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# T.S. ELIOT AND THE MUSIC OF POETRY

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## ABSTRACT

### T.S. ELIOT AND THE MUSIC OF POETRY

Ph.D Degree, University of Durham, 1999

This thesis is a study of T.S. Eliot's poetry in the light of the different ways in which it can be considered 'musical'. Two concerns central to the thesis are: (1) Eliot's enduring interest in the musical quality of poetry; (2) the critical usefulness and viability of drawing analogies between his poetry and music. The thesis considers three important related topics: (1) Eliot's preoccupation with language, its inevitability and its inadequacy; (2) the figure of the seeker in his poetry; (3) his interest in mysticism.

The thesis begins by exploring affinities between music and literature in the context of Wagner's ideal of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' and its influence on French Symbolist writers. It goes on to trace the development of T.S. Eliot's poetic style as influenced by the French Symbolist poets, by Dante and the mediaeval mystics, and by the music of Wagner, Stravinsky and other composers.

Throughout, Eliot's poetry presents variations on the theme of detachment and involvement in relation to the figure of the seeker: consciousness is most engaged and challenged when it journeys. In the early poetry, music serves to emphasize failed relationships: the closer the physical proximity between protagonists, the greater the psychological distance. From The Waste Land on, Eliot makes use of myth and leitmotif to portray consciousness in the role of seeker urged on by the need for meaning. After his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, Eliot's characters embark on a journey inward, where music, now "unheard", no longer signifies neurosis and despair, but becomes the only language for the ineffable.

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*In memory of my father  
who, together with my mother,  
first put a song in my heart*

## NOTE ON THE TEXT

For references to T.S. Eliot's poems, I have used Collected Poems: 1909-1962, (London: Faber & Faber, 1963). For references to his plays I have used Murder in the Cathedral. 1935. (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), The Confidential Clerk. 1954. (London: Faber & Faber, 1991) and The Family Reunion. 1939. (London: Faber & Faber, 1991).

I have restricted the translations from French to the longer verse and prose sections. For the translations of Baudelaire's, Laforgue's and Mallarmé's poetry I used the following editions: (1) Les Fleurs du Mal, a bilingual edition trans. by J. Sanders (Paris: Gallimard, 1983); (2) P. Dale, Poems of Jules Laforgue, trans. with an introduction and critical notes (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1986); (3) B. Cook, The Prose Poems of Stéphane Mallarmé, a critical edition with notes (London: Viking Press, 1971). Translations of the longer prose sections were kindly made by Mr Alfred Falzon and Mr Frank Muscat.

Throughout the whole text I have used the MHRA Style Book (London: Humanities Association 1991) for details of punctuation, references in footnotes and bibliography.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ACM</i>	<i>Aligarh Critical Miscellany</i>
<i>AL</i>	<i>American Literature</i>
<i>ANQ</i>	<i>American Notes and Queries</i>
<i>AQ</i>	<i>Arizona Quarterly</i>
<i>AUMLA</i>	<i>Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association</i>
<i>BRMMLA</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association</i>
<i>BuR</i>	<i>Bucknell Review</i>
<i>Clit</i>	<i>College Literature</i>
<i>CompLit/LitComp</i>	<i>A Canadian Journal of Comparative Literature</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Critical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Centennial Review</i>
<i>CritQ</i>	<i>Critical Quarterly</i>
<i>Des</i>	<i>Descant</i>
<i>DUJ</i>	<i>Durham University Journal</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Essays in Criticism</i>
<i>EL</i>	<i>Essays in Literature</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>Journal of English Literary History</i>
<i>ELN</i>	<i>English Language Notes</i>
<i>Eng</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>EngR</i>	<i>English Review</i>
<i>EngS</i>	<i>English Studies</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>English Record</i>
<i>Exp</i>	<i>Explicator</i>
<i>Flett</i>	<i>La Fiera Litteraria</i>
<i>ForumH</i>	<i>Forum (Houston)</i>
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Humanities Association Review</i>
<i>JML</i>	<i>Journal of Modern Literature</i>
<i>LC</i>	<i>Library Chronicle</i>
<i>MichA</i>	<i>Michigan Academician</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>NEW</i>	<i>New English Weekly</i>
<i>NQ</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>Ren</i>	<i>Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature</i>
<i>RLC</i>	<i>Revue de littérature comparée</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>RSWSU</i>	<i>Research Studies of Washington State University</i>
<i>SAB</i>	<i>South Atlantic Bulletin</i>
<i>SAP</i>	<i>Studia Anglica Posnaniensia</i>
<i>SewRev</i>	<i>Sewanee Review</i>
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>

UES  
URKC  
UTQ  
WWR  
YER

*Unisa English Studies*  
*University Review (Kansas City)*  
*University of Toronto Quarterly*  
*Walt Whitman Review*  
*Yeats Eliot Review*

## INTRODUCTION

*Musick and Poetry have ever been acknowledg'd Sisters.  
As Poetry is the harmony of Words, so Musick is that of Notes...  
sure they are most excellent when they are join'd.*<sup>1</sup>

*Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heav'ns joy,  
Sphere-born harmonious Sisters, Voice, and Vers,  
Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ  
Dead things with inbreath'd sense able to pierce.*<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation examines Eliot's poetry in the light of his ideas about music, as these were inherited from and influenced by French Symbolist philosophy and aesthetics. This Symbolist inheritance brings into focus: (1) Eliot's view that poetry can approach the condition of music; (2) His preoccupation with myth and ritual, a preoccupation which was reinforced by the poetry of Baudelaire as well as the music of Wagner and Stravinsky; (3) His interest in the paradox inherent in the "unheard music", an idea inherited from Mallarmé and coinciding with the influence on Eliot of the Christian mystics, particularly St John of the Cross.

### *Perspectives on Literature and Music in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries*

The poet hears a song that assumes epiphanic power precisely because it is unintelligible, and often at the very point where it passes the threshold of intelligibility.... The poet's imagination is initially aroused by the impulse to insert his own words in the linguistic gap opened by the song. Once in place, these words gradually dissolve like the song's own, leaving the poet mute and transfixed usually in a posture of intenser listening.<sup>3</sup>

Just as certain composers lay bare the skeleton of late nineteenth-century's formal sense by simplifying and rigidifying the polarizations in harmony and rhythm,<sup>4</sup> so certain authors and works render the polarizations of literary form in a purified and, therefore, unmistakable way. Bleak House experiments with juxtaposing a pitiless, objective, foggy narrator with a romantic and sunny one and moves towards

<sup>1</sup> H. Purcell, in 1691, quoted by A. Ellis ed., in The Cambridge Cultural History, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), I, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> J. Milton, 'At A Solemn Musick', in The Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. by H. Darbishire, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), II, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> L. Kramer, Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After (London & Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> So, in connection with the "antinomy that everything should be at once understandable and striking", Theodore Adorno writes even of so complex a work as *Tristan und Isolde* that "[t]he socially conformist demand of comprehensibility and the artistic one of plasticity split asunder". See, T. Adorno, 'Die musikalischen Monographien', in Gesammelte Schriften, trans. by M. Brown, 20 vols (New York: Continuum, 1989), XIII, p. 51.



reconciling the two at the end. Stevenson's best-known work pits the real scientist Dr Jekyll against the nightmarish romantic villain Mr Hyde. Also, detective stories in the mould of Conan Doyle regularly fall into two main parts, namely, the recital of the actual situation in the present tense with all the scattered clues of the crime, and the recital in the past tense of the romantic and exciting history of the criminal and the crime.

At the end of the nineteenth century these polarized forms become formulaic. The artist who preserves the traditional forms becomes an artisan, often a miniaturist, like many of the Nationalist composers or the numerous superb short story writers who emerge from almost every country except England. The grand formal problems all but vanish, and hitherto subordinate resources of nuance and tone colour are featured, such as piquant chords and dialect words. Increasing formal ease and virtuosity mean that a whole piece may be generated out of a kernel phrase, as in the famous Maupassant story about a string of diamonds, "rivière de diamants", that is lost in the river, making martyrs out of the poor bourgeois of the nearby Rue des Martyrs.<sup>5</sup>

When formal coherence of the old sort is abandoned in favour of such fragmentary evocation, larger structures become problematic, as most obviously in the episodic works of Bruckner, Mahler and Zolá. In longer works, one solution - particularly associated with Wagner and his followers and, in literature, with Flaubert - was to sustain interest by refusing to come to rest: perpetual unresolved dissonance, a middle with very little end. This is signally the mode of James's The Turn of the Screw, which seeks to turn the screws of intensity higher in each of its twenty four chapters so as to maintain a constant frenzy of excitement, so different from the carefully paced, intermittent horror of romantic gothic. Alternatively, by the end of the century, impressionists like Debussy and Chekhov preserve compositional depth by melancholy or ironic reminiscences of traditional motifs and forms, the sunken cathedrals of the past.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, G. de Maupassant, Romans, ed. by L. Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> This brings to mind all the unsent letters, untold stories, unnoticed crimes and cruelties of Chekhov's early tales.

Creators like these can now construct larger forms only as a patchwork based on recognizable motifs but lacking a prevailing tonality. Chekhov's first longer story, 'The Steppe', is a degenerate picaresque. The indifferent plain through which Egorushka passes decomposes into contrasting story types, the idealized princess Dranitskaya and the mysterious Varlamov, but Egorushka remains equally untouched by the stability of the one and the excitement of the other: "Egorushka felt that, with these people disappeared for him, eternally, like smoke, all that had been lived through until now".<sup>7</sup> Such halting, uncertain cadences mark endings that are not a culmination, but dissolution. Debussy's composites are games, *Jeux*; for the gloomier Chekhov they constitute 'A Dull Story', but for both, the climactic, structuring elements of traditional forms remain but a hollow shell. The bang of excitement may resound, as it does, almost at the end of 'A Dull Story', "[t]here are terrible nights with thunder, lightning, rain, and wind, that among the people are called sparrow's nights. One such sparrow's night occurred in my personal life..."<sup>8</sup> - but the end is, at best, a gloomy thud. The organization, though not the texture, of 'A Dull Story' resembles that of Debussy's later Cello Sonata, where an excited climax of plucked dominant seventh chords on G, instead of resolving, is followed by a return of an earlier melancholy, plaintive recitative, and then by a series of D Minor chords, loud, yet ending low and abruptly muffled, with the marking 'secco'. Counterpoint and melodic line come unglued, leaving structures that are heaps of fragments not well shored up against ruin.

In the absence of an audible internal structure, music, for a short period, predominantly seeks its coherence from some external occasion. Ballet, programme music, and song become the norm. Out of the heart of darkness there must emerge a voice, without which pure form retains only the briefest sustaining power. It is not by chance that Kurtz is the name of the mysterious central figure in the story that climaxes with the anguished cry "A voice! A voice!" Or else, music seeks a symbolic meaning, a fugitive vision that lies beyond words, the song of the

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<sup>7</sup> A. Chekhov, *Plays*, trans. & ed. by P. Andersen, 2 vols (London: Penguin, 1979), I, p. 334. For a more extended analysis, see the essay by M. Finke, 'Chekhov's "Steppe": A Metapoetic Journey', in *Russian Language Journal*, 39 (1985), 79-120, where the "irreconcilable, dis-harmonious directions" of the anticlimactic plot (p. 91) are shown to be resolved in a "drama of motifs" and a musicality of structure (pp. 107-12) in which "words more than characters are the story's actors" (p. 102).

<sup>8</sup> *Plays*, p. 420.

nightingale perhaps. In a few published programme notes to his *Orchesterlieder*, Schoenberg speaks of this striving. Conventional programme music, he says, had attempted to bring the represented object directly into the music; in semiotic terms, it had identified the musical sign with that which the verbal programme signified. However, Schoenberg envisioned a new music that could function as an enactment, not as a designation, and that would ultimately circumvent or surpass language in its meaningfulness:

If an actor will speak in a different cadence of a rough sea and of a calm one, my music will be no different: the music will not become agitated like the sea, but *differently*, like the actor.... A word describes the object and its condition;... music ... *carries* the thing and its essence *up before the eye of the mind*.<sup>9</sup>

A new semiotics is born that overcomes the disjunction between signifier and signified; the nature of meaning changes. To illustrate the transition on the literary side, part of the well-known 'Letter to Lord Chandos' of 1902 by Hugo von Hofmannsthal would seem to be appropriate here:

Everything fell apart into pieces around me; they coagulated into eyes which stared at me and into which I had to stare back: they are whirlpools into which I gaze in giddiness, which revolve incessantly and through which one reaches the void.... Since then I have led a life which you, I fear, can hardly grasp, so spiritlessly, so thoughtlessly does it flow by.... A watering-can, a harrow left in the field, a dog in the sun.... It is all a kind of feverish thought, but a thought in a material which is more immediate, more fluid, more glowing than words.<sup>10</sup>

Literature was striving towards the condition of music just as music was striving towards the condition of language, and these apparently opposite strivings arose out of a single impulse, to substitute embodiment for denotation in order to restore expressivity where formal control had been lost.<sup>11</sup>

The new style that emerged from these polarized forms at the end of the nineteenth century is thus a fragmentation of form. Those who outstrip nineteenth-century form arrive at the incoherence of what might well be called atonal literature. An example of what Schoenberg was to call the emancipation of dissonance would be Mallarmé's

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<sup>9</sup> A. Schoenberg, *Style and Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 290. cf. V. Jankélévitch, *La Vie et la mort dans la musique de Debussy* (Neuchâtel: Flammarion, 1968), p. 93, "[t]he voice of things is captured as closely as possible, and by so immediate an intuition that the human voice, that human presence, that the human person are finally effaced". This book also contains a sensitive appreciation of Debussy's temporality.

<sup>10</sup> H. von Hofmannsthal, *Complete Works*, ed. and trans. by R. Hirsch, 6 vols (Frankfurt am Main, '[n. pub.]', 1957), II, pp. 342-3, 347-8.

<sup>11</sup> There is a fine account of this development in both linguistics and poetics (Mallarmé, Valéry, Sartre and Jakobson) in G. Genette, *Mimologiques* (Paris: Nizet, 1976), pp. 257-314. See especially, pp. 268-88 on the musicalization of language and pp. 298-9 on "signification [which] has fallen into immanence [and] become a thing".

'Un Coup de dés', and this randomized flotsam of interwoven motifs is surely one type of literary atonality.<sup>12</sup> The ecstatic semiotics of atonality eventually leads to a style where meaning is felt to arise from outside the local phrase. Musical expression no longer seems natural and immediate. Stravinsky, Bartók and even, to a considerable extent, the greatest of the traditionalists, such as Ravel and Prokofiev, are less schematic in their procedures, but fundamentally they share the same formal sensibility. The manner of proceeding common to all these composers derives from the breakdown of the polarizations that had structured music for the preceding one hundred and fifty years. In his essay 'Composition with Twelve Tones', Schoenberg writes that "in this space ... there is no absolute down, no right or left, no forward or backward".<sup>13</sup> Thus, for instance, dissonance is no longer expressively marked with respect to consonance. Melody loses its primacy through being fragmented in early twelve-tone music, demonized by pulsing ostinatos in Bartók, skeletonized by rhythmic displacement and pointillist instrumentation in Stravinsky. As a result of these changes, amongst others, formal unity and totality can no longer be generated organically through tension (internal division) and relaxation (reconciliation). The work is no longer an organism, self-defining and self-limiting. Instead, composers normally adopted historical forms to impose an arbitrary recognizable shape on their works. The forms of music in this period are, therefore, not a product of the musical language, as they had been earlier. The language generates only fragments, and the larger forms employed are alien to this language.<sup>14</sup>

This contradiction between form and language leads in turn to the second main result of the stylistic transformation, namely that a division between internal and external components replaces a series of internal divisions as the semiotic foundation of

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<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, Schoenberg developed the twelve-tone system as a means for integrating larger works. He systematically subordinated dramatic modulations of intensity to the continuous fabric of intervallic relationships dispersed throughout the work. The local intelligibility of a melodic curve is replaced by long-range relationships that confer a meaning on each interval or in terms of its place in the tone row and its employment elsewhere in the piece.

<sup>13</sup> A. Schoenberg, p. 223.

<sup>14</sup> There is an excellent, nuanced description of the disjunction between style and form by C. Rosen, in his book Arnold Schoenberg (Glasgow: Strathclyde University Press, 1976), pp. 79-116. He characterizes the aims as "a move to resurrect an old classicism" (p. 82) and "as such a defiant proclamation of freedom as an exercise in nostalgia" (p. 103), but the attribution of a mood is risky at best. Along similar lines, see the precise and eloquent analysis of musical structures in Thomas Mann's 'Doktor Faustus', in H. Redner, In The Beginning Was the Deed: Reflections on the Passage of Faust (Berkeley: Boston University Press, 1982), pp. 216-41, although Redner appears to understand Schoenberg differently (pp. 236-7).

musical expression. The style has no internal limits and only the bounded forms of the past that lie outside the modern style carry any special charge. Where dissonance is the norm, for instance, consonance becomes an expressive device. Consequently, expressivity is always attached to devices that break the stylistic conventions of the form. These devices, expressive and disruptive, are precisely those features of melody, harmony, form and others, which are the familiar elements of the older style. Hence, the law for music of this period is that the familiar is frequently destabilizing, while the stable elements are frequently estranged. Coherence and shape are at odds. The former, the unity of the piece, comes from the modern style, most often from the denser texture of microscopic motifs that permeate the whole, while the latter, the expressive totality, comes from the larger units like melody and structure that are borrowed wholesale from the past. From this permanent division arises the ironic or elegiac character that seems inescapable in the period. The music always seems to be saying one thing and meaning another, or to be pointing towards a position it does not occupy. Yet, the irony rarely seems to arise from the kind of firm ground that supports the jokes of Haydn or the parody so frequent in late Beethoven. The great music of the twenties does not seem to take a position. It rarely has the pronounced and unmistakable ideological character found in the music of powerful revolutionary composers like Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner. It has no home base; even composers who preserve the notion of tonality use devices like a confusion of major and minor modes, or oblique tonal relations in order to undermine the stability of the tonal system.<sup>15</sup>

Music is not a referential art, and the homelessness of musical style in this period is a structural necessity, not a biographical or sociological one. This realization may offer one way of understanding what Hardy once called “the ache of modernism”<sup>16</sup> – the condition of homelessness or exile that besets the literature of the period. The happy ending and the tragic but redemptive one have become equally obsolete; the inability of the citizens of Joyce’s Dublin to get along with one another is an aesthetic precondition for the energy and movement required of a narrative. Therefore, Joyce’s Exiles ends with Richard’s confession of a wound “which can never be healed”, a

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<sup>15</sup> The very key relationship that signals abnormality in Schubert or Chopin and madness in Smetana becomes unremarkable after 1900, and can be found in works like Kodály’s *Cello Sonata, Op. 4*, Ravel’s *Sonate pour violon et violoncelle* and the first of Richard Strauss’s *Four Last Songs, Op. 69*.

<sup>16</sup> T. Hardy, Tess of the D’Urbervilles. 1891. (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. 105.

wound which consists of the “restless living wounding doubt” that makes love possible.<sup>17</sup> What is a law of musical form is merely a norm of literary expression. Joyce spoke, for instance, of the “scrupulous meanness” of his writing.<sup>18</sup> This does not mean that every sentence must be discordant, but it does imply that he wanted to emancipate dissonance, and that catharsis becomes one of his most frequent and characteristic stylistic devices.<sup>19</sup> The old organic forms are reduced to a fragmentary residue, and consistency comes from the web of motivic connections. There is no law, but there is a principle that urges “scrupulous meanness” in the proper sense of concentration on a narrow repertoire of motifs. Totality or closure, on the other hand, comes from the archetypal patterns of ageing, of the progression of the seasons, of the growth of social organization, that pervade the collection as a whole and that are entirely disjunct from the shape of the individual stories. Whereas tonal music is selective - some notes are in the scale, others are out of it - twelve-tone music substitutes what Rosen calls “the saturation of the musical space: all notes must be represented equally”.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Joyce’s encyclopaedic impulse saturates the narrative space, where all walks of life are represented, as are all ages of man, and the absence of spring from the cycle of seasons is the one significant structural irony in the collection. There is no pastoral and no regeneration.

At the very least, such parallels between music and literature may confirm one’s sense of what is truly general in the artistic culture of a period. There is no question of influence here, no common heritage, no particular shared problematic, not even necessarily the same public. There is only a common sensibility. These parallels can help the reader with some of his interpretative problems and judgements. For the laws of musical structure offer firmer guidelines to interpretation than the more approximate principles of verbal expression. They can help guide the reader’s interpretative tact by clarifying for him what constitutes a message and what belongs

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<sup>17</sup> J. Joyce, *Exiles*. 1918. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Grant Richards, dated 13 March 1906, in *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. by R. Ellmann, 3 vols (London: Methuen, 1966), II, p. 134. By “meanness” Joyce presumably understands parsimoniousness, but with an unpleasant effect, as in *Dubliners*. 1914. (London: Cape, 1967), ‘A Little Cloud’, p. 83 (“He found something mean in the petty furniture he had bought for his house on the hire system”), and ‘A Painful Case’, p. 107 (“he found all the other suburbs of Dublin mean, modern and pretentious”).

<sup>19</sup> “A bell clanged upon her heart” in ‘Eveline’; “A light began to tremble on the horizon of his mind” in ‘A Little Cloud’.

<sup>20</sup> C. Rosen, pp. 69-70.

to a cultural code and therefore indicates which features of the work he should decide to rely on or to stress. In Joyce's case, they can help the reader with the peculiar tonelessness of *Dubliners*, that deadpan succession of declarative sentences, poor in connectives, that characterizes his prose. There is a temptation to regard this feature as a savage irony, an Irishman's pitiless exposé of Dublin, as if Joyce might have written differently of London, Paris or Trieste. However, the great artists of this period hardly wrote differently of other cities. "Scrupulous meanness" could well describe the tone of Svevo's Trieste, Proust's Paris and Woolf's London. Svevo even makes one of the apparent villains in *The Confessions of Zeno* a musician, the sort of violinist who plays Bach's *Chaconne* smoothly and sweetly. According to the title character, by contrast, "mistuning is the path of unison."<sup>21</sup> Yet, Zeno's paradox reminds the reader that unison, the point of rest or the perspective point, can never be reached, but only approached through the increasing acuteness of permanent mistuning. Therefore, the modernist sense of structure differs radically from the nineteenth-century principle that dissonance is the road to consonance – or in the Hegelian language of dialectical musical aesthetics, "in the suspension of equilibrium lies the tendency to return to a condition of equilibrium."<sup>22</sup> There is no implied superior position, ideological or utopian, from which the creator looks down on his creations. The disjunction in the works is not a judgement but the very form of modernism.

### **Edgar Allan Poe: The Prophet of French Symbolism**

Now, we all of us like to believe that we understand our own poets better than any foreigner can do; but I think we should be prepared to entertain the possibility that these Frenchmen have seen something in Poe that English-speaking readers have missed.<sup>23</sup>

What is immediately striking in Poe's writings is that he achieves effect, in part, by his restrained understatement, by the avoidance of a direct account when suggestion and implication will serve his purpose better. He brings a classical sense of control to his handling of romantic material.

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<sup>21</sup> I. Svevo, *La Coscienza di Zeno* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1962), p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by T. Lipps, in *Psychological Studies* (Leipzig: Publication of the Leipzig Conservatoire, 1905), p. 195.

<sup>23</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'From Poe to Valéry', *The Hudson Review*, 2:3 (Autumn 1949), 327-42 (p. 328).

For the French Symbolists, it was the poetry and the critical ideas of Poe that were of major interest, and in these areas they freely acknowledged him as their ancestor. It was particularly Baudelaire who, as it were, discovered Poe, and who gave an account of his first encounter with Poe in a letter to Armand Fraisse, a literary scholar and critic in Lyon:

In 1846 or 1847 I became acquainted with certain fragments by Edgar Poe. I felt a singular excitement. Since his complete works were not collected in one volume until after his death, I took the trouble of looking up Americans who were living in Paris so that I might borrow files of the magazines which Poe had edited. And then – believe me or not as you like – I found poems and stories which I had thought about, but in a confused, vague and disordered way, and which Poe had been able to treat perfectly.<sup>24</sup>

This is one of the basic texts in the history of modern literature. Here, there is stated the extraordinary relationship that Baudelaire recognized as existing between himself and Poe. The reverberations set up by the impact of Poe on Baudelaire extended beyond France to make themselves felt on modern writers in America and England. The letter to Fraisse might, therefore, well serve as epigraph to more than one inquiry into the history of literature during the past century.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the main aspect of Poe's criticism that most concerns the reader is the references he makes to music and poetry. This point is vital to a consideration of influence of Poe on Baudelaire and Mallarmé, for all Symbolist poets, from Baudelaire to Verlaine, each one with his own private meaning, talk about music. In The Poetic Principle Poe writes:

Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected – is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance, I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music perhaps that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles - the creation of supernal Beauty. It *may* be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained in *fact*. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which *cannot* have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minnesingers had advantages which we do not possess - and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Oeuvre complètes: Correspondance Generale, 6 vols (Paris: Conard, 1943), III, p. 41. See also the letter to his mother, Mme Aupick, dated 27 March 1852, "I have found an American author who has aroused in me an incredible sympathy, and I have written two articles on his life and work", *ibid.* p. 160. Both are quoted by A. Armstrong McLees, in Baudelaire's 'Argot Plastique': Poetic Caricature and Modernism (Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp. 62, 89.

<sup>25</sup> The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. by J.A. Harrison, 17 vols (New York: AMS Press, 1965), XIV, p. 204.

Next to this passage, one may place the end of a letter to Baudelaire:

A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having, for its object, an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *indefinite* sensations, to which end music is an *essential*, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music, without the idea, is simply music; the idea, without the music, is prose, from its very definitiveness.<sup>26</sup>

One may also examine the following extract contained in Marginalia CXCVI, which deals with Poe's archetype of poetry, namely, Tennyson:

*I know* that indefiniteness is an element of true music – I mean of the true musical expression. Give to it an undue decision – imbue it with any very determinate tone – and you deprive it at once of its ethereal, its ideal, its intrinsic and essential character. You dispel its luxury of dream. You dissolve the atmosphere of the mystic upon which it floats. You exhaust it of its breath of faëry. It now becomes a tangible and easily appreciable idea – a thing of the earth, earthy.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, one may also read an extract from Poe's letter to James R. Lowell:

I am profoundly excited by music and by some poems – those of Tennyson especially – whom with Keats, Shelley, Coleridge (occasionally) and a few others of like thought and expression, I regard as the sole poets. Music is the perfection of the soul or idea of Poetry. The vagueness of exultation aroused by a sweet air which should be strictly indefinite and never too strongly suggestive is precisely what we should aim at in poetry. Affectation which is thus no blemish.<sup>28</sup>

The main point that emerges from the above quotations is the insistence on the importance of indefiniteness and music in poetry, which for Poe is music “with a pleasurable idea”. Poe does seem to pass rather too easily from the concept of “indefinite pleasure” to the more general concept of “indefiniteness”. However, the crux of Poe's remark is that the aim of poetry and music is to cause an indefinite pleasure. This stress on indefiniteness and vagueness fits within the general idea of symbolism as a term covering forms of literary expression that gained the ascendancy at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 318.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 457.

<sup>28</sup> Letter written from New York dated 2 July 1844, in Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. by J. Ostrom, 2 vols (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1965), I, pp. 257-8.

<sup>29</sup> Here, the reader is very close to the art of Verlaine, although it is not quite the same. For Verlaine, poetry is what it meant for Yeats, the song flowing with the fluidity and indefiniteness of music but surging from the heart not from the head, as with Poe.

## The French Symbolist Background

"La Poésie, proche l'idée, est Musique par excellence - ne consent pas d'infériorité."<sup>30</sup>  
For the French Symbolists, the music of poetry and the poetry of music is one and the same thing. The identification of poetry with music is the shaped flow of time produced by the unfolding of a structural rhythm.

When Poe wrote that the music of poetry should be indefinite and suggestive, by its very vagueness producing a spiritual effect, he was laying the foundation of Symbolist thought. One of the major concerns of French Symbolist poets was the effort to achieve a musicalization: "[d]e la musique avant toute chose" wrote Verlaine in his opening sentence to Art poétique.<sup>31</sup> It was a reaction against intellectualism in poetry and an attempt to achieve a singing quality by the suggestive flow of sounds. For the Symbolists, the sensuous emphasis falls on the ear more than the eye. It is a music that casts the feeling inwards. Along with their concern with music there is also a preoccupation with inwardness, the mystical, the mysterious and the arcane, states which are detached from all that is public and institutionalized. Symbolism implies that words suggest rather than state. The verse is musical in the sense that, in practice, it aims at breaking with the oratorical tradition of the French alexandrine and, in some cases, breaks completely with rhyme. 'Vers libre', the invention of which is usually ascribed to Gustave Kahn, outlasted the movement. Kahn sums up the doctrine as "anti-naturalism, anti-prosaism in poetry, a reaction against the regimentation of the Parnassians and the naturalists".<sup>32</sup>

By definition, the Symbolist poets sought a refined aesthetic satisfaction not available at the level of ordinary mundane experience. If decadence required the stimulation of sensation, symbolism required the veiling of significance, and contained a hint of the early romantic preference for vagueness rather than precision in poetry. It also emulated the impressionist attempt to capture reality by depicting only transitory

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<sup>30</sup> S. Mallarmé, 'Le Livre, instrument spirituel', in Oeuvres complètes: Poésies, a critical edition by C.P. Barbier & C.G. Millan (Paris: Flammarion, 1984), p. 381.

<sup>31</sup> P. Verlaine, 'Art poétique', in Oeuvres en prose complètes, ed. with notes by J. Borel (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted by J. Chiari, in Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation, 1957), p. 66.

appearance in music and painting. Essentially, the Symbolist poets attempted to poeticize the concrete and the real by speaking in such a way as not to declare but to imply, to set up associations, aspirations and resonance which transcend the ordinary and aspire towards the Transcendent, Other, Absolute or Pure. They cultivated the ability to transform brutal physical reality into something "rich and strange". As Pound put it:

To hold a like belief in a sort of permanent metaphor is, as I understand it, 'symbolism' in its profounder sense. It is not necessarily a belief in a permanent world, but it is a belief in that direction. Imagism is not Symbolism. The symbolists dealt in 'association', that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy.<sup>33</sup>

The French Symbolists argue that all art aspires towards the condition of music, music being the object of the great 'Anders-streben' of all art and of all that is artistic. The very perfection of poetry often seems to depend, in part, on a certain suppression or vagueness of mere subject so that the meaning reaches the reader through ways not distinctly traceable by the understanding. The kindling force of poetry inherent in the verse seems to pass for a moment into an actual strain of music. It is almost always possible to distinguish matter from form in poetry, music and painting, and the understanding can always make this distinction. Yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. For the French Symbolists the ideal type of poetry is that in which this distinction is reduced to a minimum. Art is always striving to be independent of form and matter. In its ideal, consummate moments, the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression. They inhere in and completely saturate each other. It is poetry that seems to absorb past and future in an intense consciousness of the present. It is not the fruit of experience, but the experience itself that is the end.

Symbolism, therefore, seems to have emerged as a heroic act of aesthetic desperation, a reaction against the secular materialism of nineteenth-century life, which could find no terms for its reaction save those of negation. The verse of Mallarmé and Valéry tends to be as material and sensuous as it is abstract and pure. Its aesthetic eroticism merely has a void of more or less desperate negation at its centre. It developed a characteristic imagery reflective of this conscious and serious lack of matter other

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<sup>33</sup> E. Pound, *Polite Essays*. 1937. (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1966), p. 93. As opposed to Imagism, which tends to dwell on static objects, Symbolism aspires towards a state of flux.

than the processes of consciousness. It is an imagery of ice, of mirrors, of Narcissus gazing at his image. This is a symbolism already latent in Baudelaire's reference to life "lived so to speak, in front of a mirror".<sup>34</sup> Over a century later, Eliot was saying of Valéry's criticism that "[h]e reminds me of Narcissus, gazing into the pool, and partakes of the attraction and mystery of Narcissus, the aloofness and frigidity of that spiritual celibate".<sup>35</sup> In their verse, Mallarmé and Valéry fracture syntax and collapse idioms into a unique timeless continuum approximate to the unvoiced condition of music.<sup>36</sup> Music lacks one of the basic characteristics of language, namely, a fixed association and a single unequivocal referent. Listeners are always free to fill its subtle articulate forms with any meaning that fits them. As R. Dragonetti points out, it is this freedom that makes Symbolist poets musicians of silence.<sup>37</sup> It leads Symbolist art in the direction of freedom from specific referent.

A major influence on the French Symbolist poets is Wagner. The two most salient lines of development suggested to the Symbolists by music are, in fact, indicated by Wagner who said that

[w]hat music expresses is eternal, infinite and ideal: it does not express the passion, love or longing of such-and-such an occasion, but passion, love and longing in itself, and this is present in that unlimited variety of motivations, which is an exclusive and particular characteristic of music, foreign and inexpressible to any other language.<sup>38</sup>

The two ideas which stand out in Wagner's philosophy are that music is objective formulation and that its meaning is multiple and even ambivalent. It is hard to over-estimate the importance of the radical assertion of the objective nature of great music. Great music springs from intense emotional experience. The emotion, however, is first formalised as a 'Gestalt', filtered through and cleared of the practical nature of its appeal. It is then symbolized in a musical configuration. The formulation is the primary step in musical composition. It does not completely de-personalize the

<sup>34</sup> Correspondance, a critical edition by C. Pichois in collaboration with J. Ziegler, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), I, p. 671. Quoted by J. Chiari, Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Preface to Valéry's 'Art poétique', in Oeuvres: Pièces sur l'Art (Paris: Édition du Sagittaire, 1938), p. xxiii. For more detail on what G. Reeves calls this "chilling narcissism" see, G. Reeves, "'The Present Self-Conscious Century': Eliot on Valéry", in *YER* (Summer 1994), 42-7 (p. 43).

<sup>36</sup> There is an extended discussion on this idea in A. Loranquin's essay 'Paul Valéry et la musique', in *La Bulletin des lettres* (15 June 1964), 241-6.

<sup>37</sup> See, R. Dragonetti, 'Rythme et silence chez Paul Valéry', in Aux frontières du langage poétique (Ghent: Rijksuniversitat te Ghent, 1961), pp. 157-78.

<sup>38</sup> R. Wagner & F. Liszt, Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt. 1951. Trans. by F. Hueffer & ed. by W.A. Ellis, rev edn (London: J.M. Dent, 1987), p. 51.

experience but it does enable the composer to handle it with a great deal of impersonality, thereby objectifying the experience. This is what Hanslick means when he says that “[a]n inward singing and not an inward feeling, prompts a gifted person to compose a musical piece”.<sup>39</sup> The subsequent configuration is primarily an invitation to insight not to a sympathetic emotion.

The second line of the development suggested by Wagner concerns the multiplicity and even the ambivalence of meaning embodied in musical symbolism. Given the ‘Gestalt’, there is given, too, a very great variety of motivations. Indeed, so great is the variety, that it may include conflicting attitudes. Taken out of context, the figures wrought by the silver snarling trumpets are at once gay and chiding. They hang in the memory as perennial as the constellations and their musical expressiveness holds all the possibilities of this universal frame. Their meaning is multiple to the point of contradiction and beyond it.

The possibility of extending musical objectivity to their own art was eagerly seized upon by the French Symbolist poets. Baudelaire saw all things as symbols of transcendental reality suffusing nature. Poetry was an embodiment of insights into that reality; Mallarmé summed up this idea in “moi projeté absolu”.<sup>40</sup> Most of Mallarmé’s poems, and virtually all his letters, are about the problems of writing poetry. As for ambivalence, the poets were again moved to emulate music within the limits of linguistic discipline. They had to use words and, as a consequence, although they could never free the idea entirely from the bonds which words impose, they could enlarge their vision and multiply their meaning. Under the stimulus of musical meaning, they were driven to re-examine their medium - words - and to discover in that medium the possibility of articulating functions which, although delimited, were at once alogical and multiple.

The third aspect of the analogy sprang from the structure of large musical works. As argued earlier, Poe was the prophet of the Symbolist poets and he begins his famous

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<sup>39</sup> S. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 222.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted by A.G. Lehmann, in *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France 1885-1895* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 168.

essay 'The Poetic Principle' by denying the very existence of the long poem. As Joseph Chiari put it:

Paradise Lost, for him, is merely a series of minor poems. The idea that a long poem is an imaginative synthesis like a painting, a symphony or a tragedy does not seem to have occurred to Poe, ever preoccupied with the idea of a poem as being the expression of one single mood or one single emotion.<sup>41</sup>

From another point of view the French Symbolist poets may have been so staggered by the organic complexity of their new world of meaning that the very notation of articulating larger forms springing from this world must have seemed to them a task almost beyond human power. If they did discover that their new vision of meaning could be caught only by new articulation, they kept their attention concentrated on the small achievement, "l'intellectuelle Parole à son apogée", the line, the few brief vibrations, the suggestion, the fleeting impression.<sup>42</sup> There were movements towards larger structures, notably in Mallarmé's 'L'Après-midi d'un faune' and 'Hérodiade'. However, the analogy was with programme music, where a series of impressions suggested by a story were designed in dynamic and sensuous forms similar to those of Liszt's and Richard Strauss's symphonic poems, 'Mazeppa' and 'Also Sprach Zarathustra' respectively. It was left for Eliot to see that the leitmotif of Wagner and the strong, ragged rhythms and fragmented forms of Stravinsky might be echoed in the structure of a larger piece.

The problem of sound and meaning is an essential part of aesthetics in the second half of the nineteenth century. Poetry aims not so much to describe experience as to convey the very sensation of experience. Metaphor takes over from simile. The sounds of Baudelaire's 'Correspondances' seek to evoke and prolong the experience of "une ténébreuse et profonde unité".<sup>43</sup> Baudelaire suggests that this be achieved in the same way as in music. In his article on Wagner he compares his own reactions to the Prelude to 'Lohengrin' with those of Liszt and Wagner himself, arguing that

la véritable musique suggère des idées analogues dans des cerveaux différents ... car ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c'est que le son *ne pût pas* suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs *ne pussent pas* donner l'idée d'une mélodie et que le son et la couleur fussent impropres à traduire des idées.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé, p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> G. Duhamel, & C. Vildra, Notes sur la technique poétique (Paris: Nizet, 1925), p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> C. Baudelaire, 'Spleen et Idéal' in Les Fleurs du Mal (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Oeuvres complètes: Curiosités esthétiques, ed. with critical notes by J. Crépet (Paris: Conard, 1923), p. 132. "Real music prompts similar ideas in different minds ... for what would be really surprising is that sound could not suggest colour, that colours could in no way conjure the idea of a melody, and that sound and colour seem inadequately equipped to translate ideas".

Listening to 'Lohengrin', Baudelaire felt himself liberated from the laws of gravity and conceived of a soul moving about in luminous nothingness, detached from the natural world as in 'L'Élévation' - "[a]u-dessus des étangs".<sup>45</sup> His intense response to Wagner's music points to the psychological affinities between the two artists. Both descend to the source of their creativity, the wordless and the imageless amorphous realm of the collective unconscious. Each conveys his feelings and sensations in his own way, in primordial images and archaic forms endowed with colour and feeling, which give form and substance to a structure even as it appears nebulous and indeterminate. Wagner's operas and Baudelaire's poems are mythical, archetypal expressions of living intuitions and perceptions. They concentrate and distil energies which, when manifested in visions, dreams, fantasies, tones and rhythms, alter their inner world.

For Baudelaire, the creative spirit learns through a kind of Platonic recognition. Music, for him, like archetypal images, exists as a potentiality in the psyche, awaiting its emergence into the consciousness at the appropriate moment. Baudelaire argues that Wagner composed like a man possessed, as if in a trance, with divine and demonic excitement, receiving idea, tone and gesture from his unconscious without any conscious direction on his part. His Dionysian side and his exalted spirituality mastered all else. More cerebral than Wagner, Baudelaire perceives ideas intuitively amid the whirling sensations brought on by the composer's leitmotifs. The intermingling of idea and intuition and sense perception paves the way for a spiritual operation, a revelation, inviting Baudelaire to bathe in mystery and hear, see, touch and breathe the new structure and methods from the unknown. The monistic view of wholeness enables Baudelaire, like Wagner, to experience cohesion and unity, physical and spiritual beatitude. He now feels linked to cosmic realms through a reciprocal analogy between words and music. Baudelaire feels musical tones reverberating in his psyche when triggered by Wagnerian resonance and residues from a distant past and anterior worlds. He probes these by penetrating their amplitudes, vibrations and trajectories. His analogical approach to music and poetry consists in intuiting connections between networks of correspondences, thus enabling

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<sup>45</sup> Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 62.

him to restore the primordial unity for which he longed. Through mutuality, sounds, colours and aromas, textures blend into a harmonious whole.

Mallarmé, on the other hand, defines poetry as music “dans le sens grec, rythme entre des rapports”.<sup>46</sup> His principal preoccupation is with sonority in the musical sense. He arrives at this aesthetic conception by meditating on music, of which he knew little and had no real technical knowledge. The “rythme entre des rapports” which Mallarmé sees as the essential characteristic of art is close to being the matter of his poems. For him, music is “l’indicible ou le Pur, la poésie sans le mots”; dance, a “poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe”; pantomime, a “soliloque muet ... comme un page pas encore écrite”; the literary text, a “représentation [qui] supplée à tous les théâtres”. For Mallarmé, the function of artistic performance is broadly equivalent to that of performative language and ritual. He restored to art the function of ritual, where music, dance and theatre are seen as ritual languages of the body.

Poe’s idea that “music is the perfection of the soul or idea of Poetry” could well be the Idea of Mallarmé, in the sense of essence coming into existence in poetry. The Idea of Mallarmé, although it is strongly intellectualized, is obtained by negating the real into the ideal source of things - the logos. The difference between Poe’s attitude and that of Mallarmé’s towards music is fundamental and is the very measure of the gap that separates their poetry. Both are aware that music is an essential and intrinsic part of poetry. However, there is a marked difference in depth of appreciation. Mallarmé knew that one could not confuse the inner music, the initial melody, the start and source of the poem, what Eliot would later call the “auditory imagination”, with the external music of the words. The unheard music which could be the melody, the rhythmic essence of the feeling or emotion which is the starting force of the poem, is defined by Mallarmé as “le chant jaillit de source innée, antérieure à un concept, si purement que refléter au dehors mille rythmes d’images”.<sup>47</sup> It is that original creative impulse, the ideal music of Plato, which he tries to suggest by extracting the essence of things.

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<sup>46</sup> S. Mallarmé, ‘Letter to Edmund Gosse’, in *Correspondance*, IV, pp. 201-3. Quoted by S. Barnard, in *Mallarmé et la Musique* (Paris: Nizet, 1959), p. 151.

<sup>47</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, a critical edition with notes by H. Mondor & G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), pp. 389, 304, 311, 334.

The issue is different with Poe. He is, above all, concerned with external music, the music of the words. His conception of the relationship between music and words brings him nearer to Wagner than to anybody else. Poe starts from a vague emotion that is at once conceptualized and submitted to the logical objectivity of language, and then he uses the music of the words as a means to counteract that logic or to put the intellect to sleep. He does not allow the initial emotion to reach form unfettered by the intellect. On the contrary, he submits that emotion to concepts of form and expression from the start. The music of the words ought to correspond to the inner music, but in the case of Poe it does not. The inspirational impulse having been weak, the intellect has worked from concepts and rules untransmuted by creative innocence. The result is that the music of the words is merely an external attribute conferred upon the poem for a purpose.

With Mallarmé, the aspiration towards the condition of music becomes both more precise and all embracing. Music combines with metaphysics in an escape from matter towards the Absolute, the world of essences. For Mallarmé, “[f]aire de la musique” means achieving “un au-delà magiquement produit par certaines dispositions de la parole”.<sup>48</sup> In poetry, his concern is not with an accumulation of beautiful sounds for its own sake but with a synthesis of elements in which each depends upon its relation to others to create “le mot total incantatoire”. Therefore, the musical ambition and the interest in Wagner prompt Mallarmé to assert the supremacy of the word, “[l]a Poésie, proche l’idée, est Musique par excellence - ne consent pas d’infériorité”.<sup>49</sup> Mallarmé seeks an architectural organization of the poem, both complex and not dependent upon “le hasard”, to establish a set of non-representative relationships between the words, the lines, the motifs and the rhythms. The poem becomes a network of relations and the metaphor imposes a unity over disparate terms, fusing apparent opposites into a single intellectual image.

In a different way from Mallarmé, Laforgue also strives to bring the arts of music and poetry together. The suggestion that a connection can be traced between Laforgue’s interest in music and painting in general, and in Impressionism in particular, and his

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Crise de vers’, in *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 368.

<sup>49</sup> See p. 11, footnote no. 30. As Barnard comments, “la conclusion de l’esthétique musicale de Mallarmé, ce sera paradoxalement, une esthétique du Livre”, p. 35.

poetic style and ambitions is not an idea that would have seemed strange to his contemporaries. Baudelaire's views on the relatedness of the art-forms - the visual arts, literature and music - were by now common currency, and his famous essay 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' was interpreted with poetry as well as the visual arts and music in mind. Laforgue was convinced of the naturalness of applying the methods of music and the visual arts to literature. In one passage, he contrasts the Impressionists' 'œil naturel' with traditional academic vision, dominated by concepts that he considers artificial, such as line, relief and perspective. The natural, or Impressionist, eye sees the external world as it really appears, that is, in multiple gradations of prismatic colour:

Laforgue draws a parallel between the Impressionist sensitivity to the variety and complexity of visual experience and the symphonic ambitions of Wagner, linking both to the Hartmannian unconscious law governing the universe.<sup>50</sup>

Plus de mélodie isolée, le tout est une symphonie qui est la vie vivante et variée, comme 'les voix de la forêt' des théories de Wagner en concurrence vitale pour la grande voix de la forêt, comme l'Inconscient, loi du monde, est la grande voix mélodique, résultante de la symphonie des consciences de races et d'individus.<sup>51</sup>

Laforgue's admiration for the Impressionist composers' and painters' fidelity to their perceptions, and for their translation of them into the medium of musical notes and paint respectively, no doubt encouraged his similar translation of perceptions into language. Like Baudelaire, Laforgue insists on modernity, "Il s'agit de n'être pas médiocre. Il faut être un nouveau".<sup>52</sup> If the modern interest of Laforgue's subjects in the Deniers Vers matches those of the Impressionists, so does his treatment of them. Like Baudelaire and Mallarmé, Laforgue was also greatly influenced by Wagner. Wagner had long become the idol of the symbolist or decadent school of poetry, the avant-garde of the literary world led by Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Wagner's aim to

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<sup>50</sup> One of the reasons that initially attracted Laforgue to Hartmann was that he solved for him the problem of the gulf between idealist and determinist aesthetic positions by putting forward a view that combined them. Laforgue believed in evolving ideals of beauty, since for him the essential characteristic of art was its reflection of the ephemeral and the contingent. Hartmann discovered a path between the entrenched opposing positions by means of his proposition that a constantly evolving unconscious force was the ultimate metaphysical reality. Hartmann's separation of talent from genius would have found a sympathetic ear in Laforgue.

<sup>51</sup> Mélanges posthumes, ed. by P. Bonnefis (Paris & Geneva: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 137-8, 153. "No more isolated melody, the whole is a symphony that is life, variant and lively, like "the murmurs of the forest" of Wagnerian theory locked in a vital competition for the great voice of the forest, the melodic curve is like the subconscious law of the world, resulting from the symphony of the self-awareness of races and individuals".

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p. 153

emotionalize the intellect is a poetic as well as a musical concept. The inter-relationship of art-forms is almost a commonplace by the time that Rimbaud, in his 'lettre du voyant' to Paul Demeny (1871), writes of poetry in musical terms, "la symphonie fait son mouvement dans les profondeurs". Laforgue, writing about the freedom of Rimbaud's poetic style, refers to both music and painting to illustrate his point:

Avouons le petit bonheur de la rime, et les déviations occasionnées par les trouvailles, la symphonie imprévue vient escorter le *motif*; tout comme un peintre est amené là - à ce gris perle à propos de bottes, à ce géranium sans nécessité ... tel le musicien avec ses harmonies qui ont l'air parasites.<sup>53</sup>

The fact that the "symphonie", unanticipated because it springs from the depths of the personality and speaks to those depths, supports the motif, is precisely what Wagner was at pains to explain. Laforgue wrote "en connaissance de cause" and would have met these ideas in the Spring issues of the *Revue wagnérienne* of 1885.<sup>54</sup> He understood that, however lacking in necessity an element in Impressionist painting or in Wagnerian music might appear to be - and its apparently spontaneous randomness was essential to its effect - no such element was in fact either gratuitous or parasitic. Each related to the "symphonie" that derived its being from "les profondeurs". Laforgue insists on various occasions on the importance that he attaches to musicality in poetry, one of the most notable being his criticism of Corbière for his lack of it.<sup>55</sup>

All these ideas were expressed by Arthur Symons in his book The Symbolist Movement in Literature, where Symbolism is presented as an attempt to make the soul of things visible.<sup>56</sup> Reacting against scientific materialism, the Symbolist poet assumes that reality is ultimately spirit or soul. Seeking to evoke this, he exploits symbols, but also dream, vision, association, suggestion, connotation and deliberately

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p. 130. "Let us acknowledge the little joy of rhyme and the deviation resulting from brainwaves, the unexpected symphony comes to join the *motif*; just like a painter is led there - to that grey pearl with regard to bunches, to that geranium without need ... thus the musician regards his harmonies looking like parasites".

<sup>54</sup> The *Revue wagnérienne*, which ran from 1885 to 1887 existed to make the other, non-musical side of Wagner's work and personality known to the French public. It was planned at Munich in the summer of 1884 by a group of French intellectuals who were attending a performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The moving spirit was Edouard Dujardin, who had been at the Paris Conservatoire with Debussy, and Théodore de Wyzewa, later famous as a Mozartian scholar. The literary, rather than the musical, character of the whole undertaking was emphasized by the collaboration of Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Mallarmé, Mendès and Laforgue. The avowed object of the editors was the study of Wagner as poet, thinker and creator of a new art-form. Baudelaire's 'Correspondances', published in Les Fleurs du Mal in 1857, linked easily with Wagner's ideal of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk', the work of art which should be a product of all the arts.

<sup>55</sup> Oeuvres complètes: Denier vers, a critical edition with notes by compiled by G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Mercure de France, 1922-1930), p. 137.

<sup>56</sup> The Symbolist Movement in Literature. 1899. (New York: Dutton, 1958).

indefinite reference. He avoids whatever might seem denoted and external, especially plot, logic and rhetoric. As a literary mode, Symbolism is the opposite not only of fictional realism but also, according to Symons, of Parnassian poetry, with its emphasis on precise description and statement. For Symons, the intuition of organic unity or correspondence provides the ground for a technical procedure that later appears in Modernist poetry, namely, the juxtaposition of apparently alien things. Carried by the singing voice, poetry approaches the source of creation by uniting with the harmony that its words cannot express. Music for the French Symbolist poets has the privilege of transcending immediacy while poetry is transfigured by it. The Symbolist poet would flash upon the reader the soul of that which can be apprehended only by the soul - the finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident. In Paris, the emotion of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Laforgue, amongst others, became new vision, and their revolution became linguistic. In Paris, as later in London, boredom and mortality were always present behind leisure and pleasure. Symons's influence forms one of the principal links between nineteenth-century poetics and the poetics of Modernism, an influence which gave a powerful impulse to the artistic innovations of, amongst others, Eliot and Pound.

The literary traditions and poetic styles handed down by the French Symbolist poets to major writers in England were immense. Through their appropriation of writers like Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Laforgue writers such as Eliot and Pound engaged in a relentless reformation of English poetry and in the equally relentless counter-reformation that ensued, (exemplified in Aldous Huxley's most apposite choice of title for Point Counter Point). As these writers wrestled with the French Symbolists' protean posture, as it were, one can witness France in dialogue with England, and the icons of the past in tortuous conflict with those of modernity. Exported abroad, French Symbolism was the first movement in which art ceased to be national and assumed the collective identity of Western culture. Its overwhelming concern was the non-temporal, non-sectarian, non-geographic, and non-national problem of the human condition. Along with Beauty, mysticism is incorporated into the Symbolist view of the world:

Je me mire et me vois ange, et je meurs, et j'aime  
- Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité -  
A renaître, portant mon rêve un diadème,  
Au ciel antérieur où fleurie la Beauté!

writes Mallarmé in 'Les Fenêtres'.<sup>57</sup> Beauty, art, music and mysticism are elements that are as integral to the intellectual aspect of Symbolism as they are to its emotional stream. These elements, derived initially from Poe, first captivated Baudelaire, then Mallarmé and lastly Valéry, amongst others, and were later analyzed by Eliot in a lecture first given in France and then in America at the Library of Congress.<sup>58</sup>

### The Impact on T.S. Eliot

The eminent Polish music critic Théodore de Wyzewa once told Mallarmé that “[p]oets who leave the most visible stamp on the musician are those who have worked on language itself”. Mallarmé duly responded that “poetry, most nearly approaching the Idea, is music *par excellence*”.<sup>59</sup> For Mallarmé, language has to undergo some process of purification which would render it capable of serving a truly poetic purpose - “Donner un sens plus pur aus mots de la tribu”.<sup>60</sup> The first step in this purifying process is to find a way of detaching words from the material world, a way, that is, of subverting their referential propensity. For Mallarmé, this idea has profound structural implications. He believes that the detachment could be effected by establishing an intricate and complex series of relationships between the words themselves. Furthermore, he believes that once such a series of relationships has been successfully established between words, the original simple references will be destroyed, or at least subsumed, in the complexity of the ensuing structure.

In his ‘Conclusion’ to The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, Eliot writes that “[p]oetry begins, I dare say, with a savage beating a drum in a jungle, and it retains that essential of percussion and rhythm”.<sup>61</sup> An argument which runs through Eliot’s works is that poetry should be purged of all prosaic contamination, an idea propounded by Mallarmé’s famous line. So, when Lucasta in The Confidential Clerk says

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<sup>57</sup> Oeuvres complètes: Poésies, p. 621.

<sup>58</sup> This lecture, ‘From Poe to Valéry’, delivered on 19 November 1948, was subsequently published in The Hudson Review. See, p. 8, footnote no. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted by M. Breatnach, in Boulez and Mallarmé (Aldershot, Hants: Scolar Press, 1996), p. 49.

<sup>60</sup> Correspondance, collected & ed. by H. Mondor & L.J. Austin, 11 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), I, p. 234.

<sup>61</sup> op. cit. 1933. (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), p. 155.

I really would like to understand music,  
Not to be able to talk about it,  
But...partly, to enjoy it...and because of what it stands for.  
You know, I'm a little jealous of your music!  
When I see it as a means of contact with a world  
More real than any I've ever lived in.<sup>62</sup>

she seems to be echoing Symbolist thought by looking at music as a means of and for communication, a language felt, even if not necessarily understood.

Mallarmé's banner line, which Eliot deliberately takes up later in 'Little Gidding', is a central process in Eliot's poetic theory. Eliot argues, however, that the purifying process can be achieved by "develop[ing] or procur[ing] the consciousness of the past", which is the way the poet may develop or procure command over the language of the present.<sup>63</sup> The whole of the artistic past is available to poet, painter and musician as never before. He is free to wander in the past, to pick and choose from among the styles of the past in a way his predecessors never dreamed of. Yet, as Donald Davie amply demonstrates, the poet is faced with the difficulty language presents. Although he shares with the other artists a new attitude towards the cultural and artistic past of the race and a new freedom in picking and choosing among the styles of the past, the poet finds himself less free of the riches of the past than the painter and musician are, if only because most of the poems of the past are written in languages he does not understand. "The poet", argues Davie, "stands awkwardly with one foot inside the imaginary museum, and one foot out of it".<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, the transfiguration of the dead and the re-writing of their literature require of the poet countless deaths, his present self always under revision in a dialogue with compound ghosts. This self-erasure and wounding, this ascesis of impersonality, is central to Symbolist thought. However, it also seems to be a dangerously ironic way of arriving at creative potency. One may well argue that nothing can stop the influence of the dead from silencing the nascent voices of those who turn to the past in the hope of recollecting a language for the living. It may also be difficult to believe that the nightmare of history can be transformed into dawn, when one knows that

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<sup>62</sup> The Confidential Clerk. 1954. (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), II. 223-9.

<sup>63</sup> 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in Selected Essays. 1932. (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp. 13-22 (p. 17).

<sup>64</sup> The Poet in the Imaginary Museum (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1977), p. 51.

every day begins as the knowledge of night. Poetics-as-inheritance has to devise solutions to these riddles. One solution is for this poetics to step into the Quester's role, knowing its kingship will pass, watching that passing with the ancient glittering eyes of Yeats's chinamen. It is the poet who presses a relentless kind of quest for intimacy of relationship with the various particular realities of experience, not with the "light that never was on land and sea", but with the concrete actualities of the world; with the unique historical event, with the unrepeatably personal encounters and with all the rich singularity that belongs to things in their intractable specificity.

In Eliot's early poetic output, as in Laforgue's, the spectacle is often comic. The world of modern poetry includes a vaudeville of motley figures got up in purloined rags and fineries. Such texts work the stage of borrowed languages and inherited costumes set up by history. Yet, they take their irony and play seriously, with a kind of earnestness that expresses an almost innocent desire to restore poetry to a status it once enjoyed. Laforgue, Yeats, Eliot and Pound, amongst others, thrust upon poetry prophetic duties it could rarely, if ever, perform without stumbling into the ridiculous on the way to the sublime. Prufrock's "overwhelming question" is, indeed, laughable, but somehow it manages to become the reader's own. Symons calls Laforgue's language "a kind of travesty, making subtle use of colloquialism, slang, neologism, technical terms, for their allusive, their factitious, their reflected meanings, with which one can play, very seriously".<sup>65</sup> Fundamentally Laforguean play is the mind's play with its own attitudes and feelings. The reader may rightly argue that here is Laforgue's real impact on Eliot - the theatricality of his verse. Absorbing Laforgue's poetic of theatricality, Eliot applies the mask and play to neutralize any threat to the self and its feelings. However, what Poe had defined as "perverseness", the natural instinct by which a man acts in the way that will insure self-defeat is reflected in Prufrock's pattern of his own behaviour.

Within the context of a Symbolist aesthetic, Art not only mirrors the present but it has, at its best, an archetypal validity which expresses both the individual creative mind at a given historical moment and the mind and history of a race, of a civilization, and of man himself. The greater the knowledge and awareness of history one has the

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<sup>65</sup> The Symbolist Movement in Literature, p. 58.

more readily the relationships and connections of a given work with the past. The present and the future will outline themselves and make it easier to assess the place and importance of the work of art in the context to which it belongs. This kind of knowledge necessarily excludes notions of influence and dependence which it replaces by elective relationships, natural developments of thoughts, feelings and social structures, and affinities between social-historical periods which present similar characteristics. Eliot does not imitate Laforgue. He shares some of his preoccupations and attitudes; he has affinities with him and he lives in a society in which the conditions of life were, in some respects, similar to those in which Laforgue had lived. Later he echoes Dante and the Metaphysical poets because, as Laforgue and other writers of his age, he finds in them a sensibility caught between two worlds. This is a sensibility also his own, not only that of those who, like himself, are torn between a puritanical upbringing and the call of the senses, but that of his time, despairing at the loss of centuries-old values and the irrationality and hedonism of life lived on the verge of cosmic collapse. Laforgue helped Eliot find a voice for what he (Eliot) wanted to say, while Dante and the Metaphysical Poets seem to have tapped a source already present in Eliot's mind.

In his paper 'Sul Simbolismo di T.S. Eliot', F. Fiumi traces the sources of Eliot's symbolist inheritance, from Laforgue in his early poetry to Baudelaire and Mallarmé in his later poetry.<sup>66</sup> He argues that Eliot's poetic technique is firmly grounded upon a descriptive clarity which definitely escapes the rhetoric of romanticism. According to Fiumi, Eliot discovers in the poetry of the French Symbolists an originary node which permits the joining of the artist, the visionary and the realist in a single figure. He refers rightly to the notion that within the Symbolist world, attention is concentrated on the inner world which automatically suggests the subject. However, the reader also remembers that within that dim expanse of consciousness is an undiscovered world of objective truth. Symbolist poets feel their way tentatively, brushing against verbal connotation until they reach a formulation in words of their personal intuition of objective truth. The idiom is their own but the intuition has a perennial character. Of his numerous descriptions of the task of the poet, Eliot's most celebrated consideration occurs in his confession 'What Dante Means To Me'. Above all else,

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<sup>66</sup> op. cit. *SA*, 223-224 (1988), 245-303.

Eliot finds in Dante a fulfilment of the poet's "obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them". As a result, the poet finds himself an "explorer beyond the frontiers of ordinary consciousness" who seeks to "comprehend the incomprehensible" by "enriching the meaning of words and showing how much words can do". By deliberately striving to increase the resources of language, the poet widens the range of his sensibility to increase the "*width of emotional range*" in his poetry, "making possible a much greater range of emotion and perception for other men, because he gives them the speech in which more can be expressed".<sup>67</sup> Therefore, the poet's twin obligations to language and sensibility are inseparable; both must co-operate, become organically one, to complete the circuit of creativity. Attempting to illustrate this relationship, Eliot characteristically turns to three different metaphors, namely, depth, centre and circumference, and levels of consciousness. Eliot will often picture the struggle for adequacy as a quest to raise "rude, unknown, *psychic material*"<sup>68</sup> to the surface of consciousness. Seizing on a related metaphor from Gottfried Benn, the poet is viewed as having

something germinating in him for which he must find words; but he cannot know what words he wants until he has found the words; he cannot identify this embryo until it has been transformed into an arrangement of the right words in the right order. When you have the words for it, the 'thing' for which the words had to be found has disappeared, replaced by a poem.<sup>69</sup>

In his essay 'From Poe to Valéry', Eliot writes:

Poetry, of different kinds, may be said to range from that in which the attention of the reader is directed primarily to the sound, to that in which it is directed primarily to the sense. With the former kind, the sense may be apprehended almost unconsciously; with the latter kind – at these two extremes – it is the sound, of the operation of which upon us we are unconscious. But, with either type, sound and sense must cooperate; in even the most purely incantatory poem, the dictionary meaning of the words cannot be disregarded with impunity.<sup>70</sup>

For Eliot, by its very nature, poetry demands a constant attention to sound and, therefore, is likely to suggest musical analogies to both poet and reader. Eliot's main emphasis is on the structure or pattern of language, the system of relations that permits meaning, rather than on the meanings themselves. In the terms of his dissertation on F.H. Bradley, Eliot is more concerned with the dynamics of ideas than

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<sup>67</sup> 'What Dante Means to Me', in To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings. 1965. (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 134.

<sup>68</sup> 'The Three Voices of Poetry', in On Poetry and Poets. 1957. (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 101.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p. 97-8. There is an extended discussion on this idea by C.K. Stead, in The New Poetic (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), pp. 31-7.

<sup>70</sup> 'From Poe to Valéry', p. 332.

with the nebulous character of concepts. Eliot desired absolute knowledge which, while remaining knowledge, was simultaneously being. Eliot argues that words always mean, they express and develop ideas and objects. Language maintains continuity with objects more or less real; poetry on all levels is sensible, meaningful, although not always accessible:

It is a commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase. It is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins.... If, as we are aware, only a part of the meaning can be conveyed by paraphrase, that is because the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist.<sup>71</sup>

The sounds of words arranged in pattern, as Eliot will again claim in Four Quartets, are capable of meaning at a level beneath that of denotation. For Eliot, words, which long usage darkens almost out of recognition, take on fresh lustre. He argues that "symbolism is that to which the word tends both in religion and in poetry; the incarnation of meaning in fact".<sup>72</sup> It is on the lines of that spiritualizing of the word, that perfecting of form in its capacity for allusion and suggestion, the confidence in the eternal correspondences between the visible and invisible universe, that literature moved. The sensation and rhythms that a reader experiences when reading a poem, the atmosphere that adheres to a poem, are as meaningful for Eliot as are the denotative meanings of its words, and are as much a part of the music.

I.A. Richards also speaks of the "music of ideas".<sup>73</sup> Here, a parallel can be drawn with what Eliot himself speaks about in his essay 'From Poe to Valéry', that the search for poetic meaning is essentially tied up with the patterns of words on the printed page, and he constantly directs our attention to that pattern, to the need for concentrating on the text. He continues to add that if puzzlement follows, then the reader should subordinate the meaning of the words to their activity within the much-advertised auditory imagination. The auditory imagination, what Mallarmé calls "le chant jaillit de source innée", seems to be a means of overcoming a fallen language by penetrating below the conscious articulations of the mind and civilization. Eliot, in his own famous description of the auditory imagination, states explicitly that, "[i]t

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<sup>71</sup> 'The Music of Poetry', in On Poetry and Poets, p. 30.

<sup>72</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Preface', to H. Crosby, Transit of Venus: Poems (Paris: The Black Sun Press, 1931), pp. i-ix (p. viii).

<sup>73</sup> I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism. 1943. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947), appendix, 2.

works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense".<sup>74</sup>

In 'The Music of Poetry' he makes the point even more decisively when he states that [m]y purpose here is to insist that a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words that compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one.<sup>75</sup>

In trying to establish the organic structure of mental activity which Eliot's poetic theory presupposes, one can detect what is one of the most enduring of all these influences, namely the aesthetic of the French Symbolists poets.

From the beginning of his career as a poet and critic Eliot was aware that in our time "a refreshment of poetic diction similar to that brought about by Wordsworth had been called for".<sup>76</sup> He was conscious that the history of European culture provided examples of earlier times of exploration and times for the development of the territory acquired. Dante and Shakespeare, Milton and Dryden, Wordsworth and Coleridge had all provided him with shining examples. Their work, however, had been done and a new need had to be faced, "[f]or last year's words belong to last year's language/And next year's words await another voice".

In the Appendix to Notes towards the Definition of Culture Eliot remarks:

But in the second half of the nineteenth century the greatest contribution to European poetry was certainly made in France. I refer to the tradition which starts with Baudelaire, and culminates in Paul Valéry. I venture to say that without this French tradition the work of three poets in other languages - and three very different from each other - I refer to W.B. Yeats, to Rainer Maria Rilke, and, if I may, to myself - would hardly be conceivable.<sup>77</sup>

Apart from this explicit testimony, Eliot also wrote a vivid essay on the ebullience of thought and theory in the Paris of his student days. He was deeply influenced by the ideas of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and Remy de Gourmont which were rooted in the triumphant Symbolist experiment.<sup>78</sup> One should recall as well his acknowledged early debt to Laforgue,<sup>79</sup> the acknowledged influence

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<sup>74</sup> 'Matthew Arnold', in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 119.

<sup>75</sup> op. cit. p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> ibid. p. 35.

<sup>77</sup> Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, 1948. (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 112.

<sup>78</sup> See, 'A Commentary', *Criterion*, XIII. 2 (April 1934), 451-4.

<sup>79</sup> 'Talk on Dante', *Adelphi* (First Quarter 1951), 106-7.

of Symons' book on the French Symbolists,<sup>80</sup> and his equally acknowledged kinship as a theorist with Valéry.<sup>81</sup>

It is possible, however, to be much more precise about the influence that this testimony would suggest. In that literary criticism which Eliot has called "a by-product of my private poetry-workshop; or a prolongation of the thinking that went into the formation of my own verse",<sup>82</sup> one may detect a preoccupation with language and music which repeats what has been said so far about the French Symbolists. Like them Eliot was concerned, in his non-didactic and non-dramatic verse, with exploiting the possibilities of connotation in language. He expressed this in general terms in a brief notice of 'Situation de la Poésie', an analysis of the state of modern French poetry by Jacques and Raisse Maritain. He says that "[i]t is true, I think, that poetry, if it is not to be a lifeless repetition of forms, must be constantly exploring 'the frontiers of the spirit'". After making clear that this exploration must have a historical perspective, he speaks of the poet's work in the following words, "[t]he problem of which he [the poet] can afford to be most conscious is the problem of what he can do with his language".<sup>83</sup> The poet's development of the "still undeveloped resources of the language"<sup>84</sup> is concerned with much more than connotation. Eliot's preoccupation with this aspect of poetic meaning has been constant. The possibility of creating new organic formulations from the dark recesses of the poet's consciousness is discussed in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in the famous analogy of the poet's mind as a catalyst, fusing apparently disparate functions of his medium - language. It is returned to in the equally well known passage on this fusion in The Metaphysical Poets. In writing on Dante in 1929 Eliot speaks of this resource of poetic meaning as it is embodied specifically in the English Language:

In English poetry words have a kind of opacity which is part of their beauty. I do not mean that the beauty of English poetry is what is called mere 'verbal beauty'. It is rather that words have associations, and the groups of words *in* association have associations, which is a kind of local self-consciousness, because they are the growth of a *particular* civilization.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> 'Foreward' to J. Chiari, Contemporary French Poetry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952), pp. vii-xi (p. viii).

<sup>81</sup> 'Leçon de Valéry', *Listener*, 37:939, 9 January 1947, p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> 'The Frontiers of Criticism', in On Poetry and Poets, p. 106.

<sup>83</sup> 'That Poetry is made with words', in *NEW*, 15 (27 April 1939), 72-4 (p. 72).

<sup>84</sup> 'What is a Classic?', in On Poetry and Poets, p. 57.

<sup>85</sup> 'Dante', in Selected Essays, pp. 239-40.

Here, Eliot is concerned with what has been referred to above, namely, connotative fields of force and the articulation of these fields of force. In 'The Music of Poetry' he describes the technique of delimitation in typical symbolist terms:

The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association.<sup>86</sup>

The second relation describes the field of force that constitutes a word's connotations within the language. The first relation describes the delimited meaning that is fixed in each articulation the poet achieves. The whole process of Symbolist delimitation is summed up in the account of the genesis of the first voice in 'The Three Voices of Poetry'. For Eliot, the resource of the language is the medium "of words, with their history, their connotations, their music".<sup>87</sup> The "arrangement of the right words in the right order" is the process of delimitation. In his description of the "objective correlative" Eliot makes it clear that the dynamic of sensuous forms is proper to all good poetry.<sup>88</sup> Its peculiar power in the hands of the French Symbolists and Eliot derives from the special connotative formulations out of which it is built.

There is, however, a great deal in Eliot's criticism on the three aspects of the musical analogy of which the French Symbolists were so fond. The objectivity which arises from the formulation of a musical experience in a 'Gestalt' is outlined in Eliot's account of the first formulation of some of his own poems. In 'The Music of Poetry' he writes:

... but I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realise itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself.<sup>89</sup>

It is an objectivity that derives from something radically absolute in the experience itself. Eliot puts this most clearly in his essay on Baudelaire when, in commenting on a passage from the French Symbolist poet, he says that

[t]his introduces something new, and something universal in modern life.... It is not merely in the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the *first intensity* - presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself - that Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other men.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> op. cit. pp. 32-3.

<sup>87</sup> 'The Three Voices of Poetry', in On Poetry and Poets, p. 98.

<sup>88</sup> Elizabethan Essays (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 61.

<sup>89</sup> op. cit. p. 38. This is a repetition, in poetic terms, of Hanslick's quote earlier on.

<sup>90</sup> 'Baudelaire', in Selected Essays, p. 426.

It is this radical absoluteness, inherent in the words, which makes Eliot impatient of critics who try to explain a poem by the accidents of its birth. Writing in 'The Music of Poetry' of the notes to Mallarmé's poems, compiled by Roger Fry and Charles Mauron, he says:

... when I learn that a difficult sonnet was inspired by seeing a painting on the ceiling reflected on the polished top of a table, or by seeing the light reflected from the foam on a glass of beer, I can only say that this may be a correct embryology, but it is not the meaning.<sup>91</sup>

The meaning is something objective that inheres in "an arrangement of words on paper".<sup>92</sup> In 'The Three Voices of Poetry' he says that, for the poet:

...when the words are finally arranged in the right way - or in what he comes to accept as the best arrangement he can find - he may experience a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation, which is in itself indescribable. And then he can say to the poem: "Go away! Find a place for yourself in a book - and don't expect *me* to take any further interest in you."<sup>93</sup>

Eliot often refers as well to the multiplicity of meaning which may be found in an objective formulation. The sheer fact of multiplicity is clear from the many different and equally valid interpretations that may be prompted by one poem. In 'The Music of Poetry' he says that

[a] poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant. For instance, the author may have been writing some peculiar personal experience, which he saw quite unrelated to anything outside; yet for the reader the poem may become the expression of a general situation, as well as of some private experience of his own. The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid - it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of. The different interpretations may all be partial formulations of one thing; the ambiguities may be due to the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate.<sup>94</sup>

By this, Eliot means that words may also function at some remove from the poet's "conscious purpose", and may receive varying emphases from varying points of view belonging to the poet himself and to others. Nevertheless, all aspects of a poem's music are in relation and, as in the case of tradition, make up an ideal, albeit provisional, whole.

However, the reason for this multiplicity lies in the very nature of the poetic process.

For, as Eliot says in 'Virgil and the Christian World':

... if the word 'inspiration' is to have any meaning, it must mean just this, that the speaker or writer is uttering something which he does not wholly understand - or which he may even misinterpret when the

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<sup>91</sup> op. cit. p. 30.

<sup>92</sup> 'Conclusion' to The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 145.

<sup>93</sup> op. cit. p. 98.

<sup>94</sup> op. cit. pp. 30-1.

inspiration has departed from him.... A poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience... yet for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation. He need not know what his poetry will come to mean to others.<sup>95</sup>

By 1917, Eliot had made it clear that this poetic process meant a concentrated fusion of connotative fields of force that already possessed a multiplicity of meaning: "It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all."<sup>96</sup> Also, as 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' makes abundantly clear, this multiplicity of meaning, achieved white hot in intuitions of the absolute, constantly reveals new facets as the cultural tradition develops. At the same time that he insists on multiplicity of meaning in a poem, Eliot is adamant about the fact that poetic meaning cannot be ambivalent. Elsewhere he states that "[w]e can never emulate music, because to arrive at the condition of music would be the annihilation of poetry".<sup>96</sup> Again, in 'The Music of Poetry', he writes:

I would remind you, first, that the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning. Otherwise, we could have poetry of great musical beauty which made no sense, and I have never come across such poetry.<sup>97</sup>

As a final judgement of all Symbolist dreams of achieving musical meaning he says that "in even the most purely incantatory poem, the dictionary meaning of words cannot be disregarded with impunity".<sup>98</sup>

In the third aspect of the analogy, the aspect which derives from the structures of larger musical works, Eliot goes even further than the French Symbolist poets. In this matter, too, his critical writing is explicit. In 'The Music of Poetry' he says:

There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter.<sup>99</sup>

It is in his own longer poems that the reader must seek for a realization of these possibilities.

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<sup>95</sup> op. cit. in *On Poetry and Poets*, pp. 122-3

<sup>96</sup> 'Poetry and Drama', in *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 87.

<sup>97</sup> op. cit. p. 29.

<sup>98</sup> 'From Poe to Valéry', p. 332.

<sup>99</sup> op. cit. p. 38.

With all this in mind, the reader becomes aware of how close and persistent the influence of French Symbolist philosophy and aesthetics on the poetry of Eliot has been. One can also understand clearly what he means when he says:

What we get from a study of these French poets in relation to Poe, is an understanding of their aesthetic which enlarges our understanding of their poetry. And by "aesthetic" here I do not mean merely an abstract theory of what poetry should be; I mean an attitude to poetry, by poets of great critical capacity, which has affected indirectly a good deal of poetry written since and which has also affected the attitude of readers towards their poetry.<sup>100</sup>

Eliot found that with the Symbolists there is the essential relationship between conscious control and inspirational force. Symbolist poets thought that music was to contain, or be invested with, pure emotional states. Its expressivity was looked on as a means of revelation of depth of feeling not normally experienced. It was the most alluring of the arts, the most mysterious, the most capable of expressing an indefinite "infini", the most private and the most satisfying. Theirs was the ambition to write poetry that was emotionally music's equivalent, "la Poésie véritable, le seule qui demeure irréductible à la littérature proprement dite, est une musique emotionelle de syllabes et de rythmes".<sup>101</sup>

Eliot's purpose is to establish that words operate beyond an author's intentional control. Speech, nearly always considered a communication of intention, is stressed more for its rhythms than for its denotative character. It is quite possible that for Eliot the sound of speech unique to a particular people is as crucial to the rooting of poetry in time and place as what is actually said, since "[t]he music of poetry, then, must be a music latent in the common speech ... of the poet's *place*".<sup>102</sup> The power of poetry is, therefore, two-fold, namely, to evaluate and validate time and place, and to link time and place with something greater, something which might suggest the interconnectedness of all experience.

Here, Eliot seems to privilege poetry at the expense of other forms of discourse. However, it is important to emphasize that poetry and conventional discourse, for Eliot, do not constitute wholly separate forms. Eliot never sets poetry against conventional speech. Poetry is not other than conventional discourse. Rather, it is

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<sup>100</sup> 'Foreward' to J. Chiari, *Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé*, p. vii.

<sup>101</sup> T. de Wyzewa, *Revue wagnérienne*, 2 (1885), 62.

<sup>102</sup> 'The Music of Poetry', p. 31.

language put to its best use and as such it is in relation with everyday speech as aspects of a whole. Eliot's insistence that poetry never lose touch with common speech evidences the intimate relation of the two:

So, while poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains, all the same, one person talking to another; and this is just as true if you sing it, for singing is another way of talking. The immediacy of poetry to conversation is not a matter on which we can lay down exact laws. Every revolution in poetry is apt to be, and sometimes to announce itself to be a return to common speech.... The music of poetry, then, must be a music latent in the common speech of its time.<sup>103</sup>

Eliot recognizes poetry's ability to develop and trigger a more extensive series of relations than can ordinary experience. However, this ability belongs to language proper and remains dependent on speech. He writes that

[t]he poem comes before the form, in the sense that a form grows out of the attempt of somebody to say something; just as a system of prosody is only a formulation of the identities in the rhythms of a succession of poets influenced by each other.<sup>104</sup>

For Eliot, then, poetry is language committed to process. It represents a relational field in which, under pressure from various sources, (the author's limited intention, the etymology of certain words, and others), the forms of language, from common speech to the pronouncements of dead languages, assert their relations as a tentative aesthetic whole. All of this is possible because words are essentially unstable. While always pointing towards an aspect of immediate experience, they are in a constant state of flux in relation to each other and to their referents.<sup>105</sup> So, "a word can be made to insinuate the whole history of a language and a civilization... [by virtue of] an allusiveness which is in the nature of words".<sup>106</sup> Eliot goes on to say that

[a]t some periods, the task is to explore the musical possibilities of an established convention of the relation of the idiom of verse to that of speech; and at other periods, the task is to catch up with the changes in colloquial speech, which are fundamentally changes in thought and sensibility.<sup>107</sup>

Ordinary speech is fundamental rather than inferior. Poetry and speech are components of each other. In order for either to live, as it were, they must be in relation. What comes before the poetic line and allows it to mean is the whole of the poem, the context. In its turn, the poem has its complete meaning in the context of tradition.

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* The conversational idiom is one of the qualities Eliot greatly admired in Dante.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* p. 37.

<sup>105</sup> This is in agreement with Mallarmé's principle that when words are used to describe they are tools of destruction. On the other hand, using words to suggest, the poet creates.

<sup>106</sup> Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), pp. 32-3.

<sup>107</sup> 'The Music of Poetry', p. 35.

Taking into consideration the Symbolist influence, together with his preoccupation with language and his interest in the musical quality inherent in verse, one finds that Eliot's verse contains a rhythmic movement that tends to sweep across the whole line and links lines and stanzas together. His is a language that is highly charged with a harmonic resonance and a certain distancing and abstracting which makes the reference more universal, less specifically personal. For Eliot, music evokes the structure of feeling, and in doing so escapes the limitations of meaning in the conventional sense. The French Symbolists hold that language, freed of conventional reference, points to the existence of an independent, numinous realm such as beauty, truth and other spiritual dimensions. Eliot's desire is to evoke some semblance of the Absolute, and his concept of an "objective correlative", "a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion",<sup>108</sup> echoes one aspect of the symbolist project.<sup>109</sup>

As with the French Symbolist poets, the reader finds two main factors that contribute towards Eliot's poetry aspiring towards the condition of music, namely those of myth and leitmotif. The Symbolists had dreamed of a universal language comprehensible to the cultural elite of their time and the common denominator of that language was the almost automatic response to mythical allusions on the writer's part. Mallarmé, in his role as both pre- and post-symbolist, envisaged the dangers of routine comprehension of mythical connotations, and circumvented the normal allusion to avoid the danger of conventionalization. He thereby drew attention to the need to revise and transfer the initial automatic response. The desire to re-adjust this universal language becomes in him not an effort to achieve a simultaneous identification of allusions in all the languages of the world, but to establish universally an approach to the reading of poetry in the process of which the reference becomes the common denominator not merely of signification. It is expected that the personal

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<sup>108</sup> 'Hamlet', in Selected Essays, p. 145.

<sup>109</sup> Mallarmé argues that "... we are now precisely at the moment of seeking, before that breaking up of the large rhythms of literature, and their scattering in articulate, almost instrumental, nervous waves, an art which shall complete the transposition, into the book, of the symphony; for, it is not in elementary sonorities of brass, strings, woodwind, unquestionably, but in the intellectual word at its utmost, the supreme Music". Correspondance, III, pp. 156-7. Quoted by M.L. Shaw, in Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 164. This is, essentially, the doctrine that had been divined by Gerard de Nerval. However, what in Nerval is pure vision, in Mallarmé becomes a logical sequence of meditation.

adjustment to the reference will be made in an infinite spectrum of deviations and elaboration. "I am inventing a language which must necessarily surge out of a new poesis which I can define in these two words: to paint not the thing but the effect it produces" is the way he explains the writing of 'Hérodiade'.<sup>110</sup>

Eliot's most explicit discussion of the importance of Frazerian studies to modern artists may be found in his 1923 review of Joyce's Ulysses.<sup>111</sup> Eliot argues that Frazer's work makes possible the use of the mythical method and that this method makes the modern world possible for art. He goes on to say that this method does something to the modern world, alters it in some way beneficial to artists. It is also one of the legacies inherited by the French Symbolists through Wagner. Eliot's idea needs to be understood within the context of his preoccupation with history. In the introduction to Savonarola, Eliot says that every period of history is seen differently by itself and by every other period, and "the past is in perpetual flux, although only the past can be known".<sup>112</sup> As he indicates in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', we know the past in a way that it could not have known itself because we can see it from the outside, but that in other ways we cannot know it as it knew itself because we cannot see it from the inside.<sup>113</sup>

When Eliot in the Ulysses review calls the modern world an "immense panorama of futility and anarchy" he is not simply complaining. He is speaking with philosophical precision about the instability of all relations when they are perceived from inside a closed system. From one point of view, all of history is a closed system, a house with many "cunning passages" and "contrived corridors". However, by moving to a higher view, to a greater or lesser extent, one can discover order. For Eliot, as it had been for Frazer and Weston, one way of manufacturing a synthetic perspective, a place from which the feeling of seeing from the outside can be juxtaposed with the problem of being trapped on the inside, is by alluding to ancient myths. Alluding without explanation to many myths generates an abstraction, something outside ourselves in

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<sup>110</sup> Letter to Henri Cazalis, dated October 1864, in Documents, ed. by C.P. Barbier, 7 vols (Paris: Nizet, 1968), VI, 439-40. Quoted by M.L. Shaw, p. 88.

<sup>111</sup> 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', Dial, 75 (November 1923), 480-3.

<sup>112</sup> 'Introduction' to Charlotte Eliot, Savonarola (London: R. Cobden-Sanderson, 1926), pp. I-xv (p. vii).

<sup>113</sup> op. cit. pp. 14-15.

both time and space. It makes the modern world possible for art by enabling it to be seen or perceived from an ideal or imagined position similar in some ways to what cubists labelled a fourth dimension. The modern world is altered to make it viable matter for art by inventing a perspective on it. Myth provides the raw materials out of which the synthetic transcendent perspective is manufactured. In explaining the points of similarity among myths by proposing a common origin, Frazer comes up with an abstract first myth, a monomyth. This myth provides a common ground, a sort of fourth dimension, from which viewers can look at the contemporary world from a sufficient distance to make that world appear to have an order. At the same time, or in rapid alternation, viewers are observing the contemporary world from their various perspectives within it. By simultaneously or in alternation occupying both an ideal mythic platform and a real position within the house of history, the poet permits binary vision.<sup>114</sup>

Mythic consciousness exists under the category of transcendent experience and in The Waste Land functions as a counterpoise to the relational cognition upon which secular knowledge depends. In using such figures as the Sibyl of Cumae and Tiresias, Eliot is trying to provide a means for the reader to transcend jarring and incompatible worlds, to move to a higher viewpoint that both includes and transcends the contemporary world. Like any scene viewed from the inside, the contemporary world is a panorama of futility and anarchy. However, the contemporary world is anarchic for a further reason. It is a world trapped in a relational mentality because it happens to be a culture based upon the assumptions that the transcendent either does not exist or is irrelevant to its principal concerns. Like Blake, Eliot deplors "single vision and Newton's sleep".<sup>115</sup>

As with the mythical method, Eliot's use of leitmotif is not attached by a convention to its subject, as is a code. If it is attached by convention, it must inevitably cease to be significant, in music and literature alike. The true leitmotif earns its meaning from the dramatic contexts in which it appears. For instance, within the Wagnerian

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<sup>114</sup> With this in mind, one may better understand Eliot's note on Tiresias, when he says that "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest.... What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem".

<sup>115</sup> Letter of William Blake to Thomas Butts, dated 22 November 1802, in The Letters of William Blake, ed. by G. Keynes (London: Rupert Hart Davies, 1968), p. 62.

framework (with which I shall deal in detail in both my second and fourth chapters), Wotan's theme in *Die Walküre* Act III, "Wer meines Speeres/Spitze fürchtet/durchschreite das Feuer nie!" no more means 'Siegfried' than does the descending scale of Wotan's spear-theme means "spear" or "treaty".<sup>116</sup> The theme is creating an expressive link between dramatic contexts which compels the listener to bring one situation to bear on another so that their atmospheres fuse. As T.A. Smailes argues, a "leitmotif is not a symbol in a code but a musical/literary magnet around which meaning slowly accumulates".<sup>117</sup> He argues that in The Waste Land, each image in the repetitive scheme is a thematic motif. However, although the images constitute what Smailes calls "a complete exposition of a theme", each is also a fragmentary statement. The reader knows that the strongest images are those which synthesize one or more classes of imagery. For instance, the image of "dry grass singing" comprehends three separate classes, namely, aridity, vegetation and music. Besides suggesting the themes of sterility and fertility, it condenses multiple associations in a single image and, thereby, constitutes a valuable symbolic motif. Smailes also argues that themes, like musical motifs, are associated with certain dominant complexes of images. He says that the images of aridity, fire and water correspond respectively to the themes of sterility, sexual love and rebirth. He concludes his argument by stating that Eliot's quick transitions and swift movements in chronology and locale are partly responsible for the poem's condensation of effects. However, the reader will find that for such effect, the poetry of Apollinaire provides an excellent mode. For instance, a cursory glance at a few of Apollinaire's verses from 'Zone' may help clarify certain areas which Smailes's article leaves somewhat obscure:

Maintenant tu es au bord de la Méditerranée  
 Sous les citronniers qui sont en fleur toute l'année  
 Avec tes amis tu te promènes en barque  
 L'un est Nissard il y a un Mentonasque et deux Turbiasques  
 Nous regardons avec effroi les poulpes des profondeurs  
 Et parmi les algues nagent les poissons images du Sauveur<sup>118</sup>

One notes the French poet's quick movements from place to place, his sudden time-shifts, his abrupt contrasts and disparate concrete imagery couched in a conversational idiom. This technique prevails strongly in The Waste Land, which is replete with

<sup>116</sup> See, *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Die Walküre*. 1865. 4 vols (Leipzig: Schott, 1899-1900), II. English translation by A. Porter, "Whoever is afraid of my spear will never walk through the fire".

<sup>117</sup> T.A. Smailes, 'The Music of Ideas in The Waste Land', *UES*, 11:1 (1993), 25-9, (p. 26).

<sup>118</sup> G. Apollinaire, *Alcools: Poèmes 1898-1913* (Paris: Gallimard, 1920), p. 11

ever-changing patterns of imagery and thematic organization. It is a formal structure which depends for its forward movement on the fundamental recurrence of motifs as leitmotifs throughout the poem. Leitmotif permits the listener/reader to complete the dramatic thought, and this is largely because it serves as an expressive link. The leitmotif works like a metaphor, coalescing with the dramatic idea and dragging it into the music/text where it is subjected to development. It is a development that the leitmotif does not resist.

### *The Poems*

From the beginning of his career as a poet and throughout the development of his poetic style, the reader finds that Eliot's concern with musical qualities in verse brings him close to Symbolist thought and technique. I have not deemed it relevant to deal with his recently published collection of his very first poems entitled *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*.<sup>119</sup> From the very beginning of his poetic output, one finds a remarkable sequence of city poems. This newly published collection of his first poems is the start of a set of variations on the theme of detachment and involvement within the seeker figure. This sequence emphasizes Eliot's other main construct for organizing psychic materials, the journey. Throughout the whole spectrum of Eliot's poetic output, consciousness is most engaged and challenged when it journeys: through the city streets beneath the muttering street lamps; along the "contrived corridors" of a sterile historical mind; among the "swarming crowds" crossing London Bridge; or in "the dark throat... /Or wherever cannot reach them the sound of the sea bell's/Perpetual angelus". Eliot repeats the tested pattern through which a physical journey over space traces an interior movement in awareness. The journey motif recurs obsessively throughout all his poems (and plays) because Eliot's generic consciousness is that of the seeker urged on by the need for meaning.

Up to his conversion in 1927, Eliot moves uneasily among possible stances towards experience: observer, self-watcher, director, disturber. Driven but sceptical, he journeys to reconcile the rival claims of matter and spirit, action and withdrawal, inner and outer, self and other. A divided self, he quests for wholeness, outwardly

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<sup>119</sup> op.cit. ed. by C. Ricks (London: Faber & Faber, 1996).

through encounter with others, and inwardly through role exchanges that may transform the fearful observer into the articulate disturber, the poet into the prophet. After his conversion, Eliot's journey is a journey inwards, one which leads to the discovery that death-in-life is a life-in-death, that the end is actually a beginning. Silence is no longer a neurotic state of being but the only language for the ineffable, and revelation of light comes through darkness.

In the poems of the 'Prufrock' volume, the language is dumb. Reflecting heavily the influence of Laforgue, one finds neat iambics, there is rhythm and rhyme, yet the verse floats self-absorbed, beamed from nowhere, without referents. The syntax is complete and empty. For all its formal rightness, the writing deliberately alienates. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as a whole is partly about language, its inevitability and its inadequacy. Prufrock's void occurs in a larger void. The society by which he measures his meaning - in coffee spoons - is also a society gripped by a paralyzing impotence of language. Every negative disclaimer of Prufrock is met by a vacuity of speech and action. The room echoes to the banter of socialites mouthing platitudes on Michelangelo, reducing the genius of creativity to a mere sound. The presumed girlfriend reclines on a linguistic couch of "that is not what I meant, at all", a disclaimer unqualified by any assertion of what was meant. The eventfulness of language is on Prufrock before he is prepared: the future tense "[s]hall I say", for instance, is overtaken by the present tense of verbal happenings, much too fast for him to control. Suddenly, language is happening through him. Before he can pull himself together, the language carries him beyond what he meant to say, into saying what he did not know he wanted to say, did not know he had it in him to ask, "[a]nd watched the smoke that rises from the pipes/Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?... " "It is language which happens through the speaker and not the speaker who expresses himself through language".<sup>120</sup> In this phase of his poetic career, Eliot's use of music serves to emphasize failed relationships, namely, that the closer protagonists are physically, the more distant they become psychologically.

In his interesting paper 'Aspects of Rhythm and Rhyme in Eliot's Early Poems', J. Chalker argues that Eliot makes use of "the steadiness and predictability of musical

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<sup>120</sup> D. Davie, p. 119. This concept also sums up Mallarmé's poetic aesthetic regarding language. Chapter Four will discuss this idea in more detail.

rhythm” to provide psychological reassurance in the midst of emotional disturbance.<sup>121</sup> In his article Chalker could not have been thinking of the irregular and unpredictable rhythmic pulse so characteristic of either Bartók or Stravinsky, amongst many others. The reader realizes that what Chalker calls “the steadiness and predictability” is more proof of the ironic stance that Eliot takes in his early poetry. The reader remembers the tremendous impact which Laforgue’s ironic twists had on the young Eliot. For instance, Eliot’s use of a regular rhythmic pulse in the “yellow fog” section of ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ conveys agitation rather than reassurance. The manipulation of rhythm and also rhyme (particularly internal rhyme) plays a major part in expressing mood and atmosphere. This is done not only in supporting what Chalker calls “the relatively superficial effects of onomatopoeia”, but by establishing a pattern of climax and cadence, of progressive and arrested movement, of resolved and frustrated expectation which, working for the most part subconsciously, creates in the reader’s mind an appropriate emotional response, what Eliot calls an “objective correlative”. With reference to ‘Portrait of a Lady’, Chalker argues that Eliot uses rhyme to establish “a comic atmosphere”. However, the reader knows that this “comic atmosphere” is a sharp undercutting of satire, a grim reality hidden beneath a linguistic comic relief. The same thing happens in the clerk-typist’s episode of The Waste Land:

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

The nonchalance of the girl’s reaction to her seduction, the loveless sex and listless ennui is enacted in the casual rhyme. One may add that, in being displayed, rhyme is inevitably destroyed.

Through comparisons mainly with Baudelaire, Chapter Two argues that the language of The Waste Land is also a language of the moment. Part of the anxiety of this poem is an anxiety about language, and this is not merely talked about but is incorporated in the text. The reader cannot get beyond the poem because language is fallen and he is trapped on the inside. Contrary to what P. Chancellor writes in his article ‘The Music of The Waste Land’, Wagner’s lament as it occurs in Eliot’s poem is reduced to mere

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<sup>121</sup> J. Chalker, ‘Aspects of Rhythm and Rhyme in Eliot’s Early Poems’, *Eng*, 16 (Autumn 1996), 84-8 (p. 87).

noises - "wallala leilala", to the whimper of "la" - rather than a mere "analogical sequence".<sup>122</sup> In a similar manner, Gerontion's world had also been blowing of the wind as he, with his words, scatters to the trades. Also, in a final linguistic abnegation, the hollow men are propped on sticks while the wind batters them, tearing their words to shreds.

All such personae fail to find an absolute point from which meaning may be construed, either linguistic or spiritual. Their speech, like their lives, is relative to the moment. Up to The Waste Land, Eliot's poems are full of fragmented thought, consonant with his idea of the fragmentariness of modern consciousness. It is less frequently noted that his central thesis about fragmentariness presupposes his own capacity for a sustained transcendence of that condition, and for the most extraordinary totalizing assertions about historical consciousness. For Eliot, the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition. In his extremely interesting article 'Musical Analogues in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land and Igor Stravinsky's "*The Rite of Spring*"', M.M. Boaz draws parallels between the structural layout of Eliot's poem and Stravinsky's ballet. He rightly argues that both poet and composer are deeply concerned with going back to the roots and with the subtle presence of primitivism and tradition in contemporary culture. For Boaz, The Waste Land is "all about myth and ritual" and "the quest for an ideal", while Stravinsky's ballet is "the personification of savage primitivism".<sup>123</sup> Apart from this, Boaz stresses that Eliot and Stravinsky shared three concerns. Each was interested in suggesting a relationship between the idea of prehistory, spring death and rebirth; each saw primitive times as an opportunity to search for the primordial roots of his art and each was interested in group rather than individual effects. Ultimately, the link between man and nature was rhythm, for poet and composer alike. What Boaz stops short of discussing is the way employed by Eliot in The Waste Land and by Stravinsky in *The Rite of Spring*, namely the technique of superimposing independent ideas which suggests the simultaneity of unrelated actions. The technique of superimposing autonomous, even irreconcilable ideas replaces the traditional notion of transition in both poetry and music. As a way of bridging a shift

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<sup>122</sup> P. Chancellor, 'The Music of "The Waste Land"', *CLS*, 6 (March 1989), 221-32 (p. 224).

<sup>123</sup> M.M. Boaz, 'Musical Analogues in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*', *CR*, 24 (1990), 218-31, (p. 222).

in thought, it acknowledges the independence of the two ideas while allowing the reader/listener to transfer his attention gradually from one to the next.

Words must be released from their subjective participation in the life of the ego before any potentially religious language can become the vehicle of faith. Eliot (undoubtedly deeply influenced by his conversion in 1927 to what he calls Anglo-Catholicism) believed that such implications are enormous for both character and poetic creator. If the characters in his poetry are ones who discover the locus of meaning in an absolute, then the author must also discover linguistic methods of formally incarnating their discoveries in the poetic work. Eliot himself discovers this in a poetic language that moves from irony to a level of incantation and contemplation where words take on the aura of sacramental gesture.

In his excellent article 'Wit and Music in T.S. Eliot's Poetry'<sup>124</sup> M. Scofield combines the metaphysical aspects in Eliot's mature poetry with the musical. True to the stance taken by the Metaphysical poets, he presents the essence of wit as intellectual surprise with the latent irony in its conceits, together with a suggestion of the grotesque which seems conscious and intellectual. He argues that, like Dante before him, Eliot's metaphysical quality in his poetry is a technique of fusing images and ideas which is deliberately strained and forced. He then goes on to relate this with what Eliot himself says about "a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience". The reader knows that the two aspects of this mechanism - the subjective and the objective - are often described in terms of music and the visual arts respectively. Scofield refers to those parts in Eliot's poetry, particularly 'Ash-Wednesday', where the rhythm of the incantation is most prevalent in those parts which deal with wit in the metaphysical sense. To support his arguments, Scofield refers to the ubiquitous presence of Dante in 'Ash-Wednesday', an influence which is responsible for both the lucidity and obscurity of his work. The reader also knows, however, that the metaphysical overtones in Eliot's poetry contribute to the musical qualities of his verse, a feeling for syllable and rhythm which prods an instantaneous impression in the reader purely through the beauty of its sound. The result is not only what Scofield calls a "fleeting sensation of something mystical" but also an aesthetic

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<sup>124</sup> 'Wit and Music in T.S. Eliot's Poetry', *EngR*, 1 (April 1991), 7-10 (p. 8).

and spiritual experience which transcends the intellectual and emotional levels of the sensitive reader. In perusing Dante, the reader feels the force of the poem's communication and accepts it as a species of ritualistic chant before actually inquiring into its meaning.

This is evident in 'Ash-Wednesday' and the 'Ariel Poems' (the subject of Chapter Three). In Eliot's estimation, a word signifies as much by how it sounds as by its dictionary meaning. This emphasis upon the rhythm of a work remained intact from the earlier work through to the 'Ariel Poems'. Eliot had always prized rhythm as a constituent element of the poem's fundamental meaning. As utilized in 'Ash-Wednesday' and the 'Ariel Poems', rhythm is an aesthetic object. The nineteenth century had developed a view of music and poetry as arts that are deeply inter-related, endowed with common sources and common ends. When a poem and a composition converge, the intertextual link between them can represent two kinds of intimacy. In some cases, the structural rhythm through which various works are affiliated acts like a paradigm and its characteristic patterns, problems and phenomenology appear as a kind of impromptu grammar of particulars.<sup>125</sup>

Eliot's very evident personal reticence must have added to the other more intellectual motives which made him, in his early work, cherish a doctrine and practice of impersonality. The early verse moves towards the Symbol, "[t]he yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes", or rests in the musical cadence or quotation, "[t]his music crept by me upon the waters". The quite different, yet related, power of Four Quartets is the unfailing and unfaltering conscience with which the poem endlessly forces itself into individual utterance, voices itself "beyond poetry". This phrase "beyond poetry" comes from an extremely interesting part of an unpublished lecture given by Eliot in 1933.<sup>126</sup> Eliot himself had quoted from a not wholly negative description by D.H. Lawrence of modern poetic style, namely, "everything can go, but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, today". Eliot then adds a brief reference to his own ambition, "[t]o get *beyond poetry*, as

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<sup>125</sup> Wagner argues that "In art... the way to make an effect is putting forward something instinctive". Quoted by R. Ray, in Words on Music (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 97.

<sup>126</sup> It was the year before Eliot visited Burnt Norton.

Beethoven in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*.”<sup>127</sup> To get beyond music is to achieve musicality. To get beyond poetry means, perhaps, both to comprehend and to transcend the limitations and failures of language.

This effort produces some of those formal aspects of Four Quartets (the subject of Chapter Four) which critics have noted. K. Verheul argues that Eliot’s ideas about music in his essay ‘The Music of Poetry’ can be directly related to A.W. de Groot’s principle of ‘Gestalt’ in the latter’s Introduction to General Linguistics.<sup>128</sup> However, such an exercise reduces Four Quartets to a linguistic experiment. The reader realizes that an important feature which this poem has in common with music is the way it moves and is perceived in time. It is music which can only be heard in its silence. Verheul goes on to argue that the connection between the poetic and musical ‘Gestalt’ in Four Quartets is linear. However, the reader will not fail to notice that only by acquainting and relating the linear movement of the language with the cyclical notion of the leitmotif can one arrive at the “still point” which is the fulcrum of the paradox of the mystical theology of St John of the Cross. In Four Quartets Eliot adopts the mystic’s choice of the negative way. Amongst others, he echoes the paradoxes inherent in the writings of St John of the Cross. Eliot’s use of silent music, “the unheard music in the shrubbery”, as transcendent figure, as sign of unitary vision is, perhaps, the most traditional of his linguistic figurations. He himself places it in a traditional frame when, in ‘Burnt Norton’ I, he goes on to oppose “shrieking voices/Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering” against “the Word in the desert... attacked by voices of temptation”. The passage recalls the fifth movement of ‘Ash-Wednesday’, where its doctrinal context is even more explicit, namely, in the “Word unheard/The Word without a word, the Word within/The world and for the world”.

Chapter Four goes on to argue that in Eliot, such asceticism becomes an aesthetic. His is a purgative writing that strives, as he puts it in ‘Little Gidding’ I, to offer “a husk of meaning/From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled/If at all”. In this ancient exegetical image, the signifier is a shell, or husk, that falls away once the truth it was its purpose to convey is achieved. As Eliot writes in ‘English Poets as

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted by F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 89.

<sup>128</sup> K. Verheul, ‘Music, Meaning and Poetry in “Four Quartets”’, *Lingua*, 16 (1986), 279-91.

Letter Writers', the ideal of art would be a "poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poetry points at, and not on the poetry".<sup>129</sup> In this sense, Mallarméan desire "[d]onner un sens plus pur aus mots de la tribu" resonates well even beyond a strictly aesthetic project. The poem is an ascetic discarding, a purgative process that also discloses the contradictions of Eliot's position. The poem claims, in its numerous synecdochic tropes, to represent partly "a lifetime burning in every moment", both "[s]till and still moving/Into another intensity/For a further union, a deeper communion". Those "united in the strife which divided them" are reconciled only when all "accept the constitution of silence". The ascetic commitment finds its ultimate sign in silence. Both as representing, and as subject to, temporal division, language is to be surpassed, denied. As the mystical descent of 'Burnt Norton' III points away from "the twittering world" as "words, after speech, reach into the silence" in 'Burnt Norton' V, so the soul is enjoined to "be still" in 'East Coker' III, and consummate experience is "quite ineffable" in 'The Dry Salvages' II. It is only in this self-negating sense that there "is a voice descanting (though not to the ear/The murmuring shell of time, and not in any language)" in 'The Dry Salvages' III. Even supposedly positive images of voice thus prove to be true only in their negation, namely, voice only as non-voice, a trope for silence. In Four Quartets, language invades the territory of silence without inhabiting it, without, therefore, making it fully articulate.

Both this positive promise and its subversion come to their finale in 'Little Gidding', which at last and above all announces "the complete consort dancing together". At this point, words are apparently embraced and affirmed, "[a]nd every phrase/And sentence that is right (where every word is at home/... /An easy commerce of the old and the new". Here, however, as throughout the poem, linguistic goals prove to contradict linguistic means. Affirmation at once modulates into endings that, rather than embracing linguistic process, surpass it in ways that also deny it: "[e]very phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning". However, it is in the light of promise that the cycle closes, for Eliot's phrase "complete consort dancing together" does promise union, harmony, reconciliation and mutuality. It offers a gracious gesture of synecdochic embrace. The whole poem is a desire to make a poetic journey from the

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<sup>129</sup> Quoted by P. Chancellor, p. 230.

“rose-garden” of ‘Burnt Norton’ to its transfigured counterpart in ‘Little Gidding’, to the moment of “midwinter spring”. It is also in the light of the Incarnation that the speaker in Four Quartets is able to arrive at a transfigured view of temporality and eternity and so approach a new mode of being. A Symbolist might say that all history aspires towards the condition of a symbol. In Four Quartets, Eliot devotes his symbolist art to history.

There is something ineffable about the music in Four Quartets, something that words cannot capture, but which must nevertheless be heard by the mental ear and grasped in our deeper experience of meaning. One may have the same experience of ineffability even when semantic expectations are fulfilled. Were I to try to identify this ineffability I might point to some other work of art; a Corot landscape for instance, or a Fauré chamber movement. It is not because semantic expectations have been simultaneously aroused and thwarted but because expressiveness, in poetry as in music, cannot be detached from its sensuous form. The ineffability of artistic meaning is a special case of the ineffability of first-person awareness, the impossibility of translating ‘what it is like’ into a description. It is this which explains the effect of condensation in art. For instance, Rimbaud’s lines “Ô saisons, Ô châteaux/Quel âme est sans défaut?” convey an indefinable emotion. Much is at work apart from the literal meaning. The alert reader will ask himself what seasons and castles have to do with each other and why they prompt the question “[q]uel âme est sans défaut?” He will recall that the seasons began, according to traditional Christian belief, only with the Fall and expulsion from Paradise; that castles represent man’s futile attempt to stave off disaster, to render permanent what is fleeting; hence the two ideas seem to suggest the only kind of permanence that man obtains - the permanence of ageing things. The question comes and the invited answer is not ‘none’ but ‘none since the Fall’. In two lines the reader has been prepared for Rimbaud’s invocation to guilt and sexual transgression. None of this is stated by the poet, but precisely because it is not stated the lines can be understood only by a leap into subjectivity, by attaining the first-person perspective that binds these images together.

The seeming paradox of the expressive and the ineffable go together not only in music but also in poetry. If all art aspires towards the condition of music, it is because music achieves the greatest possible distance from the explicit statement, while still

inviting the listener to enter into its expressive content. Understanding both music and poetry involves the active creation of an intentional world, in which notes and words are transfigured into sounds and tones, into metaphorical movements in a metaphorical space. At a certain point, the listener/reader has the experience of a first-person perspective on a life that is no-one's. This recognition of expression is a continuation of the imaginative activity that is involved in understanding music and poetry: the activity of hearing sounds as figurative life so that "you are the music while the music lasts".

Between the impulse to render concretely the nuances of felt experience and the desire to transcend experience entirely by circumscribing it within the settled categories of expository reason, Eliot is an eclectic figure of an important movement of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Age of Prufrock

*But I've gotta use words when I talk to you.*<sup>1</sup>

*The reactions which music evokes are not feelings,  
but they are the images, memories of feelings.*<sup>2</sup>

The Symbolists argue that the purpose of art is beauty and beauty is style. For them, style is a supremely difficult achievement, won by knowledge, calculation and scrupulous toil against the resistance of language. The Introduction dwelt in some detail on Symons's book on the French Symbolist poets, which presents Symbolism as an attempt to make the soul of things visible. Reacting against scientific materialism, the Symbolist poet assumes that reality is ultimately spirit or soul. Seeking to evoke this, he exploits symbols, but also dream, vision, association, suggestion, connotation and deliberately indefinite reference. He avoids whatever might seem "denoted and external"<sup>3</sup> especially plot, logic and rhetoric. For the Symbolists, the intuition of organic unity or correspondence provides the ground for a technical procedure that later appears everywhere in Modernist poetry, namely, the juxtaposition of apparently alien things.

Symons argues that one of the beliefs of French Symbolist poets is that artistic inspiration and execution are the result of a spiritual experience which occurs in that region of the being where there is no separation into different arts. The poet, thus, becomes a prophet. "Il faut être voyant", says Rimbaud,<sup>4</sup> and in Latin, the same word - 'vates' - describes both prophet and poet. In 'Nos maîtres', the eminent music critic Théodore de Wyzéwa writes:

[le] créer l'oeuvre d'art, c'est être voyant, ou atteindre le vrai à travers la Maïa du Réel; c'est être poète, ou s'efforcer de rendre l'infini par le fini, le monde émotionnel par monde sensible; c'est être artiste, ou capable d'extérioriser l'émotion ressentie au contact de l'invisible.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Agonistes', in *The Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. by Mrs V. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> P. Hindemith, *A Composer's World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 38. He emulates the Symbolist theory that poetry does not seek to describe the idea but is the idea itself.

<sup>3</sup> A. Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Random, 1967), p. 19

<sup>4</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, a critical edition with notes by A. Adam (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) p. 436.

<sup>5</sup> *Revue wagnérienne*, 2 (1885), 47. "to create the work of art, is to be a visionary, or reach the truth by contact with the Maya of Reality; it is to be a poet, or strive to substitute the infinite by the finite, the emotional world by a sensitive world; it is to be an artist, or to be able to exteriorize the emotion that is felt in contact with the invisible".

Among all arts, the Symbolists believe that music is more capable than the rest of expressing this spiritual quality which they are all seeking. Their aim is, as Valéry puts it, to “reprendre à la musique leur bien”, to take back from music the expressive powers which the other arts had allowed her to monopolize.<sup>6</sup> It means that poetry should be able to follow music in the power it possesses of evoking a state of mind, “un état d’âme”.<sup>7</sup> Valéry argues that Symbolism is an attempt to spiritualize literature, whereby it may at least attain liberty and its authentic speech. In attaining this liberty it accepts a heavier burden for, in speaking to the reader so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken, “it becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual”.<sup>8</sup>

Reading Symons’s book, on which he commented that it “is one of those [books] which affected the course of my life”,<sup>9</sup> Eliot was particularly impressed by the essay on Laforgue, in whom he found a writer who helped him become aware of what he wanted to say himself. Laforgue writes verse in the vein of ironic pessimism and continually makes references to the illusory nature of all experience. In Laforgue’s poetry Eliot discovered a poetic language: “Of Jules Laforgue, for instance, I can say that he was the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech”, he said in a talk in London in 1950.<sup>10</sup> Intent on finding a poetic method suited to the personal confession, Eliot discovered in Laforgue a ready-made strategy, the creation of the detached, objective and apparently flippant commentator, which he could employ for his own ends. Using Laforgue as a kind of springboard, as it were, Eliot found in him a source of fresh inspiration. In Laforgue he admired three things in particular, namely, his “essential quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind”, and his use of irony to express a “*dédoublement* of the personality against which the subject

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<sup>6</sup> A. Fabré, in ‘Le rôle de la musique dans l’oeuvre poétique de Valéry’, *Memoires de l’Académie de Vaucluse*, 3:57 (1938), 35-47, gives a detailed analysis of the musicality in Valéry’s verse.

<sup>7</sup> Mallarmé also wished his poems to possess the faculty of multiple interpretation. With the French language, he found difficulty in exteriorizing a spiritual experience since it possesses no overtones and no mystery. He also wished poetry to possess, as the religions did, its mystery into which it could withdraw and hide itself from the contamination of the masses. In ‘Hérésie Artistique’, *Documents*, III, p. 298, he wrote: “Toute chose qui veut devenir sacrée s’enveloppe de mystère”. Mystery and obscurity are the protection of poetry from the idle curiosity of the masses.

<sup>8</sup> A. Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Essays Ancient and Modern* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> This talk, ‘What Dante Means to Me’, was given at the Italian Institute in London on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1950. It was later published in *To Criticize the Critic*, pp. 125-35.

struggles".<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Eliot's involvement with Laforgue brought about a thoroughgoing and absorbing re-orientation of his basic ideas concerning the kind of poetry that he might write.<sup>12</sup> These qualities are evident in Laforgue's dramatic monologues as in Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. Eliot's poems of this period show that he is even more concerned than Laforgue ever was to establish a character for his narrator, and so gives him more external characteristics. Eliot's monologues imply criticism of a particular attitude, hypersensitive and negative, and of a particular artificial and pretentious society. As a result, the reader can mentally visualize Prufrock and the environment he inhabits more precisely than he can the narrator of Laforgue's monologues.<sup>13</sup>

"Nothing makes a man more ridiculous really than the fear of ridicule".<sup>14</sup> The early works of Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot depict a picture of a general breakdown of traditional relationships - Man and God, a world without redemption; Man and Man, the community dissolves into the anonymous crowd of exiles; Man and Woman, a fragmentary mutilated religion is matched by a fragmentary mutilated love; the different faculties of the Individual and the destruction of the self. In these works, Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot compose in units of various and varying lengths, working out of involved states of feeling often associated, in the both the poems and the music, with inhibition, fastidiousness and an acute sense of the ridiculous. Eliot follows Laforgue and Stravinsky in endowing poetry with vagueness and ridding it of large oratorical flourishes, bringing it closer to the contemporary individual's mental processes.

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<sup>11</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion*, XII. 3 (Spring 1933), 467, 469.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot's neglect of the work of Pound as late as 1910 illustrates this: "I was introduced to Personae and Exultations in 1910", he wrote much later, "while still an undergraduate at Harvard. The poems did not then excite me any more than did the poetry of Yeats. I was too much engrossed in working out the implications of Laforgue". See, 'On a Recent Piece of Criticism', *Purpose* (April-June 1938), 23. Here, one is also reminded of Sylvia Plath's confession of willed immersion in the works of others: "I will imitate until I can feel that I am using what he can teach", she said of the writings of Frank O'Connor. Quoted in *TLS*, 21 June 1991, p. 19. Examples of such obsession are striking in the visual arts: Matisse before Cézanne's bathers, Francis Bacon before Velásquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X, and Derain working out the implications of Seurat and Gauguin.

<sup>13</sup> Much later, in 1953, Eliot claimed that pure dramatic monologue could not "create a character". See 'The Three Voices of Poetry', p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Christianity and Communism', *Listener*, 2 (16 March 1932), 383.

In Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot, modern urban man has a particularly nervous, exacerbated sensibility and reacts intensely to slight stimuli. Language and music grope, slowly expand and build a mental scene. It is the movement of consciousness trying to grasp the totality of experience. As in 'Complaintes' and *Petrouchka*, in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' there is no real story overall but rather, a succession of images, ideas, actions and moods. The mind of the reader races to find a narrative logic, the kind of logic used to recall the dissociated images of a dream. Like *Petrouchka*, Prufrock can be comprehended as a nightmare. *Petrouchka* proves the possibility of sustained musical representation of a totally new order. It proceeds without all the traditional means by which music is supposed to make itself intelligible, namely, repetition of themes, integrity and discursive transformation of clearly recognizable motives, and harmonic structures based on a framework of tonality. It is not only the apparently total freedom from the requirements of musical form that makes this ballet a well-attested miracle, inexplicable and incontrovertible, but also its freedom from traditional dramatic process. Stravinsky's fascination with Symbolist poetry and theatre, and his own brilliant literary sensibility, made him an experienced user of experimental techniques, whether his own or others'. He shows a special ability to escape generic constraints to find new forms and new sounds.

In a similar manner Eliot, in his early poetry, makes use of rhythm, the steadiness and predictability of rhythm, in an almost futile attempt at providing psychological reassurance in the midst of emotional disturbance. The rhythmic motif in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' offers a flexible musical idea to be resorted to again and again. It could be repeated, expanded, contracted, added to, truncated, counterpointed against itself, and set either to repeated pitches or to any number of pitch shapes. Throughout this poem and others of the same period, the musical imagery is couched in Symbolist parlance, where the sense of thwarted desire and latent frustration weave their fantasies around an imaginary and idealized object which, through a series of displacements, must itself be anchored to a real, though debased, world. Distinctive in Laforgue's, Stravinsky's and Eliot's early works are prolonged 'ostinati' and systematic presentation of ideas, first as fragments, then as abrupt juxtapositions and, finally, as seemingly implausible super-impositions. These works evoke particular experiences and emotions, and they do so largely through the symbolist techniques of juxtaposition, irony, image and symbol. They are works whose control of patterned

sound and rhythm is exquisitely sure in its suggestion of traditional poetic structure while the form itself is actually varied and highly improvisational. In the case of Laforgue and Eliot each poem, by virtue of its free verse, seems to be a free musical composition based on the changing needs of the emotional context.

Through their novel approach to discontinuity, modern musical and poetical works make how the reader hears and perceives as important as what he hears and perceives. Besides passing on the technique of irony to musicians and writers, French Symbolist poets, particularly Laforgue, further handed over the possibilities inherent in 'vers libre' to poets. The aesthetic principle involved in 'vers libre' is a negative one. The Symbolists were merely carrying to its logical conclusion that demolition of arbitrary rules for attaining beauty that the romantic age had long since inaugurated. In 'vers libre', Mallarmé had announced that there is

Style, versification s'il y a cadence et c'est pourquoi toute prose d'écrivain fastueux, soustraite à ce laisser-aller en usage, ornementale, vaut en tant qu'un vers rompu, jouant avec ses timbres et encore les rimes dissimulés; selon un thyrsé plus complexe. Bien l'épanouissement de se qui naguères obtint le titre de *poème en prose*.<sup>15</sup>

Both Mallarmé and Laforgue argue that the rhythmic patterns of 'vers libre' are not at the whim of the user but, on the contrary, stem from it and are contained within the limits of its rhythmic possibilities, so that even in 'vers libre', there is something of the "musiques convenues" acting as link between poet and reader.

The peculiar notion of 'vers libre' is intended to advertise, as it were, its freedom from all generic constraint, as being beyond generic classification, beyond even the fluidity of the prose poem. Yet, in one key formal aspect, it resembles the commercial and cultural world of which it speaks, in its aspect of pure speed. Concision is the essence of Laforgue's 'vers libre'. Laforgue's 'Les plaintes de cette bonne lune' is a text not only about speed of circulation but is also itself fast-moving, constituted as a linguistic environment governed by a quite wildly accelerated flow of images and signifiers. Syntactically, there is scarcely a fully formed sentence. As in most of Eliot's poems of the Prufrock volume, there is

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<sup>15</sup> 'La Musique et les lettres', *Revue blanche* (Paris: 1894), 298. "Style, versification if there is rhythm and that is all the prose of a sumptuous writer, removed from the usual casual stance, the ornamental, is worth as much as a broken verse, playing with its timbre, and the still dissimulated rhymes; according to a more complex state. Indeed, the blossoming of what formerly started to be known as *poem in prose*."

constant ellipsis and fracture, a breathless rush from one phrasally under-formed idea to the next. Lexically and semantically, these poems work as a version of collage, a fragmentary and mobile patchwork of eclectic juxtapositions, migrating morphemes, verbal metamorphoses, puns and neologisms. Through such techniques, Laforgue and Eliot seem to label the intimate tensions and stress of contemporary urban man as neurasthenia. For Eliot, language, like consciousness itself, appeared to be in decay, yet poetry could only be alive in so far as it reflected this difficult situation. It is a varied style, which deliberately switches from the solemn to the ridiculous to express the peculiar sense of bathos that characterized urban life.

From the French Symbolists Eliot learned a great deal in formulating his own notions of metrical sequences. "The constant evasion and recognition of regularity, this contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony ... is the very life of verse".<sup>16</sup> This is evident in 'Preludes', a tactic which creates a formal tension that in turn recapitulates the poem's themes. Like these rhythms, rhymes and lines, Eliot's personae in his early poetry exist suspended between poles of order and awkwardness, desire and frustration, beauty and ugliness. The surface of their lives nonetheless remains composed, even routine. There is subliminal dissonance yet no outright disturbance. The connotative shift from inanimate to human subjects constitutes this poem's psychological method. City life places all souls under pressure, depleting them ethically and spiritually. Such souls may find themselves over-extended, as in the painful, membranous "stretched tight across the skies" or victimized, either "like a patient etherized on a table" or "trampled by insistent feet". From the heavens to the pavement, the poem's atmosphere renders pathos stranded amid indifference and emphasized by it.

From Laforgue, Eliot develops a certain kind of rhythmical free verse in which expansions and contractions of metre and irregular rhyme patterning echo the shifting play of emotions. Laforgue is responsible for proving to Eliot that it is possible to present in verse an interior monologue, disjointed and often incongruous, which expresses basic human conflicts. These conflicts exist between the outer world of action and the inner world of sensitive reaction; between the sexes, estranged from

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<sup>16</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Reflections on *vers libre*', *New Statesman*, VIII. 204 (3 March 1917), 518-19 (p. 518).

one another by an artificial society; the traditional conflict between body and soul and the modern conflict between the intellect and the emotions that obsess both poets. The latter led to what Pound terms “verbalism”, defined by Taupin as the “enlacement de mots, d’expressions et d’idées harmonisées par des rythmes et des refrains”.<sup>17</sup> Taupin quotes three lines from ‘Portrait of a Lady’ that he considers to be “bien du Laforgue de la meilleure manière”:

This music is successful with a ‘dying fall’  
Now that we talk of dying -  
And should I have the right to smile?

Compared with the following lines, one tends to agree:

Vraiment je ne songe pas au reste; j’attendrai  
Dans l’attendrissement de ma vie faite exprès  
‘Deniers vers’, IX<sup>18</sup>

Oh! que nous mourrons!  
.....  
O Nature relève-moi le front!  
Puisque, tôt ou tard, nous mourrons....  
‘Deniers vers’, XII<sup>19</sup>

Differences highlight the characteristics of each poet, but what the two writers share is of great importance. If Eliot is “modern”, as Christopher Ricks claims, in part because he “repeatedly refuses the satisfactions, the complacencies, of the secure and indubitable”, it must be because the French Symbolists, and Laforgue and Baudelaire in particular, led the way.<sup>20</sup>

Laforgue accepts that one of the chief aims of Symbolism is the approximation of its poetry to music. However, he does not convey the noble symphonic music of earlier poets but the dislocated rhythms of modern neurosis. The same happens in Stravinsky’s *Petrouchka*. In this poetry and this music, the reader does not hear the full symphony orchestra but the barrel-organ or the tinkling piano. Both wish to evoke the characteristic cacophony of the modern city. Eliot believes in the essential relationship between conscious control and inspirational force. Music is thought to contain, or be invested with, pure emotional states:

It is not a question of carrying out a limited operation whose end is situated somewhere in our surroundings, but rather of creating, maintaining, and exalting a certain *state*, by a periodic movement

<sup>17</sup> R. Taupin, *L’Influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine* (Paris: Nizet, 1929), p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> “Indeed, I never think of anything else; I’ll wait to tend/You in the tenderness of a life that’s found its end”. P. Dale, *Poems of Jules Laforgue* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1986), p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> “And we must die!/Oh Nature, raise my confidence high/Since sooner or later we die”. P. Dale, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> C. Ricks, *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), p. 14.

that can be executed on the spot, a movement which is almost entirely dissociated from sight, but which is stimulated and regulated by auditive rhythm.<sup>21</sup>

Within the context of French Symbolist poetry, expressivity in music is looked on as a means of revelation of depth of feeling not normally experienced. Poetry is the attempt to control and order the associations. In his early poetry, Eliot exposes with superb clarity the paradoxes and inconsistencies of human desires and behaviour, the “dissociation of sensibility” in the context of the potentially dramatic incident. His monologues are not the sensitive listening to the inner voice so much as the presentation of a powerful inner vision in conflict with the real world. Such is Eliot's desire for poetic synthesis that order is clearly discernible behind the apparent disorder of ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’. Laforgue had pursued his world of reverie in a more relaxed and more genuinely humorous manner. Laforgue's narrator is characterless when compared to Prufrock or the narrator of ‘Portrait of a Lady’, and the disease from which he suffers is inherent in his youth. This gives him a universal appeal and also a more protean flavour. In the final poem of the Deniers vers he accepts life, if very tentatively, and the reader has a vivid sense of the possibility of such transitions from one state of consciousness to its apparent opposite. Prufrock, on the other hand, is a complex personality, but he lacks such freedom. Were he to change, the reality of the monologue would be seriously undermined. The same is true of ‘Portrait of a Lady’, where the difference in age and sensibility between the two protagonists has to be seen as insuperable. Laforgue's impasses relate to broader metaphysical issues and conflict, they are set in a more fluid and shifting psychological landscape. Here, man is already, to a greater extent, a “structure of the fictions he tells about himself”.<sup>22</sup>

With their rhythmic organization, modernist music and some poetry create continuity that is relational rather than directional. Listening to modern music and reading modern poetry the listener/reader is faced with impressions of disarray and feelings of disorientation, with an elaborate and endlessly unravellable hyper-structure which has the initial impact of something chaotic and totally lacking in order, yet which makes huge intellectual and emotional demands on the listener and reader respectively. One

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Reflections on *vers libre*’, p. 518.

<sup>22</sup> P. Brooks, Reading for the Plot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 277.

finds that modern musicians and writers are deeply preoccupied with the relationship between art and sensibility.

### Pierrot, Petrouchka and Prufrock

*Pierrots and Petrouchkas are endemic everywhere in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe.  
They exist as an archetype of the self-dramatizing artist,  
whose stylized mask both symbolizes and veils artistic ferment.*<sup>23</sup>

In Laforgue's 'Pierrot' poems, Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and Eliot's Prufrock, art is able to aid enlightenment only by relating the clarity of the word to its own darkness. In the art form of this period, one comes by the illusory retreats of play-acting and the dumb 'Pierrot' shows of irony and frustration and of human tragedies enacted not on a spiritual plane but in the streets, namely, in the circus or the bull-ring as in Bizet's *Carmen* or in the fair-grounds resounding with barrel-organ music as in Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*. All are creations in the spirit of Laforgue, which are reflected in the pictures of Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso, Rouault and Seurat. The sardonic qualities of the works of Toulouse-Lautrec and Picasso, and the corresponding 'Pierrot' works of Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Debussy, would hardly have developed in the way they did without Laforgue. Laforgue's school is one of ironic thought, anti-romantic and clownesque.<sup>24</sup> These artists cultivate a dangerous fantasy, not the realistic situation itself. Apart from this, there exists a tenderness, a naïveté and a compulsion to elude reality.<sup>25</sup>

The poetry of Eliot at this stage and the writing of the French Symbolists deal with 'boredom', "des ennuis les plus comme il faut et d'occasion".<sup>26</sup> In an interview with

<sup>23</sup> I. Stravinsky & R. Craft, *Dialogues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> In the Laforguean world of irony and bathos, one may include musical compositions like Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and *Renard*; Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*; Debussy's *Gigues* based on Verlaine's poems 'Rues' with its organ-grinder of Laforguean associations, and its modern English counterpart, Walton's *Façade* on the poems of Edith Sitwell, who was herself aware of the terrors peculiar to the mind of Laforgue. In fact, in *The Russian Ballet Gift Book* (London: Methuen, 1921), p. 18, Edith Sitwell writes: "[In] *Petrouchka* we see mirrored for us, in these clear sharp outlines and movements, all the philosophy of Laforgue, as the puppets move somnambulant through the dark of our hearts. For this ballet, alone among them all, shatters our glass house about our ears, and leaves us terrified, haunted by its tragedy. The music, harsh, crackling rags of laughter, shrieks at us like some brightly painted Punch and Judy show.... And there is one short march, quick and terrible, in which the drum-taps are nothing but the anguished beat of the clown's heart as he makes his endless battle against materialism. And we know we are watching our own tragedy".

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the numerous Harlequin pictures of Picasso, notably his early undated 'Pierrot with Flowers', illustrate this tendency.

<sup>26</sup> C. Baudelaire, *Correspondance Generale*, IV, p. 56.

J.P. Hodlin, Eliot says, "I think that boredom is a very powerful force in life and that people will do the most extraordinary things to escape from it".<sup>27</sup> In the early poem 'Spleen', a wasteland is already beginning to emerge, where a relationship between people and things is a "dull conspiracy" against which boredom and depression are "unable to rally". Boredom is a typical Baudelairean experience. It belongs to the city as the psychological consequence of immersion in the commodity culture, once the latter has been emptied of its hypnotic phantasmagoria and its truth revealed in the paradox of the new appearing as ever the same. Laforgue takes the experience a stage further or, rather, turns it reflexively upon itself. He implies that boredom is in turn caught up in the very phenomenon to which it is a negative reaction. The plural form of 'ennuis' can, therefore, be read as designating the literary-cultural plurality of available 'boredoms', a range of late nineteenth-century Baudelairean posturings represented as so many brands in the store. Laforgue's ironic point is that 'ennui' post-Baudelaire has itself become commodity, empty jingle, "auto-litanies et formules vaine".<sup>28</sup> It has become 'Boredom', a mere attitude, cheaply produced and endlessly re-cycled, and nowhere more insistently than in much of the poetry of Laforgue himself. The irony seems to be self-referential, including as one of its objects Laforgue the consummate performer in the roles of Hamlet and Pierrot, languishing in the "tedium vitae" of "dies iramissibles", itself a wonderful parodic echo of both the genre of the Requiem and the Baudelairean theme of the "irrémediable".

In his acceptance of the fragility of things as actually a principle of art, Laforgue is a sort of transformed Watteau, showing disdain for the world that fascinates him, in quite a different way. He constructs his own world, lunar and actual, speaking astronomy and slang, with a constant disengaging of the visionary aspect under which frivolity becomes an escape from the arrogance of a still more temporary mode of being, the world as it appears to the sober majority. He is terribly conscious of daily life, cannot omit, mentally, a single hour of the day. He sees what he calls "l'inconscient" in every gesture, but he cannot see it without these gestures. He regards, not only as an imposition but also as a conquest, the possibilities for art

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with J.P. Hodlin published in *Horizon*, 12 (August 1945), 83-9 (p. 85).

<sup>28</sup> J. Laforgue, *Oeuvres complètes: 'Les Complaintes', 'L'Imitation de Notre-Dame de lune'* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1922), p. 32.

which come from the sickly modern being, with his clothes and with his nerves, the mere fact that he flowers from the soil of his epoch.

In his poetry, Laforgue exploits stock themes, images, attitudes and emotions of late-Romantic poetry, but with the all-important difference that he exploits them with disbelief and a devastating irony. He conveys his ironic vision through deliberate incongruities. If the lady in a moonlit scene waits for the tender, conventional vows, the Laforguean lover overflows with repartee. As a consequence, where the late-Romantic lyric presents, through the course of the poem, an undeviating unity of gradual transition of mood, point of view and style, Laforgue jolts readers with unpredictable alternation, not unlike the sudden rhythmic punches which occur in Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. Where the late-Romantic lyric has been, at least by convention, an utterance of personal emotion, Laforgue occasionally constructs his lyrics as short, objectively dramatic scenes.

Following the patterns set down by Laforgue, the poems in the 'Prufrock' volume involve people who are inarticulate and "too depressed to be rebellious".<sup>29</sup> The modern, the ephemeral, the fragmentary, the inconsequential are the realms of the Impressionist composer and painter, as they become also of Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot. The whole volume begins and continues the pattern of a negative way. It confesses failure but ventriloquizes the confession, producing an effect of understatement gained from hiding behind another poet's confession. At the same time it is an overstatement, as the contrast between the tormented soul in Dante's 'Commedia' and Eliot's timid protagonists develops from poem to poem.

The dilemma in which the modern poet finds himself is that, although the metaphysical goal is God, truth and beauty, the experiences needed to sharpen his sense of existence lead a poet like Rimbaud, for instance, farther and farther down towards Satan, sin and ugliness. In his early poetry, Eliot's speaker seeks meaning in love but is forced to move from sensual indulgence to spiritual attachment and finally into a masochistic relationship in which passion and suffering are inseparable. Discontinuity in the poems of the 'Prufrock' volume is countered by a desire for

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<sup>29</sup> See, T.S. Eliot's Preface to Charles-Louis Philippe *Bubu of Montparnasse*, trans. by L. Vail (Paris: Crosby Continental Editions, 1932), pp. vii-xiv (x-xi).

synthesis, inspired in part by Wagner's operatic aims and method, a desire that Laforgue had also found expressed in Impressionist painting. This desire has a place even in the fractured discourse of such poems as 'Preludes', in which Eliot refers to his work as a musical structure by virtue of its title, characterizes it by its unity, and expresses the wish that it may capture the true nature of existence.<sup>30</sup> It turns out that the whole question of musicality in Symbolist poetry of this kind is a straightforward comparison of 'vers libre' with the apparently free rhythms of Wagner's music.

For Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot, the stress in their works is on the sordid and the false. The sordidness is seen in terms of poverty, ugliness and prostitution; the pathetic human comedy of clowns, pimps, whores, drunks and beggars with the 'I' figure of the poems constantly debased in its own estimation of a state lower even than the world around him. Theatrical metaphors and pictures of nature reduced to artifice convey falseness. Woman is either idealized or cynically mocked as an enemy, in poetical and musical works of increasing sadism. Consistently, the overall result is one of failure. It is failure and isolation that characterize the poet and the musician of this period. For these artists, 'ennui' is the mood in which an excess of intelligence indulging in intense introspection makes the pain of existence most acute. This is what happens to Pierrot, Petrouchka and Prufrock. Both the music and the poetry juxtapose elements that are referential, mimetic or conceptual with purely formal patterns that are largely independent of external meanings. In Eliot's early poetry and in Laforgue's *Deniers vers*, for instance, the reader is presented with an orchestrated synthesis of images of the eternal natural cycle, in which the meaninglessness of life is an inherent quality rather than an explicit attitude. It is a new fluid poetic form from which the dangers of logical deformation are banished by the exclusion of all formal arrangements and the suppression of all parts of language, even conventional syntactic necessities, that do not add to emotional communication. Their verse, therefore, becomes a structure of associations and feelings expressive of deliberately unresolved complexities. Likewise, in Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, every law of musical syntax, every canon of harmony seems to have been violated. Every limit of rhythmic perversity and eccentricity of orchestration is exceeded in the tumultuous cataclysm of sound. Yet, as with the 'Complaintes' and 'The Love Song

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<sup>30</sup> Incidentally the same happens with Laforgue's poem 'Simple Agonie'.

of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Petrouchka*, with all its crudity, is a clearly planned and perfectly controlled and coordinated piece of music, having qualities which are both architectonic and anecdotal.

In reading Laforgue, Eliot acquired a coherent poetic identity, and he integrated his own personality on the basis of Laforgue's. Along with Pound, Eliot also seems to have inherited the Laforguean tactic of conflating past and present for ironic effect. In the same way, with his early ballets, the new part of the musical world that Stravinsky makes accessible to active creative feeling is no less than the past itself. Eliot, like Stravinsky, makes inter-textual journeys throughout the centuries.<sup>31</sup> Eliot's allusions are designed to make serious contact with the texts they invoke. They are not, as it were, casual literary references, for they always have structural ambitions and thematic import. Indeed, Eliot's contrapuntal craft depends for its effectiveness upon significantly engaging the text to which it alludes. The allusion is intended to retrieve the whole context surrounding the phrase or line, sometimes the entire scene, the whole work, even the culture to which the work points. The polyphony depends on the reader recognizing the diversity, consonance and congruity of the various voices. For instance, in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Eliot makes the reader feel a new kind of discomfort in which fragments of older poetic speech, which once gave meaning and identity, dissolve in a new medium which is not tragedy, nor elegy, nor comedy, though it brushes fretfully against all three. The uncomfortable displacement of the dandy, in the figure of Prufrock, within his environment translates the writer's own sense of dislocation with his language. This poem proclaims the end of order, the end of language's ability to bring unity to the world we experience. It respects the submerged and disrupts many kinds of accord between person and person, between our environment and us. Nausea and acidity intensify as Eliot deploys his gallery of grotesques.<sup>32</sup>

Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot are concerned with the quotidian. They are always on the look out for banal incidents in order to approximate them to poetic events. Baudelaire had done the same before. It is a linguistic gesture that Walter Benjamin

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<sup>31</sup> Baudelaire and Balzac had done the same in the nineteenth century.

<sup>32</sup> Later, he does this even more forcefully in 'Gerontion'.

finds “truly significant only in the allegorist”.<sup>33</sup> Benjamin writes that “[t]he look that allegory plunges in the city ... betrays a profound alienation. It’s the look of a flâneur”.<sup>34</sup> The flâneur Laforgue symbolizes, Stravinsky represents and Eliot allegorizes. For these artistes, modernity is the world dominated by phantasmagoria in the image of the dandy. Flânerie had begun as a quest for the true being of the Other. It ends as a kind of self-referential nightmare in which the self, like Baudelaire’s “homme des foules”,<sup>35</sup> goes through the city forever meeting itself, a Proteus imprisoned by its own self-projections. Flânerie ceases to signify freedom and autonomy but implies, instead, estrangement and alienation, a figure of exile. Stravinsky’s bourgeois flâneur does not seduce but he is seduced by the city to which he remains almost literally enthralled.

The same happens to Eliot’s dandy in ‘Portrait of a Lady’, only his seducer is the lady. In each case, the musical and literary text, like the city and the dancer/woman, remains out of reach. At every turn, text, city and dancer/woman frustrate desire, baffle intelligence and resist control. In the two longer poems of the ‘Prufrock’ volume, namely, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ and ‘Portrait of a Lady’, one image stands out as protagonist. What for Laforgue and Stravinsky had been the ‘flâneur’ becomes for Eliot the perfect dandy. Like Pierrot and Petrouchka, Prufrock maintains a double aspect. The dandy in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ (and ‘Portrait of a Lady’) perfects indifference into a rarefied, intelligent reaction to importunate yet predictable circumstances. Like Valéry, when Eliot longs to recreate the effects of music in poetry, it is to evoke “le mouvement de l’âme ... dans une infinité de combinaisons”.<sup>36</sup> Prufrock’s indifference to social trivia maps out not only a style of response but also a form of resistance. If modern life has forfeited the blessings of ritual for the burden of routine, Prufrock sponsors a kind of polite subversion through what Eliot called the use of irony “to express a *dédoublément* of the personality against which the subject struggles”. Here, dissonance between inner and outer selves precipitates an intense self-consciousness. Prufrock epitomizes a

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<sup>33</sup> W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 98.

<sup>34</sup> W. Benjamin, ‘Paris, Capitale du XIXe siècle’, *Essays in French Literature*, 3 (1966), 92.

<sup>35</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, p. 98. Quoted by A. Alphan, in *Les Promenades de Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> *Cahiers*, IV, p. 58.

man 'alienatus a se', a man who has lost all sense of proportion. He can neither commit nor express himself, argue or discriminate, let alone analyze, for "[i]n a minute there is time/For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse". The figure of the clown himself is, above all, a late nineteenth-century creation, the misfit of romantic artistic mythology, less sentimentalized than the Pierrots of *I Pagliacci* or *The Yeoman of the Guard*, but perpetuating the same essential conflict between the inward and the outward life. Convinced that he has been beheaded, for instance, Pierrot is absolutely outrageous. It is hard to imagine an ancestry and much more comforting to believe that he and the poems in which he is embodied emerge from nowhere. The transformation of a genre, the death of a cult and this century's commitment to modernism have created this illusion.

'Complaintes', *Petrouchka* and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' betray a principle of aggregation, with cuts and juxtapositions. The ancient union between music and poetry has infused so much symbolism into rhythmical movement, into loudness and softness of tone, that the listener/reader imagines that both arts speak directly to and come from the inward nature. Such a style is concerned with minimal definition and maximal suggestion. The sensitive listener/reader is able to elicit comparisons between Laforgue's Pierrot, Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and Eliot's Prufrock. Both the poems and the ballet assume objective meaning in that they renounce, of their accord, any claim to meaning. The tragic art of the clown as presented in these works heralds at the same time the fact that this condemned subjectivity ironically retains its primacy. Pierrot, *Petrouchka* and Prufrock survive their own demise. However, it is in the treatment of the pathetic and tragic clown that these poems and the ballet are mostly allied. In Laforgue and Eliot everything in their poems is based upon that lonely subjectivity which withdraws into itself. In the third poem of 'Complaintes', for instance, the reader reads how Pierrot designs a voyage home to a no-man's land, in whose paradoxically crystalline yet lifeless air the seemingly transcendent subject, liberated from the entanglements of the empirical, finds himself again on an imaginary plane. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', there is a pattern of sound and sense which is self-enclosed, as it were, so that the words can be said to have meaning without having reference.<sup>37</sup> With its complex play

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<sup>37</sup> This is also what Eliot meant by the "auditory imagination", that poetry begins in rhythm too far down in the unconscious to be reached by the ego.

of often heterogeneous levels of diction, literary poses and clichés, the Laforguean voice in Eliot becomes a vehicle for the expression of his own very personal emotions, of his own unperturbed sincerity. Behind Laforgue's, Stravinsky's and Eliot's ironic stance, hysteria is never far away, the sense of self as battered into crisis, splintered, as it were, into clashing voices, precisely as dissonance. It is this hysteria which prompts Prufrock to utter nervously "[t]hat is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all". Irony is the sign of a relation of discord, the relation described in Les Fleurs du Mal:

Ne suis-je pas un faux accord  
Dans la divine symphonie,  
Grâce à la vorace Ironie  
Qui me secoue et me mord?<sup>38</sup>

Contrary to Baudelaire, who insists on making order in his life through art, Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot appear to be trying to find an order that will make life amenable to art. In both Laforgue's and Eliot's poems, Pierrot and Prufrock benefit as much from the complexion of the text as they do from the complexity of the music inherent in the text. In Eliot's writings, Laforguean logopoeia is not necessarily an ironic strategy but, rather, a disengaging of the word and a recognition of its semantic determination that enables the poet to represent the complexity of nature in the modern world by joining together discourses from diverse, often divergent, worldly fields. Eliot's use of Laforguean logopoeia in his 'vers libre' and colloquialism leads Pound to define logopoeia as a "dance of the intellect among words".<sup>39</sup> The texture of both 'Complaintes' and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' designs the image of faint hope beyond hopelessness, with the expression of shelter and security in desolation and infantile fancies.

Such pathos is not alien to Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*. This work is by no means without subjective traits. Like Laforgue's and Eliot's poems, the music tends to take the part of those who ridicule the ill-treated hero rather than come to his defence. Consequently, the immortality of the clown at the end of the ballet cannot be interpreted as appeasement for the collective but, rather, as the threat of evil to it. In Stravinsky's case, subjectivity always assumes the character of sacrifice. However, the music does not identify with the victim but with the destructive element. Through

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<sup>38</sup> op. cit. p. 74.

<sup>39</sup> E. Pound, Literary Essays, ed. by T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 43.

the liquidation, as it were, of the victim, it rids itself of all intentions, of its own subjectivity. Pierrot, Petrouchka and Prufrock behave like critically injured victims. What appears as the complete absorption of shock - the submission of the text and the music to the rhythmic blows dealt from an internal and external source - is, actually, the obvious sign that the attempt at absorption has failed. This is the innermost deception of objectivism: the destruction of the subject through shock is transformed into the victory of the subject in the aesthetic complex of the work. At the same time, this destruction results in the overcoming of the subject by being-in-itself.

Therefore, in conducting an interior monologue, Prufrock becomes himself a monologue. He intones, as it were, an unaccompanied aria, taking centre stage to sing out to the audience. All the time the reader knows all too well that he is singing to himself. Prufrock sings unaccompanied because there are no other voices reaching out to him, supporting his claims and providing reassurance. Communication on an intellectual and emotional level are impossible for such a self-absorbed being. All the scenery and imagery in the poem, both indoor and outdoor, is finally the psychological landscape of Prufrock himself, and his interior monologue ends in neurotic despair, “[t]hat is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all”. It is a monologue that ultimately becomes a soliloquy on procrastination. The cumulative rhetorical effect is a deferral of the Word by words.<sup>40</sup> Like the speaking flame of the poem’s epigraph, Prufrock dares to bare his soul, for he feels that he can speak with impunity. In the Laforguean tone of serious joking, the poem takes off as a love-song, but it soon plunges into matters of more complicated import. Prufrock’s dilemma involves failure to make decisions. His sexual and spiritual impotence, his fear of future failures, his many, too many, tiny embarrassments and humiliations, all paralyze his will. Shall he part his hair behind? Does he dare to eat a peach? These relatively uncomplicated problems obsess him and make his existence a miserable affair. At the end of the poem he finally regresses into a most morbid condition of infantilism. Even here, in a world of fantasy and dreams, he cannot relive the vanished joys of his childhood for he has lost the capacity to believe, to dream, to imagine, with the result that he can no longer create.

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<sup>40</sup> Inversely, in Four Quartets this becomes a deferral of words by the Word.

In 'Mon coeur mis à nu', Baudelaire argues that love is inherently prostitution:

Qu'est-ce que l'amour?  
Le besoin de sortir de soi.  
L'homme est un animal adoreur.  
Adorer, c'est se sacrifier et se prostituer.  
Aussi tout amour est-il prostitution.<sup>41</sup>

Adoration can only be understood in terms superficially foreign to it and the lover can be complete as a lover only by realizing the ideal of prostitution. In this sense, prostitution is not understood as it may or may not be lived by prostitutes, but rather, is purely defined as an unconditional availability to others. Ideally, the prostitute's self is completely circumscribed by the other's desires. Such a formulation naturally aspires towards still another formulation whereby the ideal love to which a particular prostituted love corresponds is God's love for his creatures. "L'être le plus prostitué c'est l'être par excellence, c'est Dieu, puisqu'il est l'ami suprême pour chaque individu, puisqu'il est le réservoir commun, inépuisable de l'amour".<sup>42</sup> From this perspective, God is indefinable not as the consequence of an incommensurability of being but, rather, for the strictly naturalistic reason that there is nothing to be defined in absolute openness, in an unqualified readiness to take others in.

The prostituted 'I' of the artist, lover or God corresponds to others not on the basis of similarities but in self-erasure, in fusion with others. Like Pierrot and Petrouchka, Prufrock hides behind a mask, preparing "a face to meet the faces that you meet". In *Petrouchka* and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', lengthy passages are simplified, as it were, in their musical and literary substance, in contrast to the intricate psychological ornamentation of the dandy who has been summoned into deceptive life. The technical simplicity of these works is to be observed particularly in the extremely subtle treatment of the orchestra and language. In both Stravinsky and Eliot this simplicity corresponds to the position taken by the music and the text towards its theme. In *Petrouchka* it is the position of the highly entertained observer, focussing his eyes on the fair-ground scenes, viewing the portrayal of a stylized impression of hurly-burly, with the undertone of provocative joy which the individual,

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<sup>41</sup> *Journaux intimes*, a critical edition with notes compiled by C. Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 62, "What is love?/The need to go outside oneself/Man is an adoring animal/To adore is to sacrifice oneself and to prostitute oneself,/Thus all love is prostitution".

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 63, "The most prostituted being is the Supreme Being, God Himself, since for every individual he is the friend above all others, since he is the common, inexhaustible reservoir of love".

tired of differentiation, finds in that which he scorns. In Stravinsky's musical setting, the melodic presence is more than a matter of illusion and distortion. It is literal. Commenting on the work's gestation, Stravinsky said:

I had in my mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggi. The orchestra in turn retaliates with menacing trumpet-blasts.<sup>43</sup>

The outcome is a terrific noise which reaches its climax and ends in the sorrowful and querulous collapse of poor Petrouchka. Petrouchka is signified in the music most clearly by the well-known *Petrouchka chord*, the superimposition, in various inversions, of C Major and F# Major triads. These triads produce sounds that clash most expressively, separated as they are by an augmented fourth, the tritone, the anciently troubling 'diabolus in musica'. This produces the natural emphasis upon the aspect of the suffering, trapped soul in Petrouchka. The music is infinitely various, colourful and responsive to the character in action. It can indeed yearn, struggle and die with Petrouchka, just as it can swagger and kill with the Blackamoor. However, for all the warmth and intensity of each succeeding passage, the work as a whole is held together in emotional equipoise by a sure, restless forward momentum.

In Laforgue's Pierrot poems, the reader moves from unity to multiplicity:

Quand j'organise une descente en Moi,  
J'en conviens, je trouve là, attablée,  
Une société un peu bien mêlée,  
Et que je n'ai point vue à mes octrois.<sup>44</sup>

Such is the speaker of Laforgue's poem. "JE est un autre", Rimbaud had written some fifteen years earlier, in the context of his critical remarks about Romantic poetry.<sup>45</sup> Laforgue shares this sense of otherness of the self, insisting on the presence of a multiplicity of others. Laforgue uses various disguises, or masks, throughout the 'Complaintes', particularly in the figure of Pierrot. Each mask makes possible the utterance of a new voice. At one point in the 'Complaintes', the reader comes by repeated phrases such as "[n]ulle ne songe à m'aimer un peu", emphasizing even further the painful self-consciousness of the speaker. Like Petrouchka and Prufrock, Pierrot is always torn between two opposite impulses: between the desire for love and

<sup>43</sup> E.W. White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 156.

<sup>44</sup> 'Ballade', in *Oeuvres complètes: 'Les Complaintes', 'L'Imitation de Notre-Dame de lune'*, p. 96.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Paul Demeny dated 15 May 1871. See, *Cahiers: 1894-1942 – tomes. I-XXIX* (Paris: Centre Nationale de la recherche scientifique, 1957-1961), III, p. 42.

a mocking rejection of it, between a feeling of sympathy for women and an instinctive suspicion of their motives, between a sensual and an ideal love. These frictions and dichotomies are the basis of his 'Complainte de Lord Pierrot'. In this poem, Pierrot suffers from inner conflicts, doubts and hesitations, and from a general lack of confidence that makes it hard for him to establish his own identity:

... j'allais me donner d'un "Je vous aime"  
Quand je m'avisai non sans peine  
Que d'abord je ne me possédais pas bien moi-même.

In the climate of post-Romantic poetry, this Pierrot figure, with his aspirations towards the Ideal, becomes an 'être à part' representing not only the artist in general, but the 'poète maudit' or, in Laforgue's own term, the 'paria', who feels himself to be an outsider in real life, yet views the Ideal as either unattainable or non-existent. " - Certes! l'Absolu perd ses droits,/Là où le Vrai consiste à vivre", exclaims Pierrot in the 'Dialogue avant le lever de la lune'.<sup>46</sup>

Like Pierrot, Prufrock knows he is playing a role, whereas "the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo", just as unaware of their Laforguean predecessors as of their own banality. In Eliot's poem, too, certain phrases are repeated till they begin to sound like empty formulas:

And indeed there will be time  
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street  
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;  
There will be time, there will be time

"Ce à quoi le langage échoue ici", affirms J.E. Jackson, "coïncide avec l'échec de Prufrock, qui est d'affirmer librement, au-delà du stéréotype, une individualité propre".<sup>47</sup> For Prufrock, eyes act as agents of consciousness and self-consciousness. Though he dismisses the "faces" around him, he cannot evade the eyes that peer through their masks. Eyes hold a terror for Prufrock because strong 'I's' back them up, reaching into his private self to discover its fragility and lack of a coherent 'I'. These are the 'I's' that pin him wriggling on the wall and fix him in a "formulated phrase". "Their words dent Prufrock's emotional armour".<sup>48</sup> The violent image of his reduction into an insect and impalement for scrutiny reflects the aggression he

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<sup>46</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> J. E. Jackson, *La Question du Moi* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1998), p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> W. Arrowsmith, 'Daedal Harmonies: A Dialogue on Eliot and the Classics', *The Southern Review* (Winter 1977), 1-47 (p. 32).

perceives in these stares and his own sense of helplessness. It also accounts for the tactic he uses to defend himself emotionally against them, by dismissing what happens in these shuttered salons as inconsequential, tedious and formulaic. By a curious, ambivalent duality these occasions cause him to suffer not only psychological violence but also excruciating boredom:

For I have known them all already, known them all -  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons<sup>49</sup>

No longer sanctioned by the social authority of an aristocracy, Prufrock discovers himself to be a purely psychological myth. There is nothing to be seen in the dandy except the determination not to let anything be seen. In a sense, no one is more prostituted to others than the dandy for his aristocratic individuality depends entirely on how others will interpret his heroically scrupulous erasure of any signs whatsoever of individuality.

Rhythm is the life-blood in Eliot's poetry, and the conversational rhythms in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' constitute an extremely interesting and essential element of unity in the poem. In addition to the 'vers libre' variations that constitute the prevailing metrical pattern of the poem, one finds Victorian music-hall rhythms, purely accentual sequences and the rhythms of French prose and English conversation. One of the reasons for maintaining such a variety of cadences within a single poem could be that the incidental rhythms provide a kind of satiric commentary on the more serious lines written in 'vers libre'. The rhythms of the poem, therefore, change according to the speaker's fluctuations in feeling. English conversational and French prose rhythms provide a certain fluidity of progression in the poem. Since the rhythm of English speech is mainly duple, mainly iambic, Eliot exploits this principle in his use of common English phrases. For instance, expressions such as "For I have known them all ...", "So how should I presume?", "And would it have been worth it, after all ...", are all iambic and Eliot insinuates them easily and naturally into the fabric of his verses, repeating them several times and blending them imperceptibly with the more unusual expression found in the adjacent lines. The parallel syntax of, "[a]fter the cups, the marmalade, the tea,/Among the porcelain, among some talk of

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<sup>49</sup> Here, Laforgue seems to have helped Eliot experiment with ironic, multi-perspective commentary by a narrator upon other characters, by characters upon themselves, and by the reader upon the poem.

you and me”, suggests the rhythms of French prose with its frequent repetitions in phrasing. In this poem rhythm plays its part in structuring the whole poem, establishing balance and contrasts between parts, a rhythm that is not just an effect of sound and emphasis but is extended to the meanings and relationships of the sections. This is what Mallarmé means when he says that music is an expression of “*idée, ou rythme entre des rapports*”.<sup>50</sup> As with rhythm, Eliot’s employment of rhyme is extremely subtle. Its use in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ is distinguished chiefly by its irregular incidence. The rhyme here occurs at unanticipated intervals and the reader often perceives the acoustic concord subliminally before he is consciously aware of it and, therefore, the effect of the rhyme is psychologically more intense than it would be if the rhyming occurred at regular intervals.

The technical aspects of this poem are integral components of its total meaning, and these two aspects are inseparably joined to produce a unified aesthetic whole. By making use of such techniques Eliot constructs a poem which is striking by its very indirectness, as if for the first time poetry is taking account of a cultural situation in which the straightforward interpretation of situations and the direct assertion of emotions seem hollow, impotent and self-deluding. Subjective personality takes on a new and terrifying force. To come to self-consciousness is to find oneself irreducibly in dialogue with one’s projections of an other, equally part of one’s subjective life and equally destabilized. The poem’s speaker does attempt to harmonize those psychic roles by turning to description, hoping that the gesture outward might provide common ground. Yet even the effort at description is so warped by the speaker’s divided psyche that the attempt at communication only intensifies the pressure from within. Prufrock needs metaphors to express a scene, only to find the metaphors imposing their own violent displacements. This process of displacement begins casually, with the vague figure of evening “spread out against the sky”. However, that vagueness is enough to open the gates for Prufrock’s disturbed sensibility; “spread out” generates a bizarre pathetic fallacy in which the evening takes on the agency of an etherized patient. Then, the descriptive focus returns only to have the half-deserted streets modulate back into both literal and figurative retreats evoked by Prufrock’s loneliness.

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<sup>50</sup> Correspondance, IV, p. 420.

In these three works by Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot, the music and the language can summon and maintain the illusion of a 'puppet' tragic comedy in all its grotesque externals and all its inner ironies. The equipoise is that of puppet tragedy, essentially conditioned by the masks, the dance, the clownesque nature of the hero, the quintessential tragic comedy of the modernist at the beginning of this century. In all three cases, the self-annihilation of the observer is implied in the vain suffering under knowledge. The reader/observer escapes his own ego, taking the side of those who laugh: the concentration of the texts in Eliot's and Laforgue's poems and the music in Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* as its aesthetic subject unmasks the protagonists' worthless existence as comic.

The fundamental category of Pierrot, *Petrouchka* and Prufrock is that of the grotesque and the improbable, the category of the distorted conspicuous individual delivered up to others. The impending disintegration of the subject itself is evident in this situation. Everything characteristic of these three protagonists is grotesque as, for instance, the melismata which are misappropriated and restrained to the point of dullness. Wherever the subjective element is encountered it is depraved. It is sickeningly over-sentimentalized as in the Pierrot poems and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', and trodden to death as in *Petrouchka*. It is evoked as something which in itself is mechanical and hypostatized. On the one hand, the songs sung by the organ-grinders and other street musicians in Laforgue's poems employ not the traditional versification of poetry but the rhythms of popular speech, in which mute "e's" do not count as syllables and the hiatus between vowels are filled with a "z" or a "t" sound. Laforgue at times adopts these features as if to emphasize that what the reader mentally hears is not his voice but the inarticulate fragmented speech of the neurotic Pierrot:

Je suis-t-il malheureux!

*(Autre complainte de l'orgue de barbarie)*

C'est l'printemps qui s'amène

*(Complainte des printemps)*

Voyez l'homme, voyez!

Si ça n'fait pas pitié!

*(Complainte du pauvre corps humain)<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>51</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, pp. 43, 72, 55.

On the other hand, Prufrock listens to the dying and subdued music, for his whole life has been a succession of falling cadences, "I know the voices dying with a dying fall/Beneath the music from a farther room". This music and these voices mingle to harmonize with Prufrock's introspective mood. The smooth iambic succession of soft articulations that are set in an 'adagio' tempo seem to enforce the unity of Prufrock's feelings. The dandy's entire fragmented existence and the memory of his frustrations that cannot be erased from his mind are further emphasized by the image of "butt-ends".<sup>52</sup> Eliot seems to be referring to Prufrock's weary succession of frustrations and his burnt-out desires. This is further reinforced when Eliot describes the women in Prufrock's life. They are exhibited only as Prufrock conceives them, and if the reader regards them as an illusory image it is probably because Prufrock, in his neurotic state, also sees them in this light. A definite pattern of repetition and variation bordering on incantation, as well as of progression, unifies these stanzas.<sup>53</sup>

In Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* the wind instruments in which the subjective element is expressed sound like the components of a hand organ, the apotheosis of mere piping. The strings are perverted into a joke and deprived of their warm sound.<sup>54</sup> In all three instances, the images of mechanical music produce the shock of a modernity which is already past and degraded to an infantile level. It becomes the gate to the most original and ancient past. The hand organ, once heard, functions as an acoustical déjà-vu, as remembrance. Suddenly, the image of the shabby fallen individual - Pierrot, Petrouchka and Prufrock - is to transform itself into a remedy against decay.

Reading Laforgue's and Eliot's early poems and listening to Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* suggests that individuation is a phenomenological certainty, though one that cannot be represented. The subject's representations are always representations of otherness.

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<sup>52</sup> At this point, the reader gets another reiteration of the smoke-fog and candle image. This motif recurs in the 'Preludes' as "[t]he burnt-out ends of smoky days" and in 'Burbank with a Baedeker, Bleistein with a Cigar' as "[t]he smoky candle end of time".

<sup>53</sup> Consider the opening lines of these stanzas: Stanza 7 - "For I have known them all already, known them all -" Stanza 8 - "And I have known the eyes already, known them all -" Stanza 9 - "And I have known the arms already, known them all -"

<sup>54</sup> Technically, this piping is produced through a certain type of progression by octaves or sevenths in the contours of woodwind melodies - clarinets in particular - often at a wide range from each other. Stravinsky preserved this manner of instrumentation as a means of depicting death long after the grotesque intention had fallen victim to the verdict, as for example in the 'Cercles Mystérieux des Adolescents' in *Sacre du Printemps*.

Even more, representation itself may always be an alienating activity. The poet can speak himself, as it were, only by re-representing the world. However, his images are never presentations of the world but mnemonic perspectives on, or interpretations of, the world. Within a pattern of resistance in Laforgue, Stravinsky and Eliot to their perception of subjectivity as mobile correspondence, Pierrot, Petrouchka and Prufrock would be their most sophisticated fantasy of inviolable selfhood, a fantasy that includes the killing of affect and the total dependence of the presumably autonomous dandy on the creative admiration of others. The individual subject authenticates itself much more convincingly in the narrator's ironic voice. In writing his early poems Eliot was fully conscious of the importance of cultivating that voice. Eliot locates the principal interest of his poems not in their subject but in their demonstration of how the poet's existential truth might be substituted for the externally imposed conventions of rhythm, rhyme and the musical turn of phrase.<sup>55</sup>

### **Duet transfixed in a Portrait**

The musical imagery and analogy in 'Portrait of a Lady' constitute the poem's most important structural and semantic component. It forms a part of the general repetitive scheme of the poem, which includes the recurrences of other images and motifs as well as verbal and phrasal repetitions. Characteristic of Eliot in his early poetry is the notion that references to music serve to emphasize that physical proximity between his protagonists equates psychological distance. As in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', the reader discovers that certain images, often in the form of identical words and phrases, are repeated "either sporadically or with some degree of regularity and frequency".<sup>56</sup> These images are grouped under dominant complexes - music, seasons, times of day, flowers, drawing room and so on. Sometimes, the images drift according to locale. Occurring in interlocking cycles, they are introduced or terminated, harmonized or contrasted, according to their position and context in the poem.

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<sup>55</sup> There is an interesting discussion of the relationship between music and literature of this period by M. Beaufils, in *Musique du son, musique du verbe* (Paris: Paris University Press, 1954), pp. 54-96.

<sup>56</sup> P.L. Surette, 'The music of "Prufrock"', *HAR*, 25 (1974), 11-21, (p. 13).

Eliot's scheme of interlocking cycles of images and phrasal repetitions contributes to both the unity and the progression of 'Portrait of a Lady'. By means of repeated words and phrases, as well as of inter-stanzaic rhymes, he achieves a highly intricate form of unity among the stanzas. The repeated references to the Chopin Preludes constitute a basic technique in the poem.<sup>57</sup> Eliot invests the dramatic monologue form with greater complexity and with more dramatic intensity than usual by having his speaker record the speech of the lady. By using two characters instead of one he adds "a dramatic dimension which brings his poem close to dialogue and drama" and he enlarges the form further by giving it a "carefully laid setting as well as a narrative movement." The exterior structure of the poem resembles "an expanding and intricate spiral" in which "numerous and complex ramifications" are generated from the central conflict between the speaker and his friend.<sup>58</sup>

The form and progression of the poem are well adapted to the exposition of both the exterior and interior dramatic conflicts. In each of the three successive scenes the lady speaks and the visitor comments by his silence. Then he leaves her and soliloquizes, and from his soliloquy an analysis emerges. Moreover, one finds that numerous psychological tensions operate simultaneously both between and within the characters. Unlike the musical images in Laforgue, the recurring musical imagery in 'Portrait of a Lady' does not adhere to a fixed symbolism. It does not simply stand for a mode of empty and sentimental idealism as it does in Laforgue. It fluctuates according to the shifts in the speaker's moods, reflecting his changing attitudes and feelings as he soliloquizes during his visits to the lady.

Eliot's formulation of the speaker's feelings towards the lady is derived, in part, from Laforgue, yet Laforgue is more sarcastic and less gentle with his lady than Eliot. While Laforgue's ironic sallies convey an exact intention of demolishing his lady's character, the little ironies of Eliot seem to wear velvet gloves. Not only is Eliot's intention deliberately more ambiguous, but his speaker is less sure of himself so that there is an element of self-parody combined with sympathy for the lady in Eliot's poem. Laforgue's transparent sarcasm can be seen in the opening lines of his poem,

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<sup>57</sup> I shall dwell on these references in more detail later on in this chapter.

<sup>58</sup> R.J. Giannone, 'Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady" and Pound's "Portrait d'une femme"', *20th Century Literature*, 5 (1959), 128-35, pp. 131, 132, 134.

namely, “[e]lle disait, de son air vain fondamental :/‘Je t’ame pour toi seul!’ Oh! là, là, grêle histoire”.<sup>59</sup> Still, Laforgue’s idea for an imaginary dialogue and his dramatic setting, combined with the speaker’s ‘sotto voce’ sardonic comments have furnished Eliot with excellent raw materials for his own poem. Warren Ramsey cites a Laforgue poem to show how Eliot makes good use of Laforgue’s musical imagery, interweaving the musical images with the speaker’s thoughts and the lady’s fragments of dialogue. In ‘Portrait of a Lady’ Eliot exploits Laforgue’s device of using musical symbols to express his inner sentiments:

Among the windings of the violins  
And the ariettes  
Of cracked cornets  
Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins  
Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,  
Capricious monotone  
That is at least one definite ‘false note’.

Besides containing an ironical thrust levelled at the Preludes of Chopin, these verses offer a clear comparison with Laforgue’s own lines:

Et, comme un piano voisin rêve en mesure,  
Je tournoie au concert rythmé des encensoirs....  
L’Archet qui sur nos nerfs pince ces tristes gammes  
Appelait pour ce jour nos atomes charmés.

“The bow that scrapes sad tunes upon our nerves”, (as Dale translates one of the lines), corresponds to the harsh musical sounds that grate on the speaker’s ears in ‘Portrait of a Lady’. Here, it can be seen that Laforgue knew how to transpose the finest nuances of feeling into a musical key, a technique he seems to have transmitted to Eliot.

As an exercise in dialogue, Laforgue’s ‘Complainte des pianos qu’on entend dans les quartiers aisés’ serves as an excellent model for Eliot. In Laforgue’s poem, schoolgirls are practising idle flourishes on the piano in contrast to the grim world of ugly realities where life is “vraie et criminelle”. There is a marked conflict between the frustrated idealism expressed by the piano music and the pains of the hard outer world. It is an antithesis that is almost identical with the conflict in ‘Portrait of a Lady’. One finds the same studied repetitions of image-motifs, words and phrases as in Eliot’s early verse. The word “ritournelles” is repeated three times while the refrain “[t]u t’en vas et tu nous laisses/Tu nous laiss’s et tu t’en vas”, recurs five times

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<sup>59</sup> ‘Pierrots’, in Oeuvres complètes: ‘Les Complaintes’, ‘L’Imitation de Notre’ Dame de Lune’, p. 58.

as a structural component of Laforgue's poem. The same ironic undercutting of fine sentiments and ideals in dialogue form occurs in this poem and in Eliot's:

Ah! pensionnats, théâtres, journaux, romans!

Allez, stériles ritournelles,  
La vie est vraie et criminelle.

Et c'est vrai! L'Idéal les fait divaguer toutes,  
Vigne bohème, même en ces quartiers aisés.  
La vie est là; le pur flacon des vives gouttes  
Sera, *comme il convient*, d'eau propre baptise.

Aussi, bientôt, se joueront-elles  
De plus exactes ritournelles.<sup>60</sup>

One observes the 'faisceau' of concrete images associated with the life of these young school girls who are soon to be baptized in the waters of conventionality, "pensionnats, théâtres, journaux, romans!". These suggest the teacups, music, candlelight and flowers that are associated with the lady in Eliot's poem.

The *Piano Preludes* of Chopin's, which are blended with "attenuated tones of violins" and "remote cornets", convey an impression of subdued elegance and soft effects. The images here are in harmony with the lady's warm overtures of friendship, her sentimental idealism and her taste for refined surroundings. The next appearance of musical imagery is deliberately meant to jerk the reader out of his casual reading of the text. The reader is now faced with winding violins, cracked cornets and the beating of a tom-tom. These are images of primitive ritual which stand for the twang of the bow, the bugle blowing and the "savage beating a drum in a jungle". This dissonant clash of symbols abruptly signals a reversal of the speaker's mood, revealing his negative reaction to the lady's offer of friendship. The sharply contrasting musical textures produce the effects of instability, harshness and primitivism, as the speaker's mind recoils in disgust at the thought of entering into an intimate liaison with his hostess.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* pp. 27-8. "Oh the boarding schools, theatres, novels, papers!/Come off it, barren *ritournelle*/Life's real and criminal, as well./It's true, too. The Ideal will drive them all to stray./Bohemian vine, yes even in the plushy quarter./Life's there; the purest flask of living tastes one day/Will be, *as is convenient*, baptized in proper water./And soon they play so very well/The more exacting *ritournelle*". P. Dale, pp. 121-2.

<sup>61</sup> The references to Chopin's music are amply discussed by C. Wootton, in 'The Anti-Romantic Image of Chopin in the Poems of T.S. Eliot and Gottfried Benn', *CompLit/LitComp*, 1:1 (1973), 87-96.

Attempts at some sort of relationship deteriorate further during the speaker's second visit to the lady. The lady's voice grates on the speaker's ear like a badly tuned violin, insistent and maddening. Instead of the elegant Preludes of Chopin he hears a "worn-out common song" being executed mechanically on a street piano. Later on, the primitive ritual motif reappears. The speaker is so mentally exhausted and torn in his reaction to the lady's bid for sympathy that he feels he must express his confusion and sense of humiliation by means of animal cries, bestial forms and movements, "a dancing bear", a "chattering ape", a "parrot".<sup>62</sup> Finally, the "dying" music of the closing lines echoes not only the delicate Chopin music of the introductory stanza, but it also mirrors the young man's mood of indefinite melancholy.

In projecting the speaker's shifting states of mind, the musical images are integrated with other types of images to create a total aesthetic-semantic pattern. In inserting references to Chopin, Eliot appears to be undercutting the romantic aura that surrounds the Chopin cult. A possible Chopin Prelude which Eliot could have had in mind, if any, when writing 'Portrait of a Lady' is Prelude in Bb Major. In this Prelude, the music unfolds by dissociating the texture of its opening. It is a piece of music which seems to aim at a feeling of deliquescence as it moves towards a stabbing climax whereby its lyrical gestures increasingly seem to precipitate their own dissolution. Little by little, the broad 'cantabile' phrases of the Prelude's first measures break down into the agitated chains of intervals that make up the accompaniment. Most of the details that contribute to this pattern are rhythmic and textural, but in the passage that precedes the climactic 'crescendo', Chopin combines these with a harmonic effect that concentrates the self-consuming quality of the music into the sound of an oddly deadened chord.

A second possible Prelude that Eliot could have thought of is the Prelude in Eb Minor. This extremely short Prelude reduces integral contour to a bare minimum to form a

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<sup>62</sup> This passage recalls not only the familiar prancing bears at the circus whose parodies of men draw loud laughter, but echoes as well Flaubert's preoccupation with the insurmountable problems of the artist in his effort to express the ineffable: "The truth is that fullness of soul can sometimes overflow in utter vapidness of language, for none of us can ever express the exact measure of his needs or his thoughts or his sorrows; and human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars". *Madame Bovary*. 1856. (New York: The Modern Library, 1957), p. 216. Also, for an analysis of beast imagery in the poetry of T.S. Eliot see, L. Palmer, 'Animal, man and angel: A study of T.S. Eliot's beast imagery', *ForumH*, 11:1 (1974), 47-52.

transition between the preceding and the subsequent Preludes.<sup>63</sup> The music is a rapidly modulating sequence, begun without introduction, prolonged without a break and abruptly terminated. Also, the harmonic coherence of the sequence is relaxed to the point of dissolution, an effect redoubled by a restriction of harmonization to bare octaves. The nineteen-measure 'Allegro' touches, sometimes very tenuously, on a dizzy variety of keys, its modulatory movement being eccentric and wilfully harsh. It bristles with implied chords that are at best ambiguous. When the chromatic motion of the music is at its height, the tonality ceases to be merely tenuous and breaks into transit. The key-relationships are not so much negated by this as defamiliarized. Every source of integral shape is stopped up; melody is absent, rhythm is reduced to the repetition of eight-note triplets, colour is muted by a 'tessitura' that rises no higher than a 'g flat', and rarely that high. Inevitably, the impulse towards so much uncertainty has something explosive and anarchic about it but what really dominates is an almost violent sense of purpose, aimed not at detonating musical meaning but at expanding its sources.

In these two Preludes, Chopin makes transitive thrusts that single out a non-harmonic element and invest it with a quasi-harmonic significance. A certain register, a dynamic level, a rhythmic shape is, therefore, enabled to compete with harmony as a source of structure. Much of the time this valorizing of elements, that more often articulates the meaning that constitutes it, has the effect of diffusing the expectancy and ambiguity that belong to harmonic tension over the whole field of sonority. Such diffusion may account for the unique, often feverish intensity of these pieces. In both Preludes, the sparse harmonies, the breathless rush of the tempo, the breakdown in tonality and the almost primitive savage feeling inherent in the texture of the music seem to be symptomatic of the speaker's and his lady's state of nerves and heightened sensibility.<sup>64</sup>

The Chopin interludes help the poem to proceed by interruption, with quotations and parentheses sprinkled throughout for ironic punctuation. The 'homo duplex' paradigm, however, defines its basic strategy, with Eliot alternating two points of

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<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the reader may regard 'Portrait of a Lady' as an extension of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and as an anticipation of the frightening hallucinations of 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'.

<sup>64</sup> For my analysis of Chopin's *Preludes, Op. 28*, I used the Urtext Edition (London: 1976).

view. Her reticent guest's 'monologue intérieur' counterpoints the lady's diffuse, melancholy speeches. At best he makes only unenthusiastic, unwilling concessions to the occasion. The distancing quotation marks portray the narrator evading his discomfort in a social situation whose demands he nonetheless senses acutely. The gothic atmosphere of winter smoke, fog and wax candles portends the twinned kinds of communication, things left unsaid, that keep him on his guard. Although both characters feel obliged to maintain the social surface, the lady exploits it, taking advantage of her visitor's passive reluctance to disturb the mannerly peace. She tenders and assumes intimacy as he resists and withholds it. The narrator, like Prufrock, responds to external, social demands with an inner sense that he is about to be overwhelmed. His eerie silence in the lady's presence, given his keen awareness of things unsaid between them, alerts the reader to his sense of being off balance and mortally ill at ease. As allusions to music begin to beat a drum-like rhythm, the narrator's relentless pulse reminds him of the occasion's dissonance, its oxymoronic "capricious monotone" boring but unpredictable like their conversation, supplying a "false note".

The musical imagery also helps to contrast two settings linked to the two selves. In the lady's shuttered, private drawing room, a forced, leaden smile "falls heavily among the bric-à-brac". Its almost palpable claustrophobia diverges sharply from the social, public world, whose open air the narrator desires like a zone of tranquillity. There he might assume a more breezy personality, having a smoke and discussing "late events" over a beer, keeping to news that is interesting, remote and, best of all, impersonal. The speaker mentally seeks refuge in the outdoors, picturing himself reading a newspaper in the park. His nervous agitation is reflected in the high incidence of irregular feet in the lines. Then, the irregularities are dissolved in a sequence of evenly flowing iambic pentameters that read like newspaper headings:

An English countess goes upon the stage.  
A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,  
Another bank defaulter has confessed.

Here, the motif of cheap cosmopolitanism is merged with the imagery of the streets and out-of-doors. The evenness of these lines affirms the mechanical regularity of the speaker's public existence.

The attributes of the “mechanical and tired” street piano and of the common “worn-out” song reach beyond their immediate contexts and frame the poem’s emotional texture. The muted but relentless rhyme echoes the polite aggression in the lines themselves, which seem to give up on their relationship only to conclude that the lady, nonetheless, wants to carry on. One may detect a veiled threat in the last line. She will serve tea to friends; friends will be sure to show up and drink it and not to appear means that friendship has ceased. These lines also state a formal irony in which the highly wrought, utterly composed rhyming lines comment upon the scene’s social and emotional disintegration. As the enjambment in the second line encourages the reader to hurry past, only to discover its rhyme repeated like the tom-tom or a mechanical street piano, the three lines dwindle to an anti-climax that remains, one feels, among the most evocative, closely observed moments in Eliot’s verse.

‘Portrait of a Lady’ ends on an indefinite chord of an imperfect cadence. This music of dying falls and cadences successfully symbolizes the young dandy’s Prufrock-like existence, a broken succession of descending cadences that are never resolved into meaningful patterns. However, music can never fill in completely the emotional or spiritual voids of human life. It cannot create prolonged affective states or sustain illusions indefinitely. It can only give expression to them or intensify pre-existing states of feeling. The music is successful only when its dying falls reflect the spiritual and emotional death agonies of the lady and the pangs of self-doubt that assail the speaker. The success in ‘Portrait of a Lady’ is measured by the precision with which it expresses the emotional colour of the poem, namely, as a symbol not as a reality. Moulding his imagery on that of the French Symbolists, Eliot composes a duet which seems to transfix itself into a portrait, a portrait which is an aesthetic projection of the theme of friendship and its disillusion.

### *A few Preludes and a Rhapsody*

In ‘Preludes’, the musical obligato, as it were, which had been briefly introduced in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ and had later become the dominant symbolical motif in ‘Portrait of a Lady’, is entirely absent. These four short poems do not fulfil the accepted function of their title. Neither leading to another poem nor exploring a particular mood, these poems’ music has been snuffed out in this dreary atmosphere

of dirty streets and dispirited people for, in spite of the musical title, there is no apparent harmony in the lives of these impoverished souls.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, their world has been drained of colour and vitality. The only colour image present is the one evoked by “the yellow soles of feet” and here, the main impression is one of weariness and toil. The lives of these people seem to drift hopelessly in monotonous shades of grey and black, for they are creatures that have been schematized into the pattern of their sterile environment. Ezra Pound commented on phrases like “[t]he morning comes to consciousness”, “the light crept up between the shutters”, “[t]he conscience of a blackened street/Impatient to assume the world”, as being generic to Eliot’s early verse, referring to “his wholly unrealizable, always apt, half ironic suggestion”.<sup>66</sup> These “unrealizable” images - the awakening morning, the myriad-imagined soul, the vision that the street cannot understand - link the abstract and the concrete to produce an emotional charge.

On the one hand, ‘Preludes’ contains images of violence and conflict, namely, “beat”, “broken”, “stamps”, “trampled” and “press”. On the other, quite opposite images suggest intimacy and fusion, like “settles down”, “wraps”, “curled” and “cling”. The notion of some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing unites these two themes. Out of these divergent particulars the poet tries to abstract a single point of view or a relation between the poem’s diverse facts that will transcend, harmonize and unify them. Eliot argues that the soul does not contemplate a single, consistent world. Instead, it engages in the painful task of unifying jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher one which shall somehow include and transmute them. Eliot’s assertion implies that the ordinary mental or spiritual life pursues this “painful” but unifying task. Most particularly, however, the process Eliot sets forth describes the poet’s task precisely. The passage from diverse, lower, discordant viewpoints to a single, higher, inclusive one restates the process of poetic metaphor in philosophical and psychological terms. It is that metaphoric process in which the penultimate stanza of ‘Preludes’ engages.

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<sup>65</sup> In the Classical period, a Prelude was used as a piece of music leading into another. However, it was not fully cultivated during this time. It gained a new lease of life in the nineteenth century, particularly with Brahms, Chopin and Rachmaninov, and later with Debussy. As he does with the Chopin cult in ‘Portrait of a Lady’, Eliot seems to be undercutting the Romantic aura which surrounds this genre. This is even more forcefully felt in his use of the term ‘Rhapsody’ for his poem ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’.

<sup>66</sup> E. Pound, ‘T.S. Eliot’, in *Literary Essays*, p. 119.

As the final stanza indicates, however, the poem's speaker does not succeed. In this sense, 'Preludes' poetically foreshadows Eliot's later philosophical rejection of rational metaphysics. Eliot implies that the soul responds to the activity of thought more completely than it resembles feeling or the Absolute. This is why the poem's unifying effort collapses. If an interpretation of other souls, or of one's own, must have real existence and especially, permanence, it would seem that either must necessarily dissolve at the interpreter's will or whim. This is just what happens when, without warning or explanation, the last stanza of 'Preludes' ridicules its fragile, unstable predecessor.

In 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' the reader is faced with an intensification and extension, with variations, of much of the imagery that had been introduced in Eliot's earlier poems. However, to the sordidness and boredom of the urban scene as previously portrayed, the poet adds an element of irrationality bordering on lunacy. This element is reinforced by the setting, the moonlit midnight melting into the small hours of the morning, the sinister mutterings of the street-lamps and the cold lunar imagery. In a sense, one may say that Eliot transposes the urban images of the mornings and evenings into a midnight key, thus "converting the tone of boredom and disgust into one of Gothic horror".<sup>67</sup> To call this poem a 'Rhapsody' is a slyly mordant inversion of its true intent and tone, and it constitutes an example of Eliot's mode of inverted romanticism, already evident in his treatment of the Chopin *Preludes* in 'Portrait of a Lady'. There are no enthusiastic transports, no frenzied outbursts, and the absence of these rhapsodic elements, like the absence of music in the 'Preludes', is conspicuously felt by the reader. The non-rhapsodic tone of the poem corresponds to Eliot's transvaluation of the moon's usual attributes in the fifth paragraph, as well as to his conversion of ordinary images into objects of horror.

Although the setting of the poem would seem perfect for a ghost story or for a wildly imaginative tale of horror, there are no usual stage properties appropriate to such narratives. There are no wailing banshees, no cackling witches, no demon lovers or hallucinations. Even the wind is only an implied presence. The reader feels its effects in the sputtering street-lamps and the "whispering lunar incantations", yet it is

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<sup>67</sup> D.J. Childs, 'T.S. Eliot's Rhapsody of Matter and Matter', *AL*, 63:3 (1991), 474-88 (p. 478).

never directly mentioned except in the title. The reader feels it as a blind and mechanistic force that drives man after fruitless objects in a spiritually desiccated world in which external appearances suddenly seem unreal and horrifying. Instead of being terrorized by such supernatural creatures as screaming phantoms and vengeful ghosts, the reader is struck by the strange midnight transformations of what ordinarily seems solid and real. Detached from their daylight settings, these objects - a broken spring, a child at play, a crab in a pool - seem to acquire grotesque symbolical connotations in the very early hours of the morning when filtered through the sensitive mind of the reader. As he walks, the speaker is experiencing an epiphany in the form of a "lunar synthesis" of scattered, discrete phenomena, actual and remembered, which constitute the fractured essence of life in the modern metropolis. Compulsive and yet somewhat passive, the speaker's imagination registers these details as part of an accumulating burden of consciousness as he moves through the empty streets. The lunar imagery, as well as much of the tone and diction of the poem, derives from Laforgue. Eliot transforms the French poet's anaemic moon into one whose face bears smallpox scars. In Laforgue's 'La premiere nuit', the cat contemplates:

...de la prunelle fantastique  
 Marcher à l'horizon la lune chlorotique  
 ....  
 C'est l'heure où l'enfant prie, où Paris-lupenar  
 Jette sur le pavé de chaque boulevard  
 Ses filles aux seins froid, qui, sous le gaz blafard  
 Voguent, flairant de l'oeil un mâle de hasard.<sup>68</sup>

The lights of the moon and the lamp in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' each present the world in strange form, either an unrelated jumble held together, or isolated images, unlike the clear relations the memory stores up of daily action. Suggested by the association of 'Rhapsody' with midnight, madness and witchcraft, this becomes clear in the conclusion when the irony of preparing for life is associated with ritualized daily action. The poem deals with memory and recollection, issues connected with rhapsody as it occurs in music. For Eliot, memory means a clearly ordered process that records and dates every event. This ordered process however, becomes a "heap of broken images" when the moon, shining alike on a miscellaneous group of things, holding them together without spatial order, presents a jumble of disconnected images

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<sup>68</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, a critical edition with notes compiled by L.J. Debaeve, et al., 2 vols (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1986), 1, p. 35.

for memory to record, thus distorting it. In contrast to the moon, the street lamp isolates for observation distinct objects in disconnected moments. Like the separate beats of a fatalistic drum, the street-lights shine on a single thing, presenting the external world as a collection of sordid images. The speaker's mind encompasses the street lamp's isolated moments and the moon's synthesis for, unlike them, it both endures and experiences single moments. Yet, the memory that allows for both appropriate action and knowledge is shaken by the midnight which, like night in the 'Preludes', offers a world darkened and distorted. Here, verbal energy is based on the contrast between two kinds of music, namely, one formed of the burden of experience, the other a fullness free of private passion. In these poems music serves to suggest, in a way not unlike that of Rimbaud and Apollinaire, the ideal Eliot creates as well as the ideal he seeks to capture, the two of which must ultimately coincide. Rimbaud writes in 'Vagabonds' that "Je créais, par delà la campagne traversée par des bandes de musique rare, les fantômes du futur luxe nocturne".<sup>69</sup> Such a harmony, complete, ample, complex, would transcend the chorus of personal feeling. The poem follows the succession of hours, and at each hour the street lamp offers an object for observation. Like Baudelaire's in 'Un Fantôme', time is the "noir assassin de la Vie et de l'Art". Time is that which "dévore un morceau du délice/A chaque homme accordé pour toute sa saison".<sup>70</sup> This is the same kind of horror the reader experiences in the last stanza of 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', the horror of ultimate personal desolation which recalls the final stanzas of Baudelaire's 'Rêve parisien'. In both poems the clock functions as an agent of external time; at the end of both poems, the knife brings the soul to an excruciating awareness of reality.<sup>71</sup>

The voice of the persona in Eliot's early poetry is that of a consciousness whose sensibilities are bitterly exposed to the paralyzing nullity of life in the great metropolis. These poems are a fantasy of artistic mastery of the city that culminates in the creation of a terrifying, death-like wordless space from which not only the

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<sup>69</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, a critical edition with notes by A. Adam (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 29.

<sup>70</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, pp. 86.

<sup>71</sup> In his poem, Baudelaire describes the terrifying landscape of an abstract, infinitely extended universe devoid of "shapeless organic forms". Like Yeats, who escapes the organic demands of life in order to contemplate the eternal artifice of Byzantium, Baudelaire becomes the architect of a realm where the poetic imagination delights in "[l]'enivrante monotonie/Du métal, du marbre et de l'eau". This monotony, however, at once terrifying and entrancing, is replete with surreal splendours of form, light and colour, but strangely lacking in human presence. Over this fantastic arrangement of polished and glittering surface hangs a chilling "silence d'éternité".

strident noise of the city but all dialogue with the other has been excluded. Words seem to co-exist uneasily, jostle, clash and bounce off each other. Gathering up the fragments of experience and memory into a harmonious whole situated beyond division and loss had been the 'raison d'être' of poetry. However, confronted with the discords and dissonance of the modern city, this project comes under serious pressure and at certain points deliberately cracks, as the tension between the poetic endeavour and the recalcitrance of the urban reality with which it engages becomes increasingly more apparent. Even more important than this concurrence of images is the sense that personal patterns of order are no defence against the forces that conspire to destroy or subvert the human soul. Particularly in Eliot, it is the exploration of this spiritual condition in terms of dramatized poetic discovery that especially marks his city poetry. The speaker in these poems does not act. Space here loses its significance since movement is virtually eliminated. The only movements still remaining are "le mouvement suspendu" of the pendulum with its uncertain "double heurt impossible" swinging from the possible to the impossible.<sup>72</sup> Everything that claims existence in the absolute must try to free itself of movement and adopt a "vertigineuse immobilité".<sup>73</sup> Rimbaud had experienced hallucination in a return to the sensations of childhood, namely, imagery not restrained by preconceived mental acts. While Eliot resorts to memory, Rimbaud makes a return to the original sensation, "la lumière nature". With all their outward sophistication and quasi-scientific objectivity, the French Symbolists and Eliot had not been able to destroy one of the most fundamental and universal of human sensibilities, the inherent despair that Pascal associates with the earthly condition of the "roseau pensant". At first, the expression of this despair takes the form of passive melancholy - the diabolical inclination of Baudelaire, the silence of Rimbaud, the melancholy of Corbière, the apology of Lautréamont. With Laforgue it becomes a constant obsession which stands between his cosmic visions and his enjoyment of them. In Maeterlinck it is the symbol of a hand that marks the obstacle to emancipation. Also, Mallarmé's 'Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le

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<sup>72</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, p. 122.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p. 87. Here, the reader gets a view of the same attempt at destruction as in Rimbaud's work. Rimbaud had believed that the poet would attain the vision he was seeking only when he had lost its intelligibility. In his 'Lettre du Voyant' he explains "Il arrive à l'inconnu; et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues", See, 'Letter to M. Demeny', dated 15 May 1871, in *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 632. Rimbaud finds new fields of poetic exploration through the cult of the irrational and, like Lautréamont, tries to simulate insanity in his own person. For the first time, the theory of objective experimentation in vivisectional subjectivity is applied fully to the work of art.

hasard', a supplement to 'Igitur', is not the work of a "mystificateur" but of a "désespéré".<sup>74</sup>

Reading the poems in the 'Prufrock' volume sequentially, the reader realizes that Eliot gradually endows negativity with more and more personal relevance, until in The Waste Land there is a decisive shift from dramatic monologues, locating the voice outside the implied author's to interior monologues, identifying it clearly as the author's own voice.

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<sup>74</sup> Mallarmé commemorates the shipwreck of a man in his voyage towards the absolute, towards a star that is pictured not only beyond physical but also beyond spiritual comprehension.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The Ennui of an Acute Desolation**

*The horror! The horror!*<sup>1</sup>

*Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,  
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!*<sup>2</sup>

*Beginning in hollow drumbeats, scattered notes grew to phrases,  
and then to warm melody.... Then Edward's music sank back through the  
song's beginning to the narrator, the disconnected phrases, the drumbeats, the silence.*<sup>3</sup>

"Sybil, what do you wish?" "I wish to die". The Waste Land, rising to universality and objectivity, is not merely the confession of a distraught sensibility caught in the conflicts of life, but the expression of the sorrows and sufferings of Eliot's age. In the throes of the First World War, Western sensibility, wrenched from its roots and ripped to shreds developed an obsessive mania for dissonance. Gone was the age of Edwardian eloquence and syntactic precision of Soames Forsyte. Post-war neurosis craved for syncopation, fragmentation and ellipsis, features with which it poignantly identified.

In the post-war world of fallen institutions, shattered ideals and nervous strain, life seems to have lost its seriousness and coherence. In such an atmosphere the memory of past greatness, as revealed in brief images distilled from tradition, adds to the torment of modern man. Eliot's protagonists pursue consciousness of history and of self to the furthest extreme. The reader equates the sterility of Gerontion, or rather, the sterility that *is* Gerontion, with the protagonist's distance from historically meaningful action, specifically the heroism in defeat of the Greeks at Thermopylae.<sup>4</sup> Modern man exists in a wasteland that suffers from a spiritual and religious

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<sup>1</sup> J. Conrad, The Heart of Darkness. 1902. ed. with an introduction by P. O'Prey (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> C. Baudelaire, 'Les Sept Vieillards', in Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> This is the text of a song entitled 'Un Voix dans les déserts' composed by Edward Elgar. It is scored for mezzo soprano, percussion and chamber orchestra. Written in 1915, Elgar dedicated this song to the cause of Britian during the First World War. The above is a section from a critical review (Anon.) published in the *Musical Times* (London), on 1 March 1915, p. 155, after the song's first performance in a concert directed by Elgar himself at Shaftsbury Avenue on 29 January 1915.

<sup>4</sup> In the crucial section on memory in his dissertation on F.H. Bradley, Eliot says that "ideas of the past are true, not by correspondence with a real past, but by their coherence with each other and ultimately with the present moment; and the idea of the past is true, we have found, by virtue of relations among ideas". See, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, p. 54.

deprivation, where rampant commercialism and depraved cosmopolitanism have displaced the ideals and passions of the past. The poet's tragic vision is not confined to a reaction against the present age but it penetrates and permeates all ages. The references to the agony in the garden, the allusions to the Crucifixion, the massed barbarians of modern and ancient times and the crumbling towers of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna and London are images of disillusion which are essentially independent of time or place. In The Waste Land Eliot sketches a poem of symphonic proportions. It appears that the objectivization of his poetry towards which Eliot strives comes nearest to realization when the poetry is concerned with an actual crisis of civilization, the phase of disillusion and despair against a background of revolution and collapse after the First World War.<sup>5</sup>

### **Symbolist Influence**

In his essay 'What Dante means to me', Eliot remarks on 'Les Septs Vieillards': "Fourmillante cité?... I knew what *that* meant, because I had lived it before I knew that I wanted to turn it into verse on my own account".<sup>6</sup> In The Waste Land major influences are, amongst others, the poetry of Baudelaire and Mallarmé and the music of Wagner and Stravinsky. The radical subjectivism that initially resulted from the symbolist experiments of the nineteenth century eventually led away from the self as a lone explorer of transcendence and towards the hermetic nature of language itself. For instance, the poems of Mallarmé, as Paul de Man points out, are informed by the poet's claim of "absolute impersonality".<sup>7</sup> In Mallarmé's words, "[i]mpersonifie, le volume, autant qu'on s'en separe comme auteur, me relame approche de lecteur. Tel, sache, entre les accessoires humains, il a lieu tout seul: fait, entant."<sup>8</sup> For Eliot, as for

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<sup>5</sup> The same happens when Eliot wrote Four Quartets, composed during the air-raids and the cause of Britain during the Second World War.

<sup>6</sup> op. cit. p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> P. de Man, Blindness and Insight (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 68. For Mallarmé, impersonality means the absence of all personal anecdotes, of all confessional intimacies and of all psychological concerns. M. Blanchot, in Le Part du feu (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 48, writes "[b]ut language is also an incarnate consciousness that has been seduced into taking on the material form of words, their life and their sound, and leading one to believe that this reality can somehow open up a road that takes one to the dark centre of things". This leads the reader to the heart of the Mallarméan dialectic. Mallarmé conceived of language as a separate entity radically different from himself, and which he was incessantly trying to reach. However, the model for this entity was mostly the mode of being of a natural substance, accessible to sensation. For Mallarmé, language, with its sensory attributes of sound and texture, introduces a positive element in the sheer void that would surround a consciousness left entirely to itself.

<sup>8</sup> Documents, I, p. 547.

Mallarmé and also Baudelaire, words, though theoretically grounded in the whole of experience, from the point of view of the human subject acquire meaning only via their relations with other entities. Mallarmé writes that the pure poet yields the initiative to the Word, “[l]’oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés”.<sup>9</sup> In Mallarmé’s verse, the initiative is left to the Word as, in the mystique of pure love the initiative is left to God. In the beginning of the poem there exists a frame, a receptive void. Upon this frame, consummating it, acts what for Mallarmé is the enchanting music, the transfiguring power of words, which the poet summons up and to whose operation he surrenders himself.

Eliot’s emphasis on the pattern and rhythms of language represents a reconciliation of the different points of view expressed by the Symbolists. “Le rythme. Loi de la sensibilité”.<sup>10</sup> For the Symbolists, repetition is regarded as one of the results of rhythm. Valéry argues that “[l]a répétition, dont on fait à tort un caractère de rythme, en est contraire un conséquence”.<sup>11</sup> Eliot regards rhythm as a necessary part of the poetic experience, as one of the distinctive features capable of transforming everyday language into poetry. He identifies the fascination created by a feeling of pulse as essential to the spell of poetry. It is the rhythmic combination of ‘sons purs’ which brings poetry close to the quality of song, what Valéry calls “une chose est poétique quand elle fait chanter ... quand ses effets sur l’être sont de la nature d’un chant”.<sup>12</sup> In The Waste Land, Eliot’s use of enjambment, the positioning of the caesura and the weaving of the syntactic structure through the lines and even over several stanzas, create a taut rhythmic movement. Rhythm operates within the context of a whole poem. It plays its part in structuring the whole poem, establishing balance and contrasts between parts. It is a rhythm that is not just an effect of sound and emphasis but is extended to the meanings and relationships of the sections. Eliot’s method involves a shift in stress from the denotative meaning of words to the formal structure or pattern of language as it is found in poetry. He states that “[t]he music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning.”<sup>13</sup> However, he goes on to say

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Variations sur un sujet’, Oeuvres complètes, p. 366.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Oeuvres: Pièces sur l’Art (Paris: Édition du Sagittaire, 1938), p. 405.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Defense de la poésie chantée’, *Revue musicale* (September 1938), 89-94 (p. 91)

<sup>13</sup> ‘The Music of Poetry’, p. 29.

that “the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist”.<sup>14</sup> Eliot’s version of the ‘Intentional Fallacy’ suggests a view of language as an autonomous system whose rhythms, structures and music generate meaning.

The Symbolist temperament grasps at extremes, adopting the extraordinary as its norm, as when the speaker in ‘Conversation Galante’ mixes the metaphysical and the mundane by calling his companion the “eternal humorist” and “enemy of the absolute”. In his early verse Eliot had been profoundly influenced by Laforgue. Up to now, Eliot had been more concerned with the manipulation of language than with honouring any natural connection between word and thing, word and self. Soon after writing ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ Eliot underwent an emotional upheaval. Seeking a new voice,<sup>15</sup> Eliot entered a public dialogue through journalism, a dialogue the central term of which was rhetoric. In Symons’s book he had found a work that introduced French Symbolism as “this revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric”.<sup>16</sup>

Inheriting from the French Symbolists the technical and dynamic possibilities inherent in ‘vers libre’, Eliot found in it an intense variety which the classic, romantic and parnassian verse did not possess. For the Symbolists, ‘vers libre’ proved to be the most difficult form of all. Indeed, they found that only when a poet’s inspiration is upon him at its strongest, only when he is really under the influence of the strange bursting exaltation which goes with all creation, is he capable of ‘vers libre’. Then, they argued, he could perhaps produce such music as Vièle-Griffin did in ‘Thrène’.<sup>17</sup> Eliot discovered that, ultimately, the function of ‘vers libre’ was to strip poetry of rhetoric. Transferring his gaze to Baudelaire, Eliot found that the criterion for poetic excellence was no longer brevity together with that sense of the gratuitous fragment or throw-away piece replete with irony. Above all, it was its concentration and intensity which, with only the appearance of a paradox, gives the reader a feeling of expansion, of a kind of psychedelic multiplicity, not unlike the sudden illumination in

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> At 29 years of age, he wrote that “any poet, if he is to survive as a writer beyond his 25th year, must alter... he must seek new literary influences... he will have different emotions to express”, ‘From Poe to Valéry’ p. 330.

<sup>16</sup> *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> F. Vielé-Griffin, ‘In Memoriam Stéphane Mallarmé’, *Plus loin* (Paris: Nizet, 1906), p. 76. The poem is cited by M. de Souza, *Du Rythme, en français* (Lyon: Lyon University Press, 1952), pp. 62-3.

Rimbaud. Eliot seems to have echoed Baudelaire's intention in Le Spleen de Paris, namely, to emphasize the random and accidental aspects of his thought and inspiration, depicting from his observation of the "Unreal City" through the disillusioned eyes of a man afflicted by the ennui of a vast modern capital, "une morale désagréable".<sup>18</sup> Introducing Valéry's 'Le Serpent' two years after publishing The Waste Land, Eliot spoke of the poet's sense of "le Néant": "In 'La pythie' I find, not a philosophy but a poetic statement of a definite and unique state of the soul dispossessed".<sup>19</sup>

The Waste Land elaborates on the idea already expounded in 'Gerontion', namely, that there is no worse terror than a soul imprisoned in itself. Baudelaire describes it as "le thème du mort vivant",<sup>20</sup> the anxious preoccupation with a succession of beings who seem to inhabit some liminal world between life and death and who, unable fully to die as they have been unable fully to live, return compulsively to haunt the living. The nightmare is not the finality of death, but the possibility of its non-finality.<sup>21</sup> Gerontion, like Prufrock and the speaker in 'Portrait of a Lady', is a persona in conflict. The use of interior monologue in 'Gerontion' is the narrative equivalent of the French Symbolists' constantly modulating river of sound and the literary leitmotif, developing, intensifying and establishing inter-relationships. This stems directly from Wagner's technique of polyphonic expression of complex states of awareness.

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<sup>18</sup> Correspondance Generale, II, p. 165.

<sup>19</sup> 'Introduction' to Valéry's 'Le Serpent', *Criterion*, II. 2 (1924), 13. Later, his words on Valéry were even more closely parallel to the accounts he gave of himself while writing The Waste Land. Thus, in 'Paul Valéry', *Quarterly Review of Literature*, 3:3 (1947), 213, Eliot wrote of the difficulties of writing for a poet whose vision cannot break free of "le Néant". At best, Valéry was able to play "an elaborate game ... but to be able to play this game, to be able to take aesthetic delight in it, is one of the manifestations of civilized man. There is only one higher stage possible for civilized man, and that is to unite the profoundest scepticism with the deepest faith. But Valéry was not Pascal and we have no right to ask that of him. His was, I think, a profoundly destructive mind, even nihilistic. This cannot ... alter our opinion of the poetry.... But it should, I think, increase our admiration of the man who wrote the poetry. For the agony of creation, for a mind like Valéry's, must be very great. When the mind constantly mocks and dissuades, and urges that creative activity is vain, then the slow genesis of a poem ... [is] only possible by a desperate heroism which is a triumph of character".

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Mme Aupick, dated 2 May 1851, Correspondance Generale, II, p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> Baudelaire's voice, describing the state of mind of 'Les Sept Vieillards', for instance, is full of rounded, urbane irony, "nos aimables remords". The voice then continues with a vicious relish in its denunciation, "comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine". It unnervingly swings from a level of cultured sharpness to a kind of dandyism, then to an image that resurrects Jacques Callot's etchings or Murillo's beggars. Here, one finds a violent tension between the multiple directions into which tone and imagery are pulling the stanzas, themselves an enactment of the ingenious swarming of sins, and what offers itself as a preacher's accusing voice. The tension is kept in check only by the impeccable certainty of the verse.

Gerontion's conflict is amplified by the fear that if he ever asks himself whether his desire could be satisfied, he would be forced to answer negatively. The reader can reconstruct this fear from the questions that are implied, only to be evaded, in The Waste Land.<sup>22</sup>

In The Waste Land, the reader reads about the breakdown in Western values, resulting in the madness and meaninglessness that comes with loss of sustaining vision; the passion to search out purification by discipline and mortification; the inseparable linking of tragedy and transporting desire in mythical and literary tradition; the emptiness felt by the speaker himself, coming forward, at last, as the poet who has "shored" the "fragments" of which the poem is made "against [his] ruins", and the counter-motifs of spiritual redemption and implied calm at the end. The Waste Land, because of its particular place in the history of modern poetry and the peculiar history of its text, together with its pioneering inward voyage by way of externalized images and other points of reference, provides a fascinating problem for the modern reader.<sup>23</sup>

"Kurtz discoursed. A voice! A voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart".<sup>24</sup> Unlike Lazarus or Guido, Kurtz looked over the edge and spoke. The horror of which he spoke is the prevailing horror of The Waste Land. This horror creates a new mood, unlike the sterile terror of Gerontion or Prufrock's lonely but ironic self-effacement. Gerontion could only think, Kurtz felt. He saw, understood and spoke. The hollowness is seen not as sheer negation but as positive evil. The horror is the character's accumulated life depicted in dramatic scenes and set off against sinister and disgusting images of slimy rats, white bodies, pollution and violation. Isolation in self is accompanied by horror of self, of the very emptiness and guilt it creates. The failure of relationships in The Waste Land is what Eliot was later to call the fear of

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<sup>22</sup> One can also reconstruct what it felt to think about it from words Eliot later puts in Henry's mouth in The Family Reunion. 1939. (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 52, namely, "What I see/May be one dream or another; if there is nothing else/The most real is what I fear. The bright colour fades/Together with the unrecapturable emotion,/The glow upon the world, that never found its object;/And the eye adjusts itself to a twilight/Where the dead stone is seen to be batrachian,/The aphyllous branch ophidian".

<sup>23</sup> B. Everett, in 'Eliot's Marianne: "The Waste Land" and its poetry in Europe', *RES*, 31 (February 1980), 41-53, argues the historical perspective in which the poem is steeped. She particularly analyzes the power of allusion in Eliot as portrayed in The Waste Land.

<sup>24</sup> J. Conrad, p. 98.

“belonging to another, or to others or to God”; the separation from the hyacinth girl and the thought that “your heart would have responded”; the breakdown of Europe and hence of social relations and the inability to see the mysteries of Christ. The horror of The Waste Land is a combination of daily misery in personal life, similar to that of the earlier poems, but with a changelessness precluding salvation or renewal. This is what H. Kenner calls “the world’s and man’s incapacity for redemption”.<sup>25</sup> Chateaubriand’s René exclaims: “Soon my heart could no longer provide my mind with food for thought, and I was only aware of my existence through a profound sense of ennui”.<sup>26</sup> Also, Benjamin Constant’s Adolphe describes himself as “this heart ... alien to all the interests of the world, alone in the midst of man, and yet suffering from the isolation to which it is condemned”.<sup>27</sup> The alienation of both René and Adolphe, like that of the speaker in Eliot’s poem, ironically leads them to a self-conscious pursuit of the very elements that increase that isolation.

In The Waste Land, these themes of horror, boredom, sterility and despair are organized like music. In this connection music does not only mean sounds and rhythms but the sequence of emotions the poem creates. It is a sequence within which lies an inscrutable logic. To say that a poem is musical in the Wagnerian sense does not simply mean that there is an allusion to a musical work, or that the use of the tonal and rhythmical resonance of words reinforces their conceptual meaning. Rather, the subtle use of literary leitmotifs intensifies the quality of the feeling by repetition, unifying the various parts of the poem and relating the various parts to the whole. Baudelaire, who responded to Wagner’s music more deeply than most of his contemporaries, experiences a shadowy and profound unity; that sphere where universals and primordial images live inchoate. The mysterious world of myth, legend and mystery answers a need in both Baudelaire and Wagner, that of redemption. In Baudelaire’s poetry, the indissolubility of sound and sense is based not upon the coming together of definable qualities, one in the sound and one in the meaning, but precisely in provoking the impression of certain qualities in the context of the poem. Their indefinability, as separate values, guarantees their indissolubility.

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<sup>25</sup> H. Kenner, The Invisible Poet (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> F.R. Chateaubriand, René, trans. by P. Clarke (London: Penguin, 1928), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> H.B. Constant de Rebecque, Adolphe, trans. by M. Baker (London: Macmillan, 1938), p. 47.

As the Introduction and Chapter One argue, the French Symbolist poets were preoccupied with the nature of music and its relation to poetry. Art was to be symbolical rather than representational and an attempt was made in writing to musicalize the inner universe. A music of words was to be elaborated, and a tight organic form based on associative structure, logical ellipsis and image-transformations was sought. Under the strong influence of Wagner, psychological cross-references and associations, and inter-relationships between clusters of images and symbols started to be deliberately created. Verlaine's demand that all art be subordinate to music and Mallarmé's suspicion that poetry may have become the lesser achievement both derive from Wagner's example. Music is an expression of the unity of experience whereby the soul of the listener is elevated and he is inspired to reverie, meditation and the perception of beauty. It is a perfect harmony that is essentially spiritual. Baudelaire, who could heighten the sensuous aspect of voice to the point of hypnosis in poems like 'Le Balcon' and 'Harmonie du Soir', writes suggestively about it as "dream[ing] of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience".<sup>28</sup> Baudelaire shares Poe's view of (lyric) poetry as the rhythmical creation of beauty, and would almost certainly have endorsed Coleridge's claim that "metre [is] the proper form of poetry", the expression of "the high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity by harmonious adjustment".<sup>29</sup> Poetry, according to Baudelaire, embodies the "instinct immortel du Beau", itself connected with the desire to attain to the realm of "harmonie universelle".<sup>30</sup>

The leitmotif, that characteristic theme which, deceptively, appears to be always the same, supports the vast fabric of many modern writers. Baudelaire's obsessive use of leitmotif in Les Fleurs du Mal, for instance, expresses fragmentation and asserts the primacy of the single life, of individual points of view. It celebrates the energy of a nature that proceeds by opposites while making the reader mentally travel, in an organized manner, through a landscape of consciousness. Also, it explores the split of

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<sup>28</sup> Oeuvres complètes: Curiosités esthétiques, p. 52. Quoted by A. Balakian, in The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal, Studies in Language and Literature (New York: Random Press, 1967), p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> Oeuvres complètes: Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires par Edgar Poe, p. 636.

mind and nature while looking for ways of transcending that split. One of the forms this communing takes is in the identifying of the self with swarming energies, with crowds, with the city - "Moi, c'est tous. Tous, c'est moi. Tourbillon". In the original drafts of The Waste Land, the "swarming life you kill and breed/Huddled between the concrete and the sky" brings to mind the Baudelairean vision of the oppression of the urban landscape, in which people "swarm", not just "comme un million d'helminthes", but seethe in dreadful passiveness to mechanistic cycles, "[l]e Ciel couvercle moir de la grande marmite/Où bout l'imperceptible et vaste Humanité".<sup>31</sup>

The Waste Land is a vast fabric of themes constantly modulating, constantly repeating and constantly cross-referencing, until all sense of linear development has been superseded. Urban images appear, withdraw and return, sometimes distant and detached, yet at other times near and internal. The Waste Land may be considered an epic in its enormously subtle use of motifs - their variations, combination and modification by key, context and cumulative memory, dramatic and musical. In the later poetry, by contrast, leitmotif becomes a technique employed to preserve the inward unity and abiding present of the whole at each moment.<sup>32</sup> Mythical reverberations enrich and universalize.

In The Waste Land, the symbols, the mythology, the characters and the music are not remote from ordinary human experience, though part of the poem lies hidden beneath the obvious surface and works on the reader more intuitively than rationally. One can apply Wagner's dictum "I see afresh how much there is, from the very nature of my poetical intention, which can only be made understandable by the music."<sup>33</sup> In The Waste Land the symbolic image is a musical motive. The leading motives and the leitmotifs that Eliot so often reveals give utterance to the unspoken thought behind the words, the plotting personality behind the smooth exterior. The unavowed intention behind the actions consists of simple images, combined into compound images by symphonic development and contrapuntal associations - the Hyacinth garden episode

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<sup>31</sup> Les Fleurs du Mal, pp. 108, 145.

<sup>32</sup> In 'East Coker', V, Eliot describes this abiding present "[n]ot the intense moment/Isolated, with no before and after,/But a lifetime burning in every moment."

<sup>33</sup> Quoted by W. Blisset, in 'Thomas Mann, the last Wagnerite', *The German Review* (February 1960), 32.

and the “famous clairvoyante” looking for the “Hanged Man”, the journey to Emmaus, and others. The capacity of these images for variation is as remarkable as their distinctiveness through all the variations. They are as definite and they are as fluid as the organic realities of the human psyche for which they stand. By contrast, creation myths in Eliot’s post-Waste Land poetry are important to a primitive mentality not so much for their ostensible explanation of physical nature as for their intuitive explanation of the nature of the psyche.

Taking up where Baudelaire had left off, Eliot’s use of leitmotif in The Waste Land parades the refusal of its fragments to cohere, or offers that refusal as the identity of its narrator. As Flaubert aptly puts it, the task is to regain through art the “innéité” which is missing in life.<sup>34</sup> In both Les Fleurs du Mal and The Waste Land, the consciousness at work is a consciousness in search of its own creativity, of its selfhood, through its gradual fragmentation, stripping and failure.<sup>35</sup> It is the same kind of fragmentation which Gerontion had discovered in the “[t]he word within a word, unable to speak a word”. Eliot’s technique of eclectic fragmentation derives principally from the influence of Pound. Eliot extracts two main qualities from Pound’s imagism, namely, the importance of approaching reality without mental reservation and the “poetic value of small dry things.”<sup>36</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, Pound and Eliot together founded a literary technique which depends on quotation and reference to an unprecedented degree, with models from French Symbolist poets. The eclectic borrowings of The Waste Land provide a more unified and synthetic orchestration of effects. Thus, a poem of suggestion rather than statement, of inner rather than external movement is adumbrated, where the traditional development of character and exploration of human relationships make way for suggestiveness, musicality, mystery and reverie.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted by J. Culler, in Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty (Ithaca: Ithaca University Press, 1974), pp. 21-37.

<sup>35</sup> The Brothers Karamazov and Our Mutual Friend are also works in which rebirth can only happen through a recomposition of the self by death, a total surrender to the forces of undoing.

<sup>36</sup> S. Hamilton, Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, the Symbolist theatre of Mallarmé and the experiments of Meyerhold demonstrate once more the insistence upon the superiority of the inner vision over mere external actuality.

From 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' to 'The Hollow Men', the use of leitmotifs is employed by Eliot in various subtle ways. Particularly in 'Gerontion', the use of leitmotif depicts the old man's consciousness, a consciousness which becomes co-extensive with the objects of his contemplation, both past and present. All his thoughts and feelings are suspended in a moment of subjective 'durée'.<sup>38</sup> The intellectual core in 'Gerontion' is the analysis of history, while the moral core is an analysis of a personal and historic void. The emotional core is terror. The paradox of Gerontion's terror reflects the paradox of a history filled with meaning but empty to the very human spirit for whom its meaning exists. Gerontion's malaise is the malaise of The Waste Land, namely, what Eliot in 1917 called a sceptical, empty generation, "sick with its own knowledge of history".<sup>39</sup>

Eliot's use of leitmotif in The Waste Land provides even more points of orientation than it does in 'Gerontion'.<sup>40</sup> Each of the poem's five parts is dominated by one of the following themes, namely, sterility, in the images of the dead land, disintegrating city and death-in-life images; sexual love, in the form of lust, impotence and indifference; rebirth, in the shape of fertility gods, the grail quest and religious voices resounding through the ages. Portraying no temporal movement by juxtaposing past and present, this poem achieves its epic proportions with an economy of means, an ever-developing web of cross-references and an interweaving of images and phrases together with an interlocking of themes and a musical complex of associations. Most importantly, leitmotifs exert an emotional impact. The continual transformation of existing motifs into new ones, conveying a sense of progressive emotional and psychological development, immeasurably enriches the dynamic power of the language.

The repetitive schemes governing Eliot's imagery represent an extension of the methods of French Symbolism. While patterns of recurrent imagery are often found

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<sup>38</sup> Gerontion, like Prufrock and the hollow men, seems to be caught between incompatible inner and outer worlds of dream and actuality. Later in Eliot's poetry, there comes a stage at which action and inaction are indifferent. They merge through an ethic of right action, equally in Four Quartets and the plays.

<sup>39</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Review of Georges Sorel's "Reflections on Violence"', *Monist* (July 1917), 478-9.

<sup>40</sup> All direct perception in The Waste Land is the continuous progress of the past which impinges on the present. Here, the reader can relate with the underlying texture of a technique similar to Wagner's leitmotifs of 'Ahnung' - anticipation, and 'Erinnerung' - recollection. In Four Quartets, Eliot carries the use of leitmotif to its most complex development.

in French Symbolist poems, the practice of reiterating dominant images is greatly intensified and systematized in Eliot's work. Moreover, it forms an integral structural component of many of his early poems, contributing to both the unity and progression of these poems inasmuch as each recurrence of a particular image reveals a modification in its symbolic connotations. It is because of these patterns of repetition and variation, created by these schemes of image-recurrence, that Eliot's device is analogous to the musical practice of leitmotif, particularly within the Wagnerian framework. Wagner's method is that of repeating short melodic phrases in varying harmonies, rhythms and orchestral textures, with the effect that each successive repetition of an image results in an elaboration or modification of the meaning.

Connecting diverse parts together, leitmotifs, like the mythical method, collect associations in different contexts, and gradually become symbols. Here, leitmotif is important in its generative function and its capacity to interact dynamically, showing remarkable potential for development and extension. It enables the theme to become saturated with ideas and associations that can be brought out again and again - for repetition is a basic, salient characteristic of leitmotif - to convey such meanings and become subject to even more transformations. These symbols are created by the incremental return to the same or closely similar images. Water, for instance, is longed for in a desert yet feared lest the protagonist drowns in it. Also, through allusions to Ariel's song, to drown may mean to be transformed in a process that is uncanny and ominous, yet strangely reassuring. Water is also associated with sexual desire. As presented in the poem, water can be a symbol of Spring fertility, of the agonizing memory of innocent love in the garden, of illicit love affairs or murders along the banks of the Thames, or of the drowning Phlebas experiencing the sensation of death and rebirth. As a recurring symbol it connotes life and death, creation and destruction. As the river it recalls the water nymphs of Spenser's 'Epithalamion'; it provides the setting for Elizabeth and Leicester as they dally in their opulent barge; it also exudes oil and tar and carries such flotsam as bottles, papers and "silk handkerchiefs". As each image occurs in combination with others, its symbolic connotations shift according to changing contexts and the themes are introduced, developed and merged with other themes as the images related to them recur in varying combinations. Assimilating such associations, the reader understands the

mingled longing, fascination and fear that water excites in the protagonists throughout The Waste Land.

Another symbol which keeps recurring as a leitmotif in The Waste Land is the "wind". The dominant element in 'Gerontion', for instance, is not water, which has the power to dissolve rigidities of the self. It is a Dantesque cold wind that blows in the vacuum between self-consciousness and the inner life. This wind embodies a ceaseless randomness that cannot find an end and yet cannot die. It defines a type of emotional frontier that remains constant as a recurring motif in Eliot's mature verse.<sup>41</sup> In The Waste Land, the reader finds the following variants on the 'wind' motif, namely, perfumes "stirred by the air", "[t]he wind under the door", "the wind/Crosses the brown land, unheard", "[t]here is the empty chapel, only the wind's home", "[t]hen a damp gust/Bringing rain". With each recurrence of the words "wind", "air" and "gust", the symbolic meaning changes.<sup>42</sup> Eliot wishes to impart the idea that life unrelated to the affections is weightless, subject to the winds of random impulse, motion without final end, resulting in an immobility of inner action.

Above all, Eliot's use of leitmotif in The Waste Land helps him to work in terms of surface parallelisms that in reality make ironical contrasts, and in terms of surface contrasts which in reality constitute parallelism. The two aspects taken together give the effect of chaotic experience ordered into a new whole. The Waste Land is most centrally a repudiation of what the world has called life and its crowning negation of the rejection of the resurrection and the life at the heart of the Grail legends. The

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<sup>41</sup> Seen in this light, the first stanza of 'Gerontion' suggests much more than an old man confronting his memories. He is these memories of his past, and these memories are all negatives, a listing of what he is not. As in the case of Prufrock, Gerontion's identity, or lack of one, rests on crucial absences, both that of the present which is actually the missing past, and that of the past which itself is a series of non-events. This is one reason, perhaps, why Gerontion refers to himself as "[a] dull head among windy spaces". In 'Gerontion' there is another major component to the music of the winds, namely, the movement of empty talk, a speech that has become unmoored from its emotional springs and has degenerated into rhetoric. Always deeply concerned about the relation between rhetoric and romantic self-deception, in 'Gerontion' Eliot draws on moments in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama to represent the consequences of a paralyzing disposition towards rhetoric. The poem's speaker lives in a prison, an egotism in which life has "nor youth nor age/But as it were an after dinner sleep/Dreaming of both". Gerontion's inaudible talk does not correspond to his inner reality nor does it let him grasp the reality around him. It serves only to postpone silence and keeps him from acknowledging the truth of his condition.

<sup>42</sup> The changes that occur with each recurrence represent transmutations in meaning and symbolic context. The music motif, for instance, often creates an atmosphere, a mood, a tone. It may even symbolize a state of mind.

fortune-telling of Madame Sosostris, the modern Sybil, seems to be pertinent at this point. On the surface of the poem the poet reproduces the pattern of the charlatan, Madame Sosostris, and there is the surface irony, the contrast between the original use of the Tarot cards and the use made of them by Madame Sosostris. However, each of the details assumes a new meaning in the general context of the poem. The surface irony takes on a deeper meaning. The items of the clairvoyant's speech have only one reference in terms of the context of her speech; the "man with three staves", the "one-eyed merchant", the "crowds of people walking in a ring", and so on. Transferred to other contexts these become loaded with special meanings. The deeper lines of association only emerge, however, in terms of the total context, in the ritualistic display of myths, as the poem develops.

Eliot's use of the Tarot cards introduces the first protagonist of the poem, along with all the others represented in the deck, as empty figures, galvanized into meaningless action. Belladonna, the man with three staves, the Wheel of life and the one-eyed merchant are all, as Eliot wrote in 1921, relics "of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation".<sup>43</sup> The use of the Tarot cards as leitmotif adds levels of reference at every stage. Particularly interesting is the poet's reference to the "one-eyed merchant" and "this card,/Which I am forbidden to See. I do not find/The Hanged Man". The Hanged Man may be understood as either a trope for simple death or as a warning of the sort of violent death that is applied to criminals. However, within the context of the poem, "The Hanged Man" suggests even more forcefully the Fisher King and the god of the vegetation myth whose sacrifice engenders the renewal of life which constitutes the spring season. Eliot accommodates the Tarot pack to this myth, since the Tarot is his chief means of exploiting it. Therefore this myth, as implemented by the cards that appear in the fortune, should provide the basic reference for the parts of the poem.

In fact, though both the Fisher King and the Hanged God were victims, the Hanged God, whom the Madame does not find, represents in the poem the final cause of the wasteland and its possible restoration. In mythology he was sacrificed in order that nature might be renewed. Now, 'The Burial of the Dead' relates primarily to him, and

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<sup>43</sup> 'London Letter', *Dial*, 71 (October 1921), 453.

the state of the land is an effect of his death. Any change in that state is contingent upon his revival. The Fisher King's role is to represent man's fate as it originates in sex but cannot transcend it; without this transcendence, which is figured in the Hanged God, he is doomed to death. Eliot not only brings myth to bear down on reality but, also, continually reasserts the dynamic power of the myth by the recurrence as leitmotifs of symbols associated with that particular myth. In this manner, the first part of the poem presents and develops through leitmotif the death theme, for god and man, and relates the fear of it to sex, as in the myth.

The Waste Land is a poetic form on a new principle and the principle is the musical sequence and inter-relations of emotions by the repetition and gradual interweaving of leitmotifs. As they return in a new context, they bring with them suggestions and associations from former contexts and become progressively denser nodes of connotation and feeling. Through the use of leitmotifs the writer is, in Joyce's words, "refined out of existence", thereby achieving the impersonality in his work which Eliot craved for. Leitmotif provides authorial commentary with indirection and technical skill. The Waste Land creates a web of such themes, a musical complex of relations through the manipulation of symbolically allusive formulas. Literary allusions are employed re-creatively by Eliot. The reader understands what later in 'Burnt Norton' Eliot calls "both a new world/And the old made explicit". The Waste Land is a poem whose meaning comes through quasi-naturalistic presentation, symbolism and myth. The parallels and contrasts provided by the use of myth and leitmotif offer rich and indefinite vistas.

The city, one of Eliot's principal images employed as leitmotif in The Waste Land, is invariably presented as a labyrinth in which one gropes like a blind person without the help of an Ariadne's thread. The Waste Land releases a whole Pandora's boxful of urban monstrosities. Itself ghost-like, the city breeds ghosts from within its "plex sineaux"<sup>44</sup> and expects its corpses to sprout. Being in the city is like moving in "des labyrinthes mobiles et sans fin".<sup>45</sup> In Baudelaire's and Eliot's worlds the city is indeed where one gets lost, but lost not so much in the euphoric spin and thrill of the indecipherable collage as in the deep narcosis of the commodity phantasmagoria,

<sup>44</sup> 'Les Petites Vieilles', in Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 133.

<sup>45</sup> M. de Certeau, L'invention du quotidien, 2 vols (Paris: Nizet, 1980), I, p. 172.



ennui and despair. It is the ideal territory for the “rôdeur-parisien” and the “young man carbuncular”, and Balzac’s description of urban territory in La Cousine Bette seems to plunge the reader into the heart of the “[f]ourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves/Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant”. Eliot’s use of this phrase is at once universal in its reverberations and yet, so quintessentially and uniquely Baudelairean. For Baudelaire and Eliot, urban life becomes a theatrical performance in which the self is at once spectacle and spectator, locked in its inner life even as it most strives to externalize itself. The city itself becomes increasingly counterfeit and unreal. Surfaces are detached from substances. Spectacular exterior belies an impoverished interior. The city-dweller is confronted with a spatial order “devoid of its traditional richness of meaning.”<sup>46</sup>

Symbols denoting sterility also recur repeatedly as leitmotifs. Baudelaire’s ‘Le Cygne’ and Eliot’s The Waste Land teem with the theme of drought. “Le pavé sec”, “le sol raboteux”, “un ruisseau sans eau”, “la poudre” are all suggestive of aridity and sterility. In The Waste Land the attempt is also to break free from sterility. However, “a damp gust/Bringing rain” does not give birth to life. It is only a renewal of destructive desires not a movement into fruitfulness. In this urban wasteland, the sources of life have dried up. There is no social or existential unity, only an infinity of dust particles, and a seemingly indifferent heaven refuses to grant rain to the parched earth, “[e]au, quand donc pleuras-tu? quand tonneras-tu, foudre?; “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish?; “And the dry stone no sound of water”. Here the reader gets the emotional equivalence, or objective correlative, in both Baudelaire’s and Eliot’s poem. Such words and expressions become symbols of frustration in a manner that seems to anticipate Mallarmé.<sup>47</sup> Drama is not so much described as enacted. Sin becomes its own punishment and hell becomes even more aware of its damnation by a dim awareness of heaven. Exile, physical and spiritual, is the common denominator of all the emblematic images and figures in these poems. By virtue of their historical

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<sup>46</sup> W.H. Bizley, ‘The Decadent Metropolis as Frontier: Eliot, Laforgue and Baudelaire’, *Theoria*, 68 (1986), 25-35 (p. 26).

<sup>47</sup> The same kind of landscape is encountered in the “terrains cendreaux, calcinés, sans verdure” and “Our dried voices”; “As wind in dry grass”; “In our dry cellar”, of ‘La Béatrice’ and ‘The Hollow Men’ respectively. Likewise, the physical distortion in ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ caused by the fog, as in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, is the prelude to the psychological disfigurement which belongs to the machinery of the nightmare.

perspective these poems suggest that exile from society is not conditioned by period or geography. It is an absolute inevitable fate. However, the poet's alienation is only an intensified form of a universal human predicament.

The confusion and tribulations of life are reflected in the disorganized flux of images, their lack of clear meaning in the very obscurity of meaning, their defiance of authoritative creeds in a "license of metrical form"<sup>48</sup> and their dislocated connection with the past in the floating debris of allusion. Baudelaire's Paris and Eliot's London, as depicted in these poems, are cities plagued by a spiritual torpor. Here, ancient myth and modern image meet and rise above temporal changing Paris and London. The introduction of myth and its recurrence as leitmotif throughout the poems gains an emotional, visionary power. Overwhelmed by his experience of complexity, isolation, boredom and unfulfilment, the modern city poet instinctively seeks meaningful parallel in the classic, in a concentration of archetypal myth. In 'Epilogue' Baudelaire ascends a hill "to contemplate the city in all its profusion"<sup>49</sup> while in 'The Burial Of The Dead' Eliot gazes at an "[u]nreal City,/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn". Yet the effect is neither topographical nor visual. It seems to be a dramatization of the poet's consciousness in terms of symbolic place. Baudelaire and Eliot present only those features of Paris and London that seem to metamorphose the city's existence as a moral phenomenon. Both Paris and London are presented as cities which house a detached, isolated and enclosed spiritual sustenance. Both poets unflinchingly reveal the recesses of the Infinite within the dark, labyrinthine finitudes of the modern city.

In the twilight hour of the late afternoon, Eliot focuses on the typist and her friend. At the close of the scene the reader finds himself alone with the young woman as she paces her room and reflects absently on the weary futility and boredom of her love affair. Here, Tiresias's role as the observer assumes dominant proportions. The scene is controlled by a unified, objective point of view. Being both man and woman, Tiresias is the ideal observer for the love-making scene. He is also a witness to the eternal recurrence of the sterile passions, whether they occur in ancient Greece or

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<sup>48</sup> G. Chesters, 'Baudelaire, some functions of sound-repetition in *Les Fleurs du Mal*', *Occasional Papers in Modern Languages*, University of Hull, 11 (1975), 20.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted by W. Benjamin, in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, p. 81.

modern London. With his prophetic powers he can foresee only the endless repetition of the profitless coupling of men and women so that his observations invest the scene with strong ironic undertones. He is the all-experienced interpreter of human sins. He is both myth and reality personified. Eliot's continued mechanization of the rhythm here, enforced by the machine imagery of taxis and the gramophone, suggests the denatured quality of the characters' lives. The reader is presented with a portrait of a lover detached from the religious and intellectual aspects of life. He is all nerves and sterile passions in a world that is mechanized and dehumanized. Eliot's tired rhythms and machine imagery create an appropriate atmosphere for the dull and mechanistic affair of the typist and her lover. The close verbal repetitions of "wait" and "throbbing" in the lines:

when the human engine *waits*  
Like a taxi *throbbing waiting*,  
I Tiresias, though blind, *throbbing* between two lives ... (emphasis mine)

serve to knit these lines tightly together. These repetitions strengthen the impression of anxious waiting, and they help bring about a fusion of human and mechanical qualities. The ascription of throbbing bisexuality to Tiresias, moreover, adds a sexual and historical note to this modern industrial setting.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the unified progression of effects from verse to verse, maintained in part by verbal and phrasal repetitions, the setting for the clerk-typist scene reveals a great many contrasts in imagery, texture and diction. Not only is the ancient figure of Tiresias superimposed on the modern scene amidst desks, human engines and taxis, but the one contemporary waterfront itself echoes from Sappho to Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Requiem' - "Home is the sailor, home from the sea". The contrast between the sailor and the typist is accentuated by the sudden shift in syntax, in which the typist changes from the object of "brings" to the subject of "clears", "and brings the sailor home from the sea,/the typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast." These motifs are connected by the central image of the "violet hour", for it is the hour that

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<sup>50</sup> Eliot here draws our attention to the fluidity of the point of view in *The Waste Land*. Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. "What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem." As Tiresias was blind, the reader has to understand his kind of seeing as his visionary or prophetic experience. Curiously, Eliot once signed himself 'Tiresias' in a letter to the Italian scholar Mario Praz. Eliot may have originally taken the idea of Tiresias from Pound, who introduced this classical figure in Cantos I & III, published first in *Three Cantos* (1917) and again in *Dial* (1921). See, *Variorum Edition of The Three Cantos* by Ezra Pound: A Prototype, compiled by R. Taylor (Bayreuth: Boomerang, 1991).

seems to draw all to their respective homes, focusing at last on the typist as the main character of the scene. Her speech, “[w]ell now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over”, reflects the nervous agitation of syncopated gramophone music. Nevertheless, it is the automatic gesture, the cheap gramophone music, and not the music of love or the satisfaction of a fruitful union with her lover, with which she tries to cure her boredom and relieve her nervousness. Here, understanding becomes conflict and harmony is disfigured into dissonance. Taken within the context of The Waste Land, obliteration in this passage may function as antidote to the fragmented, deconstructed modern world.

Urban perception is by definition fragmentary and hallucinated. The city where these two lovers meet is a perpetual osmosis of fact and fantasy, “[f]ourmillante cité! cité pleine de rêves!” The ideal synoptic overview is denied to the dandy, and such fragments as he perceives are solipsistically interpreted in the light of his inner obsession. The spectacle of the street becomes a shadowgraph upon which the drama of the poet’s soul is allegorically acted out, “tout pour moi devient allégorie!” According to Jonathan Raban, urban man is compelled “to find a fixing synecdoche, to substitute a lurid part for a bafflingly complex whole” and, as a corollary of this perceptual selectivity, is fatally addicted to what Raban calls “moral synecdoche”, the tendency to abstract certain fragments from the mass of data offered by the city and to moralize or allegorize them in terms of his own subjective experience.<sup>51</sup> The city becomes an allegorical backdrop, painted with symbols of the very good and the very evil. More precisely, it is the language itself that, through its superimposition of myths and leitmotifs, enables the city to permit the sudden encounters to take place, together with the blatant contrasts, the unpredictable shifts and switches of angle, the constantly altering perspectives. It is the linguistic and urban domain of the momentary, the accidental, the heterogeneous and incomplete, the very antithesis of classicism.

In a letter to Houssaye, Baudelaire says that his collection of prose poems resembles a “serpent” that can be chopped up in any way one likes, “[n]ous pouvons couperou nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture”.<sup>52</sup> The

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<sup>51</sup> J. Raban, Soft City (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> ‘A Arsène Houssaye’, Correspondance, I, p. 229.

strangely violent comparison of the writing and reading of the prose poems to the arbitrary hacking to pieces of the serpent scarcely suggests the steps of a sinuous yet measured choreography. It implies not only a series of improvised movement upon the unpredictable mobility of the city, but also the writhing movement of a body in pain, a kind of 'danse macabre', like that of the "petites vieilles" who "dansent, sans vouloir danser, pauvres sonnets/Où se pend un Démon sans pitié!"<sup>53</sup> It may also evoke a choreography of madness, of movement running destructively out of control, a frenzy of directionless energy comparable to the "chaos mouvant" of the city street, as in the poet's reaction to the "cortège infernal" of old men at the end of 'Les Sept Vieillards', "[e]t mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre/Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords."<sup>54</sup>

What emerges from the variety of movement, as depicted in Eliot's poetry of this period, is an insistent pattern of opposites. Eliot makes use of movement in The Waste Land in order to provoke the rhythmic gestures of futility that constitute activity in the modern world. In a poet whose vision often sweeps Heaven and Hell simultaneously, the popular images of dance as mythic apotheosis and dance as death contribute to an essential paradox in his poetry. They serve to create an over-all unity of tone both in their recurrence and in their own persistent rhythm of point/counterpoint.

In The Waste Land, which is a search that uncovers only lost or debased rituals, two dance images fulfil Eliot's black vision of the modern world. The "crowds of people, walking ~~round and~~ round in a ring" not only suggest Dante's damned in the antechamber of Hell, but prefigure the 'danse macabre' of 'The Hollow Men'. In one, "each man fixed his eyes before his feet" while in the other, "[t]he eyes are not here/There are no eyes here ... In this last of meeting places/We grope together". The despair in The Waste Land emanates from the failure to unite oneself with a life-giving activity. The aimlessly circling crowd is a bitter parody of the early ring dances connoting wholeness and continuity in nature. The voices of the children singing in the cupola precede the dissolution of the "[u]nreal City" symbolized in

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<sup>53</sup> Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 133.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p. 127. Eliot brings up the image of aimless wandering in The Waste Land when he writes "I see crowds of people walking in a ring". It recurs in an even more grotesque manner in 'The Hollow Men', where the "stuffed men" go round and round the prickly pear.

“London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down”, another ring dance of death. This motif persists in Eliot’s poetry as an emblem of discordance, the “enemy of pattern”,<sup>55</sup> which the reader continues to experience in ‘Burnt Norton’:

The Word in the desert  
Is most attacked by voices of temptation  
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,  
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

However, the affirmation ultimately articulated in ‘Burnt Norton’, namely, that “the detail of the pattern is movement”, is expressed less confidently in The Waste Land, barely whispered in the fragment from another dance, that of Arnaut Daniel’s, “[p]oi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina”.

Moving aimlessly in the city is to invite a potential mutilation, a maiming of human and poetic impulse against which various strategies of self-defence have to be devised. This is why Benjamin attaches so much importance to the image of the “fencer” in Baudelaire’s work, the attempt to “parry and deflect the blows the city would inflict on the mind.”<sup>56</sup> ‘Les projets’ is, perhaps, the prose poem in which Baudelaire gets closest to establishing an equilibrium between consciousness and the city, the text in which project and actuality, inner and outer worlds, urban and mental landscape, merge as one. Here, chance appears rather as “le hasard méchant” of ‘Les Sept Vieillards’, as a violence done to the mind rather than a release from routine into exhilarating perceptual freedom. The promised moment of epiphany becomes its opposite. For the hyacinth girl in the garden, the moment is not only of heightened awareness but also of a fall into the meaninglessness of discontinuous, fragmented life. It speaks to the reader not just of the risk-taking heroism of the architect of modernism but also of the degraded temporality of the gambler of ‘Le Jeu’, for whom exposure to pure chance entails the disintegration of experience into autonomous moments, spaced disconnectedly between the euphoria of winning, the anguish of losing and the emptiness of waiting.

Eliot and Baudelaire look out of an urban window, as it were, onto a decadent metropolis. The view of the metropolis is not seen from without but becomes part of an inner landscape. Victor Hugo, in a letter congratulating Baudelaire on Les Fleurs

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<sup>55</sup> E. Drew, T.S. Eliot and The Design of His Poetry (New York: Vantage Press, 1949), p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, p. 89.

du Mal, wrote: "Vous dotez le ciel de l'art d'on ne sait quel rayon macabre, vous créez un frisson nouveau".<sup>57</sup> Baudelaire internalized the supernatural, substituting the thrill of psychological complexity for the outworn devices of hauntings and psychic appearances. In 'Les Aveuglas', for instance, the life of the city-dweller will prove to be a mirror of his own soul.<sup>58</sup> What strikes the poet, after initially recoiling in horror, is that the blind men keep their eyes raised to heaven which is the source of light. For Baudelaire, the sound must seem an echo to the sense when in the lines, "[c]omme s'ils regardaient au loin, restent levés/Au ciel; on ne les voit jamais vers les pavés,"<sup>59</sup> he makes use of a highly dislocated rhythm, conveying appropriately the jerky, groping movements of the blind. This is so because, just as it is in the nature of these blind men never to enjoy a moment's respite, so the successive enjambments prevent the alexandrines from giving that impression of harmonious completion that is only possible where rhythmic and logical groupings fully coincide. The apostrophe "O cité!" jerks the poet out of his contemplation. It is this deeply ironic antithesis that gives the poem its dialectical movement, for there is a bizarre contrast intended between those who, though physically blind, seek the light, and the complete spiritual "aveuglement" of the city, whose "divertissements" progress from the relatively innocuous verb "changer" to the crude animality of "beugler". It seems to be the kind of irony hinted at in the concluding stanza of the verses addressed to the reader in Les Fleurs du Mal, the "hypocrite lecteur", whose complacency will be deflated as he comes to see how illusory is his own detachment and moral superiority.

Baudelaire's threatening accusation is an inspiration for Eliot.<sup>60</sup> The phrase "[h]ypocrite lecteur", with its dual nature that loves and hates, identifies with and is alienated from, runs away from and is pulled back by the hand of the poet till he becomes his very flesh and blood, with "Frère" left facing an exclamation mark as the

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<sup>57</sup> Oeuvres complètes, 2 vols (Paris: Nizet, 1924), II, p. 576.

<sup>58</sup> A source for this poem could have been Sophocles's 'Oedipus Rex', according to which it is often the physically blind, like Tiresias, who are the seers, whereas those like Oedipus himself, have eyes but do not see their own damnation. Another source could have been Brueghel's famous painting 'The Parable of the Blind', where the grotesque elements of Baudelaire's vision are strongly foreshadowed. While what Baudelaire calls "capharnaüm diabolique et dropatique de Brueghel le Drôle" certainly evokes the paradoxical fusion of the terrible and the ridicule in the poem, Baudelaire's version achieves a genuine originality of vision through the admixture of a hint of Sophoclean irony.

<sup>59</sup> Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 136.

<sup>60</sup> In his Preface to the 'Contemplations', Oeuvres complètes, II, p. 512, Hugo too had addressed his reader in the same way as Baudelaire, "Hélas! Quand je vous parle de moi, je vous parle de vous.... Ah! insensé, qui crois que je ne suis pas toi".

only adequate response to his condition, looking into the poet's eyes. At the heart of Eliot's inspiration is the experience of the soul, ever aspiring to transcend the bondage of the flesh and all the limitations of the finite world, yet always encountering defeat and disillusionment. Among the attributes of the 'Spleen' poems which Eliot used for his own purpose, is the "sensation d'isolement insupportable".<sup>61</sup> Sin and vice are the two primary facts about the human condition in the wasteland. By indulging in vice, man is lulled into a false sense of security.

In Les Fleurs du Mal a new Satan, 'l'ennui', stands at the gate of the city, as certain of his power to swallow the world in one big yawn as Milton's Satan is of his bold attempt to conquer Eden. "C'est Ennui!" - its subterranean activities, carefully isolated and emphasized, which rot away at the very fibre of man's mind and will and unostentatiously, without "grands gestes ni grande cris", reduce the world to a condition of stagnation. As the protagonist of 'Au lecteur' says, "[i]l ferait volontiers de la terre un débris/Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde."<sup>62</sup> The linguistic jumbling in these poems is synonymous with the sterile convulsions of death. In Eliot's poem the stress is on the sordid and the false. Planned and rationalized, the city paradoxically no longer seems to possess coherent form. Sound, syntax and trope collaborate in a dialectic of creation and destruction. Words enter the space of the text as they do in Balzac's 'La Fille aux yeux d'or', "en fusion" and "resent à s'y déformer".<sup>63</sup> For instance, the Thames, like the Seine in Zola's time, is inseparable from its legends. Indeed, in its most powerful embodiments, the river is the symbol of the city itself, its history, its soul. It is presented as a flood of nouns without consistent verbal relations.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> C. Baudelaire, letter to his mother, Mme Aupick, dated 30 December 1857, Correspondance Generale, II, p. 786.

<sup>62</sup> Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 65.

<sup>63</sup> op. cit. in Oeuvres diverses, ed. by P.G. Castex (Paris: Édition de la Pléiade, 1990), p. 57.

<sup>64</sup> In the most famous nineteenth-century fictional walk along the quay side, Zola's artist Claude Lantier and his mistress Christine in L'Oeuvre (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 187-91, take a leisurely stroll. The river and its views come, for Lantier, both to resume the city, its secret essence, and to engender the feverish, impossible and ultimately fatal attempt to capture that essence in art. Claude and Christine start out on a simple lovers' stroll and end up in a nightmare of obsession and suicide, that other form of 'exciting'. It is the place where Balzac's Raphael de Valentin tries to kill himself and where Hugo's Javert succeeds.

Like Les Fleurs du Mal, The Waste Land is a poem compounded of myth and reality, theme and variation, motif and leitmotif, past and present, vision and drama, symbol and image, allusion and echo, prognosis and prophecy. The effect is one of polyphonic music, of counterpoint, where the entry of the different voices can be distinctly heard. Irony is created by collocation. All the place-names in The Waste Land contribute to one's sense of London as a "real" city, thus strengthening Eliot's stress on the opposite effect, the Baudelairean "unreality" that abides even in the midst of throbbing streets and swarming crowds. This is the paradox that is the cause of horror. The various images of the city reflect a heightened subjectivity of perception, as well as dynamic patterns of historical change. Eliot and Baudelaire take the pulse of city life, as it were, and touch the nerve of urban anxiety. There is no stable centre to be found either in the city or in the civilization it epitomizes. The city ceases to be pictured as a social environment and is transposed on to an existential plane. Ultimately, the metropolis becomes a metaphor, a dynamic configuration of the conflicting hopes and fears of the twentieth century.

Eliot and Baudelaire succeed in bringing about a unique synthesis of the metaphysical, the historical, the social and the personal. Both the modern and the legendary wastelands depicted in these works are the result of the violation of the pure. Death is sterile even in the wasteland: "I think we are in rats' alley/Where the dead men lost their bones", while the third Thames-maiden singing "I can connect/Nothing with nothing" as she floats down the river in the canoe, completes what Eliot describes in Murder in the Cathedral, namely, "the effortless journey, to the empty land". The Waste Land, like Baudelaire's 'Paysage', is an exercise in chromatic riot. These are works which deal with the literal and metaphorical destruction of meaning. The reader finds that the vulnerability of the poem's efforts to hold its diverse elements together in harmonious relationship starts to become apparent. Pastoral and urban cannot be successfully mixed and the chimney smoke in Baudelaire's poem is in fact the last the reader shall read about the city from the poet's garret. To maintain the notion of the landscape the text has to shut out the city. In Baudelaire's poem, the line "Je verrai les printemps, les étés, les automnes",<sup>65</sup> evokes the cycle of the seasons, with the exception of winter, as the object of the

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<sup>65</sup> Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 127.

contented gaze. The predicted arrival of winter, however, marks the moment of willed exclusion and withdrawal. With winter, the cityscape becomes a deathscape. Baudelaire's "neiges monotones", like the snow-covered Paris at the end of Zola's Page d'amour or in some of the Impressionists' winter scenes, signify a numbing of sensitivity, a loss of the élan which elsewhere characterizes Baudelaire's affective attachment to the colour and movement of the city. Paris blanketed by snow is Paris as source of emotional blank. With an ironic twist, Eliot takes the point further than Baudelaire by presenting April, rather than winter, as "the cruellest month", "stirring/Dull roots with spring rain". London blossoming in Spring is London nipped in the bud by the flowers of evil.

### *The Presence of Wagner and Stravinsky*

The dissonance of the city strikes at what for Baudelaire and Eliot is the very heart of verse, the principle of harmony. Through its regularities of sound and rhythm, verse binds together, integrates, resolves or at least holds in equilibrium the scattered and fragmentary bits and pieces of experience. The Waste Land is composed of fragments and the attention is concentrated on the transitions, using the end of one fragment to introduce the beginning of the next, sometimes with considerable overlap of themes.

Total breakdown in communication had always been one of the salient features in Eliot's poetry. The reader remembers that Eliot's poetic characters in Poems 1920 forgo a distinctly human faculty. In the poems of the 'Prufrock' volume protagonists do not act; in Poems 1920 they do not speak. No conversation interrupts the quatrain poems, whose ominous silence is only emphasized in the painstaking persiflage in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. Prufrockian company valued gentility at any price, sacrificing its conversation to preserve a smooth social surface. In 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' even the street lamps talk too much. No such self-consciousness troubles Sweeney's world, for instance, whereas only a hysterical epileptic shriek and Sweeney's simian laughter punctuate events. Even the anonymous "multitudes" weep inaudibly, and it is partly their mute, dispirited conformity that renders them so sad. The music inherent in these poems is composed of both hysterical sounds and a desperate silence.

In The Waste Land the theme of a total lack of communication reaches its peak. The fragmented verse itself symbolizes the disconnected consciousness of the individuals within the poem. Eliot seems to promote The Waste Land as a kind of sacred/secular rite for collective interpretation. To experience Wagnerian presence in The Waste Land is to begin the work of interpretation. The main point of contact is the Grail. In his essay 'Wagner in The Waste Land', Blisset writes that Weston was greatly interested both in Wagner and in a hidden religious tradition believed to have survived from primordial times. He rightly argues that the Grail legend of Wagner and Eliot are both Grail quests and Grail rituals. However, Blisset speaks more of the compassion of Parsifal than the *Liebestod* and the void of Tristan, with which Eliot is mainly concerned in his poem. In fact, musical imagery in The Waste Land is initiated by the Wagnerian lyrics from *Tristan und Isolde* in the first movement.<sup>66</sup> In his Opera und Drama, Wagner writes that it is the function of the artist "to bring the unconscious part of human nature into consciousness".<sup>67</sup> This seems to be Eliot's purpose in The Waste Land which he achieves by symbolical suggestiveness. Unconscious contents are not so easily brought up into rational consciousness. However, artistic experience does yield a kind of twilight or intuitive consciousness, much more disciplined than dreams, but with a similarly healing and illuminating potentiality. Symbols, when vividly experienced, are capable of an immense impact on our personality. As Pascal famously describes it, "the heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing".<sup>68</sup>

In the second movement of The Waste Land, musical imagery assumes the form of a ragtime fragment of 1912 - 'O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag'.<sup>69</sup> In the third movement the musical motif takes on varied and contrasting forms:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song....  
 O the moon shone bright on Mrs Porter  
 And on her daughter

<sup>66</sup> See, A. Blisset, 'Wagner in "The Waste Land"', in The Practical Vision: Essays in English Literature in Honour of Flora Roy, ed. by J. Crowe (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), pp. 72-9.

<sup>67</sup> R. Wagner, Opera und Drama, trans. & ed. by T. Harrison (Berlin: '[n. pub.]', 1914), p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> B. Pascal, Pensées, trans. & ed. by F. Fonteyn (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> The following is the full text of the American ragtime hit of 1912:

That Shakespearian Rag  
 Most intelligent, very elegant,  
 That old classical drag,  
 Has the proper stuff,  
 The line 'Lay on Macduff'.

in Jazz and Blues in America 1905-1920, ed. by M. Lewis and E. Morgan (New York: Blackmore House, 1965), p. 43.

They wash their feet in soda water  
*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!....*  
'This music crept by me upon the waters'....  
The pleasant whining of a mandoline.

In this movement, the music is now soft and seductive, now vulgar and jerky with the syncopated beats of jazz rhythms, now serious and religious. Then, it becomes soft once more and finally it assumes the sentimental plaintive quality of a mandoline being played in a public bar. In the last movement the music takes on the strangeness of the setting. The speaker hears the dry grass singing, a woman "fiddling whisper music" on the strings of her hair, and a chanted version of the nursery song 'London Bridge is falling down'. On the one hand, Eliot draws fully upon resources such as rhythm and counterpoint, dissonance and harmony, to create multi-textured variations and, above all, simultaneity. On the other hand, musical analogy extends to the whole poem. By the implementation of Wagnerian myth and leitmotif Eliot develops and extends the range of linguistic possibility. More than providing an explicit commentary or a clear-cut overview, myths and leitmotifs bring to light all the complex associations which have been building up within the intricate network and, through Tiresias, draw the threads of consciousness closer together.

In The Waste Land the reader stays on the outside of Eliot's 'hortus conclusus', the hyacinth garden hedged on either side with fragments of Wagnerian lyrics that recount longing and loss:

*Frisch weht der Wind  
Der Heimat Zu  
Mein Irisch Kind  
Wo weilest du?*

'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;  
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'  
- Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, 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.  
*Oed' und leer das Meer.*

Besides recalling Dante when he encountered the Devil in the Inferno, the song from *Tristan und Isolde* that leads into this episode seems to give promise of a light-hearted carefree love. However, the scene in the Hyacinth garden suggests the failure of what might have been a pure, idealized love, while the Wagnerian fragment from the last act of the same opera at the close of the scene refers to the tragic love of Tristan for

Isolde, thus ending the episode on a note of emptiness and disillusion. Act I of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* ends with a scene of mystical love-recognition. Eliot seems to have merged this with a crucial step in the Grail legend, where the quester meets the bearer of the Grail, fails to ask the right question and so misses his opportunity of success. The references to the opera may carry a tribute to Verdenal who valued the opera highly and wrote to Eliot to this effect. In the line "*Oed' und leer das Meer*", Eliot again refers to Wagner's opera, Act III Scene IV. Tristan is dying, waiting for Isolde, but the look-out reports that there is no sign of her ship - "Desolate and empty the sea".<sup>70</sup>

Eliot's typescript draft juxtaposed the four lines from Wagner's First Act of *Tristan und Isolde* and the hyacinth girl passage. The last line, added by hand in revision, is clearly a deliberate change in the structure of the section. The radically altered structure requires the reader to contrive a mode of interpretation that will mediate between the lovers from Wagner's opera and the lovers framed by their story. Both frame and internal story reveal the stress of love. Superficially, it appears that the mythic lovers fail in a glorious burst of tragic passion in their titanic *Liebestod*, whereas the contemporary lovers freeze into paralysis and silence. Using a frame is a way of directing focus. In this passage, the frame seems to peripheralize myth and centralize contemporaneity. The historical and artistic potency of Wagner's opera resists its designation as a frame and the mythic lovers tend to usurp the centre of the picture. The result is that frame and picture change places in rapid succession. This pattern allows neither a reversal nor a standard relation but rather produces a situation where opposite perceptions oscillate, a design which moves in its stillness and remains still in its movement. Eliot's technique in this passage produces an experience of radical uncertainty about what belongs where and when.

Looking at this episode, the reader finds that there is no direct communication between any of the lovers. A singer sings to Isolde, a messenger speaks to Tristan, the hyacinth girl commemorates the anniversary of an experience in the garden, and her lover recalls an experience that shut her out of his awareness along with all other

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<sup>70</sup> In his sixties, Eliot discussed the opera with Stravinsky, who understood from him that it was "one of the most passionate experiences of his life". See, R. Craft, 'Stravinsky and Eliot: "Renard" and "Old Possum"', *Encounter*, 50 (January 1978), 46-51, p. 43. Eliot first saw this opera in 1909.

phenomena, “[l]ooking into the heart of light, the silence”. In both frame and picture, a lack of communication between major figures is placed in the foreground. They are emphasized in a way, however, that reveals through the given surface a background in which passionate communication has occurred. In Wagner’s opera, between the lines “*Frisch weht der Wind*” and “*Oed’ und leer das Meer*”, Tristan and Isolde consummate an ecstatic and disastrous love, and King Mark and Isolde consummate an arranged marriage. In addition, the contemporary lovers remember a passionate encounter of a year earlier, an experience which led to a profound alteration of consciousness. Isolation of lovers is presented as central, but this isolation in turn frames a known background which shows not isolation but intense and ecstatic union.

In Wagner’s opera, the love affair and the tragedy are precipitated by a love potion. The drug substitutes a contrived set of feelings for those that would normally prevail. This folk convention, the love potion and its consequences, is an important aspect of the Tristan story. In this passage, it serves as a counterbalance to the modern lover’s report of an experience of an altered state of consciousness. As in ‘A Game of Chess’ and ‘Portrait of a Lady’, the woman’s words are supposedly direct speech whereas the man’s words presumably represent his thoughts. This passage is reminiscent of a moment of stasis which Eliot presents in his poem ‘Silence’.<sup>71</sup> It also recalls Gerontion’s statement that he has lost all five of his senses. It seems to be an experience that Eliot felt strongly about on a personal level. The phrase “heart of light”, which was to reappear years later in ‘Burnt Norton’, is particularly interesting, for it is the kind of phrase frequently found in the literature of mysticism to describe moments of ineffable transcendence. It is also a clear inversion of Conrad’s heart of darkness in which light, suggesting knowledge as it did a few lines earlier among “stony rubbish” and “broken images”, is presented as perhaps more terrifying than darkness.

Leaving the glaring chaos of the desert wilderness the speaker finds himself in the garden with the girl. The images in this scene belong to Eliot’s ritual-imagery of girls, hair, spring, flowers and garden, symbolizing a lost moment of beauty and the agony of unfulfilled desires. This leitmotif makes its first appearance in ‘Portrait of a

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<sup>71</sup> See, Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917, p. 18.

Lady', where the lilacs represent the lady's frustrated hopes for friendship with the speaker. It appears in fuller form in 'La Figlia Che Piange', representing the end of a love affair. In the last movement of The Waste Land, the leitmotif recurs as "the frosty silence in the gardens" and "the agony in stony places". These images not only refer to the speaker's agonizing regrets in the hyacinth garden, but they also allude to Christ's agony in the Garden of Olives. By synthesizing the pangs of frustrated love with the spiritual agonies of Christ, Eliot increases the symbolic connotations of his ritual. The dislocation of language and vision which the paralyzed speaker suffers when he fails to act upon his experiences in the hyacinth garden functions, from the reader's point of view, as a double suppression of the 'numen' which emanates from the unseen paradise. In the description of Belladonna's chamber in 'A Game Of Chess', that unseen and indescribable hyacinth garden has been translated into a kind of "[b]lower of Bliss" where the natural is submerged into artifice. Here, "fruited vines" are, in reality, metallic lamp standards and the phrase "sylvan scene" refers merely to a 'trompe l'œil' painting. The occulted 'locus amoenus' of heightened experience and vision is finally made visible only to the petrified.

The moment in the hyacinth garden reveals the inseparability of Being and Nothingness, where Being is suggested by the non-visual vision of light and Nothingness is implied by the contained condition of silence. Eliot seems to have provided his character with an opening onto this timeless and selfless ground upon which time and selfhood are built. For the character, it is a reversion to a primal state, the place where he started, here known for the first time. The reader will remember that Eliot's concern here is the failure of love. The memory after the consummation in the garden is, ultimately, as powerful an experience as Wagner's opera provides.

In accordance with Eliot's pattern of alternating contrasts, the brief fourth movement of The Waste Land is dominated by water imagery in opposition to the fire imagery that closes the third movement. Phlebas' death is linked to the sea-change music of Shakespeare's The Tempest and to all the other water-music of the poem, namely, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Spenser's 'Prothalamion' and the Rhine-maidens' lament. It is also linked to the death of Dante's Ulysses who "per seguir virtute e conoscenza" passed the threshold of mortal limits and died at sea within sight of Purgatory "com'altrui piacque". This movement represents an expansion of the

sketchy details presented in the Tarot pack. It recapitulates in final elaborated form the characters of the “drowned Phoenician sailor” and the “one-eyed merchant” with suggestions of Mr Eugenides and Ferdinand. Even the image of the wheel from the pack is subjected to new developments. It refers to the whirlpool that sucks Phlebas to his death. As the reader knows from his reading of Eliot’s French poem ‘Dans le Restaurant’, Phlebas is a merchant-sailor trading with Cornwall. He is absorbed in “les profits et les pertes, et la cargaison d’étain”. Eliot may have brought out the myth of the drowning Phlebas because the Phoenician had an ancient reputation for avarice.<sup>72</sup> He is, therefore, at least in part, a symbol of greedy mercantilism.<sup>73</sup> Phlebas is purified by literally decomposing into time, as he once was born and grew, passing through the successive changes of the changing mind of Europe corroborating what Heraclitus said, namely, that “the way up and the way down are one and the same”.<sup>74</sup> Finally, it is this rich Heraclitean music that the reader hears in Phlebas’ sea-death, so similar to the closing image of ‘Gerontion’.

The leitmotif of the symbols of death and resurrection is brought out in Phlebas’ death. As he drowns he re-enacts the rises and falls that he has experienced in life. His whole life passes in review as an instantaneous memory. The brief dramatization of Phlebas’ death prefigures the allusion to the death and resurrection of Christ in the last movement:

A current under sea  
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell  
He passed the stages of his age and youth  
Entering the whirlpool.

The motif originally appears in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ as a crustacean creature “scuttling across the floors of silent seas” and as one who has “lingered in the chambers of the sea”. In ‘Mr Apollinax’ it takes the form of “worried bodies of men”

<sup>72</sup> See, Plato, The Republic, trans. & ed. by J. Olsen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 460.

<sup>73</sup> The comparison and contrast between the two Phlebas episodes in ‘Dans le Restaurant’ and The Waste Land is exhaustively brought out in W. Arrowsmith, pp. 14-19. Since the satiric quatrains, Eliot had been preoccupied with the notion that sexual lust is not the only cause of the degeneration of civilization. Avarice, for Eliot, corrupts sex and spirituality alike. Greed presumably explains why the Princess Volupine jilts Burbank for Sir Ferdinand. In ‘A Cooking Egg’ money adulterates even heaven, where to gain entry the founder of Imperial Chemical Industries evidently located either a small enough camel or a sufficiently large needle. Cupidity also corrupts the church, having counterfeited its spiritual blessings in favour of institutional self-preservation living off its dividends, slumbering and enjoying the benefits of compound interest. Money becomes the modern medium for atonement, as acned petitioners seek intercession or absolution “clutching piaculative pence”.

<sup>74</sup> Heraclitus, On The Universe: Hippocrates, 4 vols (London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1931), IV, Fragment 60, p. 89. This later becomes one of the mottoes of Four Quartets.

drifting down in the “green silence”. Here, as in ‘Mr Apollinax’, the speaker imagines the dead men under sea dreaming in motion or worried. In ‘Death by Water’, however, he relates the submarine motif to the theme of fertility and rebirth.

The amalgamation of primitive vegetation and fertility rites with contemporary reality can also be found in Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*. On hearing this music Valéry commented, “[a]udition attentive, perspective intérieure de la sensation...”<sup>75</sup> In Stravinsky, Valéry finds the perfect expression of the opposite musical approach to Wagner, the idea of a music that refers to nothing but itself. For Eliot, Stravinsky’s music seemed to transform the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the roar of the underground tube and other barbaric cries of modern life, and to transform these despairing noises into music. The lesson enforced was that in art there should be inter-penetration and metamorphosis.

Eliot was deeply influenced by the music of Stravinsky. His first published reference to Stravinsky appeared in a 1921 ‘London Letter’ in the *Dial*:

“Stravinsky was... our lion.... Stravinsky, Lucifer of the season, brightest in the firmament... took the call many times... small and correctly neat in pince-nez .... *Le Sacre du Printemps* was received with wild applause .... The music seemed very remarkable... but at all events struck me as possessing a quality of modernity which I missed from the ballet which accompanied it.... Music accompanying... an action must have a drama which has been put through the same process of development as the music itself... The spirit of the music was modern, and the spirit of the ballet was primitive ceremony .... Even *The Golden Bough* can be read in two ways: as a collection of entertaining myths, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation. In everything in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, except in the music, one missed the sense of the present .... Stravinsky’s music... need[ed] to transform... the barbaric cries of modern life; and to transform these noises into music”.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Cahiers: 1894-1942 – tomes I-XXIX* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1957-1961), V, p. 38.

<sup>76</sup> Stravinsky’s first public reference to Eliot, quoting the passage about historical consciousness from *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, occurred in a lecture at the University of Chicago on 20 January 1944. Jacques Maritain, a member of the audience, may have drawn the musician’s attention to this essay, but, at a considerable earlier date, he had been aware of the poet from St John Perse and others. Eliot’s name begins to appear in Stravinsky’s correspondence and interviews in the 1940’s. A letter from John U. Nef, for instance, mentions the composer’s discussion, during a luncheon, of ‘The Music of Poetry’, and in an interview in *Pour La Victoire*, 24 February 1945, p. 21-2, Stravinsky says “I use the word ‘tradition’ in the sense that Eliot has given to it. To be in a tradition, one must possess a historical sense, perceive the presence of the past and the simultaneity of the entire universal intellectual inheritance. Only with this sense can a creative artist become aware of his place in the contemporary world”. Stravinsky spoke of Eliot as “that kind, wise and gentlest of men”. He composed an *Intrositus* on the death of Eliot in January 1965. Stravinsky described this piece as “[a] Panikheda chorus in memory of the unforgettable Eliot”. See, ‘Memories of T.S. Eliot’, *Esq*, 164 (August 1965), 92-3.

Like Eliot, Baudelaire and Valéry, Stravinsky uses fragmentation as form. Stravinsky described *Le Sacre du Printemps* as “le spectacle d’un grand rite sacré païen: Les vieux sages, assis en cercle et observant le danse à la mort d’une jeune fille, qu’ils sacrifient pour leur rendre propice le dieu du printemps”.<sup>77</sup> In both *Le Sacre du Printemps* and Valéry’s ‘L’Ame’, the dance is a symbolic affirmation of life, and the erotic element of the poem closely relates to the theme of rebirth in Spring.<sup>78</sup> In Eliot’s poetry, the dance reflects with varying emphasis all the symbolic meanings accrued over a long history. In a mythic sense, dance images a sacré harmonizing faculty. As Eliot says in ‘Burnt Norton’, the dance is “at the still point of the turning world,” expressing the ineffable, transforming time and change into an imperishable pattern of movement and validating Heraclitus’ statement “[t]hat which is in opposition is in concert and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony .... the harmony of opposing tensions.”<sup>79</sup>

For Eliot, to transcend the merely human, to become one with god ‘ab origine’ is the apotheosis of all myth. Therefore, the dance celebrates the triumph of unity over change, chaos, destruction and death, all that expresses man’s oneness with the rhythmic, harmonious cosmos. Dance here is the source of the poetic atmosphere, as it was for Wagner, who saw the supreme importance of this in ancient theatre. However, Wagner argues, dance has to be de-personalized. The dancer as metaphor and the dance as poem constitute the purest expression of the ideal that art can yield, poetry liberated from the contingency of language, symbolizing the elemental gestures of our being. As in myth, in Eliot’s dance, life and death, stillness and motion, form and spirit, are reconciled. Dance affirms for Eliot, as it had for Yeats, the creative impulse embodied in patterned movements, the power of the dancing god Shiva who danced the world into being and whose dance kept it alive. The Indian deity reconciles all antitheses into one unity. Simultaneously, dance becomes the symbol for the triumph of pure art, creating images that “are uniquely alive because of

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted in L. Cyr, “‘Le Sacre du Printemps’: Petite histoire d’une grande partition’, in *Stravinsky: Etudes et Temoignages*, ed. by F. Lesure (Paris: J.C. Lattes, 1982), p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> The story of the dance in primitive myth, religion and art, is in itself a fascinating chapter in cultural history. Basically, dance can be defined as movements in a pattern of changing forms that reflect and symbolize experience. In ‘L’Ame et la Danse’, the virtuosity of Athikté’s performance is translated into the leaps and turns of Phèdre’s language, “[p]ar les Muses, jamais pieds n’ont fait à mes lèvres plus d’envie!”. Op. cit. p. 134. For Valéry, music becomes the language of the instincts, of the inner impulses, of a spontaneous liberation of the self, such as is found in the music of “le nègre et le ballet russe”.

<sup>79</sup> Heraclitus, IV, Fragment V, p. 81.

their participation in a higher order of existence".<sup>80</sup> In another sense, in Eliot's poetry, dance is a significant ritual transforming and elevating human activity, namely, the manifestation of the high dream of pattern, pageant and splendour he sees in Dante's Earthly Paradise, a dream man seems to have lost in the modern world. Since dance marks the sacred seasons, man's and nature's, it offers an archetypal experience for recapturing the past, for its essential nature is communication beyond the threshold of consciousness. For Eliot, dance would appear to be an expression of the unified sensibility, externalizing in patterned movement states of feeling that are otherwise inexpressible.<sup>81</sup> Also, dance would always suggest more than itself, namely, an activity close in spirit to the elusive moments in the rose garden, sensed and only partially and fleetingly understood - "I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where". Dance seems to provide what words could not, an expression for the ineffable.

It is common in Eliot's poetic style that these multiple symbols have their antithesis in parody, namely, a debased ritual. At times it is a 'danse macabre' defined by Frye as an "ironic reversal of the kind of romanticism that we have in the serious visions of the other world".<sup>82</sup> Even in the later poetry, at the precise moment when he seems to achieve his vision, Eliot despairs of the realities and more often than not the dance reinforces the observation in 'The Dry Salvages', namely, that "[w]e had the experience but missed the meaning". The orchestration of these contrapuntal motifs provides a tension that dramatizes the best of Eliot's poetry and sets its ironic tone.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> F. Kermode, 'A Babylonish Dialect', *SewRev*, 74 (Winter 1966), 228-37 (p. 231).

<sup>81</sup> Mallarmé also singles out 'le Danse' as the best medium for the achievement of the 'Mystère', for the expression of the 'Idée'. He states that "le Danse, seule capable, par son écriture sommaire, de traduire le fugace et le soudain jusqu'à l'Idée - pareille vision comprend tout, absolument tout le Spectacle futur". *Documents*, III, p. 299.

<sup>82</sup> N. Frye, *T.S. Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> Eliot's wasteland poetry abounds in images of futile and degraded activity, but even there the reader finds the glimmering presence of another kind of 'dance', one that would elevate man and expiate his suffering. Thus, "*Invitation to the Dance*" in 'A Cooking Egg' is ubiquitous, though it sits unheeded on the mantelpiece amid the bric-a-brac of the stifling modern world. The reader is invited again to celebrate the ordered rhythm perceived in the natural world of 'Cape Ann' and to participate in the experience which will unite us with it - "Follow the dance/Of the goldfinch at noon... /.... Follow the feet/Of the walker, the water-thrush. Follow the flight/Of the dancing arrow, the purple martin...." However, characteristically, the final line returns the reader to this world as the speaker mockingly poses his idle "palaver" against the music of the communing birds: the song-sparrow, the Blackburnian warbler, the shrill-whistling quail. Again, the worlds in 'Preludes' that "revolve like ancient women/Gathering fuel in vacant lots" coexist with the "fancies that are curled/Among these images", suggesting the "infinitely gentle/infinitely suffering thing" - the unrecognized Christ in the modern city.

Eliot presents a preoccupation with life and death such as one finds in Stravinsky's treatment of sacrificial rites. Valéry had argued that there is no solution for "l'ennui de vivre": "C'est ennui absolu n'est en soi que la vie toute nue". Life is stripped of all its masks and trappings, pierced by the lucid gaze of the self. It is empty. The opposite response is a form of intoxication, whether artificial or provoked by action and emotional involvement. Dance offers the greatest example of "l'invresse due à des actes",<sup>84</sup> as being the opposite of 'ennui'. Action is an escape from the destiny of man, an assertion of life not through the work of the mind but through the work of the body. Freedom and lightness of movement are substituted for freedom and clarity of thought. The vibrant movement of Athikté becomes the nourishing flames for a phoenix; she lives within the flames and the dance becomes an all-consuming fire. The extremity of dynamism, of tension and of rhythmic impulse is, as in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, the supreme assertion of a life-force.

Both Eliot and Stravinsky use the moving crowd as an undifferentiated mass from which individuals stand out haphazardly. This happens both in *The Waste Land* and in *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Eliot's genius is for fragmented form, Stravinsky's is for ritualized dance. In their dialogues, Stravinsky and Craft argue that "what is most new in new music dies quickest and that which makes it live is all that is oldest and most tried".<sup>85</sup> This seems to lead the reader into thinking that a new piece of music is an old reality. It is a discovery even if its purpose is to uncover the past. The artist perceives, selects and combines and he is not aware at what point meaning of a different sort and significance grows and emerges into his work. All he knows is his apprehension of the contour of the form.<sup>86</sup> Eliot and Stravinsky re-discover in the ancient idea of rhythm a bearer of structure. In Stravinsky's ballet, it is the violence and elemental force associated with the death of winter which dominate both the scenario and the music. The unifying 'ostinato' chords of the 'Sacrificial Dance' in the ballet, with their biting ferocity, come as much from their tonal load of meaning as from their dissonance. In this ballet, there is conscious barbarism and an exotic

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<sup>84</sup> *Cahiers*, IX, pp. 561, 563.

<sup>85</sup> I. Stravinsky & R. Craft, *Dialogues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 62.

<sup>86</sup> This is perhaps what Eliot means when he says in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* that "the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously", p. 14, and, "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it", pp. 15-16.

cultivation of the savage, primitive and violent. Like Mallarmé's and Eliot's language, it is an attempt to purify the dialect of the tribe.

Repetition in Stravinsky is used, among other things, for sheer barbaric emphasis. In his sketch-book for *Le Sacre du Printemps* Stravinsky writes that "music exists if there is a rhythm, as life exists if there is pulse".<sup>87</sup> *Le Sacre du Printemps* and The Waste Land concern an idea rather than a story - the rhythm of human striving, the throbbing of intellectual and moral suffering and the ultimate possible victory of the spirit. These works not only link people with their ancestors and the cosmos, but also link the arts with one another,<sup>88</sup> achieving what Wagner would have termed a 'Gesamtkunstwerk', the unity of all arts into one 'Art Form.' Robert Craft argues that "like Wagner, Stravinsky illuminated large areas of the past, or of the present in the past, and at the same time left so deep an imprint on so many successors."<sup>89</sup> It may also be added that Stravinsky seems to have exploited an apparent discontinuity, to have made art out of the 'disjecta membra', quotations from other composers, the references to earlier styles, hints of earlier and other creation. Like Eliot, he did not pretend to have invented new conveyers or new means of travel. The true business of these artists seems to have been "to refit old ships".<sup>90</sup>

The Waste Land and *Le Sacre du Printemps* also correspond with Baudelaire's 'Les Correspondances'. Vertical correspondences work between the material world of sense impressions and the spiritual world of ideas while horizontal correspondences work between the senses themselves in such a way that a stimulus upon one creates an impression upon another. In Baudelaire, one finds references to these two types of correspondences and the synesthesia they effect. In Stravinsky's ballet, vertical correspondences result when the arts embody or create aesthetic 'equivalents' for some aspect of the story. In The Waste Land it is a question of creating emotional

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<sup>87</sup> I. Stravinsky, *Sketches to The Rite* (New York: Elton Press, 1958), p. 11.

<sup>88</sup> For the choreography of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, Nijinsky used eurhythmanics, a correspondence between rhythms in time and rhythms in space, between the duration of a sound and the correlative gesture accompanying it. Nijinsky created a new type of dancing, a stylized gesture, based on the physical embodiment of rhythms contained in the music. His choreography insists on the pull of the earth and the dead weight of the body, as against the traditional weightlessness of ballet. The presence of the dance in *Le Sacre du Printemps* balances the timelessness of Roerich's designs while signifying a physical connection between the past and future.

<sup>89</sup> 'Stravinsky and Eliot: "Renard" and "Old Possum"', p. 49.

<sup>90</sup> I. Stravinsky & R. Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 129.

parallels, or objective correlatives, to ideas. To the extent that sounds, gestures, and words are similar in quality, they reinforce one another and enhance one's understanding of the concept. All separate styles become part of the essential artist in 1918.<sup>91</sup> The ironic effect of these colliding planes is directly associated with the works' moralizing tendency. Both The Waste Land and Stravinsky's ballets contain a fusion of ideas, over and above the mere fusion of styles. Eliot and Stravinsky produce works that bear a spiritual witness, a ritual enactment with connotations of fertility where the survival of the people depends on the sacrifices of an individual. The king who must die is not only the latest incumbent of the priesthood, like Frazer's king of the wood at Nemi. He is a particular king, a person with recognizable faults and virtues. Like Oedipus, whose expulsion is necessary for the good of the people, then his sacrifice, to the extent that it is voluntary, is in some way Christ-like and suggests an atonement.

As already argued in the Introduction, in The Waste Land, Eliot's use of myth operates on various levels. Joyce's mythical method, manipulating a "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity", had supplied, amongst other things, what Gerontion's mind could not. Eliot had found no link between cause and effect, past and present; he had seen no coherence in human personality or motive. Myth, however, can create these things, implying that people behave in one sense outside time, that on some level their consciousness preserves some consistency, some identical reference, despite time's changes. Linking past and present, as Wagner and Stravinsky had done, this consistency posits a more or less finite range of human nature and implies that if behaviour falls within that range, so will its consequences. The mythical method offers solutions to problems, finding meaning where the poet can find none and giving shape and significance to the "immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history".<sup>92</sup> The mythical method may rescue the world and the modern mind from the fetters of historical consciousness. Here, historical consciousness and aestheticism converge. Artistic beauty had initially rendered time and materiality purposeless and ugly: without art, time passed unredeemed and the material world became a cacophony of disorganized

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<sup>91</sup> For instance, the mixing up of tonal and modal allusions as much as the jostling of popular modern dances, archetypal marches and folk ditties, became the standard practice with modern composers.

<sup>92</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', pp. 482, 483.

consciousness. The mythical method, however, reasserts artistic, historical and conscious form, adding value to art, time and consciousness, placing these things into a pattern deduced from historical culture, as interpreted by modern methods. The mythical method, discovered by means of art, proves to be not a dissolving but a resolving influence.

In The Waste Land there are basically two myths, both based on descent and return, but one focusing on rebirth and eternal life where the end is the beginning - Dante; the other focusing on the meaning of eternal death where the beginning is the end - Marlow. Eliot retains the sense of individual futility and despair as he had done with his two previous protagonists, Prufrock and Gerontion, while placing individuals in a context of all time, and presents both the musing of daily routine and the terror of emptiness as part of a larger horror. The introduction of dreams, myths, magic and the fantasies of the unconscious as leitmotifs, opened up a new seam and added a fresh dimension to poetry. Like Baudelaire before them, Stravinsky and Eliot exploited all these discoveries. All three stand for tradition and experiment, for discipline and revolt. They use traditional form and versification respectively, which serve as vehicles to new visions, and explore not only the mind and the emotions, but the nerves of contemporary urban thought with an insight which was undreamed of before their time.<sup>93</sup>

“The more radical the rejection of anything that came before, the greater the dependence on the past”.<sup>94</sup> As soon as modernism became conscious of its own strategies, it discovered itself to be a generative power that not only engendered history, but was part of a generative scheme that extended far back into the past. Writing and consciousness both compose themselves through re-arrangements of what ‘East Coker’ calls “old stories that cannot be deciphered”. Eliot’s iterative weaving of Ariel’s song “[f]ull fathom five thy father lies” is dismembered, like the

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<sup>93</sup> Laforgue says of Baudelaire: “he [Baudelaire] was the first to speak of Paris like any ordinary lost soul of the capital - ‘une damné quotidien de la capitale’ - the street lamps tormented by the wind, the prostitution which lights up the streets... but all of it in a noble, distant, superior manner”. Mélange posthumes, pp. 111-2. Quoted by J.P. Houston, in French Symbolism and the Modernist Movement: A Study of Poetic Structures (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 5. Baudelaire was the first who brought into literature the feeling of apathy in pleasure, “l’ennui dans la volupté”.

<sup>94</sup> P. de Man, p. 161.

body of Osiris spread about the land, a disseminated luminous detail. Re-collected and re-membered by the poem in numerous contexts, it fertilizes the wasteland:

[t]he new way of writing is not destructive but re-creative. It is not that we have repudiated the past, as the obstinate enemies - and also the stupidest supporters - of any new movement one likes to believe; but that we have enlarged our conception of the past; and that in the light of what is new we see the past in a new pattern.<sup>95</sup>

In the hands of modern writers and musicians, myth becomes both a way of thinking and the object thought, and in both aspects it puts the reader in connection with the mentality of primitive man with his natural environment, with his fellow men, with the past and the future and with the divine. It gives to man and his acts a significance lacking in a world deprived of myth.

Eliot regarded the mythical mentality as persisting in the depths of the mind of historical man to the present day, and because myth comes out of the depths of human nature and expresses them, to lose contact with it is to be alienated from a powerful source of emotional vitality. In The Waste Land, particular myths symbolize meanings of perennial psychological, moral and religious validity that cannot be adequately expressed in other terms. For Eliot, myth provides a third language, besides naturalistic presentation and symbolism, in which the state of affairs can be conceived. The story of Frazer's and Weston's sick king and sterile land is a concrete and imaginative way of speaking of the condition of modern man. This story inter-relates, substantiates and nuances suggestions that are also made in other ways. As Eliot says, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', "[n]ot only the best but the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously".<sup>96</sup>

Eliot also believed that the creating of myths, the mythopoeic faculty, is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic human need. The reader finds that it forms the matrix out of which his writing emerges both historically and psychologically. The internal meaning of mythology is precisely the unity of meaning of all apparently dissimilar myths. Mythological systems become identified with the internal truth. The sense of ultimate coherence achieved in and by The Waste Land is created not through dialectic but through the minute gradations by which the mythological ripple-

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<sup>95</sup> 'American Literature and Language', in To Criticize the Critic, p. 57.

<sup>96</sup> op. cit. p. 14.

system of each image approaches and overlaps another. This is, perhaps, what Helen Gardner means when she says that Eliot contributed to “a breakdown of the tyranny of linear historic time”.<sup>97</sup> Images ultimately meet themselves in the extended context of each other’s image.<sup>98</sup>

Eliot’s mythic quality in The Waste Land, like Wagner’s, Stravinsky’s and Joyce’s, is more than a question of allusion and thematic parallel. It is also a question of mythic shape. For all their importance as individuals, mythic characters are ultimately participants in a recurring elemental situation; they reveal “history repeating itself with a difference”.<sup>99</sup> The ancient gods die and come to life many times and, though there is dusk about their feet and darkness in their indifferent eyes, the miracle of light is renewed eternally in the imaginative soul. Wagner’s mythic drama in Bayreuth, in the context of German unification, had apparently done this for Germany. In nearly every case, Wagner’s plots are motivated by restoration of lost love, recovery of a state of grace or fullness, or reconciliation with elements of the past. The conceptual structure of Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* inheres in its plot, which Wagner spliced together from a number of mythic sources, in particular, three closely related legends, namely, the German ‘Nibelungenlied’ and the Icelandic ‘Volungasaga’ and ‘Thidreksaga.’ Wagner’s ideal was to transform the intellectual element in his work into feeling. This could only take place by having the right subject matter, which for him was the legend. For Wagner, legend was concentrated, inexhaustible and eternally true, even more intense and elevated than anything in everyday life. In fashioning what is popularly known as *The Ring*, Wagner linked the death of Siegfried, as he found it in these tales, with the *Götterdämmerung* - *The Twilight of the Gods* - of Germanic myths, and created an ethical drama about the problem of evil, the corruption of innocence and the possibility of redemption in a fallen world.

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<sup>97</sup> H. Gardner, T.S. Eliot: ‘The Waste Land’ (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 20. This idea finds its musical parallel in Bartok’s contribution to “the breakdown of tyranny of major and minor keys”. For an extended discussion see, J. Machlis, Introduction to Contemporary Music (London: J.M. Dent, 1961), pp. 136-7.

<sup>98</sup> It is in this way that, amongst others, Coleridge’s gradual formulation of a private system rendered it capable of “external validation”. See, L. Coupe, ‘Reading for the Myth’, *EngR*, 4:4 (April 1984), 6-9 (p. 9). Internal explication of this kind might seem to raise the problem of allegory, of reduction of myth to a separable meaning. However, understood as a universally applicable comparative method, one myth explicated in terms of another becomes an end in itself. Each image becomes itself by gradually passing into another until the web is complete and each is every other in the whole that is the end of vision.

<sup>99</sup> Ulysses. 1922. (London: Everyman’s Library, 1992), pp. 1525-6.

This is, basically, what The Waste Land is about. As in Eliot's poem, Wagner's mythic plot has many parallels in the Biblical account of the fall of man and in the Christian concepts of sin and salvation. The rape of the Rhinegold becomes an archetypal sin, a crime against nature and against love, throwing the cosmos out of joint and engendering new crimes. Only when the gold is restored to its original place in the river-bed can the fallen world of *The Ring* be redeemed. Alberich's ring will become Wagner's elemental symbol of power and ambition, always in opposition to "nature" and "love". Wagner's famous song of the Rhine-daughters, "Weilala leia/Walla leilala", is a reminder of the rape of the gold and the violation of nature. It provides the same evocation of lost innocence in 'The Fire Sermon'. In the *Götterdämmerung*, the Rhine maidens bewail the theft of the river's gold while the Thames-daughters in The Waste Land lament the loss of their virginity. As a consequence, the beauty of the Rhine is ravaged and the Thames is contaminated with "Oil and tar". The disjointed metrical sequence of the Thames-daughters' individual songs, against the background of popular resort areas along the Thames, reflects the sterile disorganization of the minds following fruitless love affairs. The three Thames-daughters first sing together as a group. Then, each of them sings separately and laments the loss of her virginity. As a setting for the girls' songs the image of the modern Thames is projected in terms of short, largely unpunctuated lines that frame a succession of fluid but fragmented impressions. These irregularly rhymed, truncated lines suggest debris floating in the river as well as the quick fleeting images which they contain:

The river sweats  
Oil and tar  
The barges drift  
With the turning tide  
Red sails  
Wide  
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.

Eliot then quotes Wagner's chant:

Weialala leia  
Wallala leialala

This chant, taken from the 'Rheintöchter' motif, serves to break the regular duple flow of the preceding lines, obtruding itself like a sudden breeze in a note of agitation against the river's calm flow. More importantly, it relates Wagner's Rhine-maidens to Eliot's Thames-daughters with reminiscences of Spenser's river-nymphs.

In the second stanza of the Thames-daughters' song, the scene melts back into the glorious days of the English Renaissance:

Elizabeth and Leicester  
Beating oars  
The stern was formed  
A gilded shell  
Red and gold  
The brisk swell  
Rippled both shores  
Southwest wind  
Carried down stream  
The peal of bells  
White towers

Here, once more, Eliot projects the scene in the same short and unpunctuated lines that were used in the first stanza of the Thames-daughters' song, thus uniting two stanzas. He enforces the elegance of the scene not only by his reference to Elizabeth and Leicester but also by his suggestion of the imagery used in Shakespeare's barge scene from Antony and Cleopatra. The dissonant rhymes of "bells" and "swell", and "towers" and "shores", however, partly mar the beauty of this paragraph. Similarly, the love affair of Elizabeth and Leicester, though superficially elegant and refined, proves to be as stale and fruitless a relationship as that of the typist and her lover.

Following an exact repetition of the "Weialala" chant, the first of the Thames-daughters sings her lament:

'Trams and dusty trees  
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew  
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees  
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.'

In order to differentiate the individual songs technically from the preceding two stanzas, Eliot punctuates them with firm periods and sets the songs in lines that are somewhat longer. However, the phrasing is 'staccato', which matches the disjointed quality of the girls' broken lives.

It is significant that the regularity of the rhythmical pulse, which is rather even in the first girl's song, decreases rather sharply in the second and third songs:

'My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart  
Under my feet. After the event  
He wept. He promised "a new start."  
I made no comment. What should I resent?

The reader notices that the last two lines are even more irregular. The last song, the least rhythmical and most inarticulate of all the songs, closes the Thames-daughters' lament:

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

la la.

In *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Wagner's Rhine maidens are mythic creatures whose lament bears a strong likeness to the bird-song. The resolving dominant ninths which usually carry the Rhine-maidens' melting cry of "Rhinegold! Rhinegold!" are later woven into the texture as an actual accompaniment to the bird-song. Here, there seems to be an almost total regression to the situation in *Das Rheingold*, the situation of largely undifferentiated unconsciousness to which one refers as the state of nature. Wagner's use of the pentatonic scale for the motifs of the forest birds and the Rhine-daughters emphasizes the conceptual proximity of both these figures to pristine nature, both being aspects of the same ambivalent force. This is why the sensitive reader of *The Waste Land* may find himself thinking of *Das Rheingold* apart from *Götterdämmerung*, even though Eliot's notes specifically state that the episode relates the Rhine-daughters' lament in *Götterdämmerung*. This is, perhaps, what Eliot means when he says that "[i]t is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins...."<sup>100</sup>

The Rhine-maidens, like Tiresias, provide a mythic perspective on the contemporary scene but, unlike him, they do not show any concern about anything. In fact, they do not in any psychological way differ from the women on the Thames. A mood of valueless detachment prevails on both sides of the mythic realistic division. The oscillation of focus does not occur. There is a mere juxtaposition. If there is a framing structure, it is made up only of the object, colour and movements that impressionistically represent the river itself and its urban environment. 'The Fire Sermon' seems to have exhausted its repertoire of improvisations on the technique of shifts from pattern to detail within a narrowing range of values. The final "la la"

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<sup>100</sup> See, p. 27, footnote no. 71.

comes as a kind of muted, resigned desperation at the moment when techniques of minimization have reached the vanishing point. Eliot's figures in this middle section of The Waste Land feel no desire, resent nothing and expect nothing. The "la la" is the nadir of The Waste Land, the very heart of darkness.

In sharp contrast to the limp metres of the preceding paragraphs, the firm accentual and syllabic rhythms of St Augustine's message seem to measure the force of the Saint's anger as he condemns the burning of sterile passions.<sup>101</sup>

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning  
O Lord Thou pluckest me out  
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

These strong rhythmical incantations emphasize the urgency of the Saint's message as he discovers in Carthage the "cauldron of unholy loves" that "sang all about mine ears". In this "collocation of eastern and western asceticism"<sup>102</sup> the words of the Buddha and St Augustine are synthesized, although in the Buddha's 'Fire Sermon', the reader is asked to shun the senses because they are all on fire. The abrupt transition from commercial London to commercial Carthage adds historical emphasis to the notion of the eternal recurrence of sterile passions and lends further support to the themes of sterility and sexual love.

The violation of the pure also takes the form of a song in the Philomela passage earlier on in 'The Fire Sermon.' Here, Eliot shows that violation of a woman makes a very good symbol for the process of secularization. Love is the aesthetic of sex, lust is the science. Love implies the deferring of the satisfaction of the desire; it implies a certain asceticism and a ritual. Lust drives forward urgently and scientifically to the immediate extirpation of the desire. The bird song in the Philomela passage

Twit, twit, twit,  
Jug jug jug jug jug jug  
So rudely forc'd  
Tereu

reiterates and recapitulates in final form the Philomel image, re-emphasizing the dirty sound by setting it in the vulgar context of Mrs Porter and Mr Eugenides.

<sup>101</sup> cf. Augustine, Confessions, iii, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted by H. Gardner, T.S. Eliot: 'The Waste Land' (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 56.

Incidentally, the first two lines of this stanza are also reminiscent of Elizabethan poetry, when this was a conventional way of representing bird-song, often in Spring time.<sup>103</sup> This fusion of ideas, namely, the crude reference to sexual intercourse and the bird-song in the phrase 'Jug jug' depict with uncanny brilliance the fate of Philomel. The much-awaited resurrection does not occur in this landscape, for

White bodies naked on the low damp ground  
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,  
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.

The hoped-for rebirth, corrupted at its roots, is imaged by the scene at Mrs Porter's:

But at my back from time to time I hear  
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring  
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.  
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter  
And on her daughter  
They wash their feet in soda water  
*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*

Sweeney's version of love is that of vulgar, thoughtless sexuality, a corruption of the creative urge. The reference to Verlaine's Parsifal is to the irony of Parsifal's conquering some forms of fleshy temptation, achieving what may pass for purity, only to discover new forms of temptation which continue to haunt him. Purity is, thus, illusory, never self-identical but rather a comparative state that always carries the sin that it seeks to banish from its structure. Introducing the song of the nightingale Eliot invests it with the 'double entendre' that adheres to "Tereu", recalling also the name of Philomela's ravisher, Tereus. A second and like-sounding name, Tiresias, represents yet another violation of the unity portrayed by the nightingale. Here, within the Wagnerian framework, mythical thought builds up structures by fitting together events, or rather the remains of events, through the fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or society. Relating this to Eliot's two-sided use of literary references, by which the reference is not only a fragment in relation to its original literary context but also a function in relation to Eliot's text, The Waste Land's construction involves the reader in two simultaneous evaluations. On the one hand, it makes history seem an accumulation of debris, a centrifugal and unintelligible process. On the other hand, it presents mythic structure as a point of suspension and reorganization of this endless fugue. The contemporary wasteland is presented, in

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<sup>103</sup> This is reminiscent of "Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!" which is one of the tunes of 'Spring' in the poem by Thomas Nashe. See An Anthology of Elizabethan Poetry, ed. by R. Rucker & G. Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 423.

large part, as the result of the scientific attitude, the complete secularization. Lust defeats its own ends.

In The Waste Land, Eliot also follows in Wagner's footsteps by making use of the symbolism inherent in the Grail legends. In these Arthurian legends, the King's fall grants the new poet his saving vocation, a quest that fosters an identity in the search for one. It resorts to poetry a sacred world-historical mission. The lament for the king does not testify to the loss of a real, past fullness, though it may reflect the universal longing for the Golden Age. The trope of Utopia uses the legend of a wasteland as the vehicle of recuperation, as the king uses his wounding as the vehicle of his re-establishment. Except that there has been no Fall. Neither plenitude nor castration is original - both are readings of an experience of difference. Strategically, the mark of death that designates the king clears the way for his heirs. It frees them from repeating the past, frees them to take on other names. These guilty progeny are modernists but the present they construct is haunted by the means of its production. The inquiries of the Quester, in his self-conscious trial, have brought him news of his own guilt, have brought to the surface what Weston and the legends had hoped to bury, namely, that death, absence, castration and waste exceed the recuperative economy of the quest. Cut off, by his own pen, from the line of benevolent descent, the Quester-poet breaks the circuit of property and deconstructs the elementary structures of kinship. Discontinuity threatens to leave the quester adrift in the wasteland he has created, self-castrated by a slash indistinguishable from writing. The selective resurrection of deities is, then, a strategy to re-form inheritance, to supplement the freedom-in-impotence of the modernist with the helpful authorial figures produced and controlled by the restricted economy of recuperation. These new deities occupy an anomalous Olympus. From there they can be invoked to support and justify the poet, but they cannot, ideally, weigh upon him as an eternally powerful anxiety-inducing presence.

Modern instrumental music possesses a capacity for speech. It can, also, through the power of association, recall past emotions and precise thought-impressions. This, in fact, was the original function of the leitmotif, namely, a dense network of allusive music that achieves the condition of a conceptual language. Within the context of Wagner's mythical method, the confusion to the point of identification of the king and

quester, indicates that the king himself was once a quester, that he acceded to his throne through the same process of usurpation and decipherment enacted by the quester. The king's mysterious demise may result from his own guilt in a prior ritual of sacrificial replacement, a primal scene endlessly repeatable and variable, every beginning an end and every end a beginning. Kings and questers, ancients and moderns supplant each other relentlessly, making a timeless time. So is transient knowledge enthroned, Fisher King-Quester doomed to dismemberment at the hands of their own off-spring. The children rise up and the dead gods come to life in their images, "[t]o become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern". The quester seeking his Holy Grail to redeem the world is the poet looking for a language to express the ineffable.<sup>104</sup>

The links between Eliot's poetry and music of mythical conception, as in Wagner and Stravinsky, is most clearly expressed by the notion of "sensibilité intellectuelle". Music comes to epitomize for Eliot the most complete expression of human aspirations and achievement. In music, he finds the embodiment of all his ideals, both of abstract analysis and of human love, so that it can accommodate without contradiction the opposing tendencies of his own character, the tension between Eros and Noûs, and between the artist and the thinker. The poetry and the music both reveal an emotional vibrancy that is thoroughly integrated into the structural conception of the work. The formal preoccupations allow the emotional release while the abstract patterns themselves take on emotional significance. Therefore, Eliot's poem is not only an allegory of a state of mind but a direct portrayal of the working of the mind and its affective states, what Eliot ~~later~~ calls "objective correlatives". It is a poem concerned with what Valéry calls "ce qu'il y a d'amour, de jalousie, de piété, de

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<sup>104</sup> The intellectual conjuncture Eliot wishes to make between 'myth' and 'formal coherence' refers especially to The Waste Land, but can also be traced back through the development of his own intellectual interests to the paper on 'The Origin of Primitive Ritual' given at Harvard in 1913, which exercised a formal influence on his concept of tradition. Here, Eliot argued an insight into the formal, internal coherence of mythic ritual and the inaccessibility of its meanings to any point of view from outside the ritual itself - "the meaning of the series of acts is to the performers themselves an interpretation" - Savoranola, p. viii. At the time of giving the paper he used to question the positivistic, interpretative method of Durkheim. During the period of the composition of The Waste Land, Eliot seems to have returned, more as an extension than as an alternative, to his original sense of myth and ritual as offering a model of formal cohesion both theoretically and in the literary practice of the poem. This is meant in the initial and primary sense of Eliot's retrospective suggestion in 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' that anthropology, as in Weston, or Frazer's The Golden Bough, may provide the intellectual basis for a literary method. However, it is also intimated, in a less specific sense, by which 'primitive ritual' can be seen as informing the perceptual and literary modes of the poet.

désir, de jouissance, de courage, d'amertume, d'avarice, de luxure dans les choses de l'intelligence".<sup>105</sup>

The juxtaposition of myths becomes a moment both in and out of time whose function is to confer a pattern and meaning on experiences separated by vast temporal distances, both in the poet's personal history and, in this case, in the history of humanity itself. 'Le Cygne' is, indeed, 'le signe', the key and underlying structure of a plethora of experiences which, but for its intervention, would not have been linked with each other. Not only do city and language become images or analogues of each other with their multiple strata superimposed one upon the other, but the city is itself an ever-changing poem of masonry and mortar, buildings and streets, while the poem becomes a city of words, shifting, mobile and complex. Poem and city are engaged in a continuous cycle of creation, de-creation and re-creation. What looks like reorganization is also a process of transvaluation. These two poems have the authority and clarity of a definitive formula yet remain at the same time open-ended and extensible by encapsulating several millenia of history. The downward spiral of decadence will continue until some final stasis or historical entropy is reached.

As discussed in the Introduction, the "awareness of the past" possessed by the modern poet is greater than "the past's awareness of itself" and this provides Eliot the licence, as it were, not only to readjust the canon and misread its contents, but to take possession of the ideal order: Baudelaire is no longer Baudelaire, Shakespeare is no longer Shakespeare. Eliot tears the texts of the ideal order from their original cultural and authorial contexts, so that they merge their old 'meanings' as they are integrated into the new structure. Eliot's brand of polyphony in the multivocal, like Frazer's system of classification, gives an appearance of transparent representation, to the limited extent that the author appears to clip out voices and let them stand in odd but interesting juxtaposition: Marie's voice breaks into that of the quester-figure, which breaks into that of Madame Sosostriis. What the reader is presented with is the impression of real voices, nuggets of real life that are, as The Golden Bough,

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<sup>105</sup> Cahiers, XIX, p. 68. When Valéry longs to recreate the effects of music in poetry, it is to evoke "le mouvement de l'âme ... dans une infinité de combinaisons". See also Cahiers, XVIII, p. 881, where Valéry refers to music as "un partie opératoire pure".

obsessively rehearsed. Those voices amount in the end, however, to a cultural mosaic that is decidedly of the author's own making.<sup>106</sup>

In an age of dissociation, when sacred and profane emerge as distinctly divided, the poet at least gives the powerfully nostalgic illusion of return to that seamless whole that is the first word. The last words of The Waste Land are not connected as intrinsic carriers of meaning but as the notes of a musical composition. They do not aim at creating a state, but they aim at being for the creative mind of the reader an act of transcendence, a flickering imitation of the passage from nothingness to being. The Waste Land is a perfect example of a text that invites such a search and gives the illusion of being near, or in, the presence of that origin. Eliot makes desirable and necessary the entry of the indivisible primal word, the explosive DA of thunder, by creating, through a complex network of leitmotifs that reach back before The Waste Land, a vast allegory of post-lapsarian fall. Like the thunder, the Holy Grail functions as a correlative of that primal word, a sacred thing that engenders searches and interpretations that seek to weld what has been torn asunder. Yet, while Eliot begins his notes to the poem stating that "not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend",<sup>107</sup> in the poem itself the Grail functions implicitly, not really imaged but ever-present. Its power groups the poem's figures as its absence makes redolent that state of indivisible grace before the Fall.

Eliot compresses several levels of time and space into the five initial paragraphs of 'What The Thunder Said'. Not only does he draw his subjects from three different epochs, namely, antiquity, the Middle Ages and modern times, but he also shifts his locales, moving from Europe to the Holy Land on the Antarctic wastes and from ancient North Africa to modern Vienna and London. Then, the speaker finds himself once more in a desert land metamorphosed into the questing knight. At the end of the pilgrimage the reader is suddenly transported to India during a terrible drought. The

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<sup>106</sup> Frazer's purpose in his book on the Bible, to disengage the literary "gems" of the Bible from their mere religious and historical contexts, proves allegorical of Eliot's comparativism, for Eliot also removes native material, as it were, from its local, culture-specific context. The culture-blending product is hardly the spontaneous and untampered gallery of voices but, rather, is a precisely sculpted and highly skewed representation of different cultures and epochs.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Eliot's note, in The Collected Poems and Plays, p. 70.

fact that Eliot opts for India has a structurally important function for it provides an insight into Eliot's deep interest in primitivism and its influence on contemporaneity. Eliot, besides taking the reader to the land that produced the Bhagavad-Gita, also transports him to the roots of language - Sanskrit - the parent of Indo-European languages. The compressed medley of metres in five different languages at the end represents a multilingual fragmentation of the secular consciousness. The language here moves towards a synthesis while the musical motifs work themselves towards a cadential resolution. Both aspects are united in their fragmentation.

As the composite speaker of the poem now sits upon a nameless shore "with the arid plane behind", a life of order and peace almost seems possible. Though London bridge is still falling down, the poet distractedly recalls other poets with comparable afflictions - Arnaut Daniel - who was refined but not destroyed by cleansing fire, and the lovelorn disinherited poet Nerval. He also recalls victims of lust turned into birds suggesting, perhaps, the power of song to sustain love among the ruins of time. Fragments of poets telling their own story are props against his own ruins. However, despite The Waste Land's closing words from the Upanishads on such positive virtues as generosity, sympathy and control, the last line of the poem answers the Sybil's opening to it. At some subliminal point, release from consciousness is what the poem seeks and finds; something that the protagonists of earlier poems do not manage to accomplish. All the same, as The Waste Land ends, the seer's cage is opened and the void full of nothingness is freely chosen.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Dark Night of the Soul**

*Que muero porque no muero.*<sup>1</sup>

*Most heavenly music  
It nips me unto list'ning and thick slumber  
Hangs upon mine eyes; let me rest.*<sup>2</sup>

*Song is the beginning and end of language as feeling is the beginning and end of understanding  
and myth the beginning and end of history.*<sup>3</sup>

The French Symbolists and T.S. Eliot make use of synecdoche as part of their poetic style. However, they do not make use of it to reconstruct a missing unity but to express and emphasize its own disintegration. They try to instil, as it were, a hope for a potential resurrection from deadened sensibility. Baudelaire did not consider that material progress was an advance but believed that true progress could only come from the diminution in the natural evil in man, from the disappearance of original sin.<sup>4</sup> Around 1845 he was exceptional in believing in the existence of Satan and of sin. With a sense of sin came bitter remorse, and this prevented Baudelaire from attaining that pagan serenity which Henry James had admired in Gautier.

The portrayal of evil in mankind persuaded many readers that Baudelaire revelled in sin and vice, because he was aware of their fatal attraction and dangerous power of luring man to his destruction.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in the middle of the nineteenth century, he was one of the very few writers who were preoccupied with spiritual values. He considered artistic creation as a spiritual activity and believed that inspiration comes from contact with ultimate reality. This experience was the same for each artist whatever might be his means of expression - painting, music or poetry. This led Baudelaire to the most fruitful of artistic experiments, that of 'correspondances', of

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<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, 'Coplas Del Alma Que Pena Por Ver A Dios', in The Collected Works, trans. by K. Kavanagh & C.O. Rodriguez (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> W. Shakespeare, Pericles (London: Arden, 1994), VI. I. 235-7.

<sup>3</sup> R. Wagner, Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen, trans. & ed. by T. Harrison, 10 vols (Berlin: '[n. pub.]' 1914), IV, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> There is an extended discussion on this point by A. Ferran in, L'Esthétique de Baudelaire (Paris: Hachette, 1973), pp. 12-15.

<sup>5</sup> This is what is usually called 'Baudelairean Satanism' which, at this time, and indeed until after the First World War, was generally considered the most characteristic aspect of his genius.

finding the earthly symbols for spiritual truth.<sup>6</sup> It led him also to symbolical 'correspondances' between one art and the other, in a desire to create one perfect art that would express them all at once.<sup>7</sup> In 'Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris' he writes:

Ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c'est que le son ne pût suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs ne pussent pas donner l'idée d'une mélodie, et que le son et la couleur fussent impropres à traduire les idées; les choses s'étant toujours exprimées par une analogie réciproque, depuis de jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et individuelle totalité.<sup>8</sup>

Baudelaire conceived the possibility of a total art appealing to all the senses in one or, as he says himself in his poem 'Tout entière':

O métamorphose mystique  
De tous mes sens fondus en un!  
Son haleine fait la musique  
Comme sa voix fait le parfum!<sup>9</sup>

As a spiritual being Baudelaire realized that music, above all the other arts, had the power of rendering, of conveying, a transcendental experience, and his efforts, therefore, tended towards making poetry approximate to music in powers of expression and suggestion. This eventually became one of his most valuable contributions to French Symbolist poetry. A primary aim in Baudelaire's poetry is depicting the pleasure that comes from suffering and the boredom that ensues from the satiety of sin. Essentially, this is the view of the Christian mystic. However, in an age when it was required of the artist to be a visionary, his mystical powers did not equal his poetic genius, and so was never granted the ultimate vision. It was this failure in Mallarmé, for instance, which eventually induced the sense of sterility. According to the Symbolists, the function of the artist is to realize and to make concrete that perfection of which one only has the shadow. The artist's function is to

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<sup>6</sup> Baudelaire rests the theory of poetic symbols on an uncompromisingly mystical foundation. In fact, the mystic tradition provided a sense of cohesion for Baudelaire for whom the central experience is a mystery arising from introspection. There seems to be little doubt that the label of mystic, as it were, was automatically linked with an obstinate denial of ordinary bourgeois values in literature, of the type ridiculed by Baudelaire himself in *Art Romantique*.

<sup>7</sup> Under the powerful influence of Wagner, Baudelaire argues that the supreme artist who achieves this is the supreme intelligence. With him, imagination is vision and this is what makes him a prophet, for when he looks into the darkness he sees.

<sup>8</sup> *Revue wagnérienne*, 2 (1885), p. 14. "What would be indeed surprising is, that the sound could not suggest colour, that colours could not leave the impression of a melody and that sound and colour were inadequately equipped to translate ideas; things being always expressed by a reciprocal analogy, since the day God poured out the world as a complex and individual totality".

<sup>9</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, p. 89. "My senses all are fused/By subtle transformation -/Her breathing makes a song./As her voice emits a fragrance!"

seek the ideal and to create a life more perfect than the one in this world.<sup>10</sup> Then, as Mallarmé says, “musicalement se lève, idée meme et suave, l’absente de toute bouquets”.<sup>11</sup>

For the reader, The Waste Land is a timeless state beyond temporality, a state shared by the poet and his epoch. It is a dark night of the mind rather than of the soul, in which all values are confused. One of the achievements of The Waste Land is what Schoenberg had called “the emancipation of dissonance.” Only through this dissonance could harmony be secured in the later poetry. For Eliot, music is the art of the thing in flight, the essentially dynamic art contrasting radically with the pictorial and the static. Pure poetry seems to share with music this dynamic quality. It is the province of the plastic arts, particularly painting and sculpture, to present contours and colours, to reproduce in some measure. It was also the intention of Parnassian poets to describe, to present the clearest possible images of material objects. However, imaginative writing at its most concentrated, when it is doing the task uniquely its own, tends to avoid telling how things look or are otherwise perceived by the senses. It neglects description and instead shows objects in action. In the verse of Mallarmé’s mature period, for instance, the reader is conscious that Mallarmé had outgrown Parnassian emphasis on the pictorial and the sculptural. He seems to be describing less and dramatizing more, till ‘Un Coup de dés’ is the barest, most skeletal representation possible of the lunges and recoils, the Antösse, of the ego developing self-consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

As Chapter Two argues, the fundamental voice in The Waste Land is that of consciousness acted upon and conditioned. Instead of a society in which the individual can remain a spectator, there is now the absolute conditioning of which he himself is a symptom. The satire of the early poetry is transformed into tragedy. The

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<sup>10</sup> For the Symbolists, as for the Mediaeval Mystics, mysticism gestures at a system of ‘comprehensio incomprehensibilis’, where rational criteria give place to those of emotional sympathy and where opposed doctrines are not necessarily contradictory. It is also the situation where the widest freedom of personal choice supplants the tight reins of methodology.

<sup>11</sup> Oeuvres complètes, p. 434.

<sup>12</sup> In this poem, Mallarmé arrives at the supreme moment when his own desire achieves itself, when he achieves Wagner’s ideal that “the most complete work of the poet should be that which, in its final achievement, becomes a perfect music”. Quoted in The Correspondence of Wagner & Liszt, trans. by F. Hueffer, ed. by W.A. Ellis, rev edn (London: J.M. Dent, 1987), p. 51. Every word is a jewel, scattering and recapturing sudden fire. For Mallarmé, every image is a symbol and the whole poem becomes visible music.

consciousness realized is not that of the poet who stands outside the society in which he lives but that of the whole civilization realized through him. The subjectivity of Tiresias has been acted upon by all that has happened in history between his Thebes and modern times. He has become its objective voice with nothing left of his own subjectivity, "I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs/Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest". When projected into many scenes, the characteristic fragmentariness lends force to the obsession, and gives the poem its apocalyptic visionary force. Also, the fragments are organized in order to stress the contrast between prophetic and contemporary voices. In The Waste Land the reader has seen how the anguish of history is regarded as a mingling of excess and exhaustion with no centre of stability.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, in his post-Waste Land poetry Eliot makes use of incantation, thereby implementing a technique capable of dissolving the delicate balance between music and psychic drama that characterizes The Waste Land. After his 'Prufrock' volume, Eliot emerged into a period where music and internal monologue were held in a powerful but precarious balance. However, starting with the "water-dripping song" of The Waste Land, music - the tendency in post-symbolist verse towards a "musical pattern of sound and musical pattern of the secondary meaning of the words which compose it"<sup>14</sup> - started to be predominant. From 'Ash-Wednesday' on, Eliot's genius for assonance, internal rhyme and melodious cadence - "[b]ecause I do not hope to turn again/Because I do not hope/Because I do not hope to turn"- comes more to the fore. He channels his propensities towards incantation.

Throughout the 1920's, Eliot was exploring a new world of thought and feeling in religion. As Chapter One argued, at the age of twenty-one Eliot had found himself strangely mirrored in the despairing and ironic pessimism of Laforgue. He had lived through growing emotional anxiety, depression and guilt in his personal life during his early years in London, and had sought, and not found, a belief or faith that would

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<sup>13</sup> In The Waste Land, there is the decadent taste in the juxtaposition of the order of barbarism and decay; crude vocabulary and refined expression; primitive religiosity and scientific notions of decline; an aristocratic ethos and revolution; proletariats and nobles; asceticism and debauchery; Parsifal and Salomé; objects of aesthetic refinement and realistic details of life, and fertility cults and the quest for the Grail. Language itself deals with the cumulative ennui of a monotonous existence.

<sup>14</sup> A. Symons in The Symbolist Movement in Literature, p. 36. There is an extended discussion about this idea in R. Berthelot, 'Defense de la poésie chantée', *Revue musicale* (September 1978), 89-94.

give a meaning to man's suffering. He had put his personally lived emotion into The Waste Land. Although the poem dwells on the meaningless and degraded life of man, it also strongly evokes the religious faiths that may have given significance to life in other times and places - the pagan world, ancient Palestine and India, the centuries of Christian belief in Europe. Symbols of religious faith, even fragments of prayer, are present. They are not necessarily understood or, if understood, believed in, but they are very much in mind. As early as 1920 he was speaking appreciatively of Dante's 'Paradiso', against which he had harboured a prejudice ten years before. The 'Paradiso' completes and explains, he said, the horrible episodes in the 'Inferno'. Dante's world has a definite structure, one that articulates life totally and endows human character and action with moral and religious meaning. Eliot's study of Dante was one of the experiences that shaped his growing change of mind. 'The Hollow Men', his next major poem after The Waste Land, descends further into emotional despair and paralysis, yet symbols of Christian hope are present in a more explicit way, as though despair were focussed on Christianity as the only alternative. In 1926 he was reading sermons and other works of Anglican clerics of the sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries. In 1927 he formally became a member of the Anglican Church. His poems and plays were now written from a Christian perspective.

### *The Hollow Men*

*... a deeper communion  
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation*

To its first readers, 'The Hollow Men' seemed to continue from The Waste Land. There is a similar imagery of a desert, and some images are almost identical. The two poems also employ similar methods of allusion and juxtaposition. Above all, 'The Hollow Men' resembles The Waste Land in mood. The opening and closing parts, especially, might almost fit into the earlier poem. Like Murder in the Cathedral, 'The Hollow Men' begins with a chorus:

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together.

It is a chorus that expresses a collective death-in-life. The chorus in both this poem and Murder in the Cathedral reinforces the meaning and meets the criteria of 'The Music of Poetry'. As he explains it in an essay written in 1940, "the chorus of excited

and sometimes hysterical women, reflecting in their emotion the significance of the action, helped wonderfully".<sup>15</sup> This can also be said of the chorus in 'The Hollow Men'. In this poem, the hollow men's chant is not only dramatic. When analyzed, there emerges a kind of musical design which reinforces and is one with the dramatic movement. It checks and accelerates the pulse of the reader's emotion without him fully realizing it. The chorus here is more than the sum of its individuals. Its essential function is to convey an experience felt in unity by all. It contributes a distinctive sound to a whole which is not an anonymous unison but the harmony of persons thinking together. In both the play and the poem, the chorus has the ability to put music, as it were, into the verse. Therefore, through the chorus, meaning and musicality are emphasized.

In 'The Hollow Men' Eliot layers the narratives of Guy Fawkes and Heart of Darkness over his drama of salvation. The final form Eliot gave 'The Hollow Men' in 1925 was a form derived from the traditions of drama. Specifically, it was derived from Eliot's then strongly held view that "the drama was originally ritual", and that poetry was born in "the beating of a drum in a jungle".<sup>16</sup> Eliot once wrote that a member of the music-hall audience participates in a give-and-take with the larger-than-life figures on the stage and "transcends himself ... unconsciously lives the myth, seeing life in the light of the imagination".<sup>17</sup> It was just such an unconscious fusion of life and meaningful shape that Eliot wanted to accomplish when he put Guy Fawkes at the centre of the poem's choruses, and when he composed them in the irresistible rhythms of popular verse.

Again like Murder in the Cathedral, 'The Hollow Men' ends with a chorus. Also, as Eliot says of the old women of Canterbury, the voices of 'The Hollow Men' reflect "in their emotion the significance of the action" that occurs around them. In the case of 'The Hollow Men' the circumjacent drama is more delicately rendered. The

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<sup>15</sup> 'Poetry and Drama', in On Poetry and Poets, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Beating of the Drum', *Athenaeum*, 4647 (28 November 1919) 1252-3. Eliot chose one of 'The Hollow Men's narrative or 'mystical' overlays because it was a story still celebrated in popular ritual. The fate of Guy Fawkes is not only remembered but re-enacted every year by the English. The form of their re-enactment takes the form of the primitive vitality of rhythm and style which, Eliot said in 1923, was the source of "all art" especially poetry. "Of course, all art emulates the condition of ritual. That is what it comes from and to that it must always return for nourishment. And nothing belongs more properly to the people than ritual". 'Marianne Moore', *Dial*, 75:6 (December 1923), 597.

<sup>17</sup> 'Notes on Current Letters', *Tyro*, I (Spring 1921), 4.

framing choruses of 'The Hollow Men' were meant to generalize the spiritual action of the poem into broad emotional statements of emptiness. Eliot may have regarded the choruses of 'The Hollow Men' as preparations for the more revolutionary choruses of Sweeney. Even thematically, the two works are counterparts. No less than Sweeney himself, the members of 'The Hollow Men's' chorus return from the dead to tell the story of their horrible purgation, their divestment of the love of created beings.

To its first readers, the poem also ends like The Waste Land, with a mocking representation of the world about to disintegrate. Therefore, in 1925 it was, perhaps, reasonable to see in 'The Hollow Men' a further expression of the despair of The Waste Land, for this latter poem was then understood to express only despair. Yet, after Eliot's conversion and the publication of 'Ash-Wednesday' a few years later, 'The Hollow Men' could be read in a different way, as beginning a new development that 'Ash-Wednesday' extended. For, amid the gestures and symbols that recalled The Waste Land, there is in 'The Hollow Men' a much more explicit religiousness. The possibility of salvation is present though the speakers either cannot or will not receive it, and this possibility is expressed in Christian symbols mediated through Dante. The poem ends in a state of mind mingling disbelieving mockery, sorrow, weariness and prayer, and cannot be simplified into affirmation. However, compared with The Waste Land, it does register a step of Eliot's mind towards conversion. The reader may argue that parallels in 'The Hollow Men' with St John of the Cross strongly suggest that this poem is a long step towards Four Quartets rather than a very short one out of The Waste Land.

In style, 'The Hollow Men' differs strikingly from The Waste Land because, like every major poem of Eliot's henceforth, it lacks fragments of dramatic scenes and passages of extended narration. Such concrete vignettes as the conversation of Marie in The Waste Land, the session with the fortune-teller Madame Sosostris and the description of the love-making of the typist and the real estate clerk are totally absent. This side of Eliot's genius went partly into making plays, but to a large extent it died. 'The Hollow Men' still juxtaposed various styles, as The Waste Land had, but they were styles of abstraction:

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act

The stylistic virtue of these lines lies in the philosophical terminology and in the intellectual clarity to which this contributes, as well as in the monotony of its rhythm and the incantation of its quasi-hypnotic chant. The style of Parts II-IV of 'The Hollow Men' might also be characterized as abstract, but it is the abstraction of symbolism:

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

These are lines that express a state of consciousness in which a presence, (eyes, voices), that might possibly be salvific is not wholly withdrawn, but is distant, only reflected, and fading. Nevertheless, the reader is meant to be uncertain as to just where the eyes "do not appear", what and where "death's dream kingdom" may be, and what exactly the tree, voices, and star may symbolize. The images are precise - "[s]unlight on a broken column" - but their meaning and emotional resonance are complicated and not fully determinable. The effect is of haunting vagueness with rich music.<sup>18</sup>

In The Waste Land Eliot had tried to dramatize the prison of the individual ego. Now, he writes meditative poetry in which structural pattern is more important than any individual voice, a poetry in which the ego of the poet is absorbed and nullified by an impersonally musical structure. "The agony of creation ... the mind constantly mocks and dissuades, and urges that the creative activity is vain".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Eliot wrote essays advocating the value of ritual-like stylization in drama, the cinema, ballet and poetry. In 'The Hollow Men', Eliot indicates shifts in the spiritual orientation of his speaker by allowing his speaker's emotional apprehension of the objects of his perception to change while the objects themselves remain the same. "We are the hollow men" refers to the Guy Fawkes story and invites readers to use historical information to make sense, as it were, of what the poem is about. The poem is objective, more like the dramatic monologue of a historical figure. However, it runs the risk that readers will lose sight of its emotional subject in the process of pursuing its historical references.

<sup>19</sup> 'Léçon de Valéry', p. 72.

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*

In these lines, Eliot uses Valéry's characteristic methods to convey his melancholy theme, "the agony of creation".<sup>20</sup> Here, a poetry of meditation takes its place in 'The Hollow Men' alongside the drama of the middle lyrics and the ritual chants of the choruses. These stanzas from 'The Hollow Men' attempt to unite scepticism and deepest faith by antiphony. With three different textures of speech, namely, the meditative abstractions of "[b]etween the idea/And the reality", the grave elegance of the Lord's Prayer and the 'cri de coeur' "[l]ife is very long", Eliot counterpoints three moods. These moods reflect a series of shifting ironies and sum up 'The Hollow Men's double movement of death and rebirth. The "shadow" refers both to annihilation and to the shadow of the Holy Spirit in Luke. Once more, Eliot's allusion merely juxtaposes a tangential and suggestive analogue to the experience presented in the action of the words. In Eliot's poetry of this period, allusions for the most part do not appropriate the broad narrative contexts of larger works. They evolve what Pound called the "emotional equations" of the literary tradition. In 'Dante' Eliot asserts, without really explaining how, that "from the Purgatorio one learns that a straightforward philosophical statement can be great poetry".<sup>21</sup> For Eliot,

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<sup>20</sup> See, 'Le Cimetière marin', *Poésies*, ed. by M. Décaudin & illustrated by O. Debré (Paris: Gallimard, 1917), rev edn (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1991), p. 117:

Entre le vide et l'événement pur,  
J'attends l'écho de ma grandeur interne,  
Amère, sombre et sonore citerne,  
Sonnant dans l'âme un creux toujours futur!

<sup>21</sup> op. cit. p. 252.

linguistic precision and intellectual coherence are guides to the sincerity of a poet's feeling.

For Eliot and Valéry, the poetic voice expresses itself musically as the voice of a living being struggling to achieve consciousness through activity, to assert aesthetic form as its most human achievement and to generate form and meaning in language. Valéry argues that the goal of poetry is to recreate in the reader the experience of listening to music through a participation that is not passively submissive, but one that engages the reader actively by recreating the emotional states suggested by the work - "en toute chose il faut trouver la *musique des actes* et elle *recontrée* - tout chante et se fait merveilleusement".<sup>22</sup> For Valéry, the role of the poet is to generate responses from within the reader - "la musique (et parfois les lettres) fait des émotions 'synthétiques' au sens des chimistes. Elle fait de la tendresse et de la fureur comme on fait de l'alcool *de toutes pièces*".<sup>23</sup> The experience of the recipient may come to be indistinguishable from the state of creative potentiality that gave rise to the work: "la poésie n'est que l'état chantant. L'état de l'être qui produit naturellement le chant et l'invention du chant, - 'l'émotion créatrice' ... l'émanation de soi soient indissolubles - indiscercables."<sup>24</sup>

Eliot, writing on the "music of a word", says that it is "at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context".<sup>25</sup> For Eliot, meaning, even that which adheres to the sounds of words and escapes paraphrase or denotation, relies on relation, difference and context. However, Eliot stresses that no word is or should be fixed in any one context. In order for words to continue to develop ideas and objects, they must move through a range of contexts, for words "*must* change their meaning, because it is their changes in meaning that keep a language *alive*".<sup>26</sup> Here, there is enlargement by a synthesis of differences. The fewer relations words enter into, the less they mean and the more they take on the character of unreal abstractions. It seems that language, in the context of Eliot's poetry, cannot be stable and at the same

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<sup>22</sup> *Cahiers*, XII, 1928, p. 657.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* VII, 1918, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* X, 1924, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> See, p. 30, footnote no. 87.

<sup>26</sup> 'Can "Education" be defined?', in *To Criticize the Critic*, p. 65.

time function as language. The quest for immediate experience requires that language be in a constant state of flux in order to appropriate as much of the whole as it is possible at any one time. The whole is inferred only through the relational activity of its parts.

'Ritual' and 'convention' are key words of Eliot's criticism, since both provide inflexible structures in which the artist's tendency towards self-expression might be disciplined. "The drama was originally ritual; and ritual, consisting of a set of repeated movements, is essentially a dance". Even more than before, the discipline of the dance becomes a preoccupation of his poetic thought. Eliot seems aware of the potentiality of dance to express the verbally ineffable yet not inexpressible law of vital experience. In 'The Hollow Men' the situation is beyond despair. The multiple associations evoked by the sightless circling figures merge in the single image:

Here we go round the prickly pear  
Prickly pear prickly pear  
Here we go round the prickly pear  
At five o'clock in the morning.

On one level, the dance of 'The Hollow Men' is an ironic counterpart of the ritual celebration of Guy Fawkes, danced yearly round a bonfire, connoting the vitality of a now legendary figure who dared unite "the idea and the reality the motion and the act". On another level, it parodies the voices of the children singing "here we go round the mulberry bush", once, perhaps, a sacred rite of Spring and renewal, its meaning now lost in a child's game. On yet another level, its insistent circling recalls the graveside dances of the past when the rites of death and transcendence were recognized:

Ring around a Rosie  
Pockets full of posies  
Ashes, ashes,  
All fall down.

'Tis for Rosalie they sing  
Alleluia  
She is done with suffering -  
So we dance and so we sing.<sup>27</sup>

The striking difference is that Rosalie is "done with suffering" while "[t]his is the way the world ends" testifies to the ultimate failure of the "hope only/Of empty men". The combined effect of the dance is a mood of hopelessness and horror that pervades

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<sup>27</sup> I. Marshall, ed., *Ballads Old and New: An Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 87, 53.

Eliot's waste land. As always in Eliot's poetry, the wrench comes with the awareness that the rituals are present but always vitiated. Therefore death itself, recalling the snickering Footman in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', is anti-climax:

This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.

The sing-song finale carrying the reader back to the circling children and the hollow men turning round the prickly pear is the dance of death.<sup>28</sup> This ring dance of death reminds the reader of the final dance of the chosen victim in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, in the sacrificial dance. Here, the most complicated rhythmic patterns restrain the conductor to puppet-like motions. Such rhythmic patterns alternate in the smallest possible units of beat for the sole purpose of impressing upon the dancer and the listeners the immutable rigidity of convulsive blows and shocks for which they are not prepared through any anticipation of anxiety. However, while shock overcomes the dancer she, like the hollow men, retains her self-control. The dancing figures in both the ballet and the poem remain the subject and, consequently, are able to assert their own life above the consequence of shock experiences which they heroically reshape as elements of their own language. In 'The Hollow Men' and in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, there is neither the anticipation of anxiety nor the resisting ego. It seems to be assumed that shock cannot be appropriated by the individual for himself. Both the literary and the musical subjects do not attempt to assert themselves but content themselves with the reflexive absorption of the blows.

There is no development of an aesthetic antithesis between the hollow men and the tribe they imitate by going round the "prickly pear". Yet, their dance completes the unopposed, direct identification with that tribe. Stravinsky's sacrificial victim and the hollow men are as far removed from exposing a conflict as is the structure of the

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<sup>28</sup> The dance of the living dead men is also reminiscent of Laforgue's:

On y danse  
Pour l'plafond  
Sans fond  
On y danse tous end rond.

See, *Oeuvres complètes*, II, p. 46. "There we dance, there we dance,/On his lap,/Guv'nor chap,/There we dance, round we tap". P. Dale, p. 111. In both Eliot and Laforgue the children's game of singing and dancing in a circle takes on a sinister twist. These lost and lifeless souls are caught in the vicious circle of a miserable existence and cannot escape. Eliot's jingle is a grotesque parody of childhood innocence involving a mordant substitution of words, where "mulberry bush" becomes "prickly pear" while "ten o'clock in the morning" becomes "five o'clock in the morning".

music and language in presenting it. As individuals, both the sacrificial victim in the ballet and the hollow men in the poem reflect nothing but the unconscious and coincidental reflex of mental and spiritual pain. Their dance - in its inner organization resembling a collective dance, a round dance - is void of any dialectics of the general and the specific. Dance here is presented as an art of static time, a turning in a circle, movement without progress. Authenticity is gained surreptitiously through the denial of the subjective pole. The dance in the ballet and the poem imitates the gesture of regression, as it belongs to the dissolution of individual identity. Through this attitude, *Le Sacre du Printemps* and 'The Hollow Men' would appear to achieve collective authenticity. In these works, both Stravinsky and Eliot show a basic desire to construct the primitive history of the modern.

The sense of emptiness that has pervaded Eliot's poetry so far reaches its peak in 'The Hollow Men'. The sensation that these creatures experience is hollow. They exist in a huge empty space, overflowing with its own nothingness. Intoning a weary chant of the religiously disenchanted the hollow men echo and re-echo a deafening silence that terrifies. They seem to be reacting, or rather, appear to fail to react, after casting a backward glance at the wasteland. Their sterile chant, however, is not an end in itself, but dissolves into the theme of purgation in 'Ash-Wednesday'.

### Ash-Wednesday

*Que muero porque no muero.*

If from the world of visible forms and ideas peculiar to poetry and art the reader enters the world of sounds and harmony, the first impression is that of a man passing suddenly from light into the deepest darkness. In the former everything can be explained, follows logically and creates an image; in the latter everything seems to spring from the unfathomed depths where darkness and mystery reign. In the one the reader finds fixed outlines and the inflexible logic of immutable forms; in the other the flux and re-flux of a liquid element, perpetually in motion and metamorphosis, and containing an infinity of possible forms. In this impenetrable night-darkness into which music plunges us, we strongly feel the vibrations of life, but it is impossible for us to see or distinguish anything. However, as the soul gradually becomes

accustomed to this strange region, it begins to acquire a kind of second sight, rather like a somnambulist who, sinking deeper and deeper into his sleep, becomes submerged in his dream until real objects disappear from sight. While the outer aspect of things is effaced, their inner content is revealed in a marvellous light.

The isolation and alienation of Eliot's early poetry take on mystical proportions from 'Ash-Wednesday' on. They become a state in the discipline of religious purification. The epigraphs from Dante at the beginning of the 'Prufrock' volume states that the observer's dilemma would be to live where solid things evaporate, and this is darkly perceived in the mirror of literature as Hell. Each poem moves towards a condition of vacuity. The way is "down", in spite of the fact that most of the poems enact the mounting of stairs towards a brilliantly dramatized void. Up to The Waste Land, the stairs lead to great spiritual and psychological descent into horror. From 'Ash-Wednesday' up to Four Quartets the stairs lead down into the darkness of the soul that in mystical theology is the means of ascending into true spiritual light. The descent into negativity becomes both an ascent and an assent.<sup>29</sup>

Another development lies in Eliot's use of music. In the early poetry, music is mainly made up of fragments from vaudeville, Wagnerian phrases and Stravinskian rhythms. It is music that goes back to the roots, imparting a primitive, savage aura to the texture of the poetry. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', silence suggests a loss of articulate speech bordering on incoherence. In the later poetry, silence begins to suggest such tranquillity that language and poetry do not really matter. The music inherent in 'Ash-Wednesday', the 'Ariel Poems' and Four Quartets is a music of silences, "the unheard music in the shrubbery", the "silent flute", the "whispers and small laughter" and "the woodthrush calling through the fog". Both music and symbolism become couched in the paradoxical aura of the mediaeval mystic. In the symbolism of these poems, there is a concealment and yet revelation. Therefore, with Silence and Speech acting together, comes a double significance.

Concepts of art, beauty and mysticism mark the later poetry. These elements are integral to the intellectual aspect of Symbolism as they are to its emotional effect. For

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<sup>29</sup> This argument is central to E. Knapp Hay's discussion of negativity in T.S. Eliot's Negative Way (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 84-112.

the French Symbolist poets and Eliot, the creative process originates in song. They argue that music has a central relevance to the creative process. Music is a point of reference both formal and conceptual, at the beginning, as it were, and at the end of artistic activity, indicating a method of composition as well as a spiritual idea. Poetry becomes the verbal echo of a rhythm, a melody, a musical pattern.<sup>30</sup> At times Eliot reaches a less tenuous music than memory in the music of poetic vision. He hears the future that appears to him, as it had to Apollinaire, "aussi simple qu'une phrase musicale".<sup>31</sup> Poetry for Eliot approximates music first of all by its genesis, which follows the dictates of an inner harmony, a truly lyrical movement where the sound invites the words. As he explicitly argues in his criticism of Matthew Arnold, poetry begins in a rhythm too far down in the unconscious to be reached by the ego. The awareness of this rhythm is an

auditory imagination ... the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end.<sup>32</sup>

In 'Ash-Wednesday', Eliot introduces into his images a complex and intricate counterpoint in which derivative melodies are striving to become the principal one and fragmentary themes strive to achieve an unbroken sequence. A salient feature of Eliot's art, as in Apollinaire's and Mallarmé's, is that within the framework of the poem one is led to experience and participate in the same aspiration, namely, of transposing a crude fact into the ideal. As opposed to the immediate music of the senses, it is an ideal creation of the mind. Like the Symbolist Poets, Eliot seeks to "reprendre à la musique son bien" where poetry approximates music by reproducing a network of ideas, where he experiences the world as a becoming, where symbols are in constant change. For him, this principle of change is dynamic and purposeful, working to attain an inner secret harmony. Music is the transitory world, but on a different level it is also the still centre, the eternal where the self is found.<sup>33</sup> With Apollinaire's 'Le Voyageur', for instance, a new symbol appears, that of a bright mountain shining in the night with figures trying to climb it. The connection with

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<sup>30</sup> Apollinaire aptly describes it "la musique est de la poésie pure", *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, a critical edition with an introduction and notes by M. Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p. 51. In his letters and in the *Anecdotes*, one finds Apollinaire repeating several times what he had written in 1913 to Henri Martineau, namely, "[j]e compose généralement en marchant et en chantant sur deux ou trois airs qui me sont venus naturellement et qu'un de mes amis a notes". See, letter to Henri Martineau, published in *Le divan* (March 1938), 17-20 (p. 18).

<sup>32</sup> 'Matthew Arnold', in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>33</sup> This idea reaches its full development in *Four Quartets*.

theological symbolism of purgatory and salvation is clear. However, the death of the god is not followed by his resurrection - the poet alone is transfigured. Following in Apollinaire's footsteps, Eliot states

The people on the stage should seem to the audience so like themselves that they would find themselves thinking: "I could talk in poetry too!" Then they are not transported into an unaccustomed, artificial world; but their ordinary, sordid, dreary world is suddenly illuminated and transfigured. And if poetry cannot do that for people, then it is merely a superfluous decoration. What poetry should do in the theatre is a kind of humble shadow or analogy of the Incarnation, whereby the human is taken up in the Divine.<sup>34</sup>

Not unlike what takes place in 'Preludes' with "its lighting of the lamps", Eliot looks to poetry to take simple language and "illuminate" the "sordid" world. This fusion of art and life, the divine and the human, a harmonization of opposites like that of the Incarnation, "transfigures" daily living into a species of 'theatrum mundi', as indeed the "masquerade" in 'Preludes' had done much earlier. One feels this is so despite the "artificial" and "superfluous decoration" of facile poetry, the antithesis against which Eliot measures the religious, even supernatural, transfiguration offered by the sort of poetry he favours. Eliot's early writing does seem to foreshadow his later religiosity, addressing the same conflicts, dissonance and divisions that Christianity eventually mediated.<sup>35</sup> Eliot's most explicit statement of this theory links the Incarnation to semantic complexity, occurring when words perform the multiple functions characteristic of poetic language:

Symbolism is that to which the word tends both in religion and in poetry; the incarnation of meaning in fact; and in poetry it is the tendency of the word to mean as much as possible. To find the word and give it the utmost meaning, in its place; to mean as many things as possible, to make it both exact and comprehensive, and really to *unite* the disparate and remote, to give them a fusion and a pattern with the word, surely this is the mastery at which the poet aims; and the poet is distinguished by making the word do more *work* than it does for other writers. Of course one can "go too far" and except in directions in which we can go too far there is no interest in going at all; and only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go... no extravagance of a genuine poet can go far over the borderline or ordinary intellect as the Creeds of the Church.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', *Adam International Review* (November 1949), 12, repr. by permission of Mrs V Eliot and Faber & Faber Ltd. The transfiguration of the poet here, as in Apollinaire's 'Le Voyageur', is similar to the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, where the apostles saw Christ transfigured. In actual fact, it was the apostles' own spiritual vision, rather than Christ's image, which was transfigured by an act of Divine Grace. For a moment, the apostles saw Christ as He had always been. Apollinaire constructs in 'Zone' a pattern whose analogy with Christian redemption is stressed but which is not identical with it, for Apollinaire envisages redemption within the limits of life only.

<sup>35</sup> The Incarnation helped Eliot define the sort of Christianity to which he could adhere, which his 1927 pronouncement called Anglo-Catholic. See also Gregory Jay, *T.S. Eliot and the Poetics of Literary History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1983), p. 155, linking Eliot's attraction to Catholicism to the "transcendental poetics" of its theology: "In contrast to the iconoclasm of Hebrew, Protestant and Puritan theories of the sign, Catholicism reunites the letter and the spirit, signifier and signified, nature and culture, human and divine in the dogma of the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection."

<sup>36</sup> 'Preface' to Harry Crosby', pp. viii-ix. Compare with 'Dante', p. 268: "Dante's power of establishing relations between beauty of the most diverse sorts ... is the utmost power of the poet".

Maximum ambiguity as the joining of extremes corresponds to the divine reconciliation of these things. Both operate by injecting a third thing, namely, the word, the incarnated Christ, to be suspended between them. For Eliot and Apollinaire, then, the new mysticism attempted to free art from as many limitations as possible. The poet is now endowed not only with the substantial power of remembering, but also with the potential power of prediction. “Le mal vient de ce que nous regardons ces éclairs avec l’oeil du passé, non celui de l’avenir”.<sup>37</sup> The cult of the future and the element of prophecy which it contained was one of the essential characteristics of ‘l’esprit nouveau’ as defined by Apollinaire in 1918. The underlying motive that manifested itself in the characteristics noted in certain poetic works at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an attempt to reach the vision of the Absolute through a new conception of what mysticism might mean.

At the beginning of his Prelude *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* Debussy, inspired by Mallarmé’s poem, wrote that “[m]usic is meant to express what cannot be expressed”. Speech, indeed language itself, is insufficient to express the ineffable. In Eliot’s later poetry, the ineffable can only be given utterance by silence. This concept had already been hinted at in The Waste Land:

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.

“Silence” at the end of its line rhymes, semantically, with the negatives at the end of the three previous lines. Like “silence”, “nothing” is positive as in St John of the Cross and Mallarmé. A silence beyond words and a nothing beyond matter are attained in an apparently ecstatic vision of “the heart of light”, which is the essence of mystical and symbolic darkness.

As it was conditioned by his reading of Shakespearean romance, Eliot’s attraction to the music of poetry has Platonic and Christian overtones. It has as much to do with

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<sup>37</sup> Saint-Pol-Roux, ‘La mobilization de l’imagination’, *Mercure de France*, 20 (1933), 225. The Symbolist poet was seeking his liberty as a creator, and would pay any price for it. He was seeking an unrestricted range of expression, free from the formal and emotional patterns imposed by a realistic art. He turned away from a philosophy whose avowed aim was a reasoned account of the exact determining forces in every sphere of knowledge and experience.

the miraculous instigation of love as it does with the imaginative patterns of poetry. For the Eliot of 'Ash-Wednesday', the 'Ariel Poems' and Four Quartets, music is not simply a formal property of verse but the emanation of a spiritual fountain. As Eliot explains it in his 'Edinburgh Lectures', after Hamlet "there appears dimly another plane of emotion, apprehensible through the *music* of the play - coming from the depths of Shakespeare himself". It is this music, this plane of emotion, which is responsible for the "ultra-dramatic" effects of the romances - the phenomenon one senses when a character in the plays is speaking "beyond character" so that his speech "has the impersonality of something which utters itself, which exists in its own life".<sup>38</sup>

In 'Ash-Wednesday', Eliot weaves an elaborate incantation by reworking Cavalcanti's lines: "Perch'io no spero di tornar giammai" from his well-known 'Ballata dell'esilio'.<sup>39</sup> The speaker in Eliot's poem suffers a spiritual exile. It is an exile not unlike that suffered by Christ in the forty days before being betrayed. Christ is the "Word in the desert" that "[i]s most attacked by voices of temptation"<sup>40</sup> and who regarded the "last temptation" as "the greatest treason".<sup>41</sup> Hence the poem's title 'Ash-Wednesday'. The poem is composed as a kind of Requiem, an orchestral rendering of penitence, a song in praise of the dead. Eliot, at this stage of his poetic career, was as certain of the birth of the dead as he was of the death of the born. The echo of Cavalcanti also harmonizes with Eliot's continuing interest in the Italian 'trecento' and Dante in particular. In addition, the turn towards the Tuscans and the Vita Nuova puts into practice the changes in Eliot's re-assessment of the literary history of Europe as sketched in the 'Clark Lectures' of 1926, where the 'trecentisti'

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<sup>38</sup> See, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry: The Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1926 & The Turnbull Lectures at the Johns Hopkins University, 1933, ed. with an introduction by R. Schuchard (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> The term 'ballata' is one of the three poetic forms used in Italian secular songs of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the other two being the 'madrigal' and the 'caccia'. In the case of the Cavalcanti 'ballata', the composer setting the text to music would provide two sections of music. The 'ripresa', or refrain, would be sung to the first section of music, and what is technically known as 'piedi', (the middle sections of the poem), would be sung to the second section. For the penultimate section and the final statement of the 'ripresa', the first section of music would again be used. The resulting musical form is AbbaA, with the 'ripresa' indicated by the capital A. In the case of the Cavalcanti 'ballata', the 'piedi' and the 'volta' together form two stanzas. This type of mediaeval Italian 'ballata' has no connection with the fourteenth-and fifteenth-century French 'ballade', whose musical form for each stanza would be aab. In fact, the form of the Italian 'ballata' resembles that of another French form contemporary with the 'ballade', namely that of 'virelai', the main exponent of which was the musician/poet/philosopher Guillaume de Machaut. In both cases, however, there is no recorded evidence of either the 'ballata' or the 'virelai' being used by musicians as a dance form.

<sup>40</sup> 'Burnt Norton', V.

<sup>41</sup> Murder in the Cathedral. 1935. (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 47, l.6.

replace the Metaphysicals as the rule of literary value. In 'Ash-Wednesday', symbols are musicalized. There is no plastic reality but a state of flux, a set of references providing constant surprise. Eliot's use of enjambment in this poem makes objects slide into objects in a kind of musical glissando, and a series of metamorphoses leads the poet on through his most subjective of worlds. Verbs are the focal points of contact in the sense that they convey the instantaneous character of the notations:

Because I cannot drink  
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is  
Nothing again

Because I know that time is always time  
And place is always and only place  
And what is actual is actual only for one time  
And only for one place<sup>42</sup>

The scarcity of punctuation naturally increases the surprise effect of these unexpected juxtapositions. 'Ash-Wednesday' focuses upon the work of music itself as a spiritual experience, what Valéry calls "la condition religieuse par excellence, l'unité sentimentale d'une pluralité vivante".<sup>43</sup> In this poem, the theme is not a simple linear statement of the message or idea. It is the shape of the idea itself as it emerges within the structure of the poem, prompting as it unfolds various hypotheses in the reader as to its ultimate direction, for "la mélodie est une attente organisée". The multiple associations of the words, the variations in the semantic meaning of "there" quoted in the first stanza above, the interruption of episodes break down any single linear development and focus attention upon the way in which the melody develops, upon the various attempts "d'attarder, de retardare, d'enchaîner, de couper, d'intervenir".<sup>44</sup> The organization of the associations becomes the very subject of the poem. In 'Ash-Wednesday' Eliot seeks the fullest possible exploitation of the harmonics and their integration into the formal structure of the work. Here is what one may call Eliot's music of the senses and the rapid interweaving of themes.

Eliot is still composing a poetic voice from traditional materials so that the confessional element of his new style was not something as simple as speaking in his

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<sup>42</sup> A similar example occurs in Apollinaire's 'Chant de l'horizon en Champagne', "[u]n chien jappait l'obus miaule/La lueur muette a jaille." See, *Oeuvres poétiques*, a critical edition with notes compiled by M. Adéma & M. Décaudin, and a Preface by A. Billy (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 265.

<sup>43</sup> 'Existence du symbolisme', in *Oeuvres: Regards sur le monde actuel* (Paris: Édition du Sagittaire, 1939), p. 699.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p. 705.

own voice, but the more difficult matter of making poetry out of one's personal beliefs. As a result, the nearer Eliot's internal monologue comes to the resolute conclusion required by its organizing syntax the stronger the power of the incantation becomes, and the greater the dominance of rhythm and feeling:

And pray to God to have mercy upon us  
And I pray that I may forget  
These matters that with myself I too much discuss  
Too much explain  
Because I do not hope to turn again  
Let these words answer  
For what is done, not to be done again  
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us.

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly  
But merely vans to beat the air  
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry  
Smaller and dryer than the will  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still.

Here, the energy of Eliot's rhymes tells us that his heart's wings are anything but vans. Dislocated from the words that announce his purpose, his yearning dissolves into the rhythm of his address. The image of "vans to beat the air" objectifies a despair connected with the act of limiting the self to a notion of "will", which is synonymous with conscious determination.

Eliot's principal sources for the ideas, liturgical phrasing and metaphysical imagery in this poem are Dante, the Bible and Roman Catholic liturgy.<sup>45</sup> Apart from Dante, the Bible and Catholic Liturgy, a strong presence is also that of St John of the Cross, whose ideas concerning the 'Dark Night of the Soul' dominate the metaphysical quality in the poem:<sup>46</sup>

The Dark Night to which Eliot alludes is a condition of various stages in St John's mysticism. Its keynote is detachment and emptiness. It is this which makes the advance towards God a negative process, for the soul advances towards perfection by being 'weaned from its desires'.<sup>47</sup>

Dante's influence is responsible for both the lucidity and obscurity of the poem. Eliot's remarks on Dante seem to apply equally to 'Ash-Wednesday' when he states

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<sup>45</sup> J.P. Riquelme, in his excellent book *Harmony and Dissonances: T.S. Eliot, Romanticism and Imagination* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), states that 'Ash-Wednesday' draws on a para-liturgical rite. The reader of this poem will argue, however, that "[b]less me father" in the sixth poem looks to be performatively as well as typographically a personal parenthesis, "voice" giving utterance within but apart from what Riquelme calls the "group ritual" in the privacy of the confessional.

<sup>46</sup> See, 'Noche Oscura', in *The Collected Works*, pp. 711-12.

<sup>47</sup> G. Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956, repr. 1974), p. 138.

that Dante's style has "a peculiar lucidity - a *poetic* as distinguished from an *intellectual* lucidity" and that even though Dante's thoughts may be obscure, "the word is lucid, or rather, translucent".<sup>48</sup> What the reader gets in 'Ash-Wednesday' are the musical qualities of the verse, what Eliot himself describes as the "feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling", which creates an instantaneous impression in the reader purely through the beauty of its sound. It is an aesthetic and spiritual experience that transcends the intellectual and emotional levels of the sensitive reader. As in perusing Dante, the reader feels the force of the poem's communication and accepts it as a species of ritualistic chant before inquiring into its meaning. From his studies of the 'Commedia' and the 'Vita Nuova' Eliot, according to Matthiessen, seems to have adapted Dante's allegorical method in constructing simple and intelligible images that symbolize the complex meanings of the poem.<sup>49</sup>

In 'Ash-Wednesday' the figure of Christ as 'infans', as a wordless baby, is the perfect image to describe and give expression to the ineffable, for He personifies the ineffable. The wordless child exudes the silence that is the possibility of a new language. Here, we have Symbolism and Christianity interpreting each other. As a spiritual exercise 'Ash-Wednesday' recalls the poetry of Mallarmé, particularly in the way the sustained negativity of the first section leads later to the positive imagining of a world being re-made. An important concept in 'Ash-Wednesday' is the redemption and recovery of that which was lost, the re-gathering and re-integration of time. For Eliot, the redemption of words is essential for the recovery of a lost language. 'Ash-Wednesday' involves this concept of the redemption of words with the great Christian theme of redemption through and by the Word. In so doing, it redeems and reintegrates what had been the lost words of Andrewes himself, reflecting on the paradox of the 'Verbum infans', "the Word without a word, unable to speak a word".

In the lines

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent  
 If the unheard, unspoken  
 Word is unspoken, unheard;  
 Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,  
 The Word without a word, the Word within  
 The world and for the world;

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<sup>48</sup> 'Dante', p. 239.

<sup>49</sup> F.O. Matthiessen, pp. 114-15.

the reader is listening to the second voice of poetry, no longer a private voice but a less individual one which addresses itself to an audience. With its aphoristic word play it teases the reader onward by its circling, elusive quality of statement. Repetition is a basic structural feature in Eliot's works as in Mallarmé's and Valéry's. At the level of metrical pulse and phrase structure, where it is perceived almost subliminally, repetition is largely responsible for the heightened feeling of 'interwovenness', the tangible sense of continuity and organic relatedness, that sets musical and poetic forms close to each other. Eliot takes up the theme and concludes it with an allusion to a re-ordering of Andrewes's words, thereby manifesting precisely the simultaneity of past and present literature that he had expounded as a critical theory so many years earlier.

'Ash-Wednesday' portrays the mystic's choice, the denial of time and human desire. Yet it is, paradoxically, one of Eliot's most sensual, musical as well as most mystical poems, creating its intense effect by the conflict of willed choice and emotion. In his essay on Dante, Eliot distinguishes dream from vision, which he calls "a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming". He says that "we take it for granted that our dreams spring from below: possibly the quality of our dreams suffers in consequence". Speaking of the "Divine Pageant" in the earthly paradise, he reiterates the distinction.<sup>50</sup> In 'Ash-Wednesday', Eliot uses this contrast of high and low dream to portray the meaning of purgation and renunciation. Although the poem moves towards a choice and justification of the "high dream", it gives not only equal space but, perhaps, more intensity to the "low dream".<sup>51</sup> The rich feeling and poignancy of the poem arise from the narrator's yearning after what is not only lost but not known ever to have been, what is known to be illusion but still wanted with that paradoxical anguish arising from the separation of thought and feeling. This contrast of low and high dream is both the primary structural device of the poem and the basis for a wide divergence in tone and style between sections, from passages of vivid juxtaposed images without logical connective to more abstract and discursive sections developed in the form of logical argument.

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<sup>50</sup> 'Dante', p. 262.

<sup>51</sup> In 'Ash-Wednesday', symbols establish the links that hold the world together, the affirmation of an eternal, minute, intricate, almost invisible life that runs through the whole universe.

Like The Waste Land and Four Quartets, 'Ash-Wednesday' is made up of poems written as separate movements and later put together in a sequence. In each case Eliot selected and arranged to create a whole. That this was so for 'Ash-Wednesday' is attested to in a statement he made to Donald Hall:

Like The Waste Land, ['Ash-Wednesday'] originated out of separate poems... then gradually I came to see it as a sequence. That's one way in which my mind does seem to have worked throughout the years poetically - doing things separately and then seeing the possibility of fusing them together, altering them, and making a kind of whole of them.<sup>52</sup>

If The Waste Land is a mass of very disparate pieces drastically cut and juxtaposed into a deliberately partial unity, Four Quartets is an equally clear deliberate sequence of carefully selected recurrent forms. 'Ash-Wednesday' is between the two, formally as well as chronologically. Though its juxtapositions may seem as abrupt and its sections as discrete, it is in fact truly unified by a single consciousness and a personal quest in a complete, if different, way than Tiresias and the Grail myth unify the earlier work. 'Ash-Wednesday' rests on a doctrine, though it does not exist to assert one. The movement from resignation to willed acceptance of God's will is a development both intellectual and emotional. The reasons for this movement are set out in the more discursive sections of Parts I, V and VI. They do not constitute a chronological sequence but a vision of dryness and purgation which allows for the movement from the low dream of Part III to the high dream of Part VI. Throughout 'Ash-Wednesday', the opposition that has already been seen in the satires and 'Gerontion' remains. Time is divorced from eternity, and permanent value can be found only in eternity. Although time and eternity are seen to intersect in the Incarnation, death can only be apprehended by renouncing time. Gerontion has lost contact with both the world and the Word; the Magi will see and feel its power but will not be able to understand it and Simeon will understand but will fail to accept its meaning for himself. The speaker in 'Ash-Wednesday' is involved in the process of understanding and accepting the consequence of this truth, which is to renounce time altogether and to accept the self-annihilation or mystic death that leads to an apprehension of eternity. This is finally achieved in Four Quartets.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *The Paris Review*, 21 (Spring-Summer 1959), 58. Quoted by Kristian Smidt, in The Importance of Recognition: Six Chapters on T.S. Eliot (Stockholm: Tromsø, 1973), p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> Discussing the relation of mediaeval symbolism to mysticism, H. F. Dunbar, in Symbolism in Mediaeval Thought and its Consummation in the 'Divine Comedy' (London: J.M. Dent, 1929), pp. 366-7, comments that "the unification of opposites is accomplished only in eternity. Man in this world, though granted glimpses of eternity, must live under conditions of time.... Dante in the spheres found matter and spirit everywhere united".

Like the music, the Lady in 'Ash-Wednesday' is the Lady of Silences in whom all opposition is contained and reconciled. The Lady speaks "no word", yet silent gesture is sufficient to renew life, "[b]ut the fountain sprang up - the word unheard, unspoken". Rejuvenation of the desert is the token of the unspoken, timeless word. Time and the dream are redeemed for man. Purgatorial suffering, depicted in the second poem, leads back to the innocence of Eden and the soul. The world remains Paradise, but the dream is a token symbolizing the apprehension of the word, an apprehension not attained in any previous poem. "Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew" implies an eventual manifestation of the word, for it is unspoken until entry into eternal life. Not until 'Little Gidding' does Eliot reconcile time and eternity. In 'Ash-Wednesday' they are utterly opposed and the low dream of human joy needs to be rejected if the earthly paradise is to be attained. In the third poem, what Prufrock desired is here created, the association specific in brown hair. In the fourth poem all is stylized, tranquil and silent. The nightmares of the early poetry are transformed into dreams, only to be transfigured later into visions. Blue and green colours of bright spring dress are formalized as liturgical symbol, and the fig tree and hawthorn of cyclic regeneration are replaced by the yew tree of immortality and larkspur that is "blue of Mary's colour". Fiddles and flutes are borne away or represented by the silent flute of the garden god while the wind blows not sensuous hair but a "thousand whispers from the yew".

The charmed circle of the silent sister had depended on poetic assumptions, in perfect accord with the poem's religious subject. Just as the Word - the vanished Christ - can neither be heard nor spoken but must be read, as it were, from its pale traces, so in symbolist practice the word - any linguistic form - is only a poor token of the reality it shadows. Although the things at which words point are real, words themselves are only pointers. Here, the aspiration towards the condition of music becomes both more precise and all embracing. Music combines with metaphysics in an escape from matter towards the Absolute, the world of essences. As happens in Mallarmé, "faire de la musique" means achieving "un au-delà magiquement produit par certaines dispositions de la parole".<sup>54</sup> In 'Ash-Wednesday', Eliot is not only concerned with an accumulation of beautiful sounds for its own sake but with a synthesis of elements in

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<sup>54</sup> S. Barnard, p. 151.

which each depends upon its relation to others to create “le mot total incantatoire”.<sup>55</sup> Eliot seeks an architectural organization of the poem to establish a set of non-representative relationships between the words, the lines, the motifs and the rhythms. The poem becomes a network of relations and the metaphor imposes a unity over disparate terms fusing apparent opposites into a single intellectual image.<sup>56</sup>

The same had occurred with Mallarmé. This Symbolist poet is aware that, like a painter, “chaque objet de la vue est virtuellement chargé des reflets des objets voisins”.<sup>57</sup> In the same way, a mental image excites a range of similar, complementary and contrasting images that constitute “un domaine de possibilités harmoniques”. When developed to the full, they form “le domaine de la spiritualité ou de la Poésie”.<sup>58</sup> As for Eliot, for Mallarmé the purpose of the metaphor is not to describe the object but to change its aspect, so that the reader responds to it in another way. When Mallarmé describes a trinket as “aboli bibelot d’inanité sonore”, he creates a fusion of senses that is unrepeatable. Inanity cannot be sonorous, yet here it resounds in a cavernous hollow of negation. Mallarmé’s and Eliot’s internal rhymes, inverted syntax and sudden emptying of sound into abysmal vowels transform the appearance of an object so that its triviality becomes also a poignant pastness, a thing mindlessly cherished now gone for ever. Words, in the poetry of both Mallarmé and Eliot, suggest a reality beyond the gulf of silence even as events in the material world may suggest the once and future reality of the Incarnation.<sup>59</sup>

A significant departure from The Waste Land is an awareness on the part of “I”, that the voices it unearths indicate an implied belief, not felt in The Waste Land, that something in the self is substantial and will survive dismemberment:

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

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<sup>55</sup> S. Mallarmé, ‘Crise de vers’, in Oeuvres complètes, p. 368.

<sup>56</sup> This is the paradox that surrounds Andrewes’s words. It is also the paradox that lies at the heart of the Incarnation.

<sup>57</sup> Oeuvres complètes, p. 85.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* pp. 152, 198.

<sup>59</sup> Here, there seems to be the implication that literature may even construct a reality that corresponds to, if it cannot mirror, the ultimate reality that lies beyond silence. However, in the case of Mallarmé’s ‘Un Coup de dés’, when optimism fails, the construction begins to look like arrangements of ciphers, just as wordly signs of the Word, taken too literally, mock the reader with their mythic inadequacy.

The dissembling, (meaning both dismembered and feigned), permitted by a will that has not dissolved, has neither the satisfaction nor the anxiety of The Waste Land's dramatization of immediate experience. Never completely out of the control of the will, the dissembling does not reach the depths of the unconscious. It anticipates certain characteristics of the mournful chant of the bones which surfaces despite the efforts of the first voice of the poem to suppress it, "[l]ady of silences/Calm and distressed".

The song of the bones has links both to the Catholic Liturgy's Litany of the Blessed Virgin and to instances of liturgical imitation in the religious verse of Gourmont, Apollinaire and Verlaine. It is prophetic for it sings out what is intuited but not yet understood and its voice is filled with wonder. One feels the wonder in the energy of the dimeter chant, which is doubly effective because one recognizes it as the fulfilment of feeling formerly held in check. Together, incantation and paradox insinuate a voice from beyond the self, releasing the reader from the here and now into a mood of unearthly tranquillity.<sup>60</sup> This voice seems to identify itself by playing with words for their own sake, "[e]nd of the endless/Journey to no end", words, at the heart of which, however, stands a serious riddle emanating from a will deeper than consciousness. After seven lines of apostrophe, the poem declares "[t]he single Rose/Is now the Garden/Where all loves end..." However, Eliot drops the "[r]ose of memory/Rose of forgetfulness/Exhausted and life-giving". The assertion "[t]he single Rose/Is now the Garden" brings the single Rose, whose spattering Eliot remembers and wishes to forget, into conjunction with the "garden", which is the poem's controlling image of desire.<sup>61</sup> As the visionary presence of the rose and garden fades, an observer reports in the past tense that "under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining..." This is the resolute voice of "I" once more, and its alienation from the chant is clear from two of its observations. Though singing in

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<sup>60</sup> In fact, one finds that in the mature religious verse of Verlaine, there is the realization of the great secret of the Christian mystic, namely, that it is possible to love God with an extravagance of the whole being. All love is an attempt to break through the loneliness of individuality, to fuse oneself with something not oneself, to give and to receive that inmost element which remains, so cold and invincible, in the midst of the soul. Verlaine argues that it is a desire of the infinite in humanity and, as humanity has its limits, it can but return sadly upon itself, when that limit is reached. Therefore, human love is not only an ecstasy but a despair, and the more profound a despair the more ardently it is returned.

<sup>61</sup> Even after their conjunction, both rose and garden are teasingly mysterious, "[e]nd of the endless". The garden as symbol of desire originally occurs in the 'Canticum Canticorum'.

unison, the bones are scattered. Then, more disquieting is the fact that even scattered they, but not "I", are "*united/In the quiet of the desert...*"<sup>62</sup> and are able to forget "themselves and each other..." This alienation of "I", first an undertone, becomes clearer as "I" associates God's instruction to Ezekiel about the future division of the land of milk and honey with the ominous silence of the desert.<sup>63</sup> It culminates with a recognition announced, typically of Eliot, with a demonstrative pronoun, "[t]his is the land. We have our inheritance".

Although less moving and less dramatic than the occurrences regarding the mature Beatrice of *Purgatorio* xxx, the climax of 'Ash-Wednesday' gestures in its own disembodied way towards Dante's "conflict of old feelings with the new: the effort and triumph of a new renunciation, greater than the renunciation at the grave, because a renunciation of feelings that persist beyond the grave".<sup>64</sup> The garden of 'Ash-Wednesday' foreshadows the bizarre garden of 'Burnt Norton', which is announced by the "deception of the thrush" and where "we" *are* but

There they were, dignified, invisible,  
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,  
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,  
And the bird called, in response to  
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,  
And the unseen eyebeam crossed...

The fourth movement ends with a chilling moment of doubt together with an ambiguous liturgical fragment. A part of the 'Salve Regina's invocation of intercession, "and after this our exile", may imply that Eliot, having found the light, seeks strength to hold to it for the remainder of his earthly life. However, like the end of 'Journey of the Magi', it may also have a darker implication. Succeeding the wind's rattle, it suggests Eliot's progressive alienation first from the unreality of the material world and then from the unreality of the immaterial.

In the beginning of Part V, Eliot attempts to sustain the magic of symbolist incantation amid his awareness that it will never yield certainty, and to assert a reality beyond words. If the lost word of prayer in Eliot's memory or imagination can no

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<sup>62</sup> My italics.

<sup>63</sup> Ez. 20:6, 15.

<sup>64</sup> 'Dante', p. 263.

longer be heard, or even if the word was never spoken or could never be spoken, Eliot still insists that the word, and the Word, exist:

Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,  
The Word without a word, the Word within  
The world and for the world...

Prufrock had heard the mermaids singing, though only "each to each". He knows all too well that they will never sing to him. Gerontion had suggested loss of meaning and had also referred to where the meaning is or may be, namely, in the unspeakable word: "[t]he word within a word, unable to speak a word,/Swaddled with darkness." Gerontion could not even imagine the unspoken word, he could only refer verblessly to "[t]he word within a word". This alters Lancelot Andrewes's statement "the Word without a word". The change of preposition focuses on the freshly creative language waiting in a fallen language, the possible new word present within a word, in the manner of Mallarmé's flower which is absent from any bouquet. The removal of the capital letter in 'Gerontion' implies, on the contrary, a lack of both a religious sensitivity and a linguistic confidence, new speech being swaddled with the darkness of language of the self. For Gerontion, as for Prufrock, salvation involves a new language. Gerontion's "...word within a word unable to speak a word", depraved spirituality, manifests the clogged sterility of a failed language, while 'Ash-Wednesday's "Word within a word, unable to speak a word", the *verbum infans*, is the only expression for the ineffable. It is the mystic's music of silences. It is the idea and the condition of music that is to be found in such verses, where the richness of sound is matched by an equivalent richness of meaning.

The chant in 'Ash-Wednesday', "[f]or those who walk in darkness" ends with a recognition that there can be no grace, either for the self who once rejoiced that "things are as they are" and renounced "the blessed face", or for the self who now inclines to return to that disposition. Dissolved in his incantation, Eliot classes even his penitent self among the fallen, "[n]o place of grace for those who avoid the face..." The final verse paragraph of Part V increases the intensity of his questioning but also alters the emotional impulses behind it. Eliot shifts the terms of his discourse so that "they" are no longer generalized images of himself but elements in Christian history and allegory. Whatever hope there was for a reconciliation of ego and self-image

fades as it becomes clear that their act of betrayal takes place in “the desert/Of drought”.

The last movement of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ begins on a note of tranquillity. Speaking in the first person again Eliot no longer distances himself from the other sufferers, “[t]hose who are torn on the horn between season and season...” The music returns to its beginnings and, although Eliot’s conflicting attractions to God and the world remain, the poet’s original orientation towards that conflict does not. In the first movement, the very first word “because” signifies that the poet is confined and constrained by the myths of his world. In this movement, “although” signifies that he accepts his confinement and constraint, and therein is on his way to the single myth, the only myth, the myth beyond myth - Truth. He no longer acts, (“because”), he acts in spite of, (“although”). As in Cavalcanti’s “ballatetta”, the speaker in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ knows that death devours all. He laments “[m]y guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions/Which the leopards reject”. However, he instinctively dismisses total annihilation and believes that the soul can transcend mortality through its incantation. The poetic voice and the incantation become one, for “I would forget/Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose”. Likewise in Cavalcanti’s “ballata”: “Anima, e tu l’adora/ Sempre nel su’ valore”. Whether or not Cavalcanti and Eliot think of the initial “giammai” and “because” respectively, they both respond “sempre” and “although” at the end. It is a conscious and deliberate attempt at asserting the triumph of the spirit over the forces of nature. The buried emotional centre of Part VI is an implied allusion to St John of the Cross who acknowledged that “to banish and mortify the natural and first movement of the will completely is, in this life, impossible”.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the section’s first verse paragraph ends with a calm recognition that the wings of worldly desire can never be broken in this world. Such wings are, as stated in the first movement, “always wings to fly”.

‘Ash-Wednesday’ is sometimes seen as a distinct turning point in Eliot’s vision when he left the wasteland behind and set himself the task of a more fruitful search for the symbol of a purgatorial experience. It is a turning point already hinted at, however bleakly, in ‘The Hollow Men’. An important precursor to the fullest expression of the

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<sup>65</sup> The Collected Works, p. 312.

dance in Four Quartets, 'Ash-Wednesday' develops its entire theme on the motif of "turning", which in its recurrence takes the form of a leitmotif. The whole poem is structured on a ritual, namely, the Ash Wednesday burning of the ashes, culminating in the great Sacrifice of the Mass on Maundy Thursday<sup>66</sup> and ascent of Mount Purgatory in Dante's Commedia, both symbolic acts of death and rebirth. The litany of the first four lines presents an image of the turning world, a mandala wheel whose circle images wholeness of being, a pattern of harmony and movement already associated with the dance. As the Dominican monk, Raffaello delle Colombe observed in 1622: "[t]he dance is a symbol of the universal order and can be compared with the dance of the stars. For prayer is a spiritual dance.... God leads the ring dance of the heavenly bodies. God leads inside the ring".<sup>67</sup>

The circling motion that will be celebrated in 'Burnt Norton' as the unity of the cosmos, is heralded here in the multifold image of turning. Combining Dante's vision of the penitential turning round Mount Purgatory with 'Ash-Wednesday's concept of turning away from the world and turning to God, Eliot has invested the image with the emotions of agony, conflict, surrender and affirmation. Although the speaker in 'Ash-Wednesday' achieves no more than an understanding of his own aspiration, limitation and dependence on divine will, the possibility of a turning that can effect a union with the "spirit of the river, spirit of the sea" is present and serves to strengthen his resolve. As elsewhere in Eliot's poetry, the restoration of hope comes with the intensity of beauty felt in the natural world:

From the wide window toward the granite shore  
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying  
Unfolded wings....

The pattern of movement, here in the prophecy to the wind, affirms the wholeness he wishes to share. The development of the dance movement in 'Ash-Wednesday' can be identified with what Valéry calls "le sens de l'intime, et le mélange puissant et trouble de l'émotion mystique et de l'ardeur sensuelle".<sup>68</sup> An impressionistic use of dream-like images, motion in a state of stasis, uneven metres and a fluid syntax combine to give an overall effect of fleeting appearances and delicate movement.

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<sup>66</sup> Eliot asks: "is not the High Mass ... one of the highest developments of dancing?", in 'The Ballet', *Criterion*, 3:1 (1928), 441.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted by M. Fisk Taylor, in A Time to Dance (Boston: United Church Press, 1967), p. 113.

<sup>68</sup> Oeuvres: L'Ame et la Danse (Paris: Édition du Sagittaire, 1932), pp. 611-12.

Eliot seems to be looking for an escape from the immediacy of actual experience into the world of intangible beauty beyond it, evoked mainly by sounds and rhythms, apart from the semantic communication of meaning. Eliot brilliantly evokes moods by making words correspond to music:

At the first turning of the second stair  
I turned and saw below  
The same shape twisted on the banister  
....

At the second turning of the second stair  
I left them twisting, turning below;  
....

At the first turning of the third stair  
....

The musicality inherent in this verse by no means excludes the properly structured organization of the poem, frequently by the employment of such rhetorical devices as repeated lines or unanswered questions. Through the use of such words, Eliot aims at conveying the essential aspect of an experience, the idea of that experience tapering off towards eternity. Instead of Verlainian imprecision and the use of the next best word in order to keep meaning in a state of fluidity, Eliot is closer to Mallarmé here by using words with extreme precision, and he uses them to produce effects of movement. 'Ash-Wednesday' has the feel of a disembodied dance with a musical verse which is paradoxically rhythmic and unconstrained. It is pregnant with an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity, and an over-subtle refinement upon refinement. It is a poem replete with musical repetitions of words and phrases, the suspended thought at the end of the poem, the indeterminate word and image, rhymes rare rather than rich, and frequent use of assonance within the body of the line. A striking characteristic in 'Ash-Wednesday' is not Eliot's use of awkward and uneven metres, what Verlaine would have called "vers impairs", but the blurred symbols whereby emotion is conveyed in a careful gradual intensity, and the musical qualities praised in his essay 'The Music of Poetry'.

At the end of 'Ash-Wednesday' Eliot understands that no sanctuary is possible short of death. Knowing that in this life he can never hear the Word without uncertainty, he still cannot scotch an instinctive hope that "even among these rocks" some kind of transcendence is possible. In the closing apostrophe he re-invokes the charm he had created out of childhood memory and symbolist chant. Then, he uses it to express

enormous yearning for the Absolute, which figures as a reunion with the sea. Though it is not the last appeal to the Virgin in Eliot's poetry, it is the last time he will struggle to free himself of the human dilemma "[b]etween blue rocks" with so much passion. Therefore he will acknowledge the pull and power of the sea but will turn from it to find, in 'The Dry Salvages', "(Not too far from the yew-tree)/The life of significant soil".

By virtue of its meditative character, 'Ash-Wednesday' can be called an intimate liturgy in the style of Verlaine. It is an interiorized and confessional work that gives an impression of melancholic fervour and pure emotion. It expresses neither the terror of death nor fear of the Last Judgement. By its aspiration for death and for a beatific vision, by its tenderness and its mystery, 'Ash-Wednesday' is directly connected to the Symbolist aesthetic. The long incantations give its poetic language a vaporous, subtle and ethereal quality that can be associated with the poetry of Verlaine and Vielé-Griffin. However, it also marks a definite disengagement from the Symbolist influence of Laforgue. From now on, the poet's gaze is more focussed on the paradox of the Christian mystic, particularly that of St John of the Cross.

### Ariel's Songs

*Heard melodies are sweet  
But those unheard are sweeter.<sup>69</sup>*

The later poetic technique develops and continues the earlier method without denying it. What changes is the set of emotions underlying the poetic work. As these emotional patterns find unity and validation in Christian theology, so too the emotional tenor of the poems themselves becomes more patterned. Whereas the earlier poetry posited an emotional weight accruing from the futility of belief and the vacuity of disbelief, the later poetry deals with the actuality of believing. It is the poet's aim to find, through the medium of his verse, a way of expressing what it feels like to believe. To express that feeling, Eliot develops more ordered forms of symbolism and more subtle turns of musical phrasing. A movement is made from heightened aridity to metaphors of water; from the burning dust of the wasteland to

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<sup>69</sup> J. Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', in The Collected Poems, ed. by J. Barnard (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 345.

metaphors of light as revelation and purity; from random and futile seeking in trackless wastes to moments of discovery in specified places, and from dissipated images of passionlessness displaced only momentarily by the burning of desire to patterns of passion directed, fulfilled and requited.

The 'Ariel Poems' also achieve a greater unity of voice than do the earlier poems. The narrators of the pre-'Ariel Poems' - Prufrock, Gerontion, Sweeney, Tiresias - are often deliberately disembodied spirits of the age they themselves behold. They are the age they represent. On the other hand, the narrators of the 'Ariel Poems', when not Eliot's own poetic persona, are historical participants in the drama being related - the Magus, Simeon, Pericles. The unity of the singing voice in the 'Ariel Poems' derives in large measure from Eliot's location of the historical facticity of the Incarnation. While Jacques Maritain accuses contemporary art of a false metaphysics, the closest he comes to an aesthetic understanding lies in a metaphysics of grace. He argues that "one thing is certain, that a Christian art is a thing so difficult and requires equilibrium so rare, that man, even Christian man, and however great a poet may be, is incapable of it himself. The spirit of God is needed".<sup>70</sup> Symbolism, as Eliot utilizes it in the 'Ariel Poems', employs an inter-connectedness that points to something - theme, person or event - which lies beyond the poem. Thus, in the 'Ariel Poems', the historic event of the Incarnation serves as a mediation of temporality with externality. Eliot accepts the event as true, not partial or culturally biased, and directs the symbolism of the poem towards the perception of that past event from the present. This is precisely what Gerontion claims he attempts, but fails, to achieve.

In the 'Ariel Poems', Eliot was no longer content to see poetry function merely as the expression of experience or of emotions. The work of the poem may begin there - symbolic constructs, like images, carry emotional weight. However, the poem ideally fuses sensibility and idea:

All poetry may be said to start from the emotions experienced by human beings in their relations to themselves, to each other, to divine beings and to the world about them; it is therefore concerned also with thought and action, which emotions bring about, and out of which emotion arises. But, at however primitive a stage of expression and appreciation, the function of poetry can never be simply to arouse these same emotions in the audience of the poet.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> J. Maritain, 'Poetry and Religion: Part Two', *Criterion*, V. 2 (May 1927), 218.

<sup>71</sup> 'From Poe to Valéry', p. 38.

This view does not deprecate the importance of emotions. That importance remains intact from the earlier poetry. In fact, Eliot often cautioned against holding religious belief simply as an “intellectual construct”, whereby it then becomes one more arid landscape.<sup>72</sup> With the agonizing awareness of symbolism as a means of revealing spiritual patterns also grew Eliot’s increased sensitivity towards the function of language and of the word itself operating as symbol. Part of the emphasis upon the word as revelation derives from the Logos motif of ‘Journey of the Magi’. However, it also derives from Eliot’s sense of rhetorical precision. While reflecting on his earlier work in the ‘Writers at Work’ interview, Eliot observes that he was sometimes at the mercy of a certain inadequacy of language. He speaks of “having something one wanted to put into words and rhythm which one didn’t have the command of words and rhythm to put in a way immediately comprehensible”. The obscurity of those early works may be traced, Eliot goes on to say, to inexperience with language itself, “that type of obscurity comes when the poet is still at the stage of learning how to use the language. You have to say the thing the difficult way. The only alternative is not saying it at all, at that stage”.<sup>73</sup>

At this stage of his career, however, the more forceful influence upon Eliot’s view of language may have come from Dante. In his essay ‘What Dante Means To Me’ Eliot points out the great challenge that Dante holds for all succeeding poets. It is “[a] constant reminder to the poet, of the obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them”. Eliot embraced the challenge as his own:

The task of the poet, in making people comprehend the incomprehensible, demands immense resources of language; and in developing the language, enriching the meaning of the words and showing how much words can do, he is making possible a much greater range of emotion and perception for other men, because he gives them the speech in which more can be expressed. I only suggest as an instance what Dante did for his own language - and for ours, since we have taken the word and anglicized it - by the verb *trasumanar*.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Eliot’s essay ‘The Humanism of Irving Babbitt’, *Forum*, 80. 1 (July 1928), 37-44.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Writers at Work’, quoted by E. Drew, p. 105. It is in this context of mastery of language that Eliot agrees with the interviewer that Four Quartets constitutes his best work. It is also in Part V of ‘Little Gidding’ that Eliot sets forth his theory of poetic diction, asserting a precision of word and phrase, an “easy commerce” of old and new words with the aim of communicability; the use of an idiom closer to the patterns of human speech than some elevated poetic language, and a fittingness of the whole in which each word takes its place, “dancing together” in the larger pattern of the poem.

<sup>74</sup> *op. cit.* p. 134.

In poetic craftsmanship, this challenge does not mean the inclusion of the odd or rare word, or even the invention of new words.<sup>75</sup> One method for understanding the development of Eliot's poetic career is through an understanding of the language spoken by the characters of the poems. The 'Ariel Poems' go one step further by seeking to establish the transcendence of language in the face of a universe of meanings by transforming language from a medium for thought or feeling into a power of pure formation. Words take on value as realities in their own right and not simply as signifiers in a structure of meaning. This idea is expressed by P. Emmanuel in his post-symbolist poem 'Sache te taire'<sup>76</sup>

Plus silencieux que le silence  
(À peine un chant)  
Les mots font des cercles immenses  
Dans le néant.

These silent words articulate not meanings but immense circles in the void. They are purely formal structures whose intelligibility, like the intelligibility of music, is entirely of an intransitive order. These are words in which language itself speaks and so offers itself as an object for experience.

The 'Ariel Poems' come across to the reader as a kind of intermezzo before the dramatic outpouring of Four Quartets. In these poems, the skill of the 'musique verbale' is consummate, achieving a gently modulating pattern that casts its own spell on the reader, combining the alliteration and assonance of certain key sounds with subtly varying rhythms and internal rhymes. Just as music is organized sound so the poetry here seeks a unity of expression and meaning that distinguishes it from the essentially communicative language of everyday speech. Whereas so much of Eliot's early verse is a direct representation of experience, the 'Ariel Poems' are a deliberate and sustained discourse on that subject, and they end with a vision of that wholeness which lies beyond time in Four Quartets.

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<sup>75</sup> One example of that practice may be 'Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service', with its harsh discordant whirl of semantically ambiguous discourse. Such diction points to the hollowness of Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service, which is also the hollowness of a mental landscape and the clangor of a dizzying diction that Eliot here sets behind him. The task now is the location of the precise word that immediately discloses meaning to the audience.

<sup>76</sup> op. cit. in Chanson de dé à couche (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 55.

“To look to death for what life cannot give”. The ‘Ariel Poems’ deal with the meaning of the Incarnation, the moment when timelessness enters time and redeems it, thus gathering all meaning and value to one point. In these poems, Eliot puts modern words in ancient mouths and ancient plots on modern ground. The blindness of ‘Gerontion’ and The Waste Land has given way only to another blindness. Now, the truth is before the historical protagonists, but they ‘see’ its physical manifestation only. Except in ‘Marina’, Eliot’s dramatic figures never do ‘see’ what they desire. Even Simeon, with this greater understanding, accepts with a kind of resignation a partial and limited vision. “I should be glad of another death” in ‘Journey of the Magi’ has to be read, perhaps, in the light of Eliot’s interest in St John of the Cross, and in conjunction with ‘A Song for Simeon’, which specifically mentions the “saints’ stair”. Death suggests the mystic death that imitates the death of Christ and allows for a direct relation to God. The earlier emphasis on their regret for sensual delight and the difficulty of their journey strengthens this view.

The advent of Christ is an event that lies at the core of each of the ‘Ariel Poems’. The significance of the artistic fusion, (whereby the work holds in tension several historical moments), lies in the fact that, having dragged the present age through his horrific poetic landscape for a decade, Eliot had himself to reinvent a past. It had to be a past that had depth, weight and earnestness that could validate his present and grant future direction. In ‘Gerontion’ he had found human history full of “cunning passages, contrived corridors/And issues” that finally “[g]uides us by vanities”. Stripped of historical significance, humanity becomes, like Gerontion or the hollow men, blown by the winds.<sup>77</sup> Historical patterns occur in the form of leitmotifs that continue to assail individual consciousness. These leitmotifs arise variously, appearing mostly as literary voices echoing insistently through the past. Moreover, they appear as cultural events that demand some reason for their occurring and some consequence of their having occurred. Finally, they appear as sudden flashes of

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<sup>77</sup> Historical significance is emphasized by Eliot at the end of Four Quartets, when he writes that “A people without history/Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/Of timeless moments”. One transition in Eliot’s shaping of the ‘Ariel Poems’ is a recovery of history as a process not as a whirl of fragments. While in the pre-‘Ariel Poems’ Eliot views history as a random composite of human experiences, the ‘Ariel Poems’ show a vision of divine influence and pattern over human experience.

divine significance, fulfilled in the Incarnation, whereby the eternal intersected the temporal and left the temporal forever changed.<sup>78</sup>

In the poetry of this period, Eliot honours the cultural roots of language at the same time as it seems to loosen words from their referents and places discursive syntax in the service of music. In 'Journey of the Magi' Eliot undermines the dramatic monologue form as soon as he announces it. Instead of cultivating the illusion of an objective speaker, Eliot suggests that the events of the monologue are convenient but inadequate representations of an experience that lies outside the dramatic frame. In doing so he calls into question the continuity of the private experience to which the frame corresponds. It begins with a self-conscious citation, signalling that the account is not a dramatic monologue but a meditation that centres on the assumption of a role.<sup>79</sup> Departing from the story of the Magi, Eliot introduces images from two unexpected sources - accounts from the Passion and his own private imagery: "[w]hy, for all of us ... do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others?"<sup>80</sup> Eliot's symbolic configuration conflates three realms of reference, namely, the fictional frame, the correspondences of Christian typology and his own deepest and most troublesome feelings. In the eyes of the world, the Magi's journey is a journey on the road to folly. The Magi hear "the voices singing in our ears, saying/That this was all folly". Although St John of the Cross asserts that the dark night is sent "only to give light in everything", he is mindful of the fact that the light comes not as a sudden effulgence but in scattered rays.

'Journey of the Magi' and 'A Song for Simeon' both use a specific historical time to symbolize a human dilemma, discovering that one is between birth and death and that rebirth requires death to this life. By juxtaposing past, present and future in an

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of what Paul de Man calls "the obsession with a *tabula rasa*", striving to locate new beginnings in history, see 'Literary History and Literary Modernity', in Blindness and Insight, pp. 142-65.

<sup>79</sup> Adapting L. Andrewes's words from his Nativity Sermon (1622), Eliot shows his admiration for the Bishop's forward-moving consecutive statements. Eliot argues that even when Andrewes repeats certain expressions, he does so in order to emphasize an important idea or image and the repeated expressions are simply reference points for starting new patterns of development in the progression of his thought. The progression of images and ideas in 'Journey of the Magi' reflects this same concise and forward-moving syntactical order which H. Kenner describes a "running line of consecutive statement". See, H. Kenner, The Invisible Poet (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), p. 23. See also, Eliot's essay 'Lancelot Andrewes', in Selected Essays, pp. 341-53.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted by F.O. Matthiessen, p. 58.

intricate counterpoint, Eliot makes the Incarnation a focal point to which all relate and Christ's birth and death as the model for all rebirth. Time is redeemed by eternity, the word is redeemed by the Word. The language of myth and ritual is thick with metaphor from start to finish. It is metaphor chosen for imaginative value but which is soon crystallized into assertion. The paschal lamb in 'A Song for Simeon' prefigures Christ's sacrifice which itself prepares for the Second Coming. In Simeon's mind, the death wind of the Old Testament and the death to come are united by birth. Thus, in both poems, the vision of birth produces a sense of death without the release such death could bring. If the Incarnation appears to the reader with all its centuries of acquired meaning, it is only uneasily present to the characters. What they express, if not anguish, is clearly not fulfilment. It is only a subdued loss, a kind of dull unease. What remains vivid is remembered sensual delight or anticipated martyrdom. Thought and feeling are beginning to diverge in these poems, in a way already anticipated in 'Ash-Wednesday'. In all three poems, a timeless vision is asserted while temporal sorrow is felt. In 'Ash-Wednesday' the theme of time finds one resolution in that it presents the mystic way of escaping the bond of time altogether. Yet, in order to do so, one must traverse the "time of tension between dying and birth", which troubles the Magi and Simeon, accepting the death of temporal life in order to apprehend eternity.

Stylistically, two elements distinguish the drama of 'A Song for Simeon's spiritual state from that of 'The Hollow Men'. The first is the way the poem uses liturgical expression. Three years earlier, Eliot had integrated the phrase "[f]or Thine is the kingdom" into the conclusion of 'The Hollow Men', only to augment that poem's final ambivalence. The sequence "[g]rant us thy peace .... Grant us thy peace .... According to the word .... Grant me thy peace .... Having seen thy salvation" represents something more. It is not a counterpointed melody but an emotional baritone, not least for the fact that Simeon, as he appears in the Old Testament, is an old man whose only remaining wish is to behold the Word made flesh. When Eliot introduces the liturgical song of the 'Nunc Dimittis' into the poem it is not to weld it into a new and unique whole of feeling. Rather, he uses it to sound a note that is anything but unique, a feeling which is impersonal not because it arises from the depths of the unconscious but because it belongs to many centuries of shared experience.

For every sound there is an echo. Being more aware than the Magi of what Christ's birth means, Simeon, in his old age, sees that the implications of his vision are more clear. He sees beyond that even to the suffering that must come before "the ultimate vision". Unlike the Magi, Simeon knows that this birth is death, "[n]ow at this birth season of decease/ ... /and no tomorrow". The image of the unspeaking Word is another reference to Andrewes's phrase used in 'Gerontion'. It also contrasts the mystic experience with Simeon's own experience. In an explanation of the difference between the Old and New Law, St John of the Cross speaks of the Word. Also, when one notes that for St John the whole mystic experience consists in imitating the death of Christ, one sees Simeon's dilemma. The Word has been given but is still "unspeaking and unspoken". For him the ultimate vision granted those who follow Christ's steps is unavailable; there is but "Israel's consolation", the knowledge that it will be. Knowing all this, Simeon sees his own life as one of resignation to a lesser order of vision. Like the Magus, he feels weariness rather than joy for, he says that "I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,/I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me". The effect of this incantation is to make Simeon not simply a figure of a strange historical situation but a representative of all those who come after him who are not capable of sainthood. It is physical life of which he is tired and physical death he dies along with others, for spiritual life and death are not to be his. Whereas Simeon's world is phenomenal and significant, Eliot's poem is typographic and musical. It is not the substance but the form; not the imagining of a totality of objects but the unfolding, typographically, of a manifold of pure activities which takes precedence here. It is the hesitation, the disposition of parts, their alternations and relationships which contribute to a rhythmic totality that, paradoxically, constitutes the very silence of the poem. At the end of the 'Song for Simeon', the speaker wishes to "[I]et thy servant depart,/Having seen thy salvation", for having seen Life he longs for death. In one sense, silence here is the silence that attends the printed word. However, silence also signals the presence of beauty as it occurs in a Mallarméan context. In silence the mystery of nothingness and of the All - the Word - breaks in upon the word. Therefore, the inaudible song that lies beneath the words of the text leads the reader, as it had Simeon, from the word to the Word, which is the ultimate music.

In Eliot's early poetry generalizations had been subordinated to a cluster of concrete images.<sup>81</sup> In 'Animula', generalized phrases depend for their impact not on dramatic or symbolic heightening but on a kind of attention-seeking precision. Therefore, configurations like "the offered good" are intended to avoid emotional distractions and reinforce the reader's concentration on universal truths. 'Animula' is mostly made up of incantatory rhythmic phrases - "Shadow of its own shadows, spectre in its own gloom". Eliot claims that the poem's entertainment falls to rhythm. The variation is in the metrics. This means, perhaps, that the rhythms of discursive poetry need not be part of a unique whole of feeling but may instead be a means of pleasing variation. In other words, they are a vehicle to bring out the truth not of a poet's mood but of his philosophy. Yet, divorced from mood, they lose their hold on the only solid anchor in Eliot's world. The more earnestly Eliot strives towards philosophical concentration, the more he seems to veer towards loosened syntax, musical elaboration of ideas and incantatory rhythms.

Like 'Journey of the Magi' and 'A Song for Simeon', 'Animula' closes on the union of death and birth. In this case, however, a reason for the association is simply asserted. Because time destroys, only a second life can satisfy and this is attained only through death. Though 'Animula' is less subtle and, perhaps, less effective than the previous 'Ariel Poems', it clearly illustrates the opposition of time and eternity on which all are based. The moment between the yew trees, like the time between Christ's birth and death, is a middle point that all must pass but which is only passed by most in physical destruction. By dying to sense and spirit in this world, the mystic passes through that point in this life, transcending time within the temporal world. Others achieve this true life in God only through physical death. Time and eternity join in the Incarnation, yet to achieve eternity, humanity must escape time by physical death or mystic death to this world. In 'Animula', the reader finds that the meaning at each line, far from destroying the musical form communicated to him, recalls it. The living pendulum that has swung from sound to sense with the words "simple soul", the Dantean "l'anima semplicetta", swings back to its felt point of departure, as though the very sense which is present in the reader's mind can find no other outlet or expression, no other answer, than the very music which gave it birth. The thoughts

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<sup>81</sup> The first four lines of The Waste Land come to mind.

suggested by the text here are by no means the unique and chief objects of its discourse, but means which combine equally with the sound, cadences and metre to produce and sustain a particular tension, and to engender within the reader a mode of existence of complete harmony.

In 'Marina', thanks to the music of Shakespeare, Eliot finds a way to fuse woman and fountain, Eros and Agape. The image of the beloved never appears, but one senses her in the trembling of the speaker's recognition and in the urgent music of Eliot's verse, "[a]nd scent of pine and the wood-thrush singing through the fog". Eliot's representation of the instigation of love has the flavour of his description of Shakespeare's. It is beyond good and evil. Shakespeare's vision of love begins with a music that flows from the elemental powers. It involves energies that exist in God's willingness to forgive, and which lie beyond the reach of sin or error. It is a vision connected to the irrepressible force of "spring incarnate". This poem achieves its consummate expression in the love that pulses and orders what Pericles calls that "heavenly music" that "nips me unto listening".

Eliot's 'Edinburgh Lectures' suggest why in the poems he wrote under Shakespeare's spell, the rhythms of children's songs should be joined with the elaborate patterns of verbal symphony. The "wood-thrush singing" and the "whispers and small laughter" of 'Marina'; the "children's voices" of 'New Hampshire' and the "dance/Of the gold-finch" of 'Cape Ann' are all related to the island music of The Tempest. They give the reader the ground bass, as it were, of the philosophical and personal meditation of 'Burnt Norton'. In 'Burnt Norton' the reader listens to the "hidden music", the "mysterious pattern of reality". It is the same music that Ferdinand hears while

Sitting on a bank,  
Weeping again the king my father's wrack,  
This music crept by me upon the waters,  
Allying both their fury and my passion  
With its sweet air.

Eliot's vision in the 'Ariel Poems' is of the transcendent word, the Word, of language which comes across to the reader in the splendour of beauty as it exists as a sheer presence. It is a pure quality which is unpredicated of any reality but the Word. These are songs which are indeed the song of Orpheus in his absence, what Mallarmé would have called:

Vaste gouffre apporté dans l'amas de la brume  
Par l'irascible vent des mots qu'il n'a pas dits,  
Le néant à cet Homme aboli de jadis:  
'Souvenirs d'horizons, qu'est-ce, ô toi, que la Terre?'  
Hurle ce songe; et, voix don't la clarté s'altère,  
L'espace a pour jouet le cri: 'Je ne sais pas!'<sup>82</sup>

Between 'Marina' and 'Burnt Norton' Eliot found ways to recreate Shakespeare's hidden music in the possibilities of a twentieth-century lyric. For Eliot, the chorus was an obvious way for the playwright to suggest the "ultra-dramatic" condition of "something which utters itself". It permits speech to be uttered "beyond character", somewhere between dramatic speech and music. Traditionally associated with philosophical material, it also articulates the rhythms of antique tragedy. The chorus-like passages of 'Burnt Norton' are both the utterance of a middle-aged man and part of the amassing harmony of a whole that is beyond his compass.<sup>83</sup>

Just as Eliot would connect the disturbing presence of music in key scenes of the romances to Shakespeare's larger pattern of musical orchestration and ultimately the "the music of the spheres", so in his own poems he embeds distant notes that form part of an elaborate musical frame. "Dissonance, even cacophony, has its place: just as, in a poem of any length, there must be transitions between passages of greater and less intensity, to give a rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole".<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> 'Toast Funèbre', in *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 294. "Vast vortex borne amid a mass of haze/by the angry wind of words that he did not say,/zero to this Man abolished yesterday:/ 'What is the Earth, O memories of horizons?'/yells this dream; and, voice whose clarity lessens,/space has for a toy the cry: 'I do not know'". B. Cook, p. 57.

<sup>83</sup> I am thinking particularly of 'Burnt Norton' I, namely, "Footfalls echo in the memory/Down the passage which we did not take/Towards the door we never opened/Into the rose-garden. My words echo/Thus, in your mind".

<sup>84</sup> 'The Music of Poetry', p. 32.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Redemption of the word by the Word

*O quanto è corto il dire  
E come fioco al mio concetto*<sup>1</sup>

*Musicienne de silence*<sup>2</sup>

*Music has reached a place not yet visited by sound.*<sup>3</sup>

In Four Quartets, a studied invocation of musical form is used to intuit a mystical experience beyond time. For Eliot, music is a vital metaphor and structural device for seeking a transcendence of time. The notion of time and timelessness prevails with particular emphasis throughout Eliot's later poetry. The reader has read about the superimposition of past on present, and present on future repeatedly throughout Eliot's poetry and plays. For instance:

We do not know very much of the future  
Except that from generation to generation  
The same things happen again and again.<sup>4</sup>

Four Quartets brings together the two worlds which have stood apart in Eliot's imagination from the beginning of his career, namely, the world of time, those who like Sweeney keep its rhythm, and those who, like the saints, keep its stillness. Up to 1930, Eliot's work is iconoclastic in relation to the English poetic tradition. Then, having lived to see the establishment of a recognised idiom of modern poetry in every European language, he turns inwards and begins to refine and at the same time deepen his harmonies. For Eliot, the "unheard music" of Four Quartets seems to be the only logical development from the neurotic rhythms of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and the vibrant syncopation of The Waste Land.

Music, dealing with an aesthetic combination of sounds and rhythms that emanate in sonorous lines from our innermost feelings is, probably, the most abstract and the

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<sup>1</sup> Dante, 'Paradiso', La Divina Commedia, ed. by N. Sapegno (Milan: Ricciardi, 1957), Canto xxxiii, 121-2.

<sup>2</sup> S. Mallarmé, 'Sainte', in Oeuvres complètes: Poésies, ed. by C.P. Barbier (Paris: Flammarion, 1984), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> V. Woolf, after hearing Wagner's 'The Ring' in Bayreuth, 1909. Quoted by R. Donnington, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Murder in the Cathedral, I. 304-6.

most subjective of the arts. As argued in the Introduction, what matters for Eliot are the quality, property and condition of music, apart from the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. Also, the use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse to bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony; there are also possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject matter. Within the context of the later poetry, Eliot is particularly interested in what the French Symbolist poets had called the inherent sense of vagueness which music imparts. The music and the meaning of Four Quartets arise "at a point of intersection", in the changes and movement of the whole. "I know that indefiniteness is an element of true music, a suggested indefiniteness bringing about a definiteness of vague and therefore spiritual effect".<sup>5</sup> The negativity, in the form of scepticism, of Eliot's early poetry is transfigured into the negativity inherent in the 'via negativa' of the Christian mystic in his later poetry.

In a letter to Gustave Flaubert, Baudelaire, a powerful influence on Eliot in his early poetry, states that:

There are in every man at every hour of the day two simultaneous postulations, one towards God, the other towards Satan. The invocation to God, or spirituality, is a desire to mount in the scale; that of Satan, or animality, is a joy of going downwards.<sup>6</sup>

Inversely, St John of the Cross argues that the way to God is a movement towards the base of the ontological scale - nothingness. The soul must desire nothing in order to come to possess all. There is also a movement towards the summit of the scale - plenitude. Love of the perfect good impels Eros upward towards the possession of complete fulfilment. Between these two movements of desire there is a dynamic tension. To the extent that the mystic soul becomes Nothing, it will come to possess the All. By contrast, Baudelaire's emphasis on man's fallen state is not balanced by any belief in his redemption. For him, religion is a symbol of the order, or 'Ideal',

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<sup>5</sup> E.A. Poe. See, p. 10, footnote no. 27. As I have already discussed in some detail in my Introduction Poe, alongside Laforgue and Baudelaire, provided a powerful model for Eliot. It will be recalled how parts of the original draft of The Waste Land resemble a scene from Poe in its visionary horrors and approach to the ice. This was the indestructible strain that remained part of Eliot in all the strange journeys in his poetry that found a final expression in 'The Dry Salvages'.

<sup>6</sup> Journaux Intimes, p. 62. Quoted by W. Benjamin, p. 54. This idea is also discussed in depth by A.J. Massin, in Baudelaire entre Dieu et Satan (Paris: Juillard, 1946), pp. 31-48.

towards which he was striving, “de la vaporisation et de la centralization du *Moi*. Tout est là”.<sup>7</sup> All through *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire creates a sense of acute instability. He does so by the double process of making the intangible tangible and the tangible intangible. He translates these opposites into subjective terms, the horrors of life and the ecstasy of life, and attempts to reconcile them in the act of poetic creation. The result is paradoxical. His great poetry is the record of the final collapse and ruin of the individual trying in vain to remain one. Images of physical and psychological destruction are what the poet calls “la vaporization du *Moi*”. Baudelaire recognizes that the origin of the dilemma is metaphysical or religious, but he tries to solve it by aesthetic means. In Baudelaire, the verb is the psychological element par excellence. ‘Harmonie du Soir’ best illustrates Baudelaire’s conception of a world in a perpetual state of movement, “voici venir les temps où *vibrant* sur sa tige/Chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir”.<sup>8</sup> It is a two-way structure, moving in perfect counterpoint. The inward movement is the impact of his surroundings on the poet while the outer movement, which is in part provoked by it, is the attempt by the poet to exteriorise his emotions and to impose himself on his surroundings. This has the effect of constantly modifying the relation between the poet and the world.

For Baudelaire, the soul’s voyage towards the Absolute ends up in Hell. Extreme, unconditioned mysticism is accompanied in certain poems of Baudelaire with a will to destroy obvious and accepted human values, as in ‘La Destruction’. The soul’s longing for eternity is couched in concrete, physical terms.<sup>9</sup> In ‘Les Sept Vieillards’, Baudelaire identifies the soul with a “vieille gabarre”, an old barge which rides aimlessly on the monstrous seas. The soul is conveyed as a heavy, degenerate entity which lacks direction, floating “sans mâts”, on the verge of annihilation. In another poem, ‘Le Voyage’, one reads that “[n]otre âme est un trois-mâts cherchant son Icarie”.<sup>10</sup> The soul is again pictured in the form of a boat aspiring towards the land of

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<sup>7</sup> *Journaux intimes*, p. 51

<sup>8</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, p. 77. My italics.

<sup>9</sup> This goes directly opposite to what happens in V. Hugo’s writings, where there is saturation with the divine presence in abstract and lofty dimensions. In ‘Hymne’, Baudelaire evokes the senses of taste and smell while in ‘Extase’ Hugo appeals to vision and hearing. See, V. Hugo, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, pp. 98-9.

<sup>10</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, p. 166.

Icarius, suggesting the aspiration of the soul for flight and liberation. However, in the last verse, hope is shattered as the boat hits a reef, “[e]nfer! C’est un écueil”. In Baudelaire’s poem the soul is barred from paradise, unable to escape its mortal coils. Embarking on a voyage, it bids “fare well” not “fare forward”.<sup>11</sup> In After Strange Gods, Eliot writes that “[f]irst-rate blasphemy is one of the rarest things in literature, for it requires literary genius and profound faith, joined in a mind in a peculiar and unusual state of spiritual sickness”.<sup>12</sup> The basis of Baudelaire’s modernism is to perceive objects in an independent way and interpret them through a satanic turn of mind.<sup>13</sup> In Les Fleurs du Mal, Baudelaire “steers his poetic bark close to the reefs of heresy.”<sup>14</sup> However, his diabolism is an inverted form of Catholicism. His poetry of flight is a dim recognition of the direction of beatitude.<sup>15</sup> It is poetry that is essentially religious because of the intrinsic quality of its doubt.<sup>16</sup>

Eliot had found a way of exploring “the negative aspect of the impulse toward ... Beauty” among French poets.<sup>17</sup> It was the way of Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé. The essence of Symbolism is its insistence on a world of ideal beauty and its conviction that it is realized through art. Music played an enormous role in relation to French Symbolist poetry. However, the making of music in Symbolist poetry did not result from an actual recapturing of musical riches. Rather, as was recommended in Verlaine’s famous Art poétique, “de la musique avant toute chose” simply implied the rejection of classical poetic conventions in order to release through fluid and

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, in ‘La cloche fêlée’, the double use of the word “fêlée” describes both the cracked sound of the bell and the spiritual devastation of the soul. Here, the ring of the bell is a knell, as opposed to the sound of Eliot’s “sea-bell” tolling the “[p]erpetual angelus”. Elsewhere in Les Fleurs du Mal, the image of the cypress trees seems to push the tombs further down into earth to be devoured by time. In contrast, for Eliot, (“Not too far from the yew tree)/Lies the life of significant soil”.

<sup>12</sup> op. cit. p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> The abyss of evil, generally associated with Hell, is linked in Baudelaire’s mind with his passion to know the infinite. In ‘Le Gouffre’, he would say “Je ne vois qu’infini par toutes le fenêtres”, while elsewhere, in ‘Les Deux Bonnes Soeurs’, he calls himself “ennemi des familles/Favori de l’enfer”.

<sup>14</sup> P. Vassallo, in an unpublished lecture entitled ‘Comprehending the Incomprehensible in the Poetry of Dante, St John of the Cross, Milton and T.S. Eliot’, given at the University of Malta in October 1996.

<sup>15</sup> In ‘Mon coeur mis à nu’, the poet imagines the vessels lying in harbour saying “Quand partons-nous vers le bonheur?” and his successor Laforgue exclaims “Comme ils sont beaux, les trains manqués”.

<sup>16</sup> Baudelaire’s negative aim in Les Fleurs du Mal is to resolve tension and his positive aim the recovery of unity, the unity as opposed to the multiplicity of experience, the “centralization” as opposed to the “vaporization” of the “Moi”. This could only be accomplished in an order that was in the widest sense religious. The attempt to achieve this unity through poetic experience accounts at one level for his preoccupation with what may be called the transcendental element in experience and at the technical level for his preoccupation with form as a means of organizing experience.

<sup>17</sup> A. Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, p. 25.

semantically imprecise verse the images, rhythms and sonorities buried in the psyche or soul. For the French Symbolists, music is neither greater nor lesser than poetry, neither absolutely analogous to nor completely different from it. Rather, by virtue of these arts' varying degrees of sensory concreteness and representational abstraction, music and poetry were considered to be at once identical and contrary and to fulfil in relation to each other the paradoxical function of the supplement, in the sense of that which both replaces and completes. The supplementary relation of music and poetry is, for the French Symbolist poets and Eliot, an aesthetic manifestation of the unity-in-diversity of mind and body, a relationship on which they pattern their concept of the Idea. For instance, Eliot's recourse to the 'via negativa' is a stratagem asking for careful and sober confrontation of reality. What is being assumed is that man shall find a route into hope and health not by evading but by facing the crises and distempers of history.<sup>18</sup> Literary ambiguity, mediating the conflict of opposites that, unresolved, remains "irony" reflects, in Eliot's case, a sensibility deeply influenced by Christianity which the incarnate Christ ultimately resolves and completes. Unity-in-diversity is what Incarnation inaugurates, Crucifixion makes manifest and Resurrection glorifies. Literary ambiguity harmonizes opposites that rhetorical terms merely express. Moreover, it prefigures in a poetic word what Eliot would come to see as the incarnated Word. As S. Ellis puts it in his excellent book Dante and English Poetry, "Four Quartets as a whole, of course, attempts to synthesize services to the Word and to the word, notably in the final section of 'Little Gidding'".<sup>19</sup> In fact, the reader knows that this attempt at "synthesiz[ing] services to the Word and to the word" has been a preoccupation for Eliot as early as the 1920's, when he discerns the pattern, the Word, to which his poetic words lead. In 1926 Eliot calls real irony an "expression of suffering".<sup>20</sup> He makes these ideas explicit later in his Clark Lectures, when he says that the poetic image in its highest form becomes a kind of knowledge that "clothes the abstract, for a moment, with all the painful delight of the flesh".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This reminds the reader of what Keats said, namely, "to bear all naked truths/And to envisage circumstance, all calm,/That is the top of sovereignty". 'Hyperion', in The Collected Poems, II. 203-205, p. 298.

<sup>19</sup> S. Ellis, Dante and English Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 240.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by E. Lobb, in T.S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> E. Lobb, pp. 53-4, quoting Eliot's Clark Lectures on irony as an expression of suffering, summarises the analogy between the word in language and the Christian logos, as well as similar analogies Eliot drew between religion and poetry. Lobb quotes Eliot's incarnational view of the poetic image clothing the abstract in the flesh on p. 24.

On the other hand, for Mallarmé poetry and music equally manifest the Idea, albeit in contrary ways.<sup>22</sup> The literary text is the Idea's sacred sarcophagus, music its ritual celebration. The complexity of Mallarmé's theory of the relationship of music and poetry to the Idea is often reflected in the paradoxical rhetoric through which it is expressed. As will be argued, in several key passages where this relationship is defined, unexpected and ambiguous shifts between literal and figurative references to music impede the reader's capacity to distinguish between music and poetry and the Idea, even as distinctions between them are being made. In the pursuit of pure poetry, Mallarmé had written in 1886 that "[j]e suis depuis un mois dans le plus purs glaciers de l'esthétique – qu'après avoir le Néant j'ai trouvé le Beau".<sup>23</sup> French Symbolism had integrated sensory perceptions of different kinds in a symphonic pattern, composed according to a psychological system of what Baudelaire called "correspondances". Baudelaire's poetic play of "correspondances" affected Mallarmé deeply. For him it is a "hymne élané mystiquement comme un lis", eliciting an equally mystic response, a synesthetic experience of ineffable holiness in which he hears the angels sing:

...des anges blancs comme des hosties chantent leur extase en s'accompagnant de harpes imitant leurs ailes, de rayons purs contournés en trompettes, et de tambourins où résonne la virginité des jeunes tonnerres: les saintes ont des palmes.<sup>24</sup>

For Mallarmé, music and poetry share several elements of a common vocabulary that is often also the lexicon of the divine: the "hymne" is a sacred song as well as a sacred text; the "lyre" is a metonym for the god of music and poetry as well as being the particular symbol of lyric poetry; the source of divine inspiration for the poet is the "muse" from which the term music is itself derived.

With their rich instrumentation of words, their vocal rhythms and 'audition coloré', the Symbolist poets attempted to fuse poetry, music and painting. Through his reading of the French Symbolist poets, Eliot realized that Symbolism is the religion of 'Ideal Beauty', of "le Beau", and "l'Idéal". This may be seen in Baudelaire's belief in the ideal beauty that he contrasted so poignantly with his own life, in Verlaine's

<sup>22</sup> In this respect, Mallarmé is neither like Hegel nor like Schopenhauer.

<sup>23</sup> 'Propos sur la poésie', ed. by H. Mondor (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1953), p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 123. "white angels like hosts sing their ecstasy with the accompaniment of harps shaped like their wings, of pure rays in the form of trumpets and of tambourines from which resounds the virginity of early thunder: saints hold palms".

attempt to write of soul and body on parallel lines and in the oracular and enigmatic utterance of Mallarmé. For Baudelaire, ideal Beauty gave force and purpose to his tortured and disordered soul while for Verlaine it justified the search for forbidden pleasure. For Mallarmé, beauty was all that mattered. The fabric of their Christian beliefs had been mutilated or undermined, and feeling a need for a gospel to take its place, they found in Beauty something that unified their activities and gave a goal to their work. To this belief they clung with a conviction which may be called mystical because of its intensity, its irrationality, its disregard for other beliefs and its reliance on a world beyond the senses.

A doctrine of this nature has much in common with that of orthodox religious poets, particularly that of Dante and St John of the Cross. Just as Mallarmé tries to capture in verse an ideal beauty, so Dante tries to create a visible image of an invisible world. Allegory in Dante makes for simplicity and intelligibility for allegory implies clear visual images. The conception of clear visual images as the mean between the extremes of incantation and meaning belongs to the polemic of the early twentieth century. Eliot achieves his hold on the modern reader's imagination not only by clear visual images but also by writing the extremes of incantation and meaning:

Dawn points, and another day  
Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind  
Wrinkles and slides. I am here  
Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

There is no doubt about the power of incantation here, nor about the fact that it means intensely and means good. Inversely, Mallarmé attempts to convey a supernatural experience in the language of visible things and, therefore, almost every word is a symbol and is used not for its common purpose but for the associations that it evokes of a reality beyond the senses. In 'Solemnité', the book of poetry is presented as conjuring up, in its blank spaces, a type of Ideal *Musique* that once again designates essence, an essence now clearly identified as contained within the self:

... ce spirituellement et magnifiquement illuminé fond d'extase, c'est bien le pur de nous-mêmes par nous porté, toujours, prêt à jaillir à l'occasion qui dans l'existence ou hors l'art fait toujours défaut. Musique, certes, que l'instrumentation d'un orchestre tend à reproduire seulement et à feindre.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 'Propos sur la poésie', pp. 97-8. "... this spiritually and magnificently illuminated core of ecstasy is indeed the pure essence of ourselves, inherent in us, always, ready to spring up when the opportunity presents itself and which always fails to appear in life or outside art. It is, doubtlessly, music which the instrumentation of an orchestra tends merely to reproduce and to simulate".

Articulated here is the irony that music, in the literal sense, appears to reproduce tangibly what cannot be apprehended, the ineffable, non-representable core of the self. Mallarmé is concerned with a special aesthetic experience that he interprets as a saint might his visions of God. In this he echoes Baudelaire who, in his sonnet 'Correspondances', sees nature as symbolical of another reality.<sup>26</sup> For Baudelaire, the visible and sensible world is full of symbols that fill man's heart with joy and sorrow, and convey him through scent, colour and sound to rapture of the spirit.

Baudelaire's sonnet 'Correspondances', Eliot's Four Quartets, and the writings of St John of the Cross strain at the limits of language, paradox and representation, suggesting an experience which lies outside them. For these poets, the subject of presence is fundamentally contradictory. Images of absence generally originate in and replace representations of more or less concrete, objective presence, and absence is itself evoked as presence by virtue of a syntax that portrays it as the coming into being of an essence. Mallarmé speaks of poetry which would not make use of isolated words but of their associations, poetry based on suggestion and allusion, excluding all description, a poetry without words (though making use of words), a poetry of emptiness and silence. It is a poetry that evokes the apparition of the Idea. Cattai remarks that, according to Mallarmé, the poet must not try to express in words an idea, but the Idea which itself creates the Word.<sup>27</sup> In 'Sainte', one of Mallarmé's most beautiful poems, the symbol of absence, the "musicienne de silence", is similarly evoked (through "la parole", the poem) as an Ideal presence - the Angel stroking a harp "formée avec son vol du soir" - that originates in and replaces the more concrete image of Saint Cecilia with her missal and viol in a stained-glass window. That the saint is initially manifest as a tangible presence is emphasized by the unusual positioning of the verb "[e]st" at the beginning of the second quatrain. Also, her image as a tangible presence, like that of her attributes, ultimately fades through the poem's unfolding, variously negated or idealized in the last two quatrains. Even though it may be generally conceded that Mallarmé's poetic images of absence can be interpreted as images of ideal presence, one may wonder what this type of presence has to do with the temporal and corporeal human presence required in ritual and music. To understand better his conception of the relationship between these two

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<sup>26</sup> Les Fleurs du Mal, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> G. Cattai, 'Notes', *Fontaine* (March 1942), 72.

modes of presence, one must focus for a moment on a distinction that he makes between poetry and music. Whereas he considers literature as a means of access to the intangible presence of the Idea through acts of language that abolish nature, he sees music (including the dance) as a means of access to the tangible presence of the Idea through non-verbal, corporeal acts that conversely nullify "la parole". Thus, in Mallarmé's critical texts the woman dancing appears as a physical incorporation of the Idea and, therefore, as a kind of negative written sign. She is a woman who, paradoxically, is not a woman but a metaphor by virtue of a corporeal writing that allows the writing of an ideal, unwritten poem, "poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe".<sup>28</sup> Music, therefore, appears as a tangible Ideal presence and as a negative form of writing. The presence of God, or Man as Ideal type, embodied in music (a presence that is also personified, though not personalized, in the physical presence of the conductor or priest), necessarily implies an absence of language, a trope for silence. Silence, therefore, is "la figuration du divin" insofar as it allows a direct encounter with the ineffable.<sup>29</sup>

As for St John of the Cross, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, for Eliot the cataloguing of the experiential detail of the way of detachment requires the same kind of acute sensitivity to the inner feel of the process as one needs in listening to music. Consequently, in Eliot's later poetry there is the presence of a high drama of the soul's journey to God. In 'Ash-Wednesday', the image of the night is not a symbol of a thing but of a function, namely, the interior journey of the soul out beyond all creatures, all knowledge, out beyond revelations and visions and all distinct apprehension. In 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', St John says that "to come to the knowledge you have not/You must go by a way in which you know not".<sup>30</sup> This is later fully taken up by Eliot in 'East Coker' III. Knowledge requires faith. The ladder by which to escape the conflict of contraries symbolizes faith. Faith hides in itself the secret of liberation. In a mystical context, faith not only believes, it also impedes understanding. Faith is a night, but night is itself regarded as a pre-condition of dawn. In a sense, J.P. Riquelme's limitations of perspective with regard to the religious

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<sup>28</sup> Documents, V, p. 393. In Mallarmé's works, mime also appears as the physical embodiment of an ideal presence and as a kind of inverse, or negative, writing.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 389.

<sup>30</sup> The Collected Works, p. 181.

dimension in Eliot's poetry cannot really be accepted. Reading Four Quartets as a poetic commentary on its Heraclitean epigraphs he finds in it an ambivalence that derives from the linking of irony with metaphor. At this point, the reader knows that what "I" signifies in Eliot's different phases of his poetry seems crucial, yet Riquelme addresses it only in a note to his discussion of 'Ash-Wednesday', which he sees as Eliot's mortality ode, its ashes contrasted with the joy-bringing embers of Wordsworth's great antitype.<sup>31</sup>

In Four Quartets, Eliot is primarily concerned with the dialectic of knowing and unknowing, of light and night, of sound and silence, within the Christian dogma of the Incarnation. It is also the dialectic of time and place. Night is time at its most negative point and light is eternity, movement at its most absolute. At the centre of the continuum of time, the mystic finds a real present, where "all is always now", while at the centre of the continuum of space he finds a real presence, the redemption of time by eternity, the Incarnation. At the same time that the present is seen only as a moving limit between past and future it is also regarded as something to be dwelt upon and dwelt in, something lived. Music has the same effect, namely, something which so shapes time as to make us live its elapsing, its duration, with unusual attention to each present moment.

With Four Quartets, Eliot strives to achieve what words alone cannot accomplish, however much suggestiveness can be bestowed on them by their removal from ordinary syntax, and however much continual revision and endless pondering over a word or a sound increases the stimulation of assonance and musicality to force the reader to look beyond semantic meaning. What Eliot extracts from Four Quartets is not only poetry's musical power of evocation, but a symbol or episode which has a special significance for him because it accords with those symbols he has collected to express his central mystical theme of the road to union. With symbolist/musical language, the symbol acquires a life of its own and contains within itself various meanings and levels of understanding. The function of the symbol allows its meaning to transcend any one interpretation.

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<sup>31</sup> J. P. Riquelme, pp.56-7.

In the period extending from the late 1920's into the early years of the following decade Eliot was undoubtedly influenced by his conversion in 1927 to Anglo-Catholicism. Disabling though the burdens imposed by his human heritage may be, Eliot started to be persuaded that man's most essential task remains that of seeking to "fare forward". Since there is no other dwelling-place for man but historical time, he began to conclude that despite all the taint and ambiguity in man's history there can be no escaping the truth that "only through time time is conquered", and that "the way forward is the way back". Although there may be "only a limited value/In the knowledge derived from experience", "only approach to the meaning restores the experience". No new access to hope and health can be found apart from a deep appropriation of the roots in tradition; or apart from a deep re-possession of that complex mixture of ordeal and humiliation and glory which constitutes the soul in actual experience out of which the human City has come.

By the time of Four Quartets, Eliot's mythic poetry had reached the status of ritual. For Eliot, ritual implies actions at their most formal, in which meaning is completely absorbed by the form. The purpose and nature of Eliot's ritual effects may be sought in his use of myth to convey man's struggle and failure to gain self-knowledge. This conflict is resolved in the conversion of personal into religious experience, the transformation of mythical insight into ritual observance. Pound goes to history for his source of mythic renewal while Eliot goes through history so as to go beyond myth.

As a mythic poem, Four Quartets achieves its end. Against the "unstilled world" stands the "centre of the Silent Word", Christ as Logos. He is the "Word without a word", because in Logos, language finds its transcendent fulfilment. The word is unspoken because Christ as God existed before Time and so transcends both time and speech. The spoken word is the Word made flesh, Christ's incarnation in time. Yet, as "Word within/The world", the Logos opens a way of transcendence, one that points beyond language and world to the "Word unheard". The "unheard music" as symbol of transcendence and, therefore, of Logos, is a trope for unbodied spirit beyond the shape of linguistic body; for an eternal moment beyond the temporal sequence in

which linguistic body unfolds; for the wholeness or concordance achieved as a unity of what appears in language only part by part.<sup>32</sup>

In Four Quartets words mean so that, when taken collectively, they may be. Here, the reader gets the semantics of mystical ecstasy. As Wagner had done earlier, Eliot argues that great myths express, far more successfully than rational discourse, the permanent truths of human experience. "A myth is a great metaphor",<sup>33</sup> and it is far better able than logical argument to satisfy man in his search for truth. For the reader, the desert wastes and the coming of the spring waters in The Waste Land had symbolized with unique power the salvation for which the human spirit longs. The myth communicates not only before it is understood but also without being understood, so natural and fundamental is that within man which responds to it. Myths, by their various associations, evoke and suggest. Hence their symbolism. More importantly, for Eliot myth demands that the supernatural and transcendental elements should have moral significance. By its mythic force, Four Quartets aims to transcend its mythic substance, to negate itself as myth and to establish itself as a mode of acknowledging in all triumphant humility the existence of God from Whom all myths flow.

In The Waste Land, Eliot makes use of allusive materials in the form of Wagnerian myths, amongst many others, particularly those of *Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal*, in order to shift perspectives on the contingent and substantial. In 'Ash-Wednesday' and the 'Ariel Poems' the technique is, through the repetitions inherent both in the rhythmic, hypnotic murmuring characteristic of collective prayer and in the solitude of disciplined meditation, to eliminate the contingent and substantial. In Four

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<sup>32</sup> As trope, silence recurs as a potent motif through centuries of theological writings, and not only mystical ones. For Dionysius the ascent finally must leave behind even "divine enlightenment and voices and heavenly utterances and plunge into the Darkness where truly dwells ... the One which is beyond all things". The goal is to arrive at an "absolute dumbness both of speech and thought ... being at last wholly united with Him Whom words cannot describe", Mystical Theology (London: Macmillan, 1920), 1, 3. However, it is St Augustine who perhaps offers the fullest meditation upon and analysis of silence as figural sign of transcendence. In Confessions (London: Heinemann, 1922), pp. 4, 19, language and silence are primary images for the way in which the world of time finds its fulfilment in eternity. In the world of time, "not all the parts exist at once, but some must come as others go, and in this way together they make up the whole of which they are parts ... our speech follows the same rule, using sounds to signify a meaning".

<sup>33</sup> B.A. Schleppenbach, 'Irony and Beyond: The Mythic Method in Conrad, Eliot and Pound', *NQ*, 55 (1987), p. 156.

Quartets, through the use of essentially musical form and, more emphatically, by aspiring towards the condition of music, there is the transformation of the contingent and substantial into a mode of truth whose substance consists precisely in its non-contingency. As in 'Ash-Wednesday', and in a different way from 'The Hollow Men', repetition in Four Quartets gives a passage an almost liturgical ring. In this context, such repetitions can induce states of trance through the potency of words insistently changed. It is a poem about the exploration of the sound of certain words. Here, words can mystify to move. The "unheard music" in 'Burnt Norton', to which the bird responded precisely because it is "unheard", echoes "la música callada" and "la soledad sonora" of St John's El Cantico Espiritual.<sup>34</sup> In both cases language is the servant of its meaning, which is the inexpressible. Here, silence seems to be challenging the poet to attempt its linguistic translation.

However, "words fail".<sup>35</sup> This is why, perhaps, in 'Sainte', the Saint in a stained-glass window touches an Angel's wing, and this wing becomes, as it were, a musical instrument, while the Saint, disdainful of her own lute, becomes a "[m]usicienne de silence". Mallarmé had created a new mysticism of art. He expressed it disjointedly in words of Heraclitean darkness and power. His unique "fleur absente de toute bouquets", is the ideal flower which has in it the beauty of all flowers. However, it is not one among the bunch but something above it. It is the ideal flower in that it belongs to pure light not to the senses. In music, Mallarmé and Eliot find more than an analogy. They believe that poetry is a kind of music, and by this they do not mean that its pleasure is comparable in quality, though this follows from this belief. Both poets seem to possess a mystical faith that means much more. They know an Absolute of aesthetic joy that is outside and beyond thought and, therefore, beyond significant words. The idea is "l'absence", "the unheard music", the perfection which is never actually present, the silence which is more musical than any song. It is this intrinsic quality that Mallarmé and Eliot wish to capture in 'Sainte' and Four Quartets respectively.

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<sup>34</sup> El Cantico Espiritual (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1944), ed. with notes by M. Martínez Burgos. Stanza XV, "the silent music" and "the resounding solitude".

<sup>35</sup> L. Janaček, at the top of one of the pieces which make up the album *On An Overgrown Path* (Bretislav: Artia, 1981), p. 21.

In a letter of thanks to Edmund Gosse for the latter's "miracle de divination" as reviewer Mallarmé, after picking out Gosse's phrase "[h]is aim is to use words in such harmonious combination as will suggest to the reader a mood or a condition which is not mentioned in the text", proceeds to define more closely the debt of poetry to music:

non celle qu'on peut tirer du rapprochement euphonique des mots, cette première condition va de soi; mais l'au-delà magiquement produit par certaines dispositions de la parole.... Vraiment entre les lignes ... sans l'entremise des cordes à boyaux et des pistons comme à l'orchestre<sup>36</sup>

What Mallarmé calls music "dans les sens grec" is seen as "rythme entre des rapports"; in these relationships, merely sensuous patterns are superficial, and abstract analogies insufficient; undefined "rêverie" and vague "musique" must be concentrated into a creatively controlled fusion of "pensée" and "chant".<sup>37</sup> Mallarmé dreams of something like the music of the spheres, a harmony audible to the spirit in the form of ideal beauty. For him, a poem is "de scintillations sitôt le septuor",<sup>38</sup> a septet of starry sounds. Mallarmé's use of the term 'septuor' has a musical aura, implying that these stars are singing, but this brings into the argument of the poem a subtle absence. Absence, argues Mallarmé, brings to our yearning the thought of presence, the still persistent refusal of the thing in itself to withdraw from the inquisitiveness of our imagination. In both poetry and music, there is a recession to distant 'mysticités'; a sort of yearning that comes from somewhere beyond the poet's hieroglyphics or the harmonious sound of the chords. This implies a belief in a sort of a mystic dimension where ideas come into being without deliberate creativity on the part of the poet or composer.

The "unheard music", the silent word, what Eliot was to call the "soundless wailing" in 'The Dry Salvages', are Mallarmé's symbols for the ecstasy and delight which mean much to him, and whose glory he tries to convey to others. He believes that beyond any poetry that he may write is an ideal and absolute poetry, compared with which what is actually written, the ordinary matter of poetry, is "un inutile gisement:/Nuit désespoir et pierrerie".<sup>39</sup> However, Mallarmé had also realized that

<sup>36</sup> Documents, III, p. 95. "Not the one that can be drawn from a euphoric reconciliation of words, that primary condition that goes without saying; but the beyond produced magically by certain verbal arrangement.... Truly, between the lines ... without the need to have recourse to strings and trumpets in the orchestra".

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* V, p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* I, p. 422.

<sup>39</sup> Oeuvres complètes: Poésies, p. 120.

there is in poetry an obstinate element because words have meanings. This prevents poetry from producing as purely an aesthetic effect as music. Words, for Mallarmé, are concerned with ideas, and poetry is made of words. It can never have the unlimited breadth of pure vision. Mallarmé had dreamt of finding “la parole sous la figure du silence” and he could give a hint of its nature in “l’insensibilité de l’azur et des pierres”.<sup>40</sup> Mallarmé’s own confession “mon art est une impasse”,<sup>41</sup> his failure to write his “oeuvre pure”, the failure of his apologists to show that poetry can achieve effects comparable to those of music, the unalterable truth that words cannot be divorced from their meanings, show that ultimately poetry can never be as indefinite as music is. This is later echoed by Eliot when he says that “the dictionary meaning of words cannot be disregarded with impunity”.

Inexpressibility presents the ambivalence towards Mallarmé’s language. Language is seen at best wanting, at worst profane, compared with the truth it would express. For Eliot of the Four Quartets, language is also a central topic and inexpressibility is a potent force. Within mystical discourse, the problem of language is treated as tangential to prior spiritual or philosophical goals. Like El Cantico Espiritual, Four Quartets is a comment on the failure of language. However, even when the poem exhausts the limits of language, it does not exhaust the experience which that language has been pressed into service to convey:

Words, after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

Here, language becomes a mode for investigating possible grounds for meaningful interpretation of experience. Such grounds also invoke what remains beyond language. The ineffable draws a boundary, sets a limit to language. However, it does so in order to define a positive linguistic terrain. Eliot’s music in Four Quartets signals transcendence into supra-historical, eternal realms. Linguistic failure is the failure to realise meaningful historical experience.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand the ineffable makes possible positive utterance, while on the other hand it may engulf it. Eliot’s

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* pp. 645, 294.

<sup>41</sup> Correspondance, X, p. 278.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, ‘East Coker’ V emphasizes the faults of language as a medium. In its military images, language is “shabby equipment”, leaving the poet to try “to learn to use words”.

poetic language, far from constructing enclosed aesthetic worlds, is invested with all the risk of temporal process and historical engagement. It goes even in the face of inexpressibility, but beyond inexpressibility there is a commitment to language as the articulation of meaning within man's immediate historical condition. The approach to language taken by Eliot in Four Quartets inscribes the struggle to define and to locate the values that endow man's life with meaning, and to translate these values into temporal and historical reality.

In Four Quartets, language functions as both medium and trope. The final movement of each Quartet, with the exception of 'Little Gidding', offers a meditation not simply on language but on linguistic failure. For instance, in the lines from 'Burnt Norton' V, which have often been praised as the justification of time by eternity,<sup>43</sup> there is the empowerment of words by the concordant silence that gathers in and informs them:

Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
Not that only, but the co-existence,  
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
And the end and the beginning were always there  
Before the beginning and after the end.  
And all is always now. Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices  
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,  
Always assail them. The Word in the desert  
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,  
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,  
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

Yet, the passage finally undermines such continuities. Here, words move not only in time but also like time. Within the mutability of sequence, they "strain, crack and sometimes break", and do so "under the burden" not only of expression, but as images of mutability. Like process itself, they "slip, slide, perish/Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,/Will not stay still". What words neither convey nor represent, except negatively, is what remains beyond succession in unity - the "stillness", the "co-existence", where "all is always now". This is represented not by language but by its antithesis, the "after-speech" that reaches "into the silence", for as speech is of time, so is silence of eternity - a basic issue in the poem. Not language, but silence, is

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<sup>43</sup> This claim is made, amongst others, by D. Donoghue, 'On Burnt Norton', in Words in Time: New Essays on Four Quartets, ed. by E. Lobb (London: The Athlone Press Ltd., 1993), p. 13.

the ultimate sign for transcendence. This is, perhaps, what Eliot means when he says “music heard so deeply/That it is not heard at all, but you are the music/While the music lasts”. Eliot appears to be presenting language as transient and, ultimately, as discontinuous with what endures beyond language. Words never reach beyond time and space; concord never fully descends into language. Only silence, linguistic negation, can act as figure for such transcendent unity. Inexpressibility is, therefore, central to Eliot’s mystical commitment. The ultimate moment language can achieve is its own transcendence. As Paul Murray insists, Eliot defines his mysticism as first, the “path of negation; second, as an ecstasy of thought... and third, as an incommunicable vision”.<sup>44</sup>

The place language has in Eliot’s work is highly ambivalent, at once prominent and withdrawn, asserted and negated. Eliot makes use of self-referential language consistently in his work. The reader has heard Prufrock’s neurotic utterance “[i]t is impossible to say just what I mean”, Sweeney’s lament that “I’ve gotta use words when I talk to you”, and the arcane reference to the “Word” as “to err” in ‘Mr Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service’. All display Eliot’s underlying concern with linguistic issues. In ‘The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ and ‘Sweeney Among the Nightingales’ language seems to be a kind of concession to others, a barrier that must be negotiated. ‘Mr Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service’ projects, if only through its parodistic failure, a longing for a Word beyond mere words. ‘Ash-Wednesday’ displays this longing, now positively expressed without irony. Finally, in Four Quartets, language is used with greater urgency. In this poem, the trope of language becomes the centre of meditation, and urgently so in each Quartet’s culminating section.

The negative drive for positive transcendent desire becomes particularly clear in the works of St John of the Cross. It is mysticism of negative definition. Negation is here mainly directed to the (un)-naming of God as that which “exceedeth all Being, Deity and Goodness”. Its function is to point beyond form and language, “where the

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<sup>44</sup> P. Murray, p. 103. In his 1930 essay on Donne, Eliot himself describes the mystic’s vision as the “assurance of experience incommunicable”. He writes, in his ‘Conclusion’ to The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 145, that mystical illumination is characterised by “the realization that you will never be able to communicate it”.

simple, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the silent music and the secret Silence".<sup>45</sup> If St John of the Cross has recourse to musical metaphor in describing the phenomenology of the text, it is because music provides the perfect structural model for this interweaving. The melodic line in its trajectory from point to point responds to our sense both of unity and duality, now revealing itself as a continuous line, now obscuring itself in complex harmonies.<sup>46</sup> Such linguistic paradox and ascetic negation seem to mark Eliot's own highly psychologized writing - "distracted from distraction by distraction". The incantation to the soul in 'East Coker' III, to "be still, and wait without hope ..." "wait without love ..." "wait without thought ..." "but the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting" and "a voice descanting (though not to the ear...)" in 'The Dry Salvages' are strongly that of St John.

In Four Quartets, silence transforms the nightmare of history into dawn, when every day begins as the knowledge of night. In this poem, Eliot's journey towards the Absolute continues where it had left in the 'Ariel Poems', namely, the 'via negativa'. The last mystery of Dante's 'Paradiso' is the Incarnation, the meeting of time and timeless. It is the mystery of man's place in a divine order, or tradition, that redeems his individual errancy. Seeing "our image within itself and in its own colour" at the end of his journey, Dante "wished to see how the image conformed to the circle and how it has its place therein", but for this "his wings were not sufficient.... Here power failed the lofty phantasy".<sup>47</sup> This upper limit to human knowledge closes the interior pilgrimage of the character Dante. Descending from heaven, he returns to earth to write his remembrance of the journey, to pen "un volume". Even Dante must rest finally in representation and writing. Therefore, the progression from the seeming victory of "un volume" to the mystery of the unity-in-diversity which characterizes Incarnation seems to parallel the progression from The Waste Land's striving to bind the dispersed leaves of its ruins to the Four Quartet's renunciation of the dream of absolute preservation and total recall. Purposes are, Eliot found, "altered in fulfilment". In Four Quartets, Eliot's perception of music and poetry as aesthetic

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<sup>45</sup> Mystical Theology, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Baudelaire, in 'Le Thyse', a prose poem dedicated to Franz Liszt, similarly describes music as the simultaneous expression of unity and duality.

<sup>47</sup> R.L. Hough, 'Dante and Eliot', *CQ*, 16 (Winter 1974), 243-305 (pp. 266, 285-6).

refinements of the identical contraries of language is fundamentally related to his perception of the identity-in-difference and unity-in-diversity of mind and body within the Self. Regarded in this light, Four Quartets as a literary text comes across as what Mallarmé would have called “l’instrument spirituel”, the superlative means of the mind’s self-expression and cognition. In Four Quartets the Idea instituted, as it were, in the poetic text resides in the singular human capacity to perceive the unperceivable, to “comprehend the incomprehensible”<sup>48</sup> to hear in poetry a “chiffraction mélodique tue”. It is the human experience of the void, “les blessures”, that allows both difference (duality) in the universe and its resolution in unity. Mallarmé describes this infinite tracing of connections that achieves the impossible, the instituting of the Idea in terms of a silent, chimerical, melodic line:

Chiffraction mélodique tue, de ces motifs qui composent une logique, avec nos fibres. Quelle agonie, aussi, qu’agite la Chimère versant par ses blessures d’or l’évidence de tout l’être pareil, nulle torsion vaincue ne fausse ni ne transgresse l’omniprésente Ligne espacée de tout point à tout autre pour instituer l’idée; sinon sous le visage humain, mystérieuse, en tant qu’une Harmonie est pure.<sup>49</sup>

Whether going up or down, the ladder of transcendence is a ladder of language. It is also a ladder that serves its own abrogation. The descent from ultimate things to the “ever-widening number of conceptions”<sup>50</sup> in the world is principally intended to pave the way of retraction, back up out of multiplicity to unity. This scale has specific linguistic corollaries, namely, the world’s multiple forms correspond to the partial, successive, multiple nature of words, while unity ascends beyond them. Ascent here is assent towards silence. Transcendence is linguistic transcendence only because it is linguistic negation.

There are a number of strategies for achieving such linguistic negation, a number of negative forms it can take, as Four Quartets amply demonstrates. There can be systematic denials of positive designations; reductions by elimination; paradox; negative designations, and direct meditations on the limits of language as fragmented, partial and successive, always pointing to a unity beyond the multiple linguistic condition. Eliot uses all of these, which seem to flow naturally into one another.

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<sup>48</sup> ‘What Dante Means To Me’, p. 134.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Propos sur la poésie’, pp. 56-7. “Silent melodic line, created by those motifs which form a logical whole, with our fibres. In spite of the death throes which chimera also excites as it sheds through the wounds of gold it inflicts the evidence of the artist’s whole being, no vanquished writhing distorts or transgresses the omnipresent Line, which remains mysterious when expressed in a human form, as long as Harmony is pure”.

<sup>50</sup> Mystical Theology, p. 3.

Thus, the poem's central and controlling image of the "still point of the turning world" moves from systematic denial to negative designation to reductions (which are also paradoxical) to overt linguistic dismissal:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.  
I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.

Such positive images as the "still point" or "the dance" are at once reduced by being denied by attributes, namely, "neither flesh nor fleshless", "neither ascent nor decline". These are denials which themselves take paradoxical form. A movement of exclusion, "except for the point", seems to assert positive presence. Yet, this is a presence that evades all formulation, for the speaker bids the reader "do not call", "I cannot say where". The image is finally one presenting language as unfit, a betrayal of the vision that cannot, however, otherwise be conveyed, "[a]nd I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time." These negative strategies recur throughout Four Quartets, establishing important aspects of their rhythm and shape. Regimens of reductive release especially concentrate in each poem's third movement, as these pursue figures of descent and detachment. Negative descriptions – ("what you do not know"; "what you do not possess") – become descriptions of negations – ("the way of ignorance"; "the way of dispossession"). Here, negation of something positive becomes assertion of something negative.<sup>51</sup>

One of the poem's most fundamental claims is that negations are not merely negative but, rather, are ultimately positive. The poem promises to conduct from negation to affirmation, from dispossession to true possession. This conversion in turn is governed and guaranteed by a further figure, that of concordance. Unity is the impelling motive in Four Quartets, and synecdoche, as the substitution of part for whole, is its master trope, as the poem's striking figures make evident. The vision of the "dry pool", "the still point of the turning world", "the dance", the "Chinese jar", the "[z]ero summer", and the moments of outright negation of "meeting somewhere, no before and after", are all points of contraction and unification, in opposition to the

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<sup>51</sup> Tautology further negates an already negative formulation, namely, "where you are not" and "what you are not" become spaces of "no ecstasy" and "the way in which you are not".

dispersion of world and time. These negations all point to the mystical discourse one finds in St John of the Cross. However, within the context of Four Quartets, the works of St John of the Cross have to be read also for their rhythm and their sound. Although very relevant, they do not help the reader in the same way as The Golden Bough and From Ritual to Romance will “elucidate the difficulties”<sup>52</sup> of The Waste Land. In her essay Gardner seems to be implying that in Four Quartets, the life of poetry is the life of sound as it is perceived in the listener’s auditory imagination. This concept brings the reader very close to French Symbolist aesthetics as argued throughout this thesis. One may add that the very structure of Four Quartets transforms living into art. The poem proposes not to deny or deflate experience, but to restore it within a totality of wholeness wherein each experience finds its true place and significance. The experience reaches its fullest moment in the dance.

### The Dance

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?*<sup>53</sup>

In his Poetics, Aristotle intimates that dance refers to life outside itself which it imitates and interprets. “Rhythm alone without tune is employed by dancers in their experimentation, for by means of rhythmical gestures, they represent both character and experiences and actions”.<sup>54</sup> Identifying himself with the dance, the dancer creates an ongoing present.

The epigraphs to Four Quartets set the tone for the dance images that figure largely in ‘Burnt Norton’. These images recur in ‘East Coker’ and again in ‘Little Gidding’. The fragments from Heraclitus proclaim the truths of the mythical view of reality and prefigure their celebration in each of the Quartets. The first asserts unity-in-diversity in the universe and the centrality of divine intelligence while the second affirms Heraclitus’ observance of the circular nature of the universal pattern which corresponds to the cyclical nature of history. The “still point” is at the intersection of Heaven and Earth where all opposites are harmonized. In Four Quartets God is at the intersection of time and timelessness, motion and stillness, permanence and change.

<sup>52</sup> H. Gardner, ‘The Music of Poetry’, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘Among School Children’, in Collected Poems, ed. & annotated by N. Jeffares, with an appendix by W. Gould (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 245.

<sup>54</sup> Poetics, trans. by W. Hamilton Frye (London: Heinemann, 1927, rpt 1973), p. 7.

Recognition of the “still point” dispels the apprehension and fear of the meaninglessness implicit in flux, disorder and death. Though achieved only in ephemeral moments, “in and out of time”, union with the “still point” is the transcendent objective of the Quartets and the dance symbolises that achievement.

Here, dance is the emblem of identical form and meaning, “incorporation visuelle de l'idée”.<sup>55</sup> The symbol is movement shrouded in stillness. It lacks separable intellectual content, and its means, as the intellect receives them, must constantly be changing. As in Yeats, there is nothing but the dance, and the dancer and the dance are inconceivable apart, indivisible as body and soul, meaning and form. Its power is not to express emotion but to objectify a pattern of sentience. Within a Symbolist context, the greatest art symbolizes not those things that one observes so much as those things that one has experienced.

‘Burnt Norton’ is a linguistic achievement in the creation of concepts. The musical overture can be perceived from the rose-garden in the form of “[t]he unheard music hidden in the shrubbery”, followed by motion, “[s]o we moved, and they, in a formal pattern”. The footsteps at the beginning of ‘Burnt Norton’ take the reader towards the garden beyond the door. In the garden of ‘Burnt Norton’, Eliot’s shadowy figures move in relation to each other, in a ritual, an aesthetic dance almost as in the sequence of a ballet. The garden passage of ‘Burnt Norton’ moves the reader nostalgically backward, through Valéry to Mallarmé. The extreme, almost provoking suavity and beauty of this passage of ghosts in ‘Burnt Norton’ turns for an instant towards that aesthetic softness and sweetness of the arts in the 1880’s and 90’s, when Mallarmé wrote on ballet and Debussy composed *Preludes* inspired by Mallarmé’s poems. Music had offered the Symbolist Poets a perfect analogy for the elusiveness and evanescence of the poetic experience. It is an art in flux, forever turning to its sources to replenish the energies expended in the pursuit of novelty.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Mallarmé, ‘Crayonné au Théâtre’, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 306.

<sup>56</sup> For instance, in Plainsong, Debussy found unstinted use of the old church modes with their many ‘eccentricities’ of interval-sequence. From folk music he gleaned his perennial fondness for the pentatonic scales which were to wield such influence over his harmonic thinking and the arabesques of oriental monody often determine the shape and direction of his wayward melodic lines. Also of oriental origin is that elusive and evocative scale formation, namely, the whole tone scale, which never before had attained such pre-eminence in Western music.

Debussy, described by Symons as “the Mallarmé of music”,<sup>57</sup> produced works which have that eminently French characteristic sense of indefiniteness, a vagueness of tonal relationship created by the lack of cadential harmony. The suggestive nature of his music exemplifies Mallarmé’s attempt to “peindre non la chose mais l’effet qu’elle produit”.<sup>58</sup> T.E. Clarke amplified this by adding that Debussy uses chords as Mallarmé uses words, as mirrors which concentrate the light from a hundred angles upon the exact meaning, while remaining symbols of that meaning and not the meaning itself. “These strange harmonies ... are not the end, but the point of departure of the composer’s intentions; they are the loom upon which the imagination must weave its own fantasies”.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Mallarmé saw that the words of a poem could reflect one upon the other so that a system of relationships may be established, giving them the quality of a musical scale:

Ce à quoi nous devons viser surtout est que, dans le poème, les mots - qui sont déjà assez eux pour ne plus recevoir d’impression du dehors - se reflètent les uns sur les autres jusqu’à paraître ne plus avoir leur couleur propre mais n’être que les transitions d’une gamme.<sup>60</sup>

Mallarmé does not only seek an accumulation of beautiful sounds as the Parnassians had done but a synthesis of effect, a fusion of qualities into the “mot total incantatoire”. Form, far from being a mere vehicle for the communication of meaning, now appears as a function of meaning. Mallarmé’s poetry is full of a densely woven verbal pattern of layers of implication. In his case, poetic language is language become thought incarnate.<sup>61</sup> For Mallarmé, metaphor is a tool for penetrating reality. It is a means whereby the inner dynamic of that reality is revealed. The purpose of poetry is to reveal a central core, which he calls “the tonality of the relationships existing between everything”.<sup>62</sup> He states that “[words] take light from mutual reflection ... replacing the old lyrical afflatus or the enthusiastic personal direction of the phrase.”<sup>63</sup> It is language that happens through the speaker.

<sup>57</sup> A. Symons, ‘Claude Debussy’, *Saturday Review*, 8 February 1908, pp. 15-18 (p. 15).

<sup>58</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 222.

<sup>59</sup> T.E. Clarke, ‘A Modern French Composer: Claude Debussy’. A lecture delivered at Newcastle upon Tyne on 9 January 1908, published in *An Anthology of Modern Composers*, ed. by J. Barton (London: Methuen, 1932), p. 74.

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Francois Coppée, 5 Déc 1886, in *Propos sur la Poésie*, p. 85.

<sup>61</sup> In his music Wagner achieves the opposite, namely, his leitmotifs permit the musical articulation of thought.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Crise de vers’, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 368, quoted by B. Johnson, in *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (New York: Baltimore, 1980), p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted by A. Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 125.

The garden where Mallarmé's innocent faun frolics is a garden which resonates in its silence. 'L'Après-midi d'un faune' is a verbal game. The music is in the text and the faun exists as a spectator-poet. The poem intricately combines the naïve assertions of the faun's desire with the complex reflections of a fiction engaged in dismantling the terms in which desire is initially figured. The text thus causes the object(s) it names to disappear by means of a language which refuses representation, and destroys and annihilates objects. Though it never does sort things out, the faun is an artist and an interpreter, whose musings illuminate certain confusions about the artist-creator. In breaking with certain forms of desire and meaning, the fiction derives its significance from an unstable relation between those forms and its difference. Any reading which might attempt to disengage a stable narrative and thematic structure, to restore a clearly delimited space or a singular voice, is doomed to repeat errors no less 'naïve', despite their subtlety, than those of the faun. The poem both produces and suspends narrative; it describes, speculates and blurs the distinction between feeling and thought; a lyric voice speaks and therefore becomes fragmented and depersonalized. A poem of desire and aesthetic production, it allegorizes its own production of meaning without ever achieving a totalizing, transfiguring moment; it is a deferring of intentionality and interpretation.

What matters in this poem is the fact that Mallarmé can give the lived and dreamed experience in the garden a permanent reality through the work of art by creating his own fiction as the painter Boucher did before him, and which Debussy was to do in his musical interpretation of the theme. In this poem, Mallarmé does not attempt to do the same thing he had done in 'Hérodiade', namely, proving the triumph of art over life, but introduces the reader into the struggle and process of creation. It becomes what Eliot later calls "an expression of suffering". The struggle is between the physical and the aesthetic, between the narration of the ephemeral experience, the creation of a verbal image beyond both reality and dream. Since they are both taken to be passing experiences, the reconstruction of the terms of the fiction of his art, "le souffle artificiel", the artificial breath, is achieved by a series of word substitutions, all avoiding the obvious denotations of "poet":

Suffoquant de chaleurs le matin frais s'il lutte  
Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse ma flute  
Au bosquet arrosé d'accords; et le seul vent  
Hors des deux tuyaux prompt à s'exhaler avant

Qu'il disperse le son dans une pluie aride,  
C'est, à l'horizon pas remué d'une ride,  
Le visible et serein souffle artificiel  
De l'inspiration qui regagne le ciel.<sup>64</sup>

The reader is allowed to witness the artist's skill not only in restoring the memory or dream but in watching the faun/artist - and again, as in 'Hérodiade', Mallarmé is his own central character - revising it, correcting it, recasting it, and finally breathing new substance into it, whereupon he can regain serenity and fall asleep, again to dream, but this time of what he has put into the work of art. This poem is unique in its process of fictionalizing reality so richly demonstrated in its modulations and struggles.

Looking longingly at the real woods, the faun/poet knows that his first response to the retrospective experience was the futile triumph of "la faute idéale de roses". The fault inherent in the rose is at the very heart of reality. It may be noted that if Mallarmé was thinking of rose in terms of the individual rose category rather than some other flower, he would have probably written "la faute idéale des roses", as if roses had a particular weakness not to be found in other flowers. However, the omission of the article turns the rose into a quality comparable to that of "incarnat" earlier in the poem. It becomes the rose quality that will be remembered and elaborated by later writers under other forms, such as that quality which is at the same time the beauty and perishability of reality, even in its loveliest form.<sup>65</sup> "Idéale" is referring to its purity only as it is identified in human terms, purity to be violated if it is to become triumphant in art. So, the process of turning reality or dream based on reality into the poet's fiction ends in rape here, as it does in decapitation in 'Hérodiade'. The rest of the poem is an alternation between the act of creating - "contez", "refleurir", "regonflons des souvenirs" - and sharing the process of creating with the reader, the ecstasy and frustration of one who is looking for "le la". Here again, Mallarmé borrows from music the tuning-up process that is a prelude to the harmonizing of the orchestra. At the same time he is comparing the creative power of language to the art

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<sup>64</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 562. "Stifling with warmth the cool forenoon if it strives,/No water purls not poured forth by my flute,/Upon the grove watered with chords; and the sole wind/Outside the twin pipes, quick to be exhaled before/It scatters the sound in an arid downpour,/Is, on the horizon, not stirred by a ripple,/The artificial breath, serene and visible,/Of inspiration, climbing homeward to the sky./Of inspiration, which regains the sky". B. Cook, p. 94.

<sup>65</sup> Some of Pater's, Yeats's and Eliot's poetry, amongst others, come to mind.

of painting. The intoxication, via the grapes, is a lens to the fictitious vision and the willed construction:

Tâche donc, instrument des fuites, ô maligne  
Syrinx, de refleurir aux lacs où tu m'attends  
Moi, de ma rumeur fier, je vais parler longtemps  
Des déesses; et par d'idolâtres peintures  
A leur ombre enlever encore des ceintures;  
Ainsi, quand des raisins j'ai sucé la clarté,  
Pour bannir un regret par ma feinte écarté.  
Rieur, j'élève au ciel d'été la grappe vide  
Et, soufflant dans ses peaux lumineuses, avide  
D'ivresse, jusqu'au soir je regarde au travers.<sup>66</sup>

Even better than in any of his theoretical writings, in 'L'Après-midi d'un faune' Mallarmé puts forward his notion of poetry. These lines contain the process and the product of the process simultaneously. Syrinx, invoked, becomes both the subject and the object of the work of art as it plots the work of art; in his perception of the essential synchronization of all art, Mallarmé first denotes a musical instrument, the syrinx, and then evokes painting. All the time, the reader knows that he is really talking about writing.

With Debussy's setting to music of 'L'Après-midi d'un faune', the public recognized an entirely new atmosphere. This was modern music with the tinged vaunted French qualities of grace, charm and colour, and with all the lightness and touch of transparency of texture. "Instead of concentrating on the emotional echo which the music sets up within us, we give our whole attention (aural and otherwise) to the sounds themselves, to the fascinating sequence of events actually taking place in the orchestra."<sup>67</sup> This is tantamount to calling Debussy a pioneer of the objective in musical technique. Like Valéry and Mallarmé, Debussy regards as the true stuff of art the echoes which any object starts reverberating in the artist. Debussy's is the language of sense impressions refined to their utmost point, the patterns that crowd the mind on the threshold of sleep made audible. He gives little guidance as to the thematic symbols in his work but seeks instead to create evocative effects, aural

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<sup>66</sup> *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 562, "Try then, instrument of my flights, oh maliciously playful? Syrinx, to reflower at lakesides where you await me./As for me, proud of the sounds I make, I will be talking for a long time to come/of the goddesses; and in idolatrous paintings/continue to remove belts from their shadow figures./And so, when I have sucked away the glow of the grapes,/to banish a regret distanced by my pretence,/laughingly I lift to the sky the empty cluster/and, blowing into its luminous skins, avidly/Seeking intoxication I look through them until dusk". B. Cook, pp. 94-5.

<sup>67</sup> Ortega y Gasset, in *El Espectador* 3 (1921), p. 56. Quoted by B. Wright, in *The Preludes of Claude Debussy* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1989), p. 41.

images with pictorial or literary associations. The melody of *L'Après-midi d'un faune* is fragmentary and vague. It demonstrates that the concept of purity is entirely compatible with a refined view of the suggestive power of the symbol. Debussy's music has no beginning or end. It emerges from silence, imposes itself without any preliminaries, 'in medias res', and then interrupting its course, continues to weave its pattern in the listener's dreams. His ideas on harmonic ambiguities, as a means of extending the range of expression, are attempts to build indefiniteness into the work. Debussy is a faithful follower of Verlaine's own principle, namely, "[r]ien que la nuance", the natural eloquence of language.

In Debussy's setting to music of Mallarmé's poem, there is a succession of motifs through which the faun's desires and dreams move in the afternoon heat. For the first time there is the exploration, in musical terms, of the lotus land, where "the poppy hangs in sleep", of that strange intangible twilight border land between dream and reality, sleeping and waking. It reproduces the essentially fleeting qualities of memory, the myriad sensations of forgotten dreams. Debussy found within his grasp the technique for which he had been groping while working on his early unpublished 'Diane au Bois' - a technique which would record the acuteness of the momentary sensation, sacrificing dramatic action to the long exploration of inner feelings. Here, for the first time in music, there is no thematic development, no thread of logical discourse. Instead, there is a freely sensuous flow of harmony and a new elusive poetry of instrumental timbre, uncannily depicting the happy dance of the faun prior to its rape. It is a continuous process of transformation, fragmentation and regeneration of harmonic and melodic particles.

As it occurs in Four Quartets, dance also demonstrates the belief in the primacy and purity of movement over the limitations and failures of language for conveying meanings of a certain order. The harmony of sense and spirit achieved by the dance is first manifested in the microcosm:

The trilling wire in the blood  
Sings below inveterate scars  
Appeasing long forgotten wars.  
The dance along the artery  
The circulation of the lymph  
Are figured in the drift of stars  
Ascend to summer in the tree  
We move about the moving tree

In light upon the figured leaf  
And hear upon the sodden floor  
Below, the boarhound and the boar  
Pursue their pattern as before  
But reconciled among the stars.

The natural rhythms of the biological process, the pattern of actions in the natural world and the movement of the stars are reconciled in the dance that is itself an articulation of life. "The dance along the artery/ ... /among the stars" implies that "the way" the world and all that is in it moves is thus a dance, from the earth's axle outward in life, vegetable or animal, towards the stars. In the next stanza the reader realizes what it is that reconciles the warring elements, "the still point", which draws the dance to itself by what St Augustine calls "the gravity of grace". Experiencing the reconciliation "among the stars", the speaker then moves to his linguistic dismissal expressed in the section which deals with the "still point of the turning world". While the function of the dance may be interpreted through words, the meaning may be grasped as the logic of choreography, which in Four Quartets is the "still point". Here, the image of the dance is eternal because of its stillness, representing concord and unity. It is motion in a state of stasis. In this section, Eliot designates the articulation of the fundamental duality of dance, namely, its combined poetic (or metaphorical) function and its corporeal, uninscribed nature. As in Mallarmé, Eliot's perception is of the dual, oxymoronic character of dance. Like the ensemble of their text, the dancers act, for the poet, as a negative poetic sign. The absence-in-presence of the dancing figures implies a presence-in-absence of the literary text.

At the end of the quiet, yet intense dance of shadows in the garden, where the light is glittering on non-existent water, a lotus arises. The connotations of the lotus are, presumably, part Eastern/mystical, part sexual. However, the poetic context seems to diminish both connotations in favour of something more capricious, more private and more fully aesthetic. An elegant lotus rose in just such a fashion some fifty years before Eliot was writing 'Burnt Norton'. During the 1880's, Mallarmé wrote what is arguably one of his best prose poems, 'Le nénuphar blanc'.<sup>68</sup> This ravishing, if attenuated, piece of word-music, is certainly an articulation of a clear dream. It speaks with the consciousness of a man rowing quietly up river one fine Sunday, who

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<sup>68</sup> "The White Water-Lily - or Lotus", *nénuphar* meaning both water-lily and lotus.

is stopped by some obstruction in the stream and realizes that he has been brought to the place he started out that morning to visit, the estate of a friend's friend:

With a glance I shall gather up the virginal absence scattered through this solitude and steal away with it; just as, in memory of a special site, we pick one of those magical, still unopened water-lilies which suddenly spring up there and enclose, in their deep white, a nameless nothingness made of unbroken reveries, of happiness never to be - made of my breathing now, as it stops for fear that she may show herself. Steal silently away, rowing bit by bit, so that the illusion may not be shattered by the stroke of oars.<sup>69</sup>

The 'White Water-Lily' is not likely to be forgotten by anyone who has once responded to it. It lives in the memory as a symbol of random but steady, if unfulfilled, upward progress, with its glittering light, its shadowy water, its packed abstract syntax uncoiling like the river itself, for the mind to drown in it and rise again like the dancing movement of the rising water-lily. It is this last symbol which the reader is most likely to take away from the passage, namely, Mallarmé's perfected symbol of a happiness never to be, the perfect flower absent from any bouquet.

For Mallarmé, "toute âme est un mélodie, qu'il s'agit de renouer; et pour cela, sont la flûte ou la viole de chacun".<sup>70</sup> Mallarmé saw the dancer in linguistic terms as a sign, a metaphor:

A savoir que la danseuse *n'est pas une femme qui danse*, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu'elle *n'est pas une femme*, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme, glaive, coupe, fleur, etc, *et qu'elle ne danse pas*, suggérant, par le prodige de raccourcis ou d'élangs, avec une écriture corporelle ce qu'il faudrait de paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction : poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe.<sup>71</sup>

The dancer, with her gesture, is pure symbol. From her motion she evokes the idea, sensation, all that one need ever know. She exists in harmonious life and her rhythm reveals the soul of her imagined being. The legendary dance of Hérodias is transformed into a gradual fixation into immobility, as eyes become jewels and darkness willed to be a permanent atmospheric condition. She awaits a metamorphosis that will distance ineffective dreams and turn useless flesh into cold, yet enduring, stone. Valéry also argues that "l'instant engendre la forme, et la forme

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<sup>69</sup> B. Cook, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Divagations* (Paris: Charpentier, 1940), p. 241. Quoted by A.G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895*. 1950. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 151.

<sup>71</sup> *Documents*, p. 304. "That is to say that the dancer *is not a dancing woman*, for those juxtaposed motives that *it is not a woman*, but a metaphor summarizing one of the elementary aspects of our form, a two-edged sword, a cup, flower, etc, *and that she does not dance*, suggesting through the marvel of fore-shortenings and surges, by means of a corporeal writing what is needed as paragraphs in prose in the form of a dialogue as well as descriptive, to express in the compilation: a poem free from any device imposed upon it by the pen-pushers".

fait voir l'instant".<sup>72</sup> In Four Quartets, gathered into one condensed and multi-faceted image, are all of Eliot's positive connotations of the dance - unifying, timeless and transcendent. In expressing the otherwise inexpressible, the dance is essential as pure art. At this point in 'Burnt Norton', mythic, religious and artistic overtones merge in a singular image that is itself a unity of thought and expression. The assertion that "there we have been, but I cannot say where" does not diminish the experience but reinforces the persistence of a search for its repetition.

In 'East Coker', the cyclical rhythms in nature and men's lives, echoing the Ecclesiastes, introduces the vision that takes the reader back to the world of Thomas Elyot in the sixteenth century. It is midsummer's eve, traditional time of seasonal rites when the process in nature and human process are jointly celebrated in the sacramental "daunsinge". It is a vision, a ritual that can be viewed, if only one can keep one's distance:

In that open field  
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,  
On a Summer midnight, you can hear the music  
Of the weak pipe and the little drum  
And see them dancing around a bonfire  
The association of man and woman  
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie -  
A dignified and commodious sacrament.  
Two and two, necessarye coniunction,  
Holding eche other by the hand or the arm  
Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire  
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,  
Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter  
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,  
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth  
Mirth of those long since under earth  
Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,  
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing  
As in their living in the living seasons ...

The vision of the harmonious dancing, with its emphasis on dignity, conjunction and concord, encloses within it as well the necessary life rhythms of birth, coupling and death. The final words of the passage, "[d]ung and death", are an inexorable reminder of man's destiny. While reassuring man of his place in the cyclical pattern of nature, this is insufficient without the uplifting vision of his union with God. In 'East Coker' II, the speaker, ruminating on his forefather who "... deceived us/Or deceived themselves", and observing the phenomenon of succession, echoes the theme of the

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<sup>72</sup> Cahiers, I, p. 57.

'danse macabre', "[t]he houses are all gone under the sea./The dancers are all gone under the hill." The speaker prepares himself for "a further union, a deeper communion", not yet achieved. It could only come with the experience of St John of the Cross, in the dark night of the soul, and until then, "the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting". Only then, "the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing". The image of the transcendent dance appears with greatest intensity in the final words, "[w]e must be still and still moving/Into another intensity."

In 'East Coker' III, the speaker says, "I said to my soul, be still/ ... /And the stillness the dancing." The richness of sound is matched by an equivalent richness of meaning. Eliot's association of the "still point" and the "stillness" with the circling of the dance is very strong. The symbol of the "dance" is itself profoundly Symbolist. Apart from Mallarmé's preoccupation with the art of the dance, Valéry makes expressive movement a central symbol in art. Eliot's phrase "the stillness the dancing" has an antecedent in Valéry's dancer, who would "rest motionless in the very centre of her movement".<sup>73</sup> What is immediately striking in Valéry's work is the extraordinary strength of will, the constancy that makes him pursue the desired encounter of the "mystique" and the "rationaliste" he contained, the "intérieur" and "extérieur" of the self. As it appears in 'East Coker', the dance constitutes an ideal sign. Eliot's belief in the ideality of dance is also determined by his perception of the dance sign as being not only a representation but also a symbolic embodiment of whatever ideal form of beauty the spectator might interpret it to represent. In 'East Coker', dance signs seem generally to constitute their own referents; they do not merely name, copy or suggest but actually materially incorporate what they signify. In her interesting article 'Dance Imagery in "Four Quartets"',<sup>74</sup> M. Wigman stresses the immediacy and directness with which the dancers in 'East Coker' convey what he calls "man's innermost emotions and need for communication" while J.L. Hanna in her article 'The Language

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<sup>73</sup> *L'Ame et la danse*, trans. by J. Hughes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 22. When Eliot writes, as a critic, to oppose Valéry's aesthetic and moral position, he does so by using the French poet's own two symbols. He counters the symbol of the "dance" - the finite and self-regarding art - with that of the "walk" - language used purposely and philosophically. Valéry's use of the dance image in his poetry is central to L. Sélhan's argument in, 'L'Ame et la Danse de Paul Valéry', in *La Danse grecque antique* (Paris: de Boccard, 1960), pp. 273-308.

<sup>74</sup> *op. cit. Criticism*, 8 (June 1992), 27-39.

of Movement in "East Coker",<sup>75</sup> analyzes the notion of the dance in 'East Coker' as a form of communication similar to language except for its non-verbal aspect. What both writers fail to emphasize, however, is that the dance as it occurs in 'East Coker' comes across as the common impulse to resort to movement in order to externalize emotional states which cannot be externalized by rational means. In this sense, rational means are evidently those of language, since dance is here perceived as an intuitive reaction which is too deep for words.

The long-finished peasant dance that appears in the second Quartet is recollected on a vacant hillside. It is first presented as a metaphor, or rather as a seeming catachresis, since the image of the dance and the still point are so hard to acquaint, far less fuse. The catachresis succeeds through the merging of negative semantic and semiotic elements, affecting the reader through rhythm and meaning simultaneously. Thus, the repetition of negative signs in 'Burnt Norton' - "neither/nor", "not", "no" - orders the semantic elements - "arrest", "decline", "fixity", "movement", "ascent" - which are themselves divided between positive and negative significance, to produce the paragraph's rise to a climax, namely, "there/ ... /there.... / ... there". Such passages show the uses Eliot makes of negation to achieve the "... sentence that is right (where every word is at home,/Taking its place to support the others,/ ... /The complete consort dancing together"), as he concludes in 'Little Gidding'.<sup>76</sup>

The motif of fire is orchestrated with great skill in 'Little Gidding', and serves to illuminate an important use of the dance as ritual. Among its several connotations are the tragic and destructive fire that laid waste Nicholas Ferrar's shrine in the middle of the seventeenth century; the Pentecostal fire when the words of God were received by the disciples; the fire of Dante's Hell, as well as the purifying fire of Arnaut Daniel's sacrifice. As the original element from which all the others were created, fire is unity-in-diversity or, in mystical parlance, an emblem of God's love.

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<sup>75</sup> op. cit. *PMLA*, 16 (April 1994), 41-55.

<sup>76</sup> Eliot, like the junior Bailey in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "rendered [himself] somewhat obscure ... by reason ... of a redundancy of negatives" (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, 1933) p. 179. In the end, few poets have been clearer in their vision. The reader's understanding in reading him depends, finally, upon our understanding his ways of negation.

Dante's words to the speaker in 'Little Gidding', comparable to Dante's own confrontation with fellow-poets in the 'Commedia', occur in the modern Inferno, namely, London in the aftermath of an air raid. The sum of Dante's advice is to emulate the experience of Arnaut Daniel, another poet:

'From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit  
Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire  
Where you must move in measure like a dancer.'

In this condensed image are contained all suggestions developed in the whole of Four Quartets, namely, sacrifice, ritual, rebirth and the promise of eternity. However, what cannot be slighted is the implication, as well, for the artist and his art. Merging in the mind is Dante, Arnaut Daniel and Eliot, all poets, whose consuming preoccupation was the creation of "a pattern of timeless moments". Here, the movements "in measure" affirm their power to free the poet from change, chaos and death. Dance, at once ritual and art, individual thought and action, formalizes the purgatorial process. Arnaut Daniel's dance is a route to the "still point" and is not, the speaker protests, "an incantation/To summon the spectre of a Rose", a ballet in the form of a 'danse macabre'. 'Little Gidding' concludes with the search unending but, interestingly, the moments of awareness, which are elusive yet precious, will be captured not only in the rose garden but also "in the stillness/Between two waves of the sea". This will carry the reader back not only to the experience of 'The Dry Salvages' but to Prufrock's momentary vision of the mermaids.

In the non-rhyming 'terza rima' passage in 'Little Gidding', Eliot alternates 'masculine' and 'feminine' syllabic line-endings to approximate the Dantean 'terza rima'. Within this fluid adaptation, his phrasing sounds at once like Dante's and like a modern mind's looking searchingly into its own motives. Therefore, the form itself dramatizes the poet's relation to the living past of his art to the present historical moment. The poet shares not only a preoccupation with the past, but also Dante's poetic technique for its re-interpretation of this past. "The true business of the artist is to refit old ships. He can say again, in his own way, only what has already been said".<sup>77</sup> The personal crisis presented tangentially in the winter images of Part I is now seen in the purgatorial encounter with a "familiar compound ghost" on a London street after an air raid. At the same time, he is facing the coming on of old age and the

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<sup>77</sup> I. Stravinsky & R. Craft, Dialogues, p. 129.

“rending pain” of knowing he can no longer mend past errors or remake himself. However, by the same token, he can recover the significant past without being able to do anything about it. The recovery is even more pointed now than in the visit to the restored site of Ferrar’s community, for this time the past is fiercely embodied in the human shape. The mercilessly articulate ghost is at once the speaker’s mirror-image and a voice out of the moral and aesthetic memory of the race, the composite voice of Dante and other poets who have formed the speaker’s mind and art, “I caught the sudden look of some dead master/... /And he a face still forming.” The compound ghost possesses the only articulate voice that can make “raids on the inarticulate” in this world, for “the communication/Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living”.

The atmosphere, so powerfully Dantean, recalls various recognition scenes<sup>78</sup> which are all significant meetings under conditions of horror. Some, especially in Dante, are full of affection and sympathy despite the circumstances. Eliot extends the feeling to imply a strange, ambiguously reciprocal identity of speaker and ghost, so that the latter is both a psychological projection of the speaker and a separate apparition. The phrasing as a whole suggests that the speaker, racked by the most vulnerable responsiveness, is a double personality in the process of formation. Under the impact of the articulate past, his sense of himself becomes eerily complex.<sup>79</sup> The ghost embodies the past meanings of the art at the point where they impinge on the present. He, rising gloomily out of all previous history, can still speak directly in the old prophetic spirit. When he does so, it is to disclose to the poet “the gifts reserved for age” that will “set a crown upon your lifetime’s effort”. It is a new litany of loss, stinging in its personal bearing of “the cold friction of expiring sense”, “the conscious impotence of rage” and “the rending pain of re-enactment” of a lifetime’s irreversible errors and harmful acts. Then, against all this crush of fatality and regret, comes the

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<sup>78</sup> It brings to mind both the ‘Inferno’ and ‘Purgatorio’, Brunetto Latini and Arnaut Daniel respectively. It also recalls Odysseus’ meeting with Tiresias in Book XI of the *Odyssey* and the way Pound, in Canto I, picks up Tiresias’s outcry at seeing Odysseus amid the shades summoned up from Erebus.

<sup>79</sup> Pound also argues that the quarrel with the present is not its vulgarity or materialism, but rather with the parochialism that confers these traits - its arrogance, self-sufficient, insular indifference to the continuing continental life of Western culture. Uninformed by the past, contemptuous of history, the present is necessarily provincial, lacking depth and richness. Having no sense of its own past, it has no sense of its own present existence or its destiny. It is one-dimensional, mindless, flat and profane.

ghost's concluding sentence singing out in a new key "[f]rom wrong to wrong/ ... /like a dancer".

The brilliant simplicity of the Dantean encounter is beautifully concentrated in this one transforming moment. Up to this point it had seemed that the whole tragic framework might be reduced to a complaint about old age and the loss of status of the poet's *métier*. The voice now reminds the reader that the realm of vision is not unremittingly infernal. In Dante's phrase, suffering can be felt as a "refining fire". The modifying clause "[w]here you must move in measure, like a dancer" implies an inspiriting value in the processes of art. The condition of this vision is still that of the "midwinter spring" movement, all desire and potentiality, though the context now is fire rather than ice. However, it is the process of poetic dialectic, "in measure, like a dancer", that has brought the reader to this new stage of civilisation. The buoyancy of this re-oriented vision is all the more remarkable when one considers that the refining fire is a form of torment. However, the major feeling is the elation of a glimmer of hope. It is supported in the closing tercet that follows in the image of daybreak and by the phrases "a kind of valediction" and "the blowing of the horn". At the very end, the reader is back on the "disfigured street" of the bombed city, as desolate as before and yet liberated from the utterly charnel-house atmosphere at the start of the episode. Dante's purgatorial image of "refining fire" and the smoking rubble of Baudelaire's city have been irrevocably linked.

Within the general tradition of dance imagery, the reader experiences in Four Quartets a complex set of correlatives. When one recalls that the dance as symbolic gesture has been one of man's earliest recorded archetypes,<sup>80</sup> one is able to appreciate its long history from primitive rite to religion to art. Central to its variant connotations is the significance of the dance as a beneficent ritual or imitation of god, totem or hero, in which the re-enactment of a paradigmatic gesture effects a union with the divine being. As Ernest Cassirer notes, "it is no mere play that the dancer in a mythical drama is enacting; the dancer *is* the god, he *becomes* the god".<sup>81</sup> Therefore, from its beginnings, the intrinsic qualities of the dance are not just compression, concentration

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<sup>80</sup> The cave drawings of the pre-dynastic Egyptians testify to this.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted by E.M. Baeten, in The Magic Mirror: Myth's Abiding Power (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 191.

and isolation from the commonplace world but identification with a life-giving, inviolable force.

Eliot's use of the dance image in Four Quartets results in his distinctive contribution towards the "juxtaposition and unification of opposites",<sup>82</sup> the unity-in-diversity inherent in both the theology of the Christian mystics and the philosophy of the French Symbolist poets. The paradoxes of light and darkness, end and beginning, garden and desert, within the mystical context that Eliot is writing, are also synonyms. More than a dramatic device, the polarity of the images emphasizes "the horror, the horror" in the midst of man's noblest reach for the "impossible union". In this way, the dance image contributes to the total design of Eliot's poetry from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' to Four Quartets.

### **The Rose Garden as a Powerful Leitmotif**

*Language is a perpetual Orphic song  
Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng  
Of thoughts and forms, which else shapeless and senseless were.*<sup>83</sup>

"Leitmotif, which like myth is vibration, is capable of attaining what in nature is most universal and consequently most elusive – namely its internal force".<sup>84</sup> Leitmotif, a musical phenomenon inherited by the Symbolists from Wagner, is a strong technical device that Eliot exploits to the full, particularly in The Waste Land. In Four Quartets, Eliot makes use of leitmotif in a more subtle and profound way than he does in his earlier poetry. Like The Waste Land, Four Quartets operates at several levels. The symbol of the rose garden, as it appears as a motif for the first time and then repeatedly as leitmotif, both alludes to, represents, and is identified with three basic dimensions of experience. The first is the dimension of ordinary awareness, which Eliot characterizes as distraction. The second is the dimension of depth-awareness, which is exemplified by the special moment in the rose garden as that moment is confronted in its original ambiguity. The third is the explicitly religious, ultimately Christian, dimension of awareness, exemplified by the transfiguration through which

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<sup>82</sup> R. Crowley, 'Towards the Poetics of Juxtaposition: 'L'Après-midi d'un faune', *Yale French Studies*, 54 (June 1977), 33-43 (p. 37).

<sup>83</sup> P.B. Shelley, 'Prometheus Unbound', IV. 415-18, in The Complete Poetical Works, ed. by T. Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 439.

<sup>84</sup> Gauguin, 'Lettre' no. 170, quoted by I. Stravinsky and R. Craft in Dialogues, p. 56.

the special moment becomes a moment of epiphany. It is in this last dimension that the Incarnation is understood as the reality leading an affirmative orientation towards temporal existence.

“After the symphonies of Beethoven it was certain that the poetry that lies too deep for words does not lie too deep for music”.<sup>85</sup> Four Quartets is the culmination of twentieth-century symbolism. The title proposes that the poem resemble music. Specific lines and passages activate the semantic suggestions and emotional overtones of words while precluding determinate meaning. As already discussed, Eliot impedes denotation by verbal contradiction and vagueness, an ambiguous or incomplete grammar, a deliberate failure of logical sequence and paradox. Writing about Wagner’s philosophy of music and the mysticism inherent in Four Quartets, J. Gatta argues that Eliot’s “over-riding preoccupation with religion” is compatible with Wagner’s “musical idolatry”.<sup>86</sup> The author fails to point out a major difference between the two, namely, that Eliot’s concern in Four Quartets is with Christian belief while Wagner’s is with pagan myths. As will be argued later in this chapter, Wagnerian influence can be strongly felt in the complexity of the leitmotif as it appears both as thematic substance and thematic symbolism.

A salient feature prevalent in Four Quartets is the leitmotif. This poem carries the leitmotif to unparalleled heights. For instance, the motif of the rose garden is employed by Eliot as a concept. By incremental repetition of the term he gives intensity even to the abstract diction of the poem. The music inherent in this particular leitmotif is not easily understood in terms of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structures. Not unlike the Eb chord of the *Prelude* to Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*, more than an actual melodic strain the music in the rose garden leitmotif comes across as an acoustic idea. It can be understood as an acoustic trace of the transposition between different levels of linguistic discourse. The rose garden as it appears in Four Quartets is valuable as a representational metaphor whose value lies in its ability to enable interpretation. The interpreter has the opportunity of investigating the discursive field in which the enabling metaphor is situated, and of

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<sup>85</sup> G.B. Shaw, The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on ‘The Nibelung’s Ring, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (New York: Dover, 1923, rpt 1967), p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> J. Gatta, ‘Spheric and Silent Music in Eliot’s “Four Quartets”’, *Ren*, 32 (1981), 167-79 (p. 172).

trying to correlate what seem to be noteworthy features of the field to the musical processes inherent in the leitmotif. This correlation moves in two directions. It condenses, as it were, the discursive field into the music, and at the same time reinterprets the discourse by means of the music. The music and the discourse do not enter into a text-context relationship, but rather into a relationship of dialogical exchange.<sup>87</sup>

For a clear understanding of the rose garden leitmotif in Four Quartets a discussion, in some detail, of the leitmotif as it occurs in Wagner would be relevant. The first striking feature of which everyone thinks first when Wagner's operatic technique is discussed is the leitmotif. Wagner was very much aware that, though the leitmotif idea created a more intimate and more specific connection between music and text than had ever been thought possible, it alone was not sufficient to produce a structural whole in opera. By filling the score with obvious motivic references, the higher structural postulate that the compositional course has to be formed in thematic consistency and thematic logic was by no means entirely fulfilled.

In this view, one sees in Wagner's operas an almost double thematic picture not unlike that encountered in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*: a surface picture formed by the frequent reiteration of the less obvious picture brought about by the normal imitations, variations and transformations of the basic material. Although the popular interest in Wagner's structural conceptions is mainly centred on the external leitmotif technique, his achievement of forging an opera into one architectural whole by inner thematic consistency is of equal importance. In practice, the two principles cannot always be clearly distinguished. With characteristic brilliance Wagner, on the one hand, whenever possible allows leitmotif to emerge as parts of the organic thematic design and, on the other hand, endows ordinary thematic phrases with leitmotivic effects. In this way, Wagner develops a convincing entity from two phenomena that are separate in principle, namely, thematic structure and thematic symbolism.

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<sup>87</sup> Here I am using the term "dialogical" in the Bakhtinian sense, a process in which different modes of expression at once presuppose, question and interpret each other. See M. Bakhtin's essay 'Discourse in the Novel' in The Dialogical Imagination, trans. by C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Texas: Austin, 1981), pp. 56-79.

A case in point of this double effect occurs in his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. The famous 'Tristan chords' with which the opera opens are built around a tonal centre with a profusion of 'appoggiaturas' which provides the tonal ambiguity for which this opening music is notable. They are mainly constructed of manifold suspensions whose resolution itself becomes another suspension resulting in a forward drive of unsatisfied emotional and psychological 'angst'. The opening chords are spread over a series of three almost identical groups, in each of which the implied tonal basis forms the accented centre. The chord itself is a summation of two fourths, one placed above the other. In each chord one fourth is an augmented, the other a perfect. The chords of the three groups, the three 'Tristan chords', show a particular relationship. The lower part of the first chord, F-B, appears as the upper part of the second chord (now with an altered accidental reading F#-B). Analogously, the lower part of the second chord, Ab-D becomes the upper part of the third chord, now en-harmonically notated as G#-D. In this way, the whole opening sounds as though it were released, in a widening cycle, from the first chord. Adding to the atmosphere of mystic symbolism that emanates from this shaping is another feature. The melodic course of each of the three groups is formed by two lines, of which one mirrors the other in contrary motion. For instance, in the first group the two lines read F, E, D#, D, and G#, A, A#, B. If one were to suppose that this was the composer's intention, namely, to express the programmatic symbolism of *Tristan und Isolde* through a shaping based on two corresponding elements - two fourths that form the harmonic utterance and two melodic lines that are a shape and its inversion - he certainly accomplished it in a construction of almost hypnotic power. If these symbols were to be called leitmotifs, then one must admit that here, the leitmotif technique is carried to the very depths of the work's structure and content.

From the beginning of the opera, one may turn to the end. One may ask, does the opera's musical and dramatic resolution, the so-called *Liebestod*, bear any structural connection to its beginning? One can detect that the *Liebestod* grows as a melodic radiation from these same opening chords. Comparing the series of three chords as they appear at the beginning of the opera with the melodic rise of the *Liebestod* one realizes that the picture of the *Liebestod* is an absolute image of the scheme expressed

by the three chords.<sup>88</sup> The thematic symbol of these ceaselessly interlacing fourths - theme and symbol are indeed one in this work - reaches its climax in the *Liebestod*. However, one finds it throughout the whole work as the structural basis of the opera's most emphatic parts. This is symbolism in utter intensity. When the opera reaches its very end, the mystic chord sounds once more, together with a melodic line mirroring the pattern of the work's opening, now at last resolving the preceding tensions into a final harmony. Thus, the reader becomes aware that the core of Wagner's leitmotif symbolism is a method of thematic forming which not only is of inexorable strictness but, in addition, has the capacity of creating musical form. Whenever and wherever the thematic and symbolic evolution of the work coincide most intensely, the operatic strength and effect of the whole are at their peak.

In Four Quartets, the rose garden at the start of 'Burnt Norton' is a formal one in which paths are laid out. As the protagonist moves through the garden he follows what Eliot calls a "formal pattern". From this point on, the rose garden and all it stands for becomes the generating theme of a symphonic web. The texture and the orchestration of the language here are already hardly separable. The rose garden leitmotif does not appear as a repeated idea as the "wind" does in 'Gerontion' for instance, or "water" appears in The Waste Land. It is an idea so capable of being developed that, like the famous *Prelude of Tristan und Isolde* discussed above, it points to that future which is our present. Until 'Little Gidding', when "the fire and the rose are one", the thematic and symbolic recurrence of the rose garden leitmotif fills the reader with emotional and psychological tension. Like the *Tristan Prelude* it deprives the reader of any respite. The absence of any resolution until the very end in both Wagner's opera and Eliot's poem fills the listener with that sense of yearning for fulfilment and craving for peace respectively which are the emotional keynotes of the whole of *Tristan* and Four Quartets.

The entire structure of Four Quartets is built on the assumption that the language of general depth-awareness only hints at the 'Reality' disclosed more fully through expressive language which is, at root, Christian. For this reason, the language of Four Quartets may be understood as depth language committed to a particular view of

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<sup>88</sup> On close reading of the score, the reader realizes that only one accidental is omitted. Otherwise, the succession and pitch are preserved to the last detail, although in an enharmonically changed notation.

reality. As such it points to depth experiences common to all human lives and utilizes their latent power in order to part the veil of ordinary awareness and complacency. It then guides the reader to a recognition of the truth of the Christian interpretation of time and life as partially glimpsed in those moments of awareness. It is by no means arbitrary that Eliot at first prevents the reader from grasping the full significance of such passages as the one depicting the special moment in the rose garden. He is constructing a poetic metaphor of how, even in our depth experiences, “we had the experience but missed the meaning”, and of why, in Eliot’s view, we must be “undeceived of our prior understanding”. The failure of language frustrates the search for meaning. The whole exploration embarked upon by Four Quartets is an approach to the meaning missed in experience. It is a meaning that can only be found in the redeemed word. As such, this exploration poetically “imitates” a meditative analysis and self-examination of the kind that Eliot regards as preparatory to hearing the Christian kerygma.

In the garden of ‘Burnt Norton’, what emerges is the special moment of vision. Neither the reader nor the “we” of the poem can apprehend the full significance of this vision yet. However, the experience itself has an immediate and powerful effect. Having in mind the questions raised in the philosophical introduction, moreover, the reader will be aware of a latent, larger significance. The sudden filling of the pool with water, the sunlight, the lotus, the heart of light, the children - all these will seem to betoken an experience of fulfilled purpose, meaningful time and of communion with a higher order of reality than is revealed to ordinary perception. In asking the nature and significance of the experience described, however, the reader cannot isolate one specific answer. The answer appropriate to the moment is to be found in the musical web of associated thoughts and feelings the poem is to spin out. As Four Quartets progresses, the rose garden as a recurring motif adds new and deeper levels of significance, where old meanings are exposed and altered. The “still point of the turning world”, described in ‘Burnt Norton’ II, comes to be identified as the source of the garden’s “graced moment.”<sup>89</sup> The death-like emptiness to which “we” descend in ‘Burnt Norton’ III suggests that taking the “way up” through special moments like that in the garden also entails taking the “way down” into a state that is the opposite

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<sup>89</sup> L.B. Salaman, ‘The Orchestration of “Burnt Norton”’, *UTQ*, 45 (1975), 50-66 (p. 65).

of the plenitude experienced in the rose garden. It has often been claimed that in Eliot, this negative, transcendent impulse against worldly attachment, which is also anti-linguistic and anti-representational, harmoniously co-exists with a more positive vision. For instance, Helen Gardner, citing Eliot's own epigraph from Heraclitus on how "the way up and the way down are one and the same", comments on how

Christianity has always found room in itself for both types of spiritual experience: that which finds all nature in theophany, and that which feels the truth of ... 'Deus Absconditus'. This deliberate descent into darkness out of twilight is 'one way'. It is the same, the poet tells us, as the other: the undeliberate ascent into the world of light which we read of in the first movement.<sup>90</sup>

Gardner here refers to 'Burnt Norton' III, one of several moments in the poem where Eliot himself invokes this ancient notion of "two ways":

Descend lower, descend only  
Into the world of perpetual solitude,  
World not world, but that which is not world,  
Internal darkness, deprivation  
And destitution of all property,  
Desiccation of the world of sense,  
Evacuation of the world of fancy,  
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;  
This is the one way, and the other  
Is the same, not in movement  
But abstention from movement; while the world moves  
In appetency, on its metallated ways  
Of time past and time future.

Eliot's witty reference to memories of the London subway, where the stairs offer a "movement" of descent while the elevator provides "abstention from movement", may disguise the more profound homology between them. As in St John of the Cross, whom this passage closely recalls, the negative way not only takes precedence over any positive one, but finally absorbs it. St John, too, calls on the soul to divest itself of all "property" as attachment, of all involvement in the "world of sense",<sup>91</sup> and finally even of spiritual things. This context dramatizes how affirmative theology is in many ways inextricable from a more forceful negative theology of greater cultural impact.

Eliot's two "ways" are the "same" because both are kinds of negative ways. The "positive" way has no independent status. This is the case even in the apparent vision of fullness offered by the rose garden in 'Burnt Norton' I. There, the music is "unheard" and the eyebeam is "unseen". The vision of the pool is reached "along an

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<sup>90</sup> *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 162.

<sup>91</sup> 'Ascent of Mount Carmel', in *The Complete Works of St John of the Cross*, pp. 62, 65.

empty alley”, the pool itself is “drained” and “dry”. Only against this emptiness does the “heart of light” come forth. It does so to disappear at once, and in a way that emphasizes its contrast with the life of world and time that it for a moment eclipsed. “Human life cannot bear very much reality” the poet intones, where “reality” seems to refer to the vision achieved only by the emptying of the natural world, while loss of reality occurs with the return to the world of time, a world which has been less redeemed than un-masked. As ‘Burnt Norton’ concludes, “[r]idiculous the waste sad time/Stretching before and after”.<sup>92</sup> Despite promises to the contrary, the affirmative vision turns out to be negative. The relation between true fullness and the world proves to be one of contrast, the “positive” being formulated in terms that negate the world, and finally serves to underscore the world’s emptiness. This contrast, however, is not due to a split between Eliot’s aesthetic and religious intentions, between his “vision” and “doctrine”.<sup>93</sup> Eliot’s intentions seem to move away from “the illusions of the temporal world” and towards becoming “almost wholly absorbed into a world of transcendent Spirit”.<sup>94</sup> Four Quartets illustrates how within the tradition the balance between affirmative and negative is unstable, and how the negative theologically takes precedence over the affirmative.<sup>95</sup>

This third movement of the poem is followed by a meditation offering yet another perspective on the rose garden experience:

Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis  
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray  
Clutch and cling?  
Chill  
Fingers of yew be curled  
Down on us? 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.

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<sup>92</sup> In T.S. Eliot: The Invisible Poet, p. 127, H. Kenner’s view that the timeless moment renders “irrelevant” the “waste sad time” of ordinary life hardly reveals a positive redemptive power.

<sup>93</sup> This is what is essentially argued by G. Hough in ‘Vision and Doctrine in “Four Quartets”’, *CritQ*, 15 (Summer 1973), 107-27 (p. 114).

<sup>94</sup> Quoted by P. Murray, pp. 86-7. This tendency is already evident in Eliot’s college notes on E. Underhill’s Mysticism. It re-emerges in such later writings as the essay on Pascal, where Eliot describes the three orders of nature, mind and charity as “discontinuous; the higher is not implicit in the lower as in an evolutionary doctrine it would be”.

<sup>95</sup> Nor is this precedence restricted to mystical writers. Aquinas, despite his insistence that within the limits of human power God is knowable with a valid knowledge, still begins his great opus by declaring that “[w]e cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not”. Summa Theologiae, ed. by Gilby & O’Brien, 60 vols (London & New York: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1964), I, p. 1.

Prayer-like, this is a passage of delicate beauty and of lyrical tentative affirmation. It is filled with the sort of hidden symbolism first encountered in the rose garden scene, but it is more specifically Christian in the images it employs. Given the nature of the preceding poetry, the reader is now able to place the images conceptually as well as emotionally. Here, there is no longer "rose" and "lotus", but "sunflower" and "clematis". Because the sun has been identified with the centre of things, with the "still point", the flower of the sun may be taken to be a sign of divine grace. Other images are similarly suggestive of Christian symbolism. The yew, long a symbol of death as well as of eternity, may point to the "necessity for death or a spiritual end to come before birth or a spiritual beginning", as in 'Ash-Wednesday'.<sup>96</sup> The Kingfisher (Halcyon), is mythically associated with a tale of burial and resurrection through divine intervention, so that it may be seen as a disguised emblem of Christ, whose light answers in earthly form the light that abides at "the still point of the turning world". By the end of 'Burnt Norton' a pattern has emerged. The reader is necessarily mindful of the Christian story when a recapitulation of the major themes begins, ordering them in such a way that one may find in them a new meaning. The secular key has been changed into a religious one that "restores the meaning" that was always present but not to be discerned, apart from a death of the ordinary mode of experiencing and perceiving.

This process of the restoration and discovery of meaning is evident, moreover, in relation to the rose garden in particular. From the point of view of the conclusion of 'Burnt Norton', the elements of this passage take an additional significance. Previously hidden motifs are brought into the foreground, as the reader becomes aware of their larger context. The rose is functioning (as it does in the whole tradition of European literature) "as an emblem of both profane love and mystic ecstasy."<sup>97</sup> Similarly, the lotus can now be taken to imply both a physical and metaphysical consummation of experience, the latter being identical with spiritual enlightenment. Whereas water is to be associated with spiritual birth and with a death leading to that birth, sunlight (both fire and light) can now be understood as the physical and divine source that illumines, purifies and unifies. The concluding lines of Four Quartets

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<sup>96</sup> M.A. Eiles, "The Infirm Glory of the Positive Hour": Reconversion in "Ash-Wednesday", *YER*, 9:3 (1988), 106-18 (p. 111).

<sup>97</sup> R. Barton, 'T.S. Eliot's secret garden', *NQ*, 31 (December 1984), 512-14.

point to the eschatological time “[w]hen the tongues of flame are in-folded/Into the crowned knot of fire/And the fire and the rose are one”.

In ‘East Coker’ there emerges a different sense of what one is looking for when one seeks the redemption of time. Moments of epiphany such as that in the rose garden are no longer dwelt on with such feelings of nostalgia, regret and sadness as they were in ‘Burnt Norton’, for it now appears that their isolated intensity is but a beginning point, “[h]ome is where one starts from/ ... /old stones that cannot be deciphered”. Thus, the reader’s “first world”, symbolized by the paradisiacal garden of ‘Burnt Norton’, can never be fully his. It can also never be a fruitful point of departure unless he recognizes its connection with death and with those who have gone before. This realization casts a revealing light on the closing lines of ‘Burnt Norton’, which seem to summon the reader to a perpetual pursuit of the timeless rose garden moment, “[s]udden in a shaft of sunlight/ ... /Stretching before and after”. These lines stand in marked contrast to the above passage from ‘East Coker’ which continues that “[l]ove is most nearly itself/ ... /through the dark cold and the empty desolation”. It is necessary to journey beyond here and now, through the dark cold and empty desolation, because only in reaching one’s “end” does one discover a “beginning”. This is also what is meant in ‘East Coker’ III, where Eliot writes about “[t]he laughter in the garden/ ... /Of death and birth”.

With this in mind it seems impossible to interpret the speaker’s desire for “a lifetime burning in every moment” as a desire perpetually to experience the moment “where all is always now”, the pure bliss of the rose garden. The idea of burning is commonly associated with love and ecstasy so that the vision of the rose garden rapture is naturally summoned to mind at this point and its apparent desirability considered. However, it is summoned in order to be re-appraised. The reader now realizes that the hope that this sort of burning intensity might be prolonged indefinitely is childish, being based on a wish to remain at the “beginning”. Hence, the reader is driven to find a second and more profound level of understanding of Eliot’s meaning. Here, the connotations of “burning” that have to do not only with love but also with fire and purgation become predominant. Also, the framework for this new understanding is that established in ‘East Coker’ IV, where the images of

roses and burning are associated with “purgatorial fires/Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars”.

‘East Coker’ establishes the Christian context of interpreting significant experience. The Christian content, although certainly alluded to, largely remains to be revealed in the later poems.<sup>98</sup> ‘The Dry Salvages’ supplies much of the positive content missing from ‘East Coker’. Indeed, this poem provides the fullest conceptual articulation of the meaning of Incarnation to be found in any of the Quartets, namely, “the moments of agony/ ... /With such permanence as time has”. This statement amounts to a major re-interpretation of the meaning of the rose garden motif, for it would be hard to imagine a more radical rejection of the notion that moments of transcendent happiness could ever be sufficient to redeem time. If agony is no less enduring than happiness, there is no justification for assuming that even the most extraordinary happiness can compensate for the grief or guilt inevitable in life, or that such happiness is somehow more real than suffering. The poem implies that somehow both happiness and suffering at once abide and are transitory, in the same way that time itself at once preserves and destroys.

It is in ‘Little Gidding’ that one encounters the full transfiguration of the rose garden leitmotif. In the opening lines of the last quartet, Eliot describes a scene that completely qualifies as a counterpart to the moment in the rose garden. This is the moment of “midwinter spring” experienced on the road to ‘Little Gidding’. In describing this latter moment, Eliot uses what R.L. Brett calls an “over-arching metaphor of a paradoxical season of life-in-death”<sup>99</sup> that is at once appropriate to the Christian proclamation of the reality of Easter and Pentecost. Drawing on the central imagery of the preceding poems, Eliot transforms it in such a way as to suggest how, having put aside one’s former “sense and motion”, one might discover the ultimate purpose behind one’s temporal quest.

Comparing the first twenty lines of ‘Little Gidding’ I with the rose garden passage in ‘Burnt Norton’, one realises that the light symbolism is used with a different effect in

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<sup>98</sup> Without that content, ‘East Coker’ seems to convey little more than the Christian kerygma that Good Friday would if it were contemplated apart from Easter.

<sup>99</sup> R.L. Brett, ‘Mysticism and Incarnation in “Four Quartets”’, *Eng*, 16 (1966), 94-9 (p. 97).

each. In 'Burnt Norton' one has the impression that the vision is not only quite fleeting but also, in some way, illusory. Moreover, the illumination physically restricted for the space filled by the light is no larger than a pool. On the other hand, in 'Little Gidding' nothing suggests that the vision may be an illusion, and here the whole landscape reflects the light, doing so with an overwhelming intensity. The difference is, perhaps, between gazing at the heart of light and being virtually in it.

Similarly, the flower symbolism is used differently in the two passages. On the one hand, the lotus and rose of 'Burnt Norton' immediately suggest a joy that is to some significant degree natural, sensual and even sexual, a joy that is youthful and, therefore, sadly inaccessible to one in the waste years to come. On the other hand, the flowering of the hedgerow in 'Little Gidding' connotes purity and a chilling beauty not so immediately appealing to the "natural" self that has not "put aside sense and notion". The petals, after all, are of snow, and to one's natural mind they seem fragile and transitory. Yet, the state of radiant illumination created by the scene declares that they partake of a time which is not our time, being "a bloom more sudden/.../Not in the scheme of generation."

Finally, the general setting of the two visionary scenes is dissimilar in a revealing way. Both locations are, as it were, waste places. One is an autumn garden with dead leaves, dry heat and a drained pool while the other is a barren winter landscape in "the dark time of the year". However, one should not overlook the fact that the first is a garden adjacent to a house whereas the second is at the end of a "rough road" and near to a chapel graveyard. Even though Eliot makes it clear in 'Burnt Norton' that it is the wrong time of the year to expect fresh-blossoming flowers and water (together with a light that renews rather than oppresses), the place itself is, nevertheless, one where a person given to nostalgia might at least come to recall such phenomena. It is where the reader could expect to feel at home and could want to re-enter "our first world".

By contrast, in 'Little Gidding', the place and time speak of death. The site is that of a historic religious community now largely in ruins. Marked by a tombstone and the "dull façade" of a chapel, it is to be found at the end of a journey, when one no longer knows what to expect. The Christian irony is, then, that the vision in the rose garden

is one that turns out to be elusive and in some sense illusory. The garden itself is discovered to be a place from which one must be expelled. On the other hand, 'Little Gidding' is where one ultimately discovers one's purpose. Whereas the rose garden could offer one but a moment "in and out of time", a moment "unattended" because not understood, the place of apparent death offers one a genuinely timeless apprehension of time's meaning, "[h]ere, the intersection of the timeless moment/Is England and nowhere." The first place, therefore, corresponds to that beginning in which lies one's end, while the second is that end in which can be found one's beginning, "[h]e who would save his life would lose it".<sup>100</sup>

As leitmotif, the moment in the rose garden is not only associated but identified with epiphany. 'Little Gidding' restores the rose garden leitmotif in an imaginative coherence of imagery. It takes up the theme of ineffable joy and modulates it into the new key of religious faith. Instead of being burdened with an intense nostalgia for something that never happened, the new vision is riveted on something evidently real and immediate that stands as a true point of illumination:

The meaning has been discovered. The kindling illumination taking place is framed within Christian theology - it is 'Pentecostal' - and the protagonist recognizes its significance.... It is the moment of baptism or rebirth, a crossing from the merely natural realm into a dimension of religious faith.<sup>101</sup>

One notices that the religious faith here incipient is social as well as private in nature. Its symbols include the church at 'Little Gidding' and the history associated with that whole community. Although this development of a social and historical dimension of faith had been anticipated by both 'East Coker' and 'The Dry Salvages', its positive implications nevertheless have not until this point in the poetry been given imaginative form. Like Wagner's '*Tristan* chord', the rose garden as symbol and leitmotif communicates before it is understood.

This last observation points to a final crucial feature of the poetry. With the moment of "midwinter spring" the reader, together with the poetic speaker, has truly arrived at a point of potential illumination because it is only now that he has a concrete metaphor embodying the major themes of Four Quartets. It is also the same metaphor for what Eliot believes to be the heart of the Christian understanding of time and

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<sup>100</sup> Mt., 10:39.

<sup>101</sup> M.J. Clark, 'Timeless Moments: The Incarnation theme in "Little Gidding"', *NQ*, 20 (1973), 330-6, (pp. 332-3).

eternity. What has been glimpsed in 'Burnt Norton', agonized over in 'East Coker' and talked about in 'The Dry Salvages' has become an imaginative reality in the poetry of 'Little Gidding'. Therefore, when the final section of the poem alludes again to the rose garden the reader has read about so early in Four Quartets, it is indeed as though he "know[s] the place for the first time", "[t]hrough the unknown, remembered gate/.../And the fire and the rose are one".

## CONCLUSION

*Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,  
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes...<sup>1</sup>*

In January 1933 Eliot interrupted his stay at Harvard to give the Johns Hopkins Turnbull Lectures, which he called 'The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry'. The third Turnbull Lecture is particularly interesting for it contains one of the autobiographical asides that gives particular poignancy to Eliot's addresses of that year:

I doubt whether, without ... Baudelaire, Corbière, Verlaine, Laforgue, Mallarmé, Rimbaud - I should have been able to write poetry at all.... Without them, the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets would have been too remote and quaint, and Shakespeare and Dante too remote and great, to have helped me.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, as Eliot went on to talk about his present notions of poetry, he made it clear that his debt had if anything increased over the years. Using phrases adapted from his 'Note sur Mallarmé' he said that the ideal literary critic should

be primarily concerned with the word and the incantation; with the question whether the poet has used the right word in the right place, the rightness depending upon both the explicit intention and an indefinite radiation of sound and sense.<sup>3</sup>

On reading the French Symbolist poets Eliot found that for these writers, who were under the influence of Wagner, the goal of poetry is itself, its music and musicality, its own intrinsic beauty. It is a delectation of the spirit, a ravishment of the soul. Baudelaire and Mallarmé were singers who were dissatisfied with their verse unless it possessed an incantatory power. Every landscape, visual and auditory, is a reflection of the state of the soul, "le vers, trait incantatoire". Poetry is not composed by naming objects but by realizing a synthesis between silence and speech. Mallarmé turns to the negative word, the word of absence, "[r]ien, cette écume, vierge vers".<sup>4</sup> The purification of the dialect of the tribe meant that the object revealed was elevated to a metaphysical value. A poem is a privileged moment when words are revealed in a new context. The making of the poem is the conversion of human experience or thought

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<sup>1</sup> A. Lord Tennyson, 'The Choric Song' from 'The Lotos-Eaters', in In Memoriam, Maud and Other Poems, ed. by J.D. Jump (London: J.M. Dent Ltd, 1974), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> op. cit. p. 287

<sup>3</sup> ibid.

<sup>4</sup> S. Mallarmé, 'Salut', in Oeuvres complètes, p.25.

into words. There ensues the ultimate discovery of the metaphor which translates and supports the experience.

This metaphor is made up of words which are pressed one against the other in a tight formula, whose music sustains the object and multiplies its beauty as they separate it in the poem from everything else. With them, the poet lives differently the limitlessness of the auditory imagination. The depth of the experience is converted into a verbal unity. Even the rhythm of the formula is an aid in this unifying process of poetry because it also answers the immemorial needs of the poet to reach some form of oneness. This dream of the poet is his torment, the realization of an experience that is fleeting, fragmentary and dispersed. The poem is not its proof but a witness to it. The words chosen by these poets for the musical rhythm of their verse give the impression of life. However, in reality, they celebrate the exaltation of a dream.

From 'Ash-Wednesday' on, the words announcing the exaltation of a dream become, in effect, a celebration of reality. Up to 'Ash-Wednesday' the poet has possessed "[k]nowledge of speech, but not of silence;/Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word".<sup>5</sup> 'Ash-Wednesday' marks the point where knowledge of silence and of the Word starts pervading Eliot's poetry with the "reborn image or word".<sup>6</sup> Eliot affirms that poetry is a musical incantation, "qui insiste sur la puissance primitive du Mot". A restoration of the primitive power of the Word enables the poet to expand his sensibility beyond the frontiers of the known world, "au-delà des limites du monde normal". At the centre of Eliot's argument, and justifying his future experiments with incantation and indeterminacy, is "le Mot" - the Word. Eliot had seen that in Mallarmé's incantatory syntax, every word dislocates the expectations of discourse with a new beginning and liberates the reality behind speech from the reader's conditioned sense of it. Installed in its "puissance primitive", the word can conduct the reader from "[le] monde tangible" to a world beyond, "[le] monde des fantômes".<sup>7</sup> In the ninth Chorus from 'The Rock' Eliot writes that out of

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<sup>5</sup> First Chorus from 'The Rock', in *The Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> 'Conclusion' to *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> 'Note sur Mallarmé et Poe', *La Nouvelle revue française*, XXVIII (1926), 525, 526.

Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that have taken  
the place of thoughts and feelings,  
There spring the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation.<sup>8</sup>

The reader observes that the syntax in this Chorus resembles the syntax in the passage from 'Purgatorio' XVI that Eliot quotes in 'Animula'. Eliot claims that Mallarmé achieves the same heights as Dante achieves in his poetry, although by a different route. Eliot joins, in effect, the symbolist poetry of incantation with Dante's poetry of Incarnation. Under the influence of the French Symbolist poets, Dante and the mediaeval mystics, Eliot's poetry suggests that a musical thought is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing, detected its elusive mystery, namely, the melody that lies hidden in it. It is the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul, whereby it exists and has a right to be here in this world. For Eliot, the deepest and most intimate things are melodious, for they naturally utter themselves in song. Song becomes a kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech which leads one to the edge of the Infinite and lets one, for a moment, gaze into that. Looking into the heart of darkness the poet sees. It is in music that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which it is destined. When inspired by what Poe calls the "poetic sentiment"<sup>9</sup> the poet creates supernal beauty. Therefore, Baudelaire's "rose" that flowers "dans les ténèbres", Mallarmé's "fleur absente de toute bouquets" and Eliot's "lotos" which "rose, quietly, quietly" are all experiences that take place in the rose-garden where the "silent flute" plays the "unheard music". It is the place where music is

heard so deeply  
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music  
While the music lasts.

"Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu, Mallarmé said of Poe; and this purification of language is not so much a progress, as it is a perpetual return to the real".<sup>10</sup> Inheriting the Symbolist notions of vagueness, connotation and incantation Eliot discovered the musical characteristics of poetry. For him the essence of music was a "striving towards an unattainable timelessness ... a yearning for the stillness of

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<sup>8</sup> op. cit. p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. by J.P. Harrison, 17 vols (New York: AMS Press, 1965), IX, p.65.

<sup>10</sup> The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, pp. 289-90.

painting or sculpture".<sup>11</sup> 'Burnt Norton', shading the word "silence" as Mallarmé does in his essay 'The Crisis of Poetry',<sup>12</sup> would put it in this way: "Words, after speech, reach/Into the silence".

Reading Eliot's poems as works written in the Symbolist tradition, the reader finds that language is used both symbolically and musically, as a kind of magic aimed at creating a state of trance from which the "unheard music", the vision of the absolute, will rise. The Symbolist philosophy fits Eliot's own aesthetic and religious beliefs well, both before and after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. In the early poetry Eliot finds in Laforgue a voice which can express his own thoughts and ideas. In the later poetry, he finds in Baudelaire and Mallarmé the means whereby he can convey the Christian's awareness of his inability to apprehend or characterize the logos - what the Chorus from 'The Rock' calls the "Light Invisible ... /Too bright for mortal vision".<sup>13</sup> For Eliot this inability is best conveyed through a poetry that trembles with force, for it is a poetry yearning towards the condition of music.

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<sup>11</sup> Introduction to Valéry's *Art poétique*, p. xiv.

<sup>12</sup> B. Cook, *Mallarmé's Selected Prose Poems, Essays and Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Tenth Chorus from 'The Rock', p. 166.

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