and night, as representation of good and evil within *Murder in the Cathedral*, and namely within St. Thomas Becket's character. Ultimately, section 4.4 deals with *The Family Reunion* and particularly with Amy's obsession with light and utter fear of darkness and her son Harry's process of initiation to the mystical 'Dark Night of the Soul', which he undertakes as a way of expiation for his and his family's sins. The ending of *The Family Reunion* thus prefigures to the atmospheres of *Four Quartets*: continuing the theme of expiation and purgation as in his pre-conversion poetry, in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, and tending towards the mystical experience of seeing the light of God, in *Four Quartets*.

Chapter Five

Excessus mentis:

THE HEART OF LIGHT

'They are all gone into the world of light!'
Henry Vaughan[1]

This will be the last stop of a journey through Eliot's poetry, and his drama, from the 'heart of darkness' of his beginnings to the 'heart of light' of his later works. In this chapter, I will conclude my thesis by considering *Four Quartets*. *Four Quartets* have been dealt with by critics extensively, and have been labeled in a variety of ways: some critics give the sequence a more social and political interpretation,[2] sometimes nearly reaching the definition of war poetry;[3] the majority of critics consider them, on the other hand, philosophical, mystical, or religious poetry.[4] All of these considerations will be, and must be, kept in mind when assessing the value of light and darkness imagery in *Four Quartets*. The political implications of the time, as well as Eliot's own religious and philosophical tendencies all play an important role in the formation of his last, greatest poem, and its deployment of light and dark images. With particular respect to this, I will try and clarify

[1] Henry Vaughan, 'They are all gone into the world of light', in *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 273
[2] John Xiros Cooper, *T. S. Eliot and the Ideology of* Four Quartets (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 122.
[3] Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 73-74.
[4] See Martin Warner, *A Philosophical Study of T. S. Eliot's* Four Quartets (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), and Paul Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism: The Secret History of* Four Quartets (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), amongst others.

Dante's presence in Eliot's work, and how reading the *Commedia* paved the way for his perception of light in *Four Quartets*, and will lead us to a better comprehension of the poem.

Dante had been a lifetime companion for Eliot: as discussed in Chapter One, his use of Dantean lines begins in *Inventions of the March Hare*, with his inscription of lines from *Purgatorio* at the very first page of his notebook, and since then, it has been an intense relationship of borrowings, imitations, reformulations, and possibly even identifications. In a speech Eliot gave on Dante's influence on his own work at the Italian Institute in London in 1950, he recalls his beginnings with the *Commedia*:

> I read Dante only with a prose translation beside the text. Forty years ago I began to puzzle out the *Divine Comedy* in this way; and when I thought I had grasped the meaning of the passage which especially delighted me, I committed it to memory; so that, for some years, I was able to recite a large part of one canto or another to myself, lying in bed or on a railway journey. Heaven knows what it would have sounded like, had I recited aloud; but it was by this means that I steeped myself in Dante's poetry.[5]

In the same paragraph, he defines Dante's influence as 'the most persistent and deepest' upon his poetry:[6] the mere recollection of him learning whole passages of the *Divine Comedy* by heart, and reciting them to himself on various occasions, witnesses his admiration, and dedication to the medieval poet. 'The greatest debts are not always the most evident',[7] he continues, and adds 'The kind of debt that I owe to Dante is the kind which goes on accumulating, the kind which is not the debt of one period or another of one's life'.[8] Dante's influence was an ongoing process in his poetry from *Inventions of the March Hare*; the influence of such poets as Thomson, Davidson, and Symons, whom I have dealt with in Chapter Two, can be considered as a debt of a precise period in his writing, rather than one present throughout his poetry.

Eliot's debt to Dante was persistent, and references to the *Divine Comedy* are numerous in the whole of his poetry: allusion was not only a way of acknowledging Dante

[5] T. S. Eliot, 'A Talk on Dante', *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1952), 178-188 (p. 178).
[6] Ibidem.
[7] Eliot, 'A Talk on Dante', *The Kenyon Review*, p. 179.
[8] Ibidem.

as a great poet, but also his own way of establishing 'a relationship between the medieval inferno and modern life'.[9] Throughout my thesis, I have argued that Eliot frequently drew comparisons between the *Divine Comedy*'s infernal and purgatorial atmospheres and his own condition in modern society, through the addition of, or reference to lines from the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* containing an image of light or darkness, often fire, or shadow. With regard to 'Little Gidding', Eliot himself explained his intention of recreating 'the nearest equivalent to a canto of the *Inferno* or the *Purgatorio*, in style as well as content' that he could possibly achieve.[10] In 1942, he had discussed the same passage from 'Little Gidding' in similar terms in a letter to his friend John Hayward:

> [I]t was necessary to get rid of Brunetto for two reasons. The first is that the visionary figure has now become somewhat more definite and will no doubt be identified by some readers with Yeats though I do not mean anything so precise as that. However, I do not wish to take the responsibility of putting Yeats or anybody else into Hell and I do not want to impute to him the particular vice which took Brunetto there. Secondly, although the reference to that Canto is intended to be explicit, I wished the effect of the whole to be Purgatorial which is much more appropriate. That brings us to the reference to swimming in fire which you will remember at the end of Purgatorio 26 where the poets are found. The active co-operation is, I think, sound theology and is certainly sound Dante, because the people who talk to him at that point are represented as not wanting to waste time in conversation but wishing to dive back into the fire to accomplish their expiation.[11]

Purgatory is thus the most appropriate atmosphere for that particular section of 'Little Gidding', inspired by Dante: if this is on the one hand undeniable, this is not the only passage in *Four Quartets* which can be labeled as 'Dantesque'. In this chapter I will argue how Eliot has been influenced by Dante, and by *Paradiso* in particular, in *Four Quartets* more than anywhere else in his poetry. It is precisely in the section on *Paradiso* of his 1929 Dante essay that Eliot states: 'Nowhere in poetry has experience so remote from ordinary experience been expressed so concretely, by a masterly use of that imagery of *light* which is the form of certain types of mystical experience.'[12]

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[9] T. S. Eliot, 'A Talk on Dante', p. 181.
[10] T. S. Eliot, 'A Talk on Dante', p. 181. Eliot mentions this repeatedly in his letters to Hayward.
[11] Letter to John Hayward, 27th August 1942, HB/V/12, King's College Archive, Cambridge. Also quoted in Helen Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), pp. 64-65.
[12] Eliot, 'Dante', p. 227.

I will show how Dante's mystical experience of light and darkness is applicable to Eliot's *Four Quartets*: by learning parts of Dante's *Commedia* by heart when he was young, and applying it to his own poetry from the very beginning, he shows how, like the great Italian master, he needed to go on a journey from darkness to light, and passing all the required stages of damnation, expiation, and purification.

This chapter's sections dedicated to *Four Quartets* attempt to mirror the thesis' larger movement from darkness to light, through the 'antelucan' moment. In section 5.1, I look at the use of darkness as both a physical darkness of the 'Blackout' during World War II and a mystical one, mainly considering echoes of St. John of the Cross and Dante in 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker', and 'The Dry Salvages'. I specifically analyze Eliot's image of darkness on the stage as a metaphor for the spiritual dark experienced by the mystics. In section 5.2, I consider Eliot's difficulties in finding the right word to describe morning twilight, the antelucan moment for St. John of the Cross, through some of his correspondence with John Hayward and an unpublished lecture given in Nice years after the publication of 'Little Gidding'. I will argue not only does this prove Eliot's interest in the various degrees of light and day, and but also the necessity of finding the right word for the specific light atmosphere he wanted to recreate. In section 5.3, I look more closely at 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker', and 'Little Gidding', comparing various instances of 'illumination' to *Paradiso*'s metaphysics of light: in particular, I will examine in depth Eliot's concepts of refining fire, and various degrees of light, liquid light, the 'heart of light', and the 'white light still and moving', with regard to the mysticism of St. John of the Cross, Dante, and also Meister Eckhart, and consider Eliot's own mystical experience in the garden of 'Burnt Norton'.

5.1 'IN THE NIGHTMARE OF THE DARK'[13]

Eliot applies images of light and dark to his religious development, as well as to time, or rather to his own perception of time, as in 'Burnt Norton':

> Time before and time after
> In a dim light: neither daylight
> Investing form with lucid stillness
> [...]
> Nor darkness to purify the soul
> Emptying the sensual with deprivation
>
> (*CPP* 173, III, lines 2-4, 7-8)

Past and future can only be perceived under a feeble light, the memory of things past, fading away, or the uncertainty of future life. At the same time, Eliot uses the image of 'dim light' to show a past lived neither under the bright light of God, nor in the midst of a purifying darkness. He applies the same uncertainty also to the future, the time after the poet's current period of expiation: the poet cannot predict whether he will be blessed with light's lucid stillness, or still condemned to refining darkness. Interestingly, St. John of the Cross connects the three different stages of night with three different types of light:

> [la noche de la fe] para el alma, es más oscura que la primera y, en cierta manera, que la tercera, porque la primera, que es la del sentido, es comparada a la prima noche, que es cuando cesa la vista de todo objeto sensitivo, y así no está tan remota de la luz como la media noche; la tercera parte, que es el antelucano, que es ya lo que está próximo a la luz del día, no es tan oscuro como la media noche, pues ya está inmediata a la ilustración e información de la luz del día, y ésta es comparada a Dios.[14]

[13] 'In the nightmare of the dark | All the dogs of Europe bark, | And the living nations wait, | Each sequestered in its hate;' 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', in Wystan Hugh Auden, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 248.

[14] San Juan de la Cruz, 'Subida del monte Carmelo', p. 34. English translation: '[the night of faith] is for the soul darker than the first night and, in a way, than the third one, because the first night, that of the senses, is compared to the first night, occurring when we stop seeing any sensitive object, and so it is not too far from light as midnight; the third night, which is the antelucan, already close to daylight, is not so dark as midnight, as it is close to daylight's illustration and information, and is compared to God's light.' (my translation).

If the first stage of expiation and purification towards God, the night of the senses, more similar to the evening, and the night of the soul, closer to dawn,[15] are thus moderately dark, then it is the 'middle' (second) night, the night of the faith, which is the hardest, and darkest, for whoever decides to undertake this mystical journey.

A few lines later, Eliot uses once again the word 'flicker' ('Only a flicker | Over the strained time-ridden faces | Distracted from distraction by distraction', *CPP* 174, III, lines 10-12), bridging the gap between light and darkness. Contrary to Warner's argument in his philosophical study of *Four Quartets*, the flicker is not a 'false mechanized reconciliation of light and darkness',[16] but rather here it should be understood as the realization of the insufficient presence of light over darkness amongst human beings: 'human kind | Cannot bear very much reality', the birds in the garden had indicated earlier. Only flickers of reality can be assimilated, and accepted by human perception. Humanity would rather keep on following their own 'distractions', only lit by occasional flickers of light, that this life made up of routines and useless, repeated gestures and actions, must lead to something else: the flickers perceived by the poet are not enough to let all humanity be purified by the darkness of God first, and then invested with His light. For this reason, he will state again, only a few lines later, 'Not here | Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.' (lines 23-24). One should 'Descend lower, descend only | Into the world of perpetual solitude' (lines 25-26), in order to experience:

> Internal darkness, deprivation
> And destitution of all property,
> Dessication of the world of sense,
> Evacuation of the world of fancy,
> Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
>
> (*CPP* 174, III, lines 28-32)

Humanity must descend into darkness and by getting rid of material belongings and sensual, worldly appetites, to be able to reach the 'white light still and moving' of 'Burnt

[15] For more on St. John of the Cross' and Eliot's use of 'antelucan' (as a synonym for dawn), please see section '5.2 Antelucan'.
[16] Warner, *A Philosophical Study of T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets,* p. 55.

Norton'. St. John of the Cross similarly lists the enemies of the soul as the world, the devil, and the flesh,[17] which must be mortified by the night of spiritual contemplation.[18] To an extent, Eliot was trying to embrace 'internal darkness' in his own life: in November 1939, Eliot wrote to John Hayward about his life in rather detached and cynical terms, rejecting every feature of his past life, also stating that he had nothing to look forward to in this world, with the only thing preventing him from joining a monastery being French tobacco (or rather, in Eliot's usual ironic style, his being a husband still).[19] In 'East Coker', Eliot reiterates how flickering human knowledge and experience of the world will not be enough for salvation: such wisdom is useless, as it will not help them deal with darkness – it will not provide them with the required courage to undertake their own spiritual journey (at most, they 'peer' into it, when they do not turn their eyes away from it, *CPP* 179, II, lines 29-31).

Dante is alluded to again, half way through 'East Coker', in what appears like a hint at *Inferno*'s opening:

> In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
> But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
> On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
> And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
> Risking enchantment.
>
> (*CPP* 179, II, lines 39-43)

The poet confesses a feeling of always having felt lost in a dark wood – not in the middle of his life exclusively, like Dante, and for a limited period of time – but rather, throughout his life up to that moment. This is not strictly a darkness of purification, as it was for St. John of the Cross, but it is rather a darkness as it was for Dante: albeit still leading to the Divine in Dante's case, this is the darkness of sin, in which nobody can be safe, constantly

[17] San Juan de la Cruz, 'Noche oscura', p. 183, and *Selected Writings*, p. 162.
[18] '[…] la dicha noche de contemplación purificativa hizo adormecer y amortiguar en la casa de su sensualidad todas las pasiones y apetitos según sus apetitos y movimientos contrarios.', ibidem. English translation: 'that night of purifying contemplation lulled to sleep and deadened all the inordinate movements of the passions and appetites in the house of sense.', in *Selected Writings*, pp. 162-3.
[19] Letter to John Hayward, dated 29th November 1939, HB/L/12/1/14 (King's College Archive, Cambridge).

tempted by monsters (for instance, the three beasts of *Inferno* I), and even lights are connoted as 'fancy' — an illusion to ignes fatui — enchanting man, and leading him astray from his path to the real light, that of God.

It is in this different kind of darkness enveloping humanity, which is a darkness of void and perdition[20] that the poet in 'East Coker' predicts as the ultimate destination of all humanity:

> O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
> [...]
> [...] all go into the dark,
> [...]
> And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,
> Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury.
>
> (*CPP* 180, III, lines 1, 6, 10-11)

It is easy to associate these lines with the darkness of wartime, indeed Auden's 'nightmare of the dark', and Eliot is here showing all his pessimism:[21] the darkness of void, war, and sin drags people and institutions down to a funeral of ideas. In a letter written to Hayward on May Day, 1941, Eliot wondered whether such dark moments as World War II made him see humanity split in two categories, the people who do not think at all, and those who think wrongly.[22] With regard to this, Eliot had often expressed how his duty as a man of letters could not be confined to culture exclusively: every man of letters must also be concerned with what goes on around him, socially and politically; similarly, a man of letters should express his opinion on the most important matters of political affairs. At the end of War World II, in the summer of 1945, Eliot wrote:

> [T]he man of letters is not, as a rule, exclusively engaged upon the production of works of art. [...] He has the same responsibility, and should have the same concern with the fate of his country, and with political and social affairs within it, as any other citizen [...].Yet there are matters of public concern, in which the man of letters should express his opinion, and exert his influence, not merely

[20] Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, p. 133.
[21] Staffan Bergsten, *Time and Eternity: A Study in the Structure and Symbolism of T. S. Eliot's* Four Quartets (Lund: Svenska Bokfoerlaget, 1960), p. 196.
[22] HB/L/12/1/18, King's College Archive, Cambridge.

as a citizen but as a man of letters: and upon such matters I think that it is desirable that men of letters should agree.[23]

The men of letters (mentioned as 'eminent', at line 3 of 'East Coker', III) should not have let themselves fall into the dark of World War II, together with all the other intellectuals, politicians, and statesmen. Eliot reprimands the disunity amongst European intellectuals during the war, a disunity which naturally led to socio-political weakness and instability, hence darkness.

At this stage, if, on the one hand, the darkness of the war as represented by Eliot in 'East Coker' is of course metaphorical, as most wars end up being associated with darkness, or dark times, in their opposition with peace (usually white, or symbolized by light), one should also consider that big cities during World War II did become literally black, as the usage of electric light at night was limited, due to the risk of air raids.[24] With Eliot's poetic sensitivity to light and dark in mind, it is interesting to see how, as early as September 1939, in a letter to John Hayward, the poet laments the difficulty of going out for dinner after dark in London, in a darkness which he himself defines 'terrifying': the only alternative is to dine in familiar areas of London, or at houses near tube stations, although that proves hard, too, for the lack of public street lighting.[25] To paraphrase a line from 'The Dry Salvages', London (like most cities in Europe) had been swallowed 'in the dark throat' of war: far from resembling the big city of Eliot's early nocturnal wanderings, with streetlamps to show him the way, London was then thrown into pitch darkness, during the Blackout.

While the whole world sinks in the darkness of the war, the poet has his own darkness to challenge himself with: a darkness straight out of medieval mysticism.

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[23] T. S. Eliot, 'The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe', *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1945), 333-342 (p. 334).

[24] In September 1939, with the beginning of World War II, blackout was imposed in England (from November 1939, it was agreed it should begin half an hour after sunset and end half an hour before sunrise). Most citizens used blinds, curtains, blackout paint, cardboard, drawing pins, brown paper to seal their windows at night. 'The cities, without neon signs or cinema posters, were utterly transformed after dark', in Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (London: Panther Books Ltd, 1971), pp. 64-65, 72-74.

[25] HB/L/12/1/13, King's College Archive, Cambridge.

Darkness will not come to him unless he 'lets' it come to him naturally: he has to exceed his mind, overcome it in the mystical experience; only thus, according to St. John of the Cross, will he be able to connect himself spiritually with God.[26]

> I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,
> The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
> With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,
> And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
> And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away—
>
> (*CPP* 180, III, lines 12-17)

At first, the similitude of the darkness of God coming over the poet, as the moment when the lights are switched off in a theatre in order to change the scene, does not strike the reader as a very obvious one: what is God, and the poet's own spiritual quest to do with a theatre? Eliot was already involved with the theatre by the time he wrote this passage of 'East Coker'. Re-thinking the stage as a metaphor for life was a familiar idea for him, but reassessing light and darkness in the theatre as a new image for religious experience is inspired. When lights are put off in a theatre to change the scene on the stage, the spectators are seated, also in the dark, waiting: most experience a sense of uneasiness when the lights are switched off for too long – an imposed darkness combined with the impossibility of simply standing up and turning on the lights, as one would do in their own home. Most of the time this is not a complete darkness, but, as Eliot writes, precisely 'a movement of darkness on darkness': even though the spectators remain seated in the dark, they perceive that there is a movement of actors and helpers on the stage changing the

[26] 'Y así, es lástima ver muchas almas a quien Dios da talento y favor para pasar adelante (que, si ellas quisiesen animarse, llegarían a este alto estado), y quédanse en un bajo modo de trato con Dios, por no querer, o no saber, o no las encaminar y enseñar a desasirse de aquellos principios. [...] Porque, aunque es verdad que Dios las lleva — que puede llevarlas sin ellas —, no se dejan ellas llevar; y así, camínase menos resistiendo ellas al que las lleva, y no merecen tanto, pues no aplican la voluntad, y en eso mismo padecen más; porque hay almas que, en vez de dejarse a Dios y ayudarse, antes estorban a Dios por su indiscreto obrar o repugnar, [...]' in San Juan, 'Subida del monte Carmelo', 2. English translation: 'And so it is sad to see them continue in their lowly method of communion with God because they receive no direction on breaking away from the methods of beginners. [...] Although God does lead them — since He can do so without their cooperation — they do not accept His guidance. In resisting God who is conducting them, they make little progress and, as a result, must endure greater suffering. Some souls, instead of abandoning themselves to God and cooperating with Him, hamper Him by their indiscreet activity or by their resistance.' in *Selected Writings*, p. 58.

scene. They also know that what they have seen on the stage a few minutes earlier (backdrop, furniture, and so on) will not be the same as when the lights will be on again: in fact, the spectators will probably be disappointed if the scene did not change at all. And, similarly, like St. John of the Cross says, the soul will have to let the dark come upon them – it cannot be a self-imposed darkness – they will have to let it come on them as the extinguished lights in a theatre are not directly controlled by the people sitting there. The soul will accept the darkness, and when the lights are back on again, it will accept that darkness changed the scene: the mystic, like the changed stage in the theatre, cannot possibly be the same again, after going through the darkness of God. If they stayed unchanged, then there cannot have been any mystical experience. 'So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing' (*CPP* 180, III, line 28) is Eliot's mystical conclusion: the darkness of the extinguished lights in the theatre, the darkness of the night of the soul, and the darkness of Dante's Hellish vision will all lead to light. Light and dancing, stillness and darkness are all one and the same: darkness is necessary to reach light, and stillness is the intellectual power which gives way to moving (like Dante's Empyrean and the First Mover). Dancing and light are here put at the same level by Eliot as they have become for him symbols of highest perfection, and happiness, as they were for Dante.[27]

5.2 ANTELUCAN

Four Quartets is not always neatly divided between darkness and daylight: intersections of these two forces also are quite frequent and have their role within the poem. In 'The Dry Salvages', Eliot writes of a certain time, 'Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception, | The future futureless, before the morning watch | When time stops and time is never ending;' (*CPP* 185, I, lines 43-45): this time before dawn, which can of course be reminiscent of St. John of the Cross' division of the degrees of the soul's salvation into the

[27] Corti, 'Metafisica', p. 295.

stages of the night, is the closest to light, and God and the truth of all things. St. John of the Cross calls it third night, the night of the soul, or 'antelucan'.[28] According to Dean Inge, whose *Christian Mysticism* Eliot was familiar with at Harvard,[29] this shade of darkness is 'the herald of a brighter dawn':[30] the darker the experience of the mystical night is, the brighter the light of the approaching day will be. This is also 'a time not our time', as the poet stated earlier at line 36: it is a private time of the soul, in search for God, with a past of sins and a future in the hands of the Divine. It is the time of the souls in Purgatory: they can reflect on their sins, the 'deceptions' of the human mind, and their salvation, their future, is almost certain but is still under God's will.

Eliot shows a particular sensitivity towards this specific time of the day, as it is present again twice in 'Little Gidding': 'In the uncertain hour before the morning | Near the ending of interminable night | At the recurrent end of the unending' (*CPP* 193, II, lines 25-27), and 'The first-met stranger in the waning dusk' (line 38). This is the passage in 'Little Gidding' mentioned in the August 1942 letter to Hayward, where Eliot made it very clear to his friend how he wanted these same lines to resemble a Dantesque canto, and in particular the atmosphere of a canto from *Purgatorio*. In this case, the choice of dusk is effectively the most consistent with Dante: as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, Dante visits *Purgatorio* in the early morning, at dusk, with a light that keeps changing in shade (as opposed to *Paradiso*'s stillness of light). At this point, it is necessary to consider more of Eliot's unpublished correspondence with Hayward, as well as a lecture he gave in Nice in 1952, to demonstrate how important the imagery, and the vocabulary of light was to him in his poetry. In September 1942, Eliot reasserts his need to find a word to mean twilight before dawn, or morning dusk:

> It is surprisingly difficult to find words for the shades before morning; we seem to be richer in words and phrases for the end of day. And I don't want a phrase which might mean either. I am

[28] San Juan, 'Subida', p. 34.
[29] "A. MS. notes on philosophy [1907]", T. S. Eliot Papers 1878-1958 (MS Am 1691 129), Houghton Library (Harvard University).
[30] William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), p. 200.

inclined to put 'The first-met stranger after lantern-end' unless it seems to you too quaint. I do mean just the moment at which we should put out a lantern, if we were carrying one.[31]

The use of the phrase 'lantern-end' and the addition of the word 'lantern' itself would suggest a reprise of old-fashioned, artificial lighting imagery, as witnessed in his early poetry. 'Lantern-end' would not work though, as Eliot is effectively looking for an image of natural light, which could transcend the reality of London at wartime, and he is searching for a word to describe a certain type of light, rather than suggest the image of a lantern. The addition of '*if* we were carrying one' (my emphasis) is intended to suggest a specific atmosphere, and not the object itself. In this exchange of letters with Hayward on possible terms to describe twilight before dawn, Eliot described his decisions, when attempting to choose the right word:

I am still [...] wrestling with the demon of that precise degree of light as that precise time of day. I want something more *universal* than black-out (for even if the blackout goes on forever, I want something holding good for the past also – something as universal as Dante's old tailor threading his needle[]]. On the other hand, any reference to the reverberes wd. take the mind directly to pre-war London, which would be unfortunate. It must therefore be a country image or a general one. I have been fiddling with something like this:

The stranger in the antelucan dusk

The stranger at the antelucan hour

Perhaps it is too self-conscious, and belongs rather to a Miltonic rather than a Dantesque passage?[32]

Eliot here mentions the French word for streetlamps (*réverbères*), and realizing how inappropriate and unsuitable for 'Little Gidding' an image of street light would be: firstly, on a more realistic level, because electric light in the streets and elsewhere in London was obviously scarce at night during World War II, and so the use of the word 'street lamps'

[31] Letter to John Hayward, 7 September 1942, HB/V/12, King's College Archive, Cambridge. As quoted in Gardner, *The Composition,* p. 177.
[32] Letter to John Hayward, 9 September 1942, HB/V/12, King's College Archive, Cambridge. As also quoted in Gardner, *The Composition*, p. 178.

would have mislead the reader, who would have thus imagined the wrong ambiance, and the wrong time period, and completely misunderstood the poem, and so the poet's intention. Secondly, the image of the street lamps would also have taken the reader back to Eliot's early poetry, and thus to his nocturnes about big cities at night: at this stage of his poetic career, Eliot was not rejecting his early compositions, but he also felt the need to acknowledge that he was at a turning point, and that he had clearly become a different poet from what he was in the 1910s. Introducing an image of street lighting in 'Little Gidding', a poem written during World War II, would have misled the reader, as well as himself. Usage of words in languages other than English was common in the correspondence between Eliot and Hayward, and yet I would argue that the precise use of the French word 'réverbère' instead of the obvious English 'street lamp', or 'street light', in this letter is a conscious choice, with Eliot deliberately hinting at his own youth, his 1910s poetry, his past life in Paris, when he still thought he might perhaps become a poet writing in French, rather than English.[33] Lastly, the image of the street lamp would not carry quite the same immediate mystical association as morning dusk: the effect sought for by Eliot is 'the uncertain hour before the morning', the daylight St. John of the Cross calls 'antelucan', and is for Dante Purgatorial dawn – a transitory, hopeful moment, with the Dark Night gone, and the Heart of Light quickly approaching.

In his Nice lecture of 1952, Eliot still remembers the difficulty and the importance of finding the right English word for morning twilight, citing it as an example of a situation where he had to sacrifice sense to sound. The word 'dusk' in English would not do, as although it carries both meanings of 'twilight before dawn' and 'twilight before night', most English speakers tend to link it to the evening, rather than to the morning, with Eliot arguing that this is probably because more people are out in the evening and only few people are out before dawn, who would need to use the word dusk in that particular acceptation.[34] Eliot adds how he could have probably found a dialect word meaning morning dusk in some English country dialect, but then it would have probably needed a footnote, and it would also have misled the reader (like in the earlier street

[33] Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot*, p. 60.
[34] 'Scylla and Charybdis', Nice lecture, p. 5, HB/P/32, King's College, Cambridge.

lamp's instance), as it would have summoned up images of the English countryside in the reader's mind, which was not the effect Eliot was looking for, since the scene he was trying to render in his poetry was a London street, during World War II.[35] Eliot eventually resolved to give up finding only one word for this particular degree of light, and opted for using two words: he would use the word dusk and would then need to find an adjective specifying what kind of dusk he meant in 'Little Gidding'.[36] At first, Eliot's idea was to use the adjective 'antelucan', as also mentioned in the letter to Hayward, as its meaning according to the Oxford English Dictionary was perfectly fitting for what Eliot wanted (referring specifically to the hour before dawn), and he was also pleased with the sound of the word 'antelucan' itself.[37] And yet, the word's rarity made it only suitable for a poem written in ornate style, which was not the case for the particular passage of 'Little Gidding' where Eliot wanted to insert the word, written in plain style.[38] Hence Eliot had to sacrifice the adjective 'antelucan', carrying the precise meaning, to his final decision of 'waning dusk', the most appropriate combination of words for that passage.[39] The choice of no other word at a crucial moment of his poetry had ever appeared to hold such importance for Eliot: as a poet, he obviously chose each word carefully, but nowhere else did he show such interest in one single word, that he should discuss it in various letters to Hayward, and even in a lecture in France, years later. This is, I believe, partly a demonstration of what I have argued throughout my thesis: Eliot was conscious of every word he chose to use, but he was even more deeply conscious of the light (or dark) atmosphere he wanted to give to a certain poem, as well as of the spiritual significance for a specific set of images. It also bears mystical relevance that Eliot should imagine that precise scene set at morning twilight (and not evening twilight): as in the earlier quotation from Inge's *Christian Mysticism*, so much darker is the mystical night, and so much brighter the dawn of God's light. Interestingly, William Force Stead, an American poet and clergyman, as well as Eliot's friend at the time of his religious conversion in 1927, asked himself in the introduction to his book *The Shadow of Mount Carmel: A Pilgrimage*:

[35] 'Scylla and Charybdis', p. 6.
[36] Ibidem.
[37] Ibidem.
[38] 'Scylla and Charybdis', p. 7.
[39] Ibidem.

In the light of my vision I am setting forth on a pilgrimage. So far, all I can see is the Spirit as life and consciousness, and as such, dwelling in man, it lifts him in some measure above space and time. My light at present is a twilight — before darkness, or dawn?[40]

Eliot held Stead's book in great esteem,[41] and must have been familiar with Stead's idea of man's soul existing at either a twilight before dark (evening twilight), or one before dawn (morning twilight): Eliot thus, when he needed to pick the right word for 'morning twilight', was not only engaging with images of dawn over London during World War II, but also, more importantly, with the mystical 'antelucan', the moment between the darkest night and the brightest rising day, before the approaching heart of light.

5.3 Fire and Light

In Dante's *Paradiso*, the blessed spirits are often described by Dante as dancing out of joy for their condition of being always in the ever-blessing light of God. In Canto XII, the spirits (each of them is a light) of the sphere of the Sun sing and dance, moving as to create a crown and communicate to each other by making their flames shine brighter; they only stop doing so to let St. Bonaventura speak to Dante:

> Poi che'l tripudio e l'altra festa grande,
> sì del cantare e sì del fiammeggiarsi
> luce con luce gaudïose e blande,
> insieme a punto e a voler quetarsi,
>
> (lines 22-25)[42]

[40] William Force Stead, *The Shadow of Mount Carmel: A Pilgrimage* (London: Richard Cobden-Sanderson, 1926), p. 11.
[41] Letter dated 4 December 1934, OSB MSS 158, William Force Stead papers 1859-1972, 'Letters to William Force Stead 1927-38' (Beinecke Rare Books Library, Yale University).
[42] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 213. English translation: 'Soon as the dance and high great festival, — alike of song and flashing light with light, gladsome and benign, — / accordant at a point of time and act of will had stilled them', in *The Paradiso*, pp. 143-5.

Again in *Paradiso* XIV, the spirits dance and then line up in the shape of a cross, while in *Paradiso* XVIII, those of the sphere of Jove (or Jupiter) sing and dance in brightness, forming letters ('sì dento ai lumi sante creature | volitando cantavano, e faciensi | or D, or I, or L in sue figure.', lines 76-78)[43]. In 'East Coker' lines from Eliot's ancestor Sir Thomas Elyot, about a countryside feast around a bonfire were perhaps chosen by the poet for their men and women dancing 'Round and round the fire | Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles' (*CPP* 178, I, lines 34-35), a peaceful image of forgotten times, as well as a reminiscence of Dantean atmospheres of happy spirits dancing in brightness.

A little-explored work that might have been influential in Eliot's shaping of his perceptions of fire, is Charlotte Eliot's dramatic poem *Savonarola*. From the very title, it indicates fire as a punishing force – Girolamo Savonarola, an Italian Dominican friar, had been tried by fire and finally burnt in the main square in Florence in 1498, for his revolutionary religious statements. In her work there are various mentions of light and darkness, fire and shadow: an episode which is relevant here is that in 'The Bonfire of Vanities 1497'. Here, children and monks are dancing together hand in hand around a bonfire, 'in holy ecstasy' (line 7),[44] burning whatever had been considered by Savonarola as impure, in both art and literature. Fire here personifies the 'Divine Madness', by consuming and destroying everything that has been thrown to it:

> The satiate flames sink down upon yon pile
> As weary of their prey. A little while
> And flickering fires will fade. Hark! they begin
> To move in a graceful dance and sing [...]'
>
> (lines 10-13)[45]

Even flames become personified, singing and dancing in an ecstatic rapture, symbolizing the fury of human passions, and the ultimate religious frenzy of purification through destruction. Fire is an important element in both 'East Coker' and 'Little Gidding': in times

[43] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 329. English translation: 'so within the lights the sacred creatures Flying sang, and in their shapings made themselves now D, now I, now L.' in *The Paradiso*, p. 223.
[44] Charlotte Eliot, *Savonarola: A Dramatic Poem* (London: R. Cobden–Sanderson, 1926), p. 49.
[45] Eliot, *Savonarola*, p. 49.

of war, Eliot feels the urge to re-establish a connection with fire's refining, purifying, spiritual powers (rather than its destructive ones). Fire's 'double nature as both destructive and transmutative'[46] is represented well by the image of the 'dove' of the Holy Spirit as a fire-bombing plane in 'Little Gidding' (*CPP* 193, II, line 28; IV, line 1): still, throughout *Four Quartets*, Eliot seems to prefer a religious, transcendental view, over a more political one.[47] The images of flames in *Four Quartets* are in fact drawn from a religious perspective. Eliot, in 'Dante' (1929), had already made an important point regarding the difference between fire in *Inferno* and that in *Purgatorio*:

> In hell, the torment issues from the very nature of the damned themselves, expresses their essence; they writhe in the torment of their own perpetually perverted nature. In purgatory the torment of flame is deliberately and consciously accepted by the penitent. [...] The souls in purgatory suffer because they *wish to suffer*, for purgation. And [...] they suffer more keenly, being souls preparing for blessedness [...]. In their suffering is hope [...].[48]

Hence the necessary specification in 'East Coker' when Eliot refers again to *Purgatorio* XXVI, and Dante meeting the lustful souls of Guido Guinizzelli and Arnaut Daniel, regarding the frigidity of fire in purgatory:

> The chill ascends from feet to knees,
> The fever sings in mental wires.
> If to be warmed, then I must freeze
> And quake in frigid purgatorial fires
>
> (*CPP* 181, IV, lines 16-19)

Both Guinizzelli and Daniel are expiating their sins of lust in the purgatorial fire: this is not described by Dante as cold, but Eliot here imagines fire in Purgatory to be 'frigid', both in the meaning of 'cold' and 'wanting in sexual vigour, impotent'.[49] Human passions being usually associated with burning (as also seen in *The Waste Land*),[50] only a frigid fire can

[46] Kenneth Asher, *T. S. Eliot and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 104.
[47] Asher, *T. S. Eliot and Ideology*, p. 106.
[48] Eliot, 'Dante', pp. 216-217.
[49] Oxford English Dictionary Online, <www.oed.com> [accessed 7 August 2013].
[50] Gareth Reeves, *T. S. Eliot: A Virgilian Poet* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 147.

effectively purify the lustful penitents, with a sexual apathy. Eliot often associated himself with Arnaut Daniel in his earlier poems and in *Ash-Wednesday*, hence his own identification, again, with Daniel's sin; as in St. John of the Cross, all appetites and all worldly senses must be 'frozen'. He is not burning in the heat of Hell, but rather trembling with cold in Purgatory, numbing his own senses, to prepare for God and salvation.

Spiritual fire appears again at the beginning of 'Little Gidding', associated with Pentecost:

> A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
> And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
> Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but Pentecostal fire
> In the dark time of the year.
>
> (*CPP* 191, I, lines 8-11)

In the immediately preceding lines, the poet's soul has made a slow transition from winter to spring, with the sun's heat melting the ice and thus the poet's icy suspension in time.[51] Here the poet finds himself blinded by the early afternoon's glare: as the mention of 'Pentecostal fire' makes clearer, this is God's light descending on the 'dumb spirit'. The metaphor of light continues with early afternoon's (or, in fact, even noon's) dazzling brilliance which becomes blindness for the poet. With regard to Eliot's mystical sources for these lines, he is not here following St. John of the Cross' light metaphysics, but rather directly Dante's: according to St. John of the Cross, blindness is not linked to midday, but rather to midnight. St. John's song 'En una noche oscura' precisely says:

> En la noche dichosa,
> en secreto, que nadie me veía
> ni yo miraba cosa,
> sin otra luz y guía
> sino la que en el corazón ardía.
> Aquésta me guiaba
> más cierto que la luz del mediodía
> [...]
> ¡Oh noche que guiaste!,

[51] Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 187.

oh noche amable más que la alborada!;

(lines 11-17, 21-22)[52]

For St. John, the night is the really purifying entity for the soul: bright daylight is not as certain as the Dark Night – the only light that can be trusted, to him, is that of his heart, the only guide through the Dark Night. Later on in 'Subida del monte Carmelo', he clarifies how blindness is a specific feature of the second stage of the Dark Night, the night of the faith: its complete darkness (equivalent to midnight for the Spanish mystic) requires also complete absence of light, hence blindness.[53] St. John's night of the faith must blind the mystic's soul to everything concerning God and spirituality.[54]

For Dante, on the contrary, the mystical experience at its highest must include a light which is at least as bright as that of noon: many critics have argued that the precise time of Dante's ascension to Paradise is noon.[55] Dante had begun his journey through Hell at sunset (*Inferno* II, lines 1-3) and that through Purgatory at sunrise (*Purgatorio* I, line 13): when he reaches Paradiso, he also reaches God's perfection, and thus noon,[56] when light is at its brightest. Dante describes in various moments of *Paradiso* his inability to see the wonderful visions before him, and to relate what he has seen: moments of high vision and blindness. At the end of *Paradiso* XXV, Dante is dazzled by the sight of the light of St. John the apostle, which is too bright for him to stare at it: 'Qual è colui ch'adocchia e

[52] San Juan, 'Subida', p. 1. English translation: 'Upon that lucky night | In secrecy, inscrutable to sight, | I went without discerning | And with no other light | Except for that which in my heart was burning. | It lit and led me through | More certain than the light of noonday clear | […] | O night that was my guide! | Oh darkness dearer than the morning's pride,' in *The Poems of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Roy Campbell (London: Harvill, 1951), p. 11.

[53] 'esta segunda de la fe pertenece a la parte superior del hombre, que es la racional y, por el consiguiente, más interior y más oscura, porque la priva de la luz racional o, por mejor decir, la ciega; y así, es bien comparada a la media noche, que es lo más adentro y más oscuro de la noche.' San Juan, 'Subida', 35. English translation: 'This second night of the faith belongs to the higher side of man, the rational and consequently the innermost and darkest, as it makes it devoid of rational light, or better, blind; hence, it is correctly compared to midnight, the most inward and darkest part of the night.' (my translation).

[54] 'el alma […] no sólo se ha da quedar a *oscuras* según aquella parte que tiene respecto a las criaturas y a lo temporal, que es la sensitiva e inferior […], sino que también se ha de cegar y oscurecer según la parte que tiene respecto a Dios y a lo espiritual, que es la racional y superior de que ahora vamos tratando;' ivi, 37. English translation: 'not only must [people] live in darkness in the sensory and lower part of their nature (concerning creatures and temporal things), […] but they must also darken and blind themselves in that part of their nature that bears relation to God and spiritual things. This latter part, which we are now discussing, is the rational part of their nature.' in John of the Cross, *Selected Writings*, p. 85.

[55] Giovanni Reggio, 'Commento al Canto I', *Paradiso*, p. 17.

[56] Edward Moore, *Gli accenni al tempo nella 'Divina Commedia'* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2007), pp. 11-12.

s'argomenta | di vedere eclissar lo sole un poco, | che, per veder, non vedente diventa;' (lines 118-120).[57] In order to see St. John better, his eyes exceed human vision, and Dante becomes blind for a few moments, with his sight being restored, and strengthened, half way through *Paradiso* XXVI (lines 70-81). Dante's blindness occurs again in *Paradiso* XXX, when he enters the Empyrean and looks at the river of light, and the intellectual light of the Empyrean blurs his sight, in a truly mystical experience:[58] 'così mi circunfulse luce viva, | e lasciommi fasciato di tal velo | del suo fulgor, che nulla m'appariva.' (lines 49-51).[59] Mystical blindness is witnessed elsewhere, too, although many critics have argued that Dante's source for this might have been namely an Islamic source translated into Latin, *Liber Scale Machometi* (English title: *The Prophet's Night Journey and Heavenly Ascent*), where it is interesting to mention briefly how light and blindness are also an essential element of the Islamic Heaven. In chapter XXIV of *Liber Scale Machometi*, Mohamed describes a heavenly river made of light, which cannot be looked at without immediately becoming blind:[60] being blinded by light is such a danger in the Islamic Heaven that Mohamed often looks at things indirectly, from different points of view, to avoid being dazzled.[61] By mentioning this book, I do not mean that Eliot knew this, or was influenced by this in any other way than through Dante; I do consider it an interesting source to support the idea of mystical blindness by excess of light in *Four Quartets*. It is the *excessus luminis* that Eliot thinks *should* take him on the mystical path to the *excessus mentis*, which he tries to recreate in *Four Quartets*. In the *Paradiso* Eliot had already

[57] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 457. English translation: 'As who doth gaze and strain to see the sun eclipsed a space, who by looking grows bereft of sight;' in *The Paradiso*, p. 311.
[58] Corti, 'Metafisica', p. 296.
[59] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 536. English translation: 'so there shone around me a living light, leaving me swathed in such a web of its glow that naught appeared to me.' in *The Paradiso*, p. 367.
[60] 'Et inter easdem acies currit quoddam flumen aque cuius principium nemo novit nec eciam finem nisi solus Deus qui fecit ipsum. Est enim aqua illa ita alba et tam clara et resplendens quod nullus eam respicere audet, ne visum timens respiciendo amittat.', in *Il libro della scala di Maometto*, ed. Anna Longoni (Milano: BUR Rizzoli, 2013), pp. 110-111. English translation: 'And amongst those same battle-lines ran a certain river, whose water's origin or end nobody knew, apart from God who created it. That water is in fact so white and clear and shining that nobody dares to look at it, for fear of losing their sight.' (my translation).
[61] Corti, 'Metafisica', p. 296.

discovered how beatitude could be 'the material for great poetry'.[62] He is, after all, a poet, and no mystic.[63]

Fire, in 'Little Gidding', is the ultimate symbol of both the act of purification and the purified soul itself: as in Dante, most spirits in *Inferno* and some in *Purgatorio* are wrapped in flames to expiate their sins (not very different from Eliot's burning moth in *Inventions of the March Hare*'s 'The Burnt Dancer'), whereas the spirits of *Paradiso* are fires burning with their own divine beatitude and joy. At the end of 'Little Gidding"s second section, 'From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit | Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire | Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.' (*CPP* 195, II, lines 91-93): refining fire is, of course, a translation of 'foco che li affina' (*Purgatorio* XXVI, line 148); and I had already shown how dancing was also an expression of light, in the perfection of the souls in Dante's *Paradiso*. Fire is always perceived by Eliot as a double force: either mortally destructive, or spiritual and purifying, hence the specification of 'refining' at line 92. In section IV, 'To be redeemed from fire by fire' (*CPP* 196, IV, line 7) shows again the implications that one can be redeemed from the fire of destruction (or perhaps, one should add, self-destruction, human beings being destined to err and sin), the burning away of human passions, by the fire of purgation.[64] A few lines later, at lines 13-14, 'We only live, only suspire | Consumed by either fire or fire.' (*CPP* 196), Eliot expresses again consumption through either the fire of worldly passions, or that of spiritual searching, suffering by purgation: it is interesting that these should be put ultimately at the same level, almost as if it did not make much difference, which fire will consume us, but that human beings will eventually be consumed, in a life of sighs, by either Hell's fire or Purgatory's.

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[62] Eliot, 'Dante', p. 214.

[63] In 1961, when asked by an interviewer from *The Yorkshire Post*, 'Are you yourself not, perhaps, a failed mystic?', he replied: 'I don't think I am a mystic at all, though I have always been much interested in mysticism. [...] With me, certainly, the poetic impulse is stronger than the mystical impulse. There have been poets whose poetic inspiration depended on some mystical insight, at one time or another, of an unsystematic kind. No doubt Wordsworth and Vaughan and Traherne and even Tennyson, I believe, had had some curious mystical experience. But I can't think of any mystic who was also a fine poet, except St. John of the Cross. A great many people of sensibility have had some more or less mystical experiences. That doesn't make them mystics. To be a mystic is a whole-time job – so is poetry.' in Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, p. 1.

[64] Eugene Webb, *The Dark Dove: The Sacred and Secular in Modern Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), p. 235.

In the letter to Hayward from August 1942, Eliot interestingly mentions the moment when, in *Purgatorio* XXVI, Guido Guinizzelli swims back into the fire, to expiate his sins, immediately followed by Arnaut Daniel: 'Poi, forse per dar luogo altrui secondo | che presso avea, disparve per lo foco, | come per l'acqua il pesce andando al fondo.' (ll. 133-135). Guinizzelli, after speaking to Dante, draws back into its purgatorial, refining fire like a fish diving back into the sea. There are various moments in Dante's *Divine Comedy* where Dante links fire with water, two elements which would otherwise be contradictory. Eliot learns Dante's notion of 'refining fire' well, and applies it to *Four Quartets*; the first, important image of light the reader encounters there is in 'Burnt Norton', and it dutifully shows how Eliot has applied Dante's teaching to his own poetry:

> Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
> And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
> And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
> The surface glittered out of heart of light,
> And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
>
> (*CPP* 172, ll. 34-38)

The name of Burnt Norton, a manor house in Gloucestershire, which as is well known Eliot visited with his American friend Emily Hale in 1934,[65] of course carries in itself a sense of fire, and light: the house derives its name from its being built in the same site as another house which had been burnt down in the seventeenth century.[66] Throughout his poetry, Eliot has shown a fascination with burning, and fire: for example, the poem 'The Burnt Dancer' in *Inventions of the March Hare*, and the hammering repetition of 'burning' in *The Waste Land*; 'Burnt Norton', and *Four Quartets*, is no exception.

While walking in Burnt Norton's gardens, Eliot came across some dry pools: one can still see them now as they must have been at the times of his visit, with sunlight touching the pool's brown edges. What Eliot saw there, though, was something more: his is almost a mystical vision – the absent water in the pools has become pure light. For a moment, Eliot can see what Dante taught him to see, over the years: through Dante, the

[65] Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Abacus, 1985), p. 229.
[66] Ibidem.

careful reader will 'apprehend sensuously the various states and stages of blessedness', together with the 'greatest altitude and greatest depth' of human passion.[67] In his vision of Paradise, Dante often combined water and light imagery: 'Per entro sé l'etterna margarita | ne ricevette, com'acqua recepe | raggio di luce permanendo unita.' (*Pd* II, lines 34-36).[68] Dante manages to penetrate the Moon's body, in the same way a sunbeam is received by water, and becomes one with it: Dante is here vested with the light of God, which allows this miraculous action to take place, at the beginning of Dante's final journey to see God, and thus is considered the first mystical union with God,[69] and his divine creation, the Moon. In Dante's instance, his ascension to the Moon and thus to God has to be 'authorized' by the metaphor of the sunbeam becoming water, in order for the reader to understand that Dante, a solid body, can only penetrate the Moon, another solid body, as a sunbeam which is taken in by water, without losing its quality as a liquid body.[70] In 'Burnt Norton', Eliot does not go quite as far as Dante: his is not a mystical union with God, but it has all the resemblance of a glimpse of mystical vision. When Dante finally does reach the Empyrean in Canto XXX, what he sees is an explosion of light in fluid form:

> e vidi lume in forma di rivera
> fulvido di fulgore, intra due rive
> dipinte di mirabil primavera.
> Di tal fiumana uscian faville vive
> e d'ogne parte si mettien ne' fiori,
> quasi rubin che oro circunscrive;
> poi, come inebrïate da li odori,
> riprofondavan sé nel miro gurge,
> e s'una intrava, un'altra n'uscia fori.
>
> (*Pd* XXX, lines 61-69)[71]

[67] Eliot, 'Dante', p. 226.
[68] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia: Paradiso* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2002), p. 36.
[69] Marco Ariani, *Lux Inaccessibilis: Metafore e Teologia della Luce nel* Paradiso *di Dante* (Roma: Aracne, 2010), p. 129.
[70] Maria Corti, 'Metafisica della luce come poesia', in *Scritti su Cavalcanti e Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 284-300 (p. 290).
[71] Dante, *Paradiso*, pp. 537-538. English translation: 'And I saw a light, in river form, glow tawny betwixt banks painted with marvellous spring. | From out this river issued living sparks, and dropped on every side into the blossoms, like rubies set in gold. | Then as inebriated with the odours they plunged themselves again into the marvellous swirl, and as one entered issued forth another.' in *The Paradiso of Dante Alighieri* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1900), p. 367.

Dante is almost blinded by the vision of the river of light, which does behave as if it were water: the 'faville', the sparks of fire are like waves in fluid light. Some lines later, the river will turn into a lake under Dante's eyes: its fluidity keeps changing, and shaping up new visions. Dante's eyes drink from it, as thirsty for this water-light as a new born baby for their mother's milk (*Pd* XXX, lines 82-90),[72] in a spiritual synaesthesia of great effect.[73] Dante feels as if reborn, becoming a child once again, and having to get used to the new sight he has been given at this final stage of *Paradiso*.[74] Eliot, too, partly goes back to his childhood memories in the first lines of 'Burnt Norton' with recollections of his St. Louis home and even of *Alice in Wonderland*, but he cannot quite reach the splendor of Dante's 'mystical synesthesia'.[75] Eliot's vision of light filling the dry pools like water is inferior to Dante's splendid image: inferior in the strength of the vision – Eliot's mystical experience in the rose garden of Burnt Norton falls short of Dante's, and is only partly experienced: as soon as Eliot perceives the 'water out of sunlight', the clouds' arrival over the garden carries away the light, as well as the vision, which is thus left interrupted. Once more, Eliot shows a particular sensibility for the verbs of 'light': 'The surface glittered out of heart of light' (*CPP* 172, line 37). Not only is the once dry pool filled with light-water, but also the surface shows all its brilliance. The heart of light does not fail to be mentioned by Dante, in Canto XII: Dante is in the sphere of the Sun, where he is watching the spirits standing and dancing as if they were in a crown of lights, and Bonaventura da Bagnoregio addresses Dante, talking 'del cor de l'una de le luci nuove' (Pd XII, line 28).[76] Dante thus defines the deepest concentration of the lights in the crown of spirits as the 'heart of light': Dante cannot recognize Bonaventura as such, as he is one thing with all the other lights; at the

[72] Dante, *Paradiso*, 'Non è fantin che sì subito rua | col volto verso il latte, se si svegli | molto tardato dall'usanza sua, | come fec'io, per far migliori spegli | ancor degli occhi, chinandomi all'onda | che si deriva, perchè vi s'immegli. | E sì come di lei bevve la gronda delle palpebre mie, così mi parve | di sua lunghezza divenuta tonda.' 538-539. English translation: 'Never doth child so sudden rush with face turned to the milk, if he awake far later than his wont, | as then did I, to make yet better mirrors of mine eyes, down bending to the wave which floweth that we may better us. | And no sooner drank of it mine eye-lids' rim than into roundness seemed to change its length.' in *The Paradiso*, p. 369.
[73] Ariani, *Lux Inaccessibilis*, p. 359.
[74] Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's* Comedy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 123.
[75] Ibidem.
[76] Dante, *Paradiso*, p. 213. English translation: 'from out the heart of one of the new lights', in *The Paradiso*, p. 145.

same time, he knows his voice originates from the deepest point of the crown of lights. The wise spirits' voices always come from the *abyssus luminis*, the abyss of light, as they proceed directly from God, the deepest of all lights.[77] It should not be forgotten that the expression 'heart of light' had already been used by Eliot in *The Waste Land* (which was to have been accompanied by the epigraph 'The horror! The horror!' from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, excised by Ezra Pound):

> [...] I could not
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
>
> (*CPP* 62, lines 38-41)

Eliot's lines typically resemble Dante's speechlessness and blindness after being able to look directly at the light of God, in the Empyrean. From the very beginning of *Paradiso* I, he describes how hard it is for him now to relate what he has seen in the Empyrean, to us mortal beings:

> Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende
> fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire
> né sa né può chi di là sù discende;
> perché appressando sé al suo disire,
> nostro intelletto si profonda tanto,
> che dietro la memoria non può ire.
>
> (*Pd* I, lines 4-9)[78]

> Trasumanar significar per verba
> non si poria; però l'essemplo basti
> a cui esperienza grazia serba.
>
> (*Pd*, I, lines 70-72)[79]

[77] Ariani, *Lux Inaccessibilis,* p. 226.
[78] Dante, *Paradiso*, pp. 11-12. English translation: 'In that heaven which most receiveth of his light, have I been; and have seen things which whoso descendeth from up there hath nor knowledge nor power to re-tell; | because, as it draweth nigh to its desire, our intellect sinketh so deep, that memory cannot go back upon the track', in *The Paradiso*, p. 3.
[79] English translation: 'To transcend humanity may not be told in words, wherefore let the instance suffice for him for whom that experience is reserved by Grace.', from T. S. Eliot, 'Dante', *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1932), 199-237 (p. 225-6).

The silence found in the heart of light is thus to be understood in two different ways: it is both the mystic's silence, and the silence of light. To clarify: when Eliot expresses his state of not being able to speak, or see, and writes 'Looking into the heart of light, the silence', he means that, as well as his inability to speak or see, he also cannot hear anything, as the heart of light is infinitely superior compared to his failing human senses; at the same time, the heart of light, like the Paradisal vision experienced by Dante, is a place saturated with silence.[80] The light of God, together with the Divine Grace, is not empty of word, but rather their own intellectual contemplation is already complete and magnificent, and so words are not necessary[81] – they would only cause the pilgrim's distraction from the pure, mystical vision.

Earlier in 'Burnt Norton', Eliot had listed the essential requirements needed to prepare himself in mystical terms:

> The inner freedom from the practical desire,
> The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
> And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
> By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
> *Erhebung* without motion, concentration
> Without elimination, both a new world
> And the old made explicit, understood
> In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
> The resolution of its partial horror.'
>
> (*CPP* 173, lines 24-32)

Like a mystic preparing for a spiritual journey, who has to get rid of all their physical belongings, Eliot describes here how one has to be free from 'practical desire', but also 'action and suffering', and the 'inner and outer compulsion', in order to begin their spiritual voyage to the heart of light: St. John of the Cross described how one had to 'lack appetite of all earthly things', as well as a full understanding of their own faith, before

[80] With the exception of the spirits' occasional songs in *Paradiso* III, VII, X, XIII, and XX.
[81] Inos Biffi, *"Di luce in luce": Teologia e Bellezza nel* Paradiso *di Dante* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2010), p. 58.

starting off on the dark night's path.[82] As well as St. John of the Cross, Eliot's use of the German word 'Erhebung', namely elevation, leads once more to Meister Eckhart:

> Viele Leute halten dafür, daß sie schwierige Dinge anstellen müßten mit äußerem Gebaren; wie fasten, barfuß gehen und solcher Dinge mehr. Man nennt das: Pönitenzen.
>
> Aber die allerbeste Pönitenz – mit der man wirklich erheblich fördert – ist die, daß man sich zu einer vollständigen Abkehr entschließe von allem, was nicht durchaus Gott und göttlich ist an uns und aller Welt; und dafür eine volle und entschiedene Zukehr eintausche zu seinem lieben Gotte in unerschütterlicher Hingabe, derart, daß unser Gedenken und Gelüsten groß sei zu ihm. [...]
>
> Dies ist die wahre Pönitenz. Und die kommt, als in ihrem Gipfel, am vollkommensten an den Tag in dem teuren Leiden unsers Herrn Jesu Christi. [...]
>
> Diese "Pönitenz" ist: schlechthin Erhebung des Gemüts über alles Endliche, ein Aufgehen in Gott.[83]

Penitence according to Meister Eckhart does not require major exterior acts, but rather complete deprivation of all which is not God, in order to get closer to God. Penitence is a lifting up, an elevation from all things earthly, to God. Inge interestingly summarized Eckhart's ascent and conjunction with the Holy in such terms: 'The first is, that the lusts and desires of the flesh have been taken away from me. The second is, that the Divine Light shines and gives me light in all my doings. The third is, that I am daily renewed in

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[82] 'Por tres cosas podemos decir que se llama *noche* este tránsito que hace el alma a la unión de Dios: La primera, por part del término donde el alma sale, porque ha de ir careciendo el apetito de todas las cosas del mundo que poseía, en negación de ellas; la cual negación y carencia es como noche para todos los sentidos del hombre. La segunda, por parte del medio o camino por donde ha de ir el alma a esta unión, lo cual es la fe, que es también oscura para el entendimiento como noche. La tercera, por parte del término adonde va, que es Dios, el cual ni más ni menos es noche oscura para el alma en esta vida. Las cuales tres noches han de pasar por el alma, o por mejor decir, el alma por ellas, para venire a la divina unión con Dios.', in San Juan de la Cruz, 'Subida del monte Carmelo', in *Subida del monte Carmelo y Noche oscura* (Ciudad de México: Porrúa, 1973), p. 6. English translation: 'We can offer three reasons for calling this journey toward union with God a night. The first has to do with the point of departure because individuals must deprive themselves of their appetites for wordly possessions. This denial and privation is like a night for all their senses. The second reason refers to the means or the road along which a person travels to this union. Now this road is faith, and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night. The third reason pertains to the point of arrival, namely God. And God is also a dark night to the soul in this life. These three nights pass through a soul, or better, the soul passes through them in order to reach union with God.', in St. John of the Cross, 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', *Selected Writings*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 63.

[83] Meister Eckhart, 'Traktat 2 – Reden der Unterweisung', *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke. Meister Eckharts Traktate* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963), pp. 520-521. English translation: 'Many people think that they ought to perform great exterior works, such as fasting, going barefoot and such things as that, which are called "penitence". But the true and very best of all penitence, which greatly improves men and raises them to the highest, is for a man to have a great and perfect aversion from everything in himself and in all creatures that is not wholly God and godly, and for him to have a great and perfect and complete conversion to his dear God in a love so unshakeable that his devotion to God and his longing for him be great. [...] This is true penitence, and it comes, particularly and most perfectly, from what our Lord Jesus Christ suffered so fruitfully in his perfect penitence. [...] This penitence is a complete lifting up of the mind away from all things into God', in Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 265.

virtue, grace and holiness.'[84] This mystical journey of self-deprivation, without any need of "physical" motion, has as its ultimate aim the 'white light still and moving': what may seem like a contradiction in itself, actually contains a Dantesque reference. Dante is drawn to the top of Paradise without need of motion, towards the Empyrean, a place of pure, still light; immediately below the Empyrean is the First Mover, the ninth sphere, and at the same time (as its own name shows) it is the first sphere to receive movement from God and the Empyrean, and then to pass it on to the other spheres, which can then start their own revolutions, [85] and it is also the sphere which rules life on Earth.[86] The First Mover is also bright with the light of the sun's rays sent by God, but its main feature is definitely movement – it is light, moving. The First Mover and the Empyrean somehow complete each other, as the one is pure movement and action, and the other one is pure light and contemplation. The Empyrean is described by Beatrice as 'ciel ch'è pura luce: | luce intellettüal, piena d'amore;' (*Pd* XXX, lines 39-40),[87] a sky of pure intellectual light, full of love. The First Mover is perceived as actual 'body', and thus it can move; the Empyrean is outside time and space, and it is perfectly still in its full brightness.[88] In the *Epistle to Cangrande della Scala*, Dante defines the Empyrean as the one heaven which receives more divine light than all the others, precisely due to its stillness and perfection, receiving divine light directly from God, and thus reflection of the Primal Light:[89]

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[84] William Ralph Inge, *Light, Life and Love: Selections from the German Mystics of the Middles Ages* (London: Methuen & Co., 1935), p. 16.

[85] In Dante's own words: 'e così lo detto cielo [il Primo Mobile] ordina col suo movimento la cotidiana revoluzione di tutti li altri, per la quale ogni die tutti quelli ricevono [e mandano] qua giù la vertude di tutte le loro parti.' (II, XIV, 15), in Dante Alighieri, *Il Convivio* (Bologna: Casa Editrice Prof. Riccardo Pàtron, 1966), p. 66. English translation: 'and so doth the said heaven regulate the same, little of their virtue would come down here, and little sight of them.' in *The Convivio of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1924), p. 128.

[86] 'E da vero non sarebbe qua giù generazione nè vita d'animale o di piante: notte non sarebbe nè die, nè settimana nè mese nè anno, ma tutto l'universo sarebbe disordinato, e lo movimento de li altri sarebbe indarno.' (II, XIV, 17), ibidem. English translation: 'Of a truth there would be no generation here below, nor life of animal nor plant; night would not be, nor day, nor week, nor month, nor year; but all the universe would be disordered, and the movement of the other heavens would be in vain.', in *The Convivio*, p. 128.

[87] Dante, *Paradiso*, pp. 535-536. English translation: 'heaven which is pure light, | light intellectual full of love', in *The Paradiso*, p. 365.

[88] Giovanni Reggio, 'Commento al Canto XXX', in Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia: Paradiso* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2002), p. 536.

[89] Mazzeo, *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's* Comedy, p. 99.

Illud igitur Cœlum, quod a nullo movetur, in se et in qualibet sui parte habet quidquid potest modo perfecto, eo quod motu non indiget ad suam perfectionem. Et cum omnis perfectio sit radius Primi, quod est in summo gradu perfectionis; manifestum est, quod Cœlum primum magis recipit de luce Primi, qui est Deus.[90]

Another mention to the Empyrean and its light can be found again in 'Burnt Norton', IV, lines 8-10: 'After the kingfisher's wing | Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still | At the still point of the turning world.' (*CPP* 175). The Empyrean is the still point, which does not move in the midst of all the movements of the other spheres, and the Earth: the world keeps turning at God's will and at the First Mover's command, but it is the Empyrean which holds everything together. In Burnt Norton's garden, on a summer day, Eliot gets closer to the Dantean vision of the world, and teaches the reader that there is no stillness without movement, and no movement without stillness, in the bright light of God.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter is intentionally arranged thematically, from darkness to the 'heart of light', in order to reflect Eliot's poetic imagery moving from one atmosphere of infernal, urban dark to one of divine blinding light. *Four Quartets* is not a pure explosion of lights, like Dante's *Paradiso*: the dark of World War II haunts Eliot's own mystical experiences, but, following Dante, Eliot attempts to reach the 'world of light', the ineffable 'heart of light', which he can only get a glimpse of. This last chapter is aimed to make my thesis come full circle: Eliot, strongly influenced by Dante's use of light and dark imagery from his early readings of the *Commedia*, consistently employs light and dark to recreate a specific kind of

[90] Dante Alighieri, Epistula X.xxvi (ll. 359-365), *Le opere latine di Dante Allighieri*, ed Giambattista Giuliani (Florence: Le Monnier, 1878), vol. 2, pp. 56-58. English translation: 'That heaven, therefore, which is not moved by anything has in itself and in its every part, in perfect fashion, everything which it is capable of having; so that it needs no motion for its perfecting. And since all perfection is a ray of the primal perfection, which realises the highest degree of perfection, it is manifest that the first heaven receives most of the light of the primal being, which is God.' in *A Translation of the Latin Works of Dante Alighieri* (London: Dent, 1904), p. 358.

atmosphere even in his late poetry. In *Four Quartets* this is made even richer in its meaning by the influence of Dante's, St. John of the Cross', and Meister Eckhart's mystical thought. In section 5.1, I have argued how Eliot's 'dark' in 'Burnt Norton' mirrors his need for a spiritual darkness, after the mystics, which eventually reflects the actually material darkness of 'East Coker' and 'The Dry Salvages', as experienced by the poet who was living in London during the blackout of World War II. Eliot employs dark in both metaphorical and literal terms, with the example of the 'dark' descending on all men of letters and politicians during World War II, as well as with his own personal quest for a mystical dark, 'a movement of darkness on darkness' to change the scenery of his own soul. Section 5.2 aims to demonstrate the centrality of light and dark imagery for Eliot, drawing on various unpublished material from the 1940s and 1950s, by way of a discussion on English terminology for the degree of light morning twilight. Looking at the process Eliot had to go through to find the most fitting word for the kind of light imagery he wanted to convey in 'Little Gidding' also provides an insight on the way he forged his poetry with the reader in mind, as well as consideration for his previous poems so that he could create a pattern of poetic consistency. In section 5.3, I have focussed mainly on various degrees of light present in 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker' and 'Little Gidding', and how they reflect in particular *Paradiso*'s influence on Eliot's mystical perceptions, such as the bright spirits' dance, liquid visions of light, the 'heart of light' and the 'white light still and moving' of the Empyrean.

Eliot was no mystic, but he looks toward the writings of mystics as a way to approach God, in order to attain emotional and spiritual stability. Dividing this chapter into three sections reiterates the importance of Eliot's attempt to pursue mystical life in his poetry: Eliot follows, almost like Dante, a pattern of *scala perfectionis*[91] which is represented by his choice of light and dark imagery. Darkness in *Four Quartets* has come to represent 'purgative life',[92] the need for self-disciplined purgation through darkness in order to see the light of God; the antelucan moment before dawn the 'illuminative life',[93]

[91] Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 10.
[92] Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 11.
[93] Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 12.

concentrating upon God before the arrival of God's brightest light; and finally, the state of 'perfect contemplation', the goal of mystical life, which Eliot does not, and indeed cannot, attain, with the exception of part-experienced mystical moments (such as that of the 'heart of light' in 'Burnt Norton'), mainly under the influence of *Paradiso*'s imagery. After all, Eliot comments in his 1929 essay on Dante that 'the modern world seems capable only of the *low dream*':[94] the time when one could witness the '*high dream*',[95] and experience, or at least imagine, visions like that of Dante's *Commedia*, is too far from the twentieth-century perspective, and modern man can only catch glimpses of it, if 'pure and ready to mount to the stars' (*Purgatorio* XXXIII, line 145).

[94] Eliot, 'Dante', p. 223.
[95] Ibidem.

Conclusion

FARE FORWARD

'Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers.'
Four Quartets, 'The Dry Salvages', III, lines 44-45

In a letter dated 3rd November 1941, Eliot discusses with his friend John Hayward his visit to St. Chad's Theological College at Durham to give a talk to the undergraduates there. After a long and exhausting journey, he eventually reaches the college two hours later than his expected arrival time. In his letter, Eliot lingers to mention two interesting details: having arrived late at night, because of World War II's "blackout", Durham is in complete darkness, and Eliot spots St. Chad's College Principal waving an electric torch just outside the college's main entrance, so that Eliot's driver could find them more easily. Eliot also remarks how the principal really should not have done so, as his action was quite risky, and could have shown the college's position in the dark to the enemies.[1] The latter interesting detail of this letter is Eliot again pausing to underline how he felt like a nocturnal animal being thrown from the dark of the street into St. Chad's College's lit indoors, with his eyes having to adjust to the light, quickly.[2] This, of course, would have happened to anyone, in that darkness, but Eliot was particularly sensitive to light and dark. What is an electric torch in the midst of a small, blackened city? Would it have really put the whole of Durham in danger? Perhaps, and perhaps not: yet, Eliot felt the importance of registering this detail in his letter. St. Chad's Principal obviously could not have put himself, and the whole college at risk of a night attack, and also Eliot's description in the letter to Hayward tells us something about his own particular perception of light and dark, interestingly coincidentally at the time when Eliot was writing *Four Quartets*, thus somehow charging what could have been perceived as a 'normal' thing for the time into something more symbolical.

[1] Letter to John Hayward, 3rd November 1941, HB/L/12/1/18, King's College Archive, Cambridge.
[2] Ibidem.

Adjusting one's eyes when entering a lit building from pitch darkness, and the image of the college principal holding an electric torch to show Eliot and his driver the way, lead us back to the image of the medieval Irish monk '[t]urning darkness into light', mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis. The polarity of light and dark haunted him throughout his life. Eliot's conversion and change of nationality do not mark a watershed moment in his life as well as in his poetic career, but rather the argument of this thesis is that Eliot's continuity in building up a poetic pattern of consistent imagery, within his theatrical pieces, and in his poetry, is reaffirmed consequently to these two important events in Eliot's life. Even when one looks at T. S. Eliot's juvenilia, it is possible to find there a prefiguration of Eliot's predilection for light: the magazine 'Fireside' he "founded" when he was 11 years old, for example, is filled with references which the reader of Eliot's poetry will encounter again and again in his works. As for the light and dark imagery, it is striking that the magazine itself should have been named by Eliot as 'Fireside', with Eliot's drawings of a fire and a fireplace for each of the magazine numbers, and various references to dark nights in the poems he 'self-published' on 'Fireside'.[3] This exemplifies Eliot's lifelong search and appreciation for images representing light, showing how light had been exerting a powerful influence on Eliot's imagination from a very early age, and would continue to shape his poetic compositions throughout his career.

If light and dark imagery is rather frequently adopted in the literatures of all countries and languages, as well as a common system of metaphors in most religions, the study of light and dark images in Eliot is often limited to his post-conversion poetry, as discussed earlier, and is limited in its understanding of Eliot's use of light and dark imagery by ignoring a direct comparison with his earlier poems. This thesis thus seeks to fill a gap in the scholarly research on T. S. Eliot, as well as reaffirm the importance of reading poetry aesthetically "for poetry's sake". 'Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood',[4] said Eliot in his 1929 essay on Dante, and his poetry communicates at its best through images. In Helen Vendler's words, '[t]he senses and the imagination together furnish rhythms for the poet. The rhythms of the poet translate themselves back,

[3] 'Fireside', T. S. Eliot Juvenilia 1899, MS Am 1635.5, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[4] Eliot, 'Dante', *Selected Essays*, p. 200.

in the mind of the reader, into the senses and the imagination.'[5] Eliot's poetry speaks to the reader through the power of its imagery: what he saw, we are made to see again; and this is the only way we can actually and genuinely understand his poetry.

[5] Helen Vendler, *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 1.

Appendix

An Attempt at a Visual Representation:

TRATTANDO L'OMBRE COME COSA SALDA

In the famous episode of *Purgatorio* XXI, quoted throughout this thesis, Statius tries to embrace Virgil, forgetting for a moment about their lack of physicality, and shadows are thus treated like 'something solid' — something real. Certain concepts are more easily understood when they can be seen, and somewhat perceived as 'more real': most students will grasp concepts more easily and more quickly when they can visualize them. This appendix is thus meant to support the argument of this image-oriented thesis with the visual aid of some graphs, which will show the number of occurrences of light and dark terms. This is particularly relevant to this thesis, since, after having confronted various types of imagery and allusions in Eliot's poetry, it will provide the reader of this thesis with a proper visualization of the numbers, and quantities, of light and dark occurrences. If, on the one hand, this thesis represents, in its own right, a qualitative study of Eliot's complex use of allusion while representing light and dark in his poetry, this appendix will offer a more quantitative approach to this thesis, supporting its argumentations. A recent work on the Digital Humanities has argued:

> Currently, visualization in the humanities uses techniques drawn largely from the social sciences, business applications, and the natural sciences, all of which require self-conscious criticality in their adoption. Such visual displays, including graphs and charts, may present themselves as objective or even unmediated view of reality, rather than as rhetorical constructs.[1]

[1] Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, and Jeffrey Schnapp, *Digital Humanities* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), p. 42.

By looking at these graphs it is possible to immediately get an idea of how Eliot's use of light and dark imagery is persistent from his very early poetry and continues, though in changing degrees, and shifting terminology, up to *Four Quartets*. Collecting Eliot's poetic 'data' of light and dark images and lexis, helps thus express 'quantifiable or quantitative information in graphic form'.[2] The four graphs produced cover a slightly different list of words related to light and dark in the four main Eliot poetry collections. *Ash-Wednesday*, and the drama pieces, have been excluded from this visual analysis, as focussing on the four main collections of Eliot's poetry proves a more interesting and fruitful comparison in the graphs.

The first graph shows the occurrences of light and dark words in Eliot's posthumously published collection of poetry, *Inventions of the March Hare*, where it is possible to notice a certain fragmentation of the light and dark terminology. It is important to see how the polarity of dark and light in Eliot's early poetry is not only expressed by the two words alone, but rather by a constellation of terms, which make the reader better visualize different degrees of light and darkness: colours (yellow, grey, blue, green, pink/rose, purple/lilac/violet, gold, red, white, brown, silver, black), atmospheric agents (fog/mist, smoke, rain), terms denoting specific times of the day (sunset, dawn, morning, day, afternoon, dusk, evening, night, midnight, moon, star, sun/sunlight), as well as such words as 'shadow', 'lamplight', 'fire/flames', and clearly 'light' and 'dark'. 'Light' and 'dark' have nearly the same amount of occurrences, and yet an important number of references remains scattered amongst all the various terms quoted above, thus making the light and dark polarity in *Inventions of the March Hare* appear perhaps less strikingly visible (unlike *Four Quartets*), but decidedly more subtly present, and thus pervasive, throughout the collection. The fragmentation of light and dark in

[2] Burdick (et alia), *Digital Humanities*, p. 43.

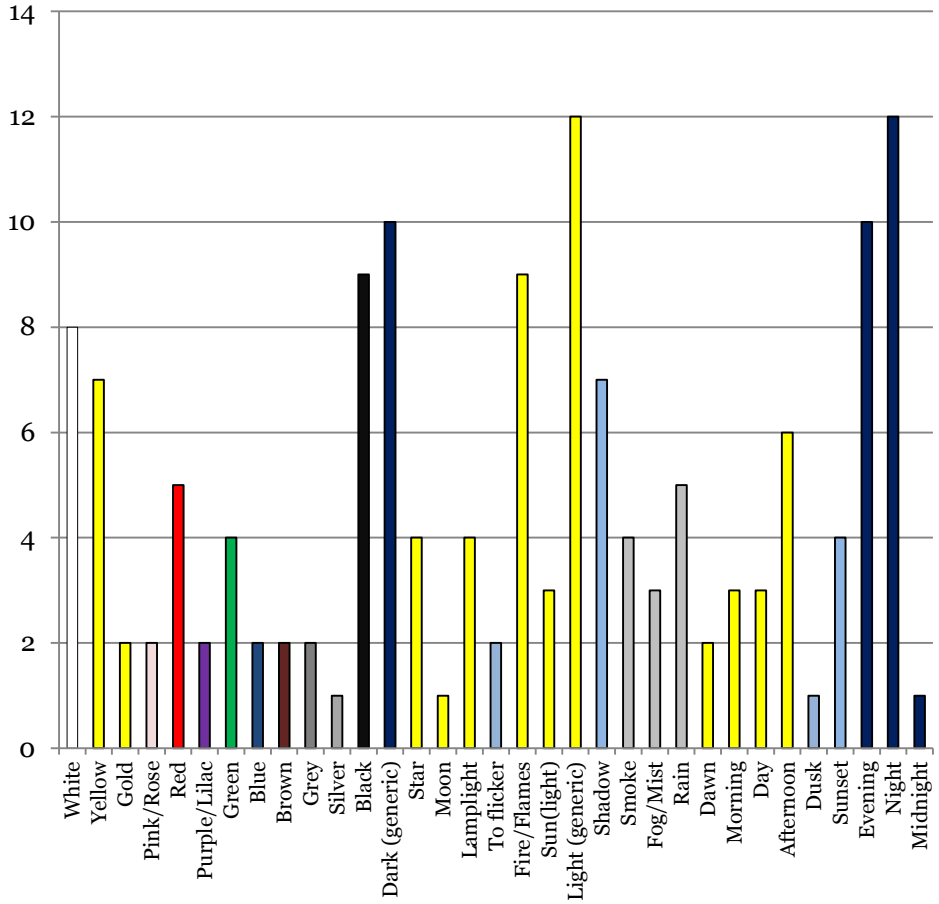
Inventions of the March Hare starts a pattern which will gradually change and alter itself during Eliot's career, moving towards a more apparent polarity of simple 'light' and 'dark' terms.

In *Prufrock and Other Observations* it is possible to observe how the terms are again still affected by a certain fragmentation, but some colours disappear from the scene (blue, purple/lilac, gold, silver), as well as the terms 'rain' and 'dawn', and rather artificial sources of light such as '(street)lamp', 'lantern', and 'candle', together with the word 'shutter(s)'. 'Shutter' itself is an interesting word, because it does not convey any particular image of light or dark, but it is always used by Eliot in conjunction with light: as discussed in chapter two, shutters symbolize the physical obstacle between the indoor and outdoor, and the boundary between the mind's rationality and the body's desires. Besides, the addition of more artificial sources of light is also fundamental for a better understanding of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, helping recreate a specific urban atmosphere and thus rendering the light and dark imagery quite different in tones from that of the other Eliot poetry collections.

The Waste Land sees an important triumph of the words 'light', 'fire', and 'flames', together with the addition of the equally important adjective 'violet', identified earlier in chapter three with twilight, or sunset. The usage of certain colours drops in *The Waste Land*, and so does that of most artificial light sources, with the exception of candles and flames (especially if one thinks of the boudoir scene at the beginning of 'A Game of Chess'), and also the term 'dark' itself is less used here. *The Waste Land* is gradually preparing the scene for light and dark imagery in *Four Quartets*, whose top occurrences are precisely 'fire/flames', 'dark', 'light', and 'sun(light)'. Most of the other terms which are present in Eliot's earlier poetry are employed in smaller measure and the contrast between the generic terms of 'light' and 'dark' becomes literally more evident.

These graphs are an attempt at seeing how the understanding of poetry can be improved, and furthered, through the use of visual aids. Graphs in this case are not a meaningless list of numbers and words, but rather acquire the value of supplementing what has been already argued throughout this thesis.

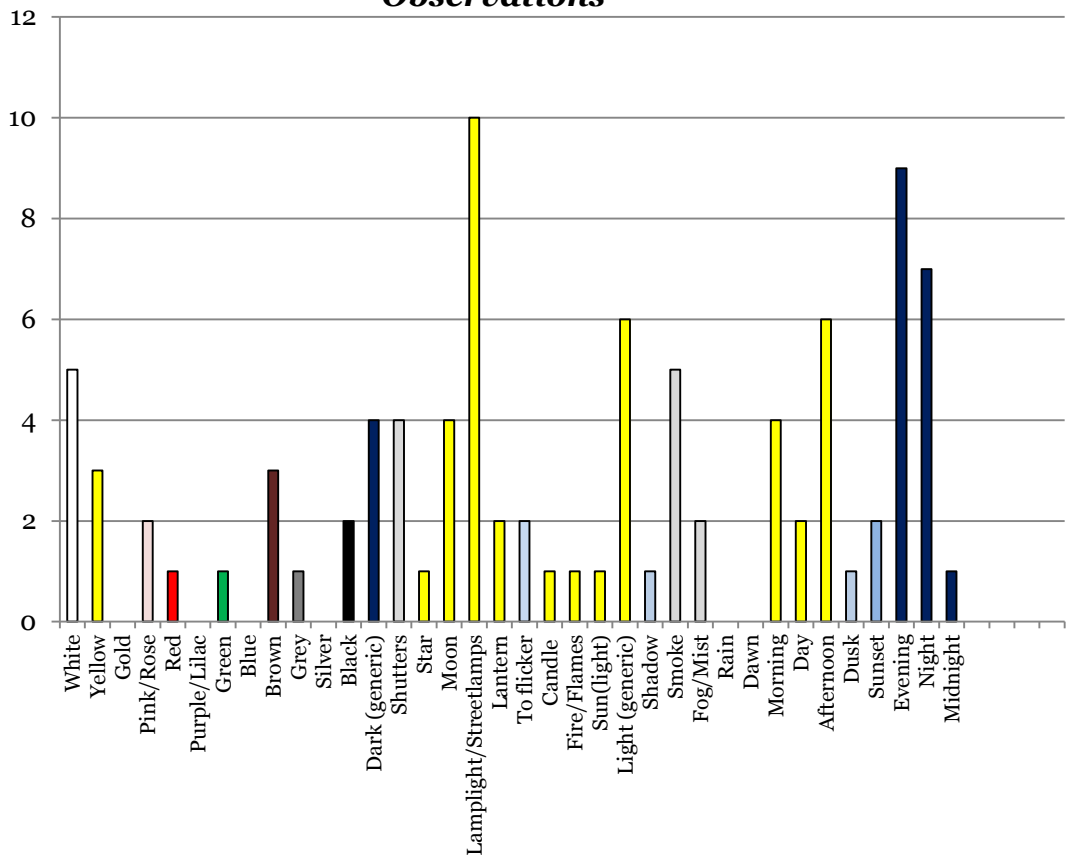
Light and Dark occurrences in *Inventions of the March Hare*



Terms	Values
White	8
Yellow	7
Gold	2
Pink/Rose	2
Red	5
Purple/Lilac	2
Green	4
Blue	2
Brown	2
Grey	2
Silver	1
Black	9
Dark (generic)	10
Star	4
Moon	1
Lamplight	4

To flicker	2
Fire/Flames	9
Sun(light)	3
Light (generic)	12
Shadow	7
Smoke	4
Fog/Mist	3
Rain	5
Dawn	2
Morning	3
Day	3
Afternoon	6
Dusk	1
Sunset	4
Evening	10
Night	12
Midnight	1

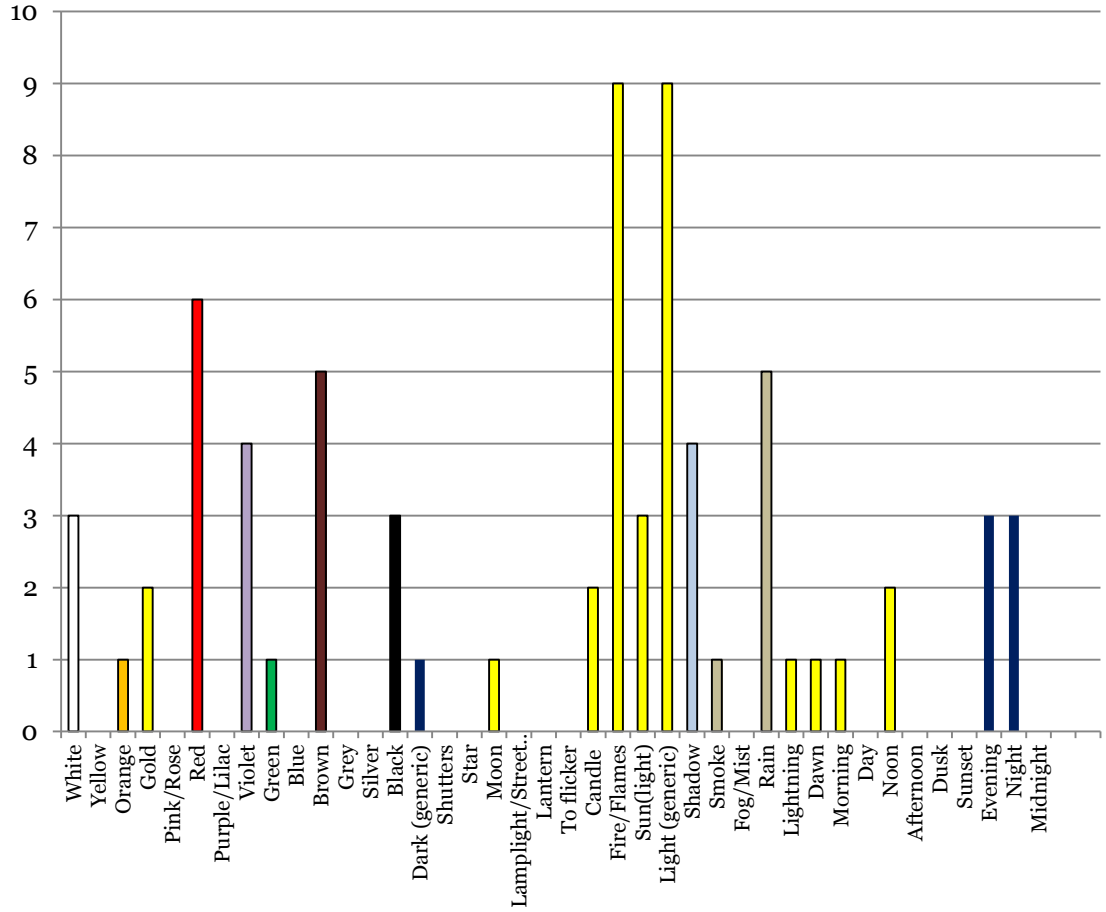
Light and Dark occurrences in *Prufrock and Other Observations*



Terms	Values
White	5
Yellow	3
Gold	0
Pink/Rose	2
Red	1
Purple/Lilac	0
Green	1
Blue	0
Brown	3
Grey	1
Silver	0
Black	2
Dark (generic)	4
Shutters	4
Star	1
Moon	4
Lamplight/Streetlamps	10
Lantern	2

To flicker	2
Candle	1
Fire/Flames	1
Sun(light)	1
Light (generic)	6
Shadow	1
Smoke	5
Fog/Mist	2
Rain	0
Dawn	0
Morning	4
Day	2
Afternoon	6
Dusk	1
Sunset	2
Evening	9
Night	7
Midnight	1

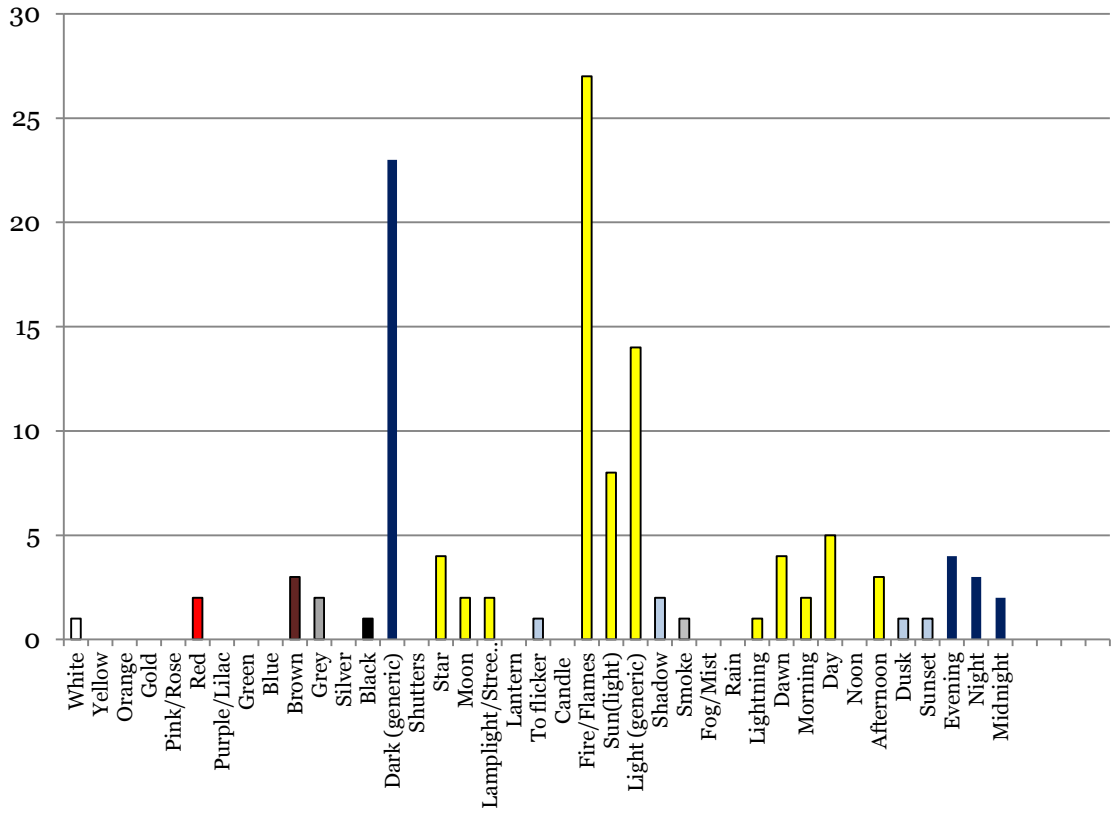
Light and Dark occurrences in *The Waste Land*



Terms	Values
White	3
Yellow	0
Orange	1
Gold	2
Pink/Rose	0
Red	6
Purple/Lilac	0
Violet	4
Green	1
Blue	0
Brown	5
Grey	0
Silver	0
Black	3
Dark (generic)	1
Shutters	0
Star	0
Moon	1
Lamplight/Streetlamps	0
Lantern	0

To flicker	0
Candle	2
Fire/Flames	9
Sun(light)	3
Light (generic)	9
Shadow	4
Smoke	1
Fog/Mist	0
Rain	5
Lightning	1
Dawn	1
Morning	1
Day	0
Noon	2
Afternoon	0
Dusk	0
Sunset	0
Evening	3
Night	3
Midnight	0

Light and Dark occurrences in *Four Quartets*



Terms	Values
White	1
Yellow	0
Orange	0
Gold	0
Pink/Rose	0
Red	2
Purple/Lilac	0
Green	0
Blue	0
Brown	3
Grey	2
Silver	0
Black	1
Dark (generic)	23
Shutters	0
Star	4
Moon	2
Lamplight/Streetlamps	2
Lantern	0

To flicker	1
Candle	0
Fire/Flames	27
Sun(light)	8
Light (generic)	14
Shadow	2
Smoke	1
Fog/Mist	0
Rain	0
Lightning	1
Dawn	4
Morning	2
Day	5
Noon	0
Afternoon	3
Dusk	1
Sunset	1
Evening	4
Night	3
Midnight	2

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