

TONE AND VOICE IN T. S. ELIOT'S EARLY POETRY AND PROSE

by

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## Abstract

This study examines 'tone' and 'voice' in T. S. Eliot's early poetry and prose from sociological and historical perspectives. A procedural framework is proposed drawn from recent work in the sociology of knowledge, social anthropology, and the sociology of language which helps to elucidate the specific relationship between a literary text and the concrete historical moment in which it is lodged. In this study a literary work is not conceived of as a discrete textual object, but as a signifying practice which shares with all uses of language the important feature of occurring in a particular social context that is already always deeply inscribed with meaning. The shared knowledge of this system of meaning in a society I call 'common intuitive life'. Works of art impinge on the common intuitive life as operations, of certain, specific kinds, on this system of settled significations. I argue that Eliot's early work actively aimed to subvert, disrupt, and, ultimately, transform the aesthetic and socio-political regions of the common intuitive life of bourgeois society. This study, thus, contests the traditional critical practice of assigning to Eliot's enactments of experience in his poetry and to his formulations of critical axioms in his prose a universalist or essentialist value. Instead his early work is read as embodying more limited aesthetic and cultural practices, which, on occasion, use universalist notions, like myth, instrumentally in the service of the more limited project.

"Hearing the dissonances" introduces the concept of 'tone' and explores the paradoxical services this notion has rendered Anglo-American formalism from I. A. Richards to American 'new criticism'. This chapter rethinks 'tone' sociologically. "The destruction of 'literature'" examines "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as Eliot's witty attempt to annul late Romantic notions of the 'literary' and of the verbal practices which follow from such notions. "Undermining the foundations" extends this analysis to other short poems and ends with a discussion of a fragment of *The Waste Land*, bringing to bear concepts and themes developed in previous chapters and looking forward to the fuller treatment of *The Waste Land* in Chapter Five. Chapter Four, "An incessant activity," examines tone and form in *The Sacred Wood*, discovering and interpreting the overall unity of this signal text as a function of its iconoclastic encounter with settled notions and theories of literature and literary practice. "A deep closed song; or the argument of *The Waste Land*" examines Eliot's early masterpiece as a work whose unity lies, not in putative intrinsic coherences, but in its relationship to the common intuitive life of bourgeois readers in post-Great War England. The chapter, in short, explores the poem's negative or dialogical 'unity'. The study concludes in "A very long perspective" with a brief discussion of "Ash Wednesday" and *For Lancelot Andrewes*. It assesses the mutations of tone and voice consonant with Eliot's migration in English society from an uneasy marginality to a socially and institutionally more central place.



But I have seen the birth and death of several purely literary periodicals; and I say of all of them that in isolating the concept of literature they destroy the life of literature. . . . Even the purest literature is alimanted from non-literary sources, and has non-literary consequences. Pure literature is a chimera of sensation; admit the vestige of an idea and it is already transformed. . . . We must include besides 'creative' work and literary criticism, any material which should be operative on general ideas--the results of contemporary work in history, archaeology, anthropology, even the more technical sciences when those results are of such a nature to be valuable to the man of general culture and when they can be intelligible to him.

T. S. Eliot, "The Idea of a Literary Review,"

*The New Criterion* 4 (January 1926): 3-4.

## Table of Contents

Abbreviations	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Preface	1
Chapter One: Hearing the dissonances	15
Chapter Two: The destruction of "literature"	53
Chapter Three: Undermining the foundations	97
Chapter Four: An incessant activity	157
Chapter Five: A deep closed song; or the argument of <i>The Waste Land</i>	207
Chapter Six: A very long perspective	302
Works Cited	321

## Abbreviations

<i>ASG</i>	<i>After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy</i> , 1934
<i>CP</i>	<i>Collected Poems, 1909-1962</i> , 1963
<i>FLA</i>	<i>For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order</i> , 1928
<i>Idea</i>	<i>The Idea of a Christian Society</i> , 1939
<i>KE</i>	<i>Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley</i> , [1915], 1964
<i>Notes</i>	<i>Notes towards the Definition of Culture</i> , 1948
<i>PP</i>	<i>On Poetry and Poets</i> , 1957
<i>SE</i>	<i>Selected Essays</i> , 1932
<i>SW</i>	<i>The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism</i> , 1920
<i>TCC</i>	<i>To Criticize the Critic</i> , 1965
<i>Youth</i>	<i>Poems Written in Early Youth</i> , 1967

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## Preface

This study examines voice and tone in T. S. Eliot's early poetry and prose. The category of 'tone' invites the close scrutiny of a work's concrete relationship with a particular socio-historical context. My work develops a sociological approach to the study of literary tone and voice. It does this in a scholarly and critical context dominated by traditions of reading and interpretation variously called "practical criticism," "new criticism," and, the term I adopt, "Anglo-American formalism." By "Anglo-American formalism" I mean that tradition of reading and interpretation that operates on the assumption that a work of literature is a discrete, self-contained textual object whose meaning is generated as the result of the entirely intrinsic action of the language of the text, recuperable formal patterns, and the unique instancing of conventional features (Fekete 1977: 85-98; Michaels 1980: 410-420; Fowler 1981: 186-187). My study opposes this view. The dominance of this formalism in the academic setting where literature is read and discussed has forced a certain polemical tone to creep into my work and into my formulation of a critical practice that is still very much a minority practice in North America, though less so in most other academic communities in the world.

For my purposes, a work of literature is not conceived of as a discrete textual object but shares with all uses of language the crucial feature of always occurring in a communicative context. By this I do

not mean that a text must be read against a communicative *background*. This would be to resurrect certain pre-formalist traditions of reading against which the reigning formalism was first minted in the 1920s and 1930s. The communicative context is not simply a separable background, recovered in criticism as separable events, objects, and individuals affecting the discrete text, either at the level of naive referentiality or at the level of general ideas. The communicative context shapes a text as a whole and pervades all its individual elements and parts (Firth 1957: 181-182; Fowler 1981: 191-192). For example, a text does not simply speak; it addresses particular readers whom the author conceives of in certain ways, beginning with the often tacit authorial assumption that readers already always have something in their heads--like expectations of what a literary text should be--with which his or her own text will have to set up some sort of detailed relationship (Eco 1979b: 7-11). Similarly, the language of a literary work is uninterpretable save in the context of the linguistic usages of a particular community, and in the context of relationships the text sets up with those changing usages and the normal expectations implied in established verbal practices. Again, modes of formal and generic patterning make no sense unless read as setting up motivated relationships with settled principles and practices that distinguish the patterned from the amorphous, noise from sound, order from chaos.

The communicative context which makes sense of a text itself occurs within a particular society. This study conceives of society in two dimensions: as a multi-level structure in continuous historical transformation (a conventional enough notion) and as a structure of

intentionality generated by the full measure of human agency in the form of human *Praxis* (Lowe 1982: 17-18). I want to insist on this latter dimension of society because very often an approach such as the one I take in this study is accused of dissolving the individual in impersonal and mechanistic forces of production, or laws of history. The human being is neither a puppet awkwardly dangling on thin wires descending from the laws of historical change, nor a nervous mask grimacing in pains and pleasures occasionally erupting from the depths of the unconscious. It has been a weakness of historicist and materialist approaches in the human sciences that they have not insisted enough on the social importance of the competent and knowledgeable human agent (Lefebvre 1969: 25-58; Giddens 1981: 15). Marx's emphasis on human *Praxis* has often been lost sight of in the importance placed on the second part of his classic formulation on human agency. Men make history, he said, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. One aspect of this observation of which the sociology of knowledge has made us aware is the fact that the products of human *Praxis*, reified in time, themselves often come to acquire the irreducibility and force of nature. In this sense, reified social and cultural structures depersonalize intention and carry into the arena of human agency and action intentionalities that have no individual locus, but are embodied in objectivated and institutional forms (Marx 1970: 46-48; Berger and Luckmann 1979: 106-109; Sartre 1982: 79-94).

Society as a field of personal and impersonal intentionalities formed and transformed in the processes of historical change generates a pervasive system of significations or meanings which inhabitants

acquire by virtue of their active residence in the given community. Objects, processes, events, individuals, groups, institutions, memories, verbal practices, and so on are all enveloped in this system of significations. All members of a society are socialized to this system which is, in essence, intersubjective; that is, it is a system of shared meanings held in common by all members of a society. The shared knowledge of the system of significations I call *the common intuitive life*. I have chosen this coinage because it conforms to a vocabulary familiar to literary studies, yet preserves the concept of society on which my work depends. This notion is not new. It derives from a number of sources including T. S. Eliot himself. But more specifically it is indebted to Raymond Williams, beginning with his important response to Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) in *Culture and Society* (1958, 1961; see Eagleton 1970 for a comparative analysis of these two views of the 'common culture'). However, Williams' reflections on the idea of the 'common culture' have not stood still since the late 1950s. In a lecture in Montreal in 1973 he sketched the theoretical model of culture to which his work has led him and which underlies, to a large extent, my notion of the common intuitive life. His remarks come in the context of a discussion of 'base' and 'superstructure' in Marxist cultural studies and of Antonio Gramsci's related concept of 'hegemony'.

I would say first that in any society, in any particular period, there is a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective. This implies no presumption about its value. All I am saying is that it is central. . . . In any case what I have in mind is the central, effective and



dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived. . . . It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. (1980: 38)

He goes on to argue that this system constitutes "a sense of reality for most people in the society," an awareness that is absolute because it is of a reality that is experienced at every level of concrete, practical life, from the most formally conceptual and public to the most feelingly intimate and private. It encompasses a society's possible range of ideas and feelings about something as formal and corporate as a national Constitution or legal system, and, correspondingly, a society's characteristic responses to the fact, say, of death or the construction of personal identity and subjectivity. It is not, moreover, a static system, but one which depends on concrete and social processes. The crucial factor here is what Williams calls the "process of incorporation" (1980: 39), that is, the process by which the meanings and valuations of experience are incorporated, principally by language, in the common intuitive life as a whole.

Within this "system of practices, meanings and values," what I am calling the common intuitive life of a society, language plays an important role. Language does not simply record the contents of the common intuitive life; it forms the basis for significant interaction within the compass of a shared life and encodes the shared systems of value, knowledge, and belief. Thus language serves not only to fix and assign meaning, but also, and this is the source of its creativity, to confirm

or contest these assignments. Works of art impinge on the common intuitive life of a society as an operation, of one kind or another, on settled significations which things acquire over time (Bennett 1979: 24-25). More specifically, works of literature impinge on the verbal practices of the common intuitive life and become operations on the way language articulates the significance of things. So that a poem, say, is not simply a work *in* language, but a work *on* language; it does not *contain* meaning, rather it is an operation on prior meaning.

These observations are important for resolving the essential problem which Eliot's poetry has always presented literary criticism, a problem which was the original spur of this study. Eliot wrote an allusive, recondite, pervasively ironic poetry which has fascinated criticism for several generations and which has invited learned commentary that is subtly ingenious in its exploration of what is taken to be Eliot's extraordinary aesthetic sophistication. His antagonists have often accused him in this respect of deliberate obscurity and an Alexandrian approach to composition (Lucas 1923: 116; Hamilton 1950; Winters 1963: 36, 64). Yet when this ingenious criticism has come finally to say what the poetry is about, what Eliot is actually saying in the poems, it has heard something rather old-fashioned, something conventional, and even rather crude. Here is Helen Gardner on the "ageless" subject of *The Waste Land*: the poem, she writes, "discovers a radical defect in human life and makes clear the 'insufficiency of human enjoyments'" (1959: 88). This comes from Gardner's first book on Eliot, which is still cited as one of the decisive and more learned readings of Eliot (Moody 1979: 93). The "radical defect" *The Waste Land* unveils at the heart of human life

is none other than Original Sin. This ponderous, crude, anti-modernist, unsubtle theological commonplace, which was already being treated as a cliché by the civic humanists in Quattrocento Italy (Baron 1966: 302-314), strikes Gardner with the force of a revelation about life. For several pages after this revelation she continues explicating details of the poem having seemingly accepted Original Sin as a necessary and obvious 'truth' or 'fact' of the human condition. Of course, the truth of such an observation about life is entirely *contestable* and she is quite unjustified in passing silently over this point. I am not saying that she should engage in a theological demonstration of the truth of the notion. What needs to be taken up is a discussion of the observation's *contestability* in 1922 when the poem was published.

It is clear from the structure of the poem itself, from Eliot's prose (*FLA* 50), and from his biography (Gordon 1977) that he knew precisely how contestable an assertion about Original Sin was in his time. It is clear that Eliot came to accept this ancient Christian doctrine very early in his life so that *The Waste Land* does not labour to *achieve* such an observation. The poem is not a series of examples in which we see the social and personal effects of Original Sin that lead us overwhelmingly to a knowledge of the truth of such a notion, although this is the kind of inductive process which Gardner suggests lies at the heart of the poem. Instead, the notion of radical human sinfulness is a point of departure. The assertion of Original Sin in *The Waste Land* cannot be innocently accounted for as the unavoidable discovery of an originally innocent 'speaker', lost in a fallen world, who engages in a heuristic probing of contemporary life and comes to the 'surprising'

conclusion that eighteen centuries of Christian thought about sin are right after all. The poem opens with what the poem shows it knows already intact.

Eliot knew, and therefore criticism should know, that the implicit assertion of radical human sinfulness in *The Waste Land* represented an oblique assault on certain liberalizing accounts of human experience inscribed in the common intuitive life of the English middle classes. The notion of Original Sinfulness opposes, in all its spiky irreducibility, the meliorist optimism of liberal, utilitarian ethics which had displaced, in the popular mind, older Christian doctrines. This ethical meliorism had become the conventional account of the moral life in the bourgeois era. The poem not only attacks the positive principles of liberal ethics --such as the notion of human perfectability and egalitarianism--but also more elusive aspects, like the atmosphere and feel of the pallid inwardness such ethics imply. The poem's whole manner and matter is shaped by that oppositional context. Narrative strategies, imagery, themes, voices, and the range of tonalities must be read for the contrasts they set up with the contents and styles inscribed in the common intuitive life. The poem must be read, in short, as an attempted re-inscription of fundamental experience. Thus, the point about *The Waste Land* is not that it presents some particular vision of life, but that it contests accounts of fundamental experience that Eliot in all honesty could not abide. That he chose visionary modes as a method of contestation and as a way of claiming epistemological authority for his 'argument' should not deflect us from the poem's actual interests. In this way, the sophistication, learning, and technique of the poem can be put, appropriately, in the service of a

simple, even simple-minded, theme, because it is not the discovery of a knowledge of the theme that is at issue, but the fate of what the theme asserts in a hostile, and yet sophisticated, learned, pervasively ironic, environment. The poem's style is called out by the rigours of the particular signifying work it must do in an affectively complex environment (Burke 1941, 1961: 3-4; Eagleton 1976: 101; Douglas 1978: 95-98). Eliot knew, and therefore criticism should know, what it meant in 1922 to write a poem 'discovering' Original Sin that Bertrand Russell was going to read.

Russell, of course, was only one reader of many, and an extraordinary one at that. However, he was also rather typical as a legatee of the principles, procedures, and attitudes of the liberal Enlightenment in Europe. Yet the Enlightenment is not the inheritance of individuals alone, let alone the sole possession of great rationalist philosophers; it is the intellectual and affective inheritance of a whole class. The principles of European Enlightenment run like threads through the structure of thought and feeling of the European bourgeoisie from the end of the eighteenth century to our own time (ASG *passim*). Of course, it is important to remember that the impact and influence of Enlightenment ideas in the regions of Europe vary with the historical circumstances of each region. Thus, the civic humanism of the French, constructed around a national image of *le citoyen*, is different from the utilitarianism of English liberals, which is different again from the radical libertarian tendencies in Italian liberalism. Yet running through the constellation of ideas and practices that had their modern formulation in the Enlightenment we find common themes and common attitudes, towards the past, towards human nature, towards science and religion, and so on. Indeed,

I take the Enlightenment and its many fruits in nineteenth-century Europe to be the transformative intellectual and ideological programme of the European bourgeoisie in its disenchantment with the sacred and mythical worlds of the feudal aristocracies (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944, 1972: 5). I understand the nineteenth century as the period of consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie as the directive elite of industrializing Europe. This is not to say that aristocratic forms and exercises of power did not persist in the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries. They did. But it is to say that these were progressively subordinated as sources of real directive power in the relevant societies and took on, more and more, the figurative and ceremonial irrelevance that aristocratic forms still have in our time, where they have managed to persist. My sense of Enlightenment as the ruling ideas of the structure of thought and feeling of the bourgeoisie is derived from a number of sources. First, the seminal study of the Enlightenment by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, translated as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944, 1972); second, Lucien Goldmann's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment: The Christian Burgess and the Enlightenment* (1973). By the 'bourgeois era', I mean the society of Western Europe, especially Britain and France, from the last third of the eighteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth (cf. Davie 1978: 14-15). And I accept Marx's definition and use of the term 'bourgeois society' from his *The Class Struggles in France* (1964: 134). E. J. Hobsbawm has succinctly summarized the specifics of European history in this era in *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*:

The great revolution of 1789-1848 was the triumph not of 'industry' as such, but of *capitalist* industry; not of liberty and equality in general, but of *middle class* or '*bourgeois*' *liberal* society; not of 'the modern economy' or 'the modern state,' but of the economies and states in a particular geographical region of the world (part of Europe and a few patches of North America), whose centre was the neighbouring and rival states of Great Britain and France. The transformation of 1789-1848 is essentially the twin upheaval which took place in those two countries, and was propagated thence across the entire world.  
(17-18, Hobsbawm's emphasis)

Of course, Hobsbawm is concerned with the opening of the bourgeois era. Eliot's career comes as that era is closing in the first decades of the twentieth century. My study can be seen as a contribution to our knowledge of the literary culture of bourgeois society, and of a particular conservative critique of bourgeois forms of thought and feeling.

This study argues that an examination of tone and voice in Eliot's early work reveals a poetry and prose directed to the transformation--he would have thought of it as a cleansing--of the common intuitive life of the Anglo-American middle class. I do not mean that his work is entirely polemical, as this implies Eliot keys his work entirely at the level of ideas. His critique is much more radical than this suggests, penetrating to the affective reality of, what he came to call in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), "negative liberal society." It is important to remember that Eliot's hostility to liberal society does not primarily involve him in his early work in a systematic critique of the political economy of liberalism. We will find no detailed considerations of political events and personalities of his time in his work, although this aspect is not entirely absent. Eliot's aim is rather the unveiling

of the specific social, moral, and psychological consequences of life as it is found in the liberal ethos. His poetry works at the level of the actually lived, the density of experience in the everyday. In this domain, below the level of formal politics and policy, Eliot was able to formulate a metonymic approach that uses an imagery drawn from the concrete experience of everyday life in a revelatory way. And although the 'revealing' particulars are often presented in a visionary or even hallucinatory aesthetic context, their use as socially typifying elements must not be lost sight of. In Chapter Five, I argue that the visionary mode of presentation functions as a legitimation strategy (Berger 1969: 31-32) that re-enforces the representativeness of the concrete particular. Indeed, Eliot's use of typifying metonymy (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 193) is a signifying practice of immense importance, because it allows the text to offer concrete experience in immediate form and, at the same time, conduct a rational argument implicitly through the metonymic 'logic' of typificatory representations (Burke 1941, 1961: 22-28). I realize that in saying this I am taking issue with the way the idea of the 'image' in modernism is normally discussed. Criticism has interpreted the 'image' as the minimal unit of *aesthetic* perception in modernism. My point is that Eliot awakened and exploited systematically the potential of the 'image' to function metonymically in a social context. In his poetry the 'image' serves more than an aesthetic function. As a typifying element, a revealing particular, it becomes impossible to dissociate the image from the ethico-religious concepts and ideas, or from the forms of concrete life, which it typifies (Della Volpe 1978: 39). Also, it is impossible, when we analyze the verbal style of the concrete image, not



to *hear* how the style itself mobilizes and focusses particular social attitudes towards what is being represented (Burke 1941, 1961: 128-131). These attitudes can be traced back to a general critique of society from a particular class position in that society and to coherent transformative social and cultural practices in that context (Machery 1977: 3; Balibar 1978: 28; Bennett 1979: 156-168).

This latter observation points to the importance of tone and voice in Eliot's work. This importance has been recognized by Anglo-American formalist criticism, but the idea of 'tone', as a critical concept, has remained largely undeveloped nonetheless. As the tone of a work of literature brings to critical attention the relationship of text and world, it has been very difficult for an anti-historicist, anti-contextual critical practice to pursue the implications of its own historicizing and contextualizing concept. Nevertheless, the fact that formalism requires a notion like 'tone' to account for the wealth of meanings that narrowly formal and generic analyses cannot encompass discloses the necessity for any literary critical practice to theorize, no matter how reluctantly, the concrete presence of the world in the text. But this demand placed on criticism requires a sophisticated, informed grasp of what the 'world' is and how it is best described for literary critical purposes. We need to acquire as sophisticated a grasp of the 'world' as of the text itself that formalism has taught us. I devote quite a few pages of this study to describing the most productive way, for literary critical purposes, of understanding the nature and structure of the social reality which always already pervades any given literary text. This description draws on the work of social anthropologists, sociologists of

knowledge, of language, and of art. Beyond the useful knowledge about forms of collective life these fields offer literary studies lies my conviction that the study of literature atrophies the further it insulates itself from contact, not with the 'world', or 'life' or history as such, but with the knowledge of its nature and forms which our colleagues in the academy offer us.

Generally speaking, my study has three themes: the principal one is the study of aspects of Eliot's work as briefly sketched here, taking as my point of departure a critical concept derived from Anglo-American formalism; the second theme involves a critique of Anglo-American formalism from the point of view that its concept of 'tone' represents a critical sleight-of-hand, by which the unavoidable necessity of discerning the effect of the external world on the text itself is silently recognized, but left unacknowledged; the third theme involves developing an understanding of social structure and the shared knowledge of its semantic codings, which permits a fruitful investigation of what a literary text actually refers to in the social world.

I have not divided this study into three separate parts in which I take up each theme in turn. I have organized the whole work around a principal thesis about Eliot's early poetry and prose. I have introduced the tributary themes in those places, variously distributed in the work as a whole, where they seem to me to be most usefully discussed. Obviously because my argument about Eliot's work depends on certain points drawn from the other themes, especially the third, the first two chapters contain longer sections on formalism and society. Chapter Five on *The Waste Land*, which culminates the study, extends some of the earlier

reflections on society.

T. S. Eliot is a writer who has had a considerable amount of attention devoted to his work. The bulk of it is formalist close reading, practical criticism, exegetical commentary, and the glossing of references and allusions (a minor industry in itself). Every word in his poetry has been read, glossed, commented upon many times over. Indeed, non-specialists in Eliot studies are often familiar not only with the man's work, but also with the critical debates and controversies his poetry and prose have provoked in our time. Because of this I have not felt compelled to provide a line by line commentary on every poem he wrote. I am interested much more in developing an argument about Eliot as a writer whose poetry and prose are the material of a wider cultural practice directed, at bottom, to the transformation of people's lives. I think the persistence of his reputation and stature derives entirely from the force and power, even the audacity, of such an enterprise. To that I should also add that I believe *all* works of literature to be irredeemably engaged, in their various direct and oblique ways, in transformative practices of a socio-verbal kind, practices which foreground, challenge, or change the routine or conventional ways individuals in particular social circumstances account for, or represent in language, the truths of lived experience.

## Chapter One: Hearing the dissonances

Historical or contextual criticism, whether materialist or not, has been most vulnerable in its treatment of the discrete literary text.<sup>1</sup> Too often a text has been reduced to a thematic cypher of particular socio-political or psycho-biographical contexts. The text's verbal and formal integrities have been dissolved in the service of themes and concepts drawn from history itself. In opposition to what were thought to be reductionist or monistic critical practices, Anglo-American formalism took as its primary polemical slogan the preservation of the formal integrity of "the text itself."<sup>2</sup> As the dominant critical practice from the late 1940s to our own day, Anglo-American formalism has been difficult to resist. In addition to the practical convenience of the principle of the autonomous text, it has directed a searching and sardonic critique of all contextualist thought from philology, biography, *belles lettres*, and the history of ideas. But formalism's most vigorous attack has been reserved for historical materialism, mainly in the form of what has come to be known as the 'vulgar Marxism' of the 1930s (Jay 1973: 53-56; Eagleton 1977: 11-43; Williams 1977: 77-82). Against the view of literature as cultural practice on the simple thematic and content plane, Anglo-American formalism poses a more sophisticated and encompassing framework for the practice of criticism. While the historicist critic blandly dismantled a work's unique formal coherence in an analysis of the work's social and political content, the formalist,

by dislodging the text from the social and political environment, seemed to preserve, and thus by that critical move and that move alone guarantee, the work's internal integrity, its positive structure. This guarantee and the confident assertiveness born of the institutional triumph of formalist practice led the formalist to take for granted that 'meaning' is entirely intrinsic to the text, that a work of literature 'contains' meaning in the same way that a jam jar 'contains' the strawberry jam.

The practice that *would have* developed from such an orientation to meaning, if strictly applied, would have produced a criticism so circumspect, thin, and irrelevant that it would have disappeared from view without a trace long ago. Anglo-American formalism has made itself the dominant critical practice of the last forty years by ignoring in its practice its own first principles, by ignoring its own assumptions (Michaels 1980: 418-419). While openly and explicitly arguing for the autonomy of the text, that a poem, in Eliot's famous phrase, is "a poem and not another thing," the actual critical activity of formalism has been as thoroughly contextual as any other critical practice, but its contextualizing has been usually silent and hidden from view.<sup>3</sup> This contradictory practice, which, on the one hand, postponed (when it didn't vehemently deny) all contextual considerations, while, on the other hand, informally drew them into the interpretative process, was possible only in the ideological hall of mirrors that has characterized intellectual life, East and West, during the Cold War. Yet formalists were not completely deaf to context; after all, in actual practice not all 'tension' or 'ambiguity' in a text could be 'resolved' in the last instance by reference to some strenuously stipulated formal 'paradox' (Burgum 1951:

31-48). They needed some thoroughly dehistoricized contextual critical concept in order to surmount the obvious philosophical ineptitude and naiveté of the assumption that meaning is entirely positive and intrinsic, entirely 'given' by the sign, and that the utterer gets meaning into an utterance by choosing the word that puts it there (Nowotny 1968: 152). Formalism needed a way of opening the text towards its relevant social and political contexts, contexts that are clearly determinative at *some* level of a work's content and form, while at the same time seeming not to. In short, what was required was a critical idea that did not collapse the work's formal and verbal integrity in the 'corrosive' contingencies of real history while yet, silently, establishing the work's relation to the world. That category is 'tone'.

With the concept of tone, treated as if it were a purely formal category and occasionally thought of as a 'device', the problem of the literary work's external relations could be "safely" approached. Although other favoured formal categories--tension, paradox, image pattern, ambiguity, and so on--were openly discussed and developed as critical instruments, tone, though used continuously, consciously, and productively for interpretation, was left largely undefined and unexplored as a concept. Clearly, however, from the use to which the notion was put,<sup>4</sup> tone represented perhaps the most important, unacknowledged, formalist category for getting at 'meaning'. One could spend a great deal of time scrupulously laying bare the positive structure or formal patterns of a work, but to get at what it all meant in the last instance required a conceptual leap that could not be managed within the naive, unidimensional positivism that formalist practice seemed to insist

upon. Tone functioned in practical criticism as the most comprehensive semantic feature of a text, accounting for all that residue of signification which intrinsic analyses could not name, because so much of what a work means depends on a reader's close awareness of the socio-cultural contexts which encompass and ratify the work. The notion of tone itself as a critical instrument, or as an aspect of meaning, or as a certain interpretable output of the activity of the text in a particular semantic environment was rarely broached. Tone was invoked in order to link, subcritically, a text's total meaning to the semantic universe which members of a society carry around in their heads, a complex linkage that went 'without saying' because supposedly all could hear it and act upon it. The *inability* to 'hear' the tone, or to make the proper inferences about a work's tone, was put down as a defect of sensibility, as an inability to master the refinements and discriminations of an achieved civilization (Richards 1924, 1959: 62; Leavis 1943, 1965: 143-171). Tone was treated implicitly as the static, intrinsic projections of certain attitudes towards audience and extrinsic themes, rather than as the *placing* activity of the text within a specific community. Tone, read as an intuitively recognized distinctive feature of intrinsic meaning, was ignored as a rational category of analysis, whose structure gave limited access to the concrete relations of text and world.

This study argues that the concept of tone, as used in formalist criticism, cannot by itself capture the richness and complexity of the world to which poems richly and complexly refer. To do that, the concept of tone would require an expanded definition. More generally, I am saying that formalism is a critical tradition that has concentrated

so much attention on the text itself, developing a highly sophisticated grasp of the internal workings of the text, that it has allowed its sense of the world beyond the text to atrophy; indeed, in the hyper-formalism of contemporary deconstruction, the 'world' has simply disappeared as a textual referent. The concept of tone, in short, is simply an acknowledgement in formalism that *some* relationship exists between text and world. I will be arguing that a *simple* acknowledgement of that relationship, normally impressionistically conveyed, is not enough to do justice to the text as a signifying practice within a particular socio-historical reality. Formalism's reluctance to investigate the text in the world led to a now well-documented form of critical blindness. This blindness was tactically crucial in the 1920s and 1930s when the new criticism was developing its assault on a variety of clumsily and deterministically applied forms of contextual criticism. However, that political moment has passed and the accompanying blindness to context is now a liability and requires a thorough re-assessment. Literary criticism needs to develop a grasp of the world--or at least of the common intuitive life of a people within a particular social reality--at least as sophisticated, detailed, and concrete as its grasp of the inner workings of the text itself. Later in this chapter I analyze some comments by F. R. Leavis about Eliot's "Burnt Norton" in order to show the result of the atrophying of a critically relevant understanding of the nature and processes of social reality inscribed as the common intuitive life of a community. My choice here is somewhat ironic, in that the early Eliot was one of the more profound influences on Leavis' own critical development. However, by the time Leavis came



to write his piece on "Burnt Norton" in the 1940s, Eliot had long transformed in his own critical practice the principles with which he had been identified in the 1920s. And to that earlier period I now turn.

In the mythology of Anglo-American formalism it was T. S. Eliot who, on French models, first thought and practiced what seemed to be the ruling principles of the 'new criticism'. In his early critical essays and reviews, and especially the group collected in *The Sacred Wood* (1920), Eliot seemed bent on rescuing literature, literary and critical work, from the hands of literary gentlemen-amateurs (Eagleton 1977: 12), whose devotion to the particular values of a social class and to the reigning commonplaces of nineteenth-century Gladstonian liberalism obscured the literary object by making it, when all was said and done, simply an instance, either for good or evil, of the meliorist thematics of the "Whig interpretation of history" (Butterfield 1931, 1968: 45-46). The nineteenth-century reception of John Milton is of course the famous case in point, whereby Milton is recruited by Macaulay as a protagonist of all that was progressive, Protestant, and liberal in the seventeenth century, thus prefiguring the equipoise of the nineteenth (Weimann 1976: 64-71). Eliot's insistence that a work of art could not be adequately understood or evaluated if it were simply vandalized for the Whig treasures it harboured, which, for the gentleman-critic, both authenticated the work's excellence and the correctness of the critic's social allegiances, was offered to Edwardian and Georgian literary London as an affront. Against the liberal literary amateur Eliot developed the glacial persona of the professional critic and the idea of a more objective, text-based critical method that took as its point of departure the

work as a work of literature "and not another thing," comparable only to other works with which it has *literary* affinities. Hinting in *The Sacred Wood* and elsewhere that a theoretically sound, conceptual, and logical sufficiency could be constructed to make literary criticism something more than the extracurricular musings-in-the-library of a man who, as part of the persona, pretended he had more momentous things to do,<sup>5</sup> Eliot developed in his early years a style of propositional assertiveness that sharply and vividly contrasted with what passed for literary criticism in late Victorian and Edwardian literary culture. If future generations of critics have not perceived that vivid contrast, it is only because the norm against which Eliot's early critical work was centrally and polemically aimed is no longer read. Robert Lynd, Edward Dowden, Edmund Gosse, and the others no longer help constitute a coherent literary culture which makes sense, negatively, of the thematics and style of Eliot's early literary criticism.<sup>6</sup> The feint towards system in *The Sacred Wood* and the sharpness of tongue which introduced it have their shape and thrust from the literary community in which Eliot had to operate. Eliot's dissatisfaction with the liberal tradition of reading, namely reading that sees through a text to its extra-literary meliorism, shaped the ruling concepts and style of his own criticism. If he insisted on the text's autonomy, it was primarily because John Morley assumed the text's subordinacy to 'higher' non-literary destinies; if he insisted on the impersonality of the author, it was primarily because Robert Lynd assumed that a poem was simply a reflex of an author's personality; if he devoted considerable space to the close and subtle analysis of the language of a poem or dramatic speech, it was primarily

because Edward Dowden quoted passages from poems as ornamental highlights for his own diffuse ramblings about psychology; if he cast his placing judgements in the *form* of philosophical propositions marked by a trained philosopher's tact for discriminative delicacy, it was primarily because Edmund Gosse wallowed in feckless and irrational impressionism. With the dissolution of the Edwardian literary world in the apocalypse of the Great War (Grubb 1965: 73-96), Eliot's work was suddenly, almost catastrophically, stripped of the context that had determined its style and themes. As a reaction against the nineteenth-century Whig world-view grew after World War One, Eliot soon became a prisoner of his own slogans, a prisoner of his own role in helping to displace and liquidate a literary scene. And I. A. Richards was his first gaoler.

The story of I. A. Richards' heroic attempts to systematize (or 'engineer' to use his favourite metaphor [Richards 1919, 1946: 179]), his own investigations in aesthetics, the theory of cognition, the psychology of perception, and Eliot's confident assertions about how a serious, professional literary criticism ought to be done has been told many times and I don't want to go over well-tilled fields (Lodge 1970: 362-403; Watson 1973: 186-192). To a large extent, it was Richards who cleansed Eliot's critical missiles of the polemical contexts in which they were launched and took the set of propositions that seemed to underly them as autonomous concepts on which a theory and practice of criticism could be built. He went about doing this in his first and most important attempt to stipulate a productive critical theory, *Practical Criticism* (1929). The fact that Eliot, as the years and the literary culture which had provoked his early essays passed into the dustbin of history, came

to ignore more and more his own critical 'principles' (Hynes 1977: 66) never seemed to worry Richards excessively, though it led some like F. W. Bateson into cranky chagrin (1977: 7-8). But as a consequence of Richards' efforts and the efforts of others who took from Eliot, or Richards, or both, a similar necessity, Eliot found his name shackled to theories of literature, authorship, and criticism that he spent a good deal of his later career shaking off. This was often put down as the magisterial quixoticism of a man whose judgement had subsided among high Anglicans. It was on this ambiguous ground that the 'new criticism', or what I call Anglo-American formalism, raised its battle standard against the philologists, historians of ideas, biographers, etc. who crowded the academic precincts where 'English literature' was first being taught in earnest in the 1920s and 1930s. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929, 1946) provided a conceptual framework and vocabulary for that struggle. It was there that the notion of 'tone' as a critical instrument was first proposed and defined. It was one of Richards' "four aspects" of meaning, aspects that needed interpretation and analysis if the critic were to recuperate the "Total Meaning" of an utterance, poetic or quotidian (180-181). Sense, Feeling, Intention, and Tone were the four "billiard-balls" the reader, as juggler, kept in the air while balancing the cue of Total Meaning on his nose (180). Tone was defined as the speaker's "*attitude to his listener.*"

The speaker chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate *recognition of his relation to them*. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is

addressing. Again the exceptional case of dissimulation, or instances in which the speaker unwittingly reveals an attitude he is not consciously desirous of expressing, will come to mind.

(182, Richards' emphasis)

This aspect of meaning functioned with the three others in complete interdependence in a meaningful utterance; a perfect understanding of such an utterance "would involve not only an accurate direction of thought, a correct evocation of feeling, an exact apprehension of time and a precise recognition of intention, but further it would get these contributory meanings in their right order and proportion to one another, and seize . . . their sequences and interrelations." For the value of a passage, Richards asserted, "frequently hangs upon this *internal order* among its contributory meanings" (332, Richards' emphasis). The emphasis on internal order, proportion, and sequence was a characteristic theme in the 'new criticism'. Not surprisingly, Richards did not rush to establish, explicitly, the continuity of his work with the ancient rhetorical tradition, for it is clear now that without changing the overall framework of analysis, without reconstituting the object of study, namely putting the literary text on a new basis, Richards rethought and renamed the internal components of the text as conceived and constituted by the ancient rhetoricians. I say 'not surprisingly' because Richards' own work, like Eliot's in the London context, was written within a highly charged polemical context in the English university community in the 1920s (Lodge 1970: 366). *Practical Criticism* represented the critical *avant-garde* of its day. It announced the younger generation's attempt to make a decisive break with the ancient critical tradition stemming from

Aristotle's *Poetics* and his *Rhetoric*, a tradition with an ample draw in the Western critical consciousness and a tradition that in the new schools and departments of English at the Universities represented the heavy orthodoxy of the classicists who took the new chairs and lecture-ships (Lodge 1970: 367, 375). *Practical Criticism* was both a dispassionate attempt, based on the latest research in aesthetics and psychology, to found a modern critical practice on a non-rhetorical basis and a passionate challenge to the preponderance of classicist critical orthodoxy. The student protocols on which Richards' book opened provided a data base for the theorizing that followed and a clear rebuke to the softheadedness of the practitioners of the old methods. Indeed the book ends, in the final section of his "Summary," directly addressing the issue of the teaching of critical practice in the English schools on the new basis proposed.

By peeling off the rhetorical tradition from the skin of the literary text, an emancipatory enterprise in the institutional context where he worked, Richards nevertheless also stripped back the critical perspective that had permitted the thinking, in its own limited way, of the relation of the individual text to its active social and political contexts. Rhetorical analysis not only conceptualized the internal organization of a work, but it also helped stabilize the relation of text and audience, text and world.<sup>7</sup> By rethinking the "internal order" of the text, Richards hoped the weakly discriminated notion of *tone* would do the conceptual work of a strongly discriminated two-thousand-year tradition of dealing with a work's external relations.<sup>8</sup>

Richards, of course, was only completing the work of romanticism.

The complex relationships linking writer and audience, writer and discourse (as genre and mode), writer and the dominant ideology of his or her time were all rethought in romanticism in the context of the invention of the metaphysics of Being in German idealism,<sup>9</sup> the accompanying phenomenology of presence, and the new authority of voice and speech<sup>10</sup> (Wordsworth 1815, 1939: 935; Coleridge 1817, 1962: 221 ff.). This was attempted without recourse to the whole system of classical rhetoric that before romanticism controlled these relationships in a system of 'devices', genres, modes, and rules of decorum that enclosed the play of meaning within a given order (Foucault, 1973: 51-76). That earlier order came to be secluded and displaced in the latter part of the eighteenth century (Vickers 1970: 58-60). In that critical moment, the 'devices', modes, etc. were suddenly seen to have epistemological dimensions; or, to put it another way, certain epistemological inferences could be made from the play of metaphor and simile which classical rhetorical theory, and the culture which sustained it, could not formulate in terms of a theory of knowledge. The play of metaphor (one might even say the role of metaphor), for example, that doubling of plain sense so familiar to us from classical and Renaissance literature, was then emblematic of cosmological structure, emblematic, as we have all been taught, of the relation of world to cosmos and man to God. By and through romanticism, however, such metaphoric doubling breached consciousness itself in the direction of its deepest rationalities and in the attending condensations of self and individuality which the new philosophical language of consciousness, idealist and phenomenological, made possible. Thus, the D major sonata for cello and piano directed

attention towards Beethoven himself rather than to some authenticating, extra-personal cosmology,<sup>11</sup> requiring only the discovery of psychological space to bring into play the new critical, descriptive binaries and themes.

In this movement of thought, the rhetorical system, refined and transformed over two millenia, could no longer serve as the unsurpassed encompassing framework or space of literature. The development of the modern conception of 'consciousness' as the species' access to Nature (Abrams 1971: 227) deflected the play of meaning away from the closures of similitude and resemblance (Foucault 1973: 238-240). This difference can best be glimpsed in the fate of the central rhetorical tropes-- simile and metaphor. Within the rhetorical system, they reflect a world always already in place prior to the activity of its representation in language. Metaphor rethought as an exploration of consciousness-in-the-world generates meaning in the activity of writing itself (Stone 1967: 144-145). Coleridge might begin "Frost at Midnight" with what seems a feint (Langbaum 1963: 45-46) towards metaphor: "The Frost performs its secret ministry, / Unhelped by any wind . . ." (lines 1-2); however, by the poem's end, the 'metaphor' of the frost's ministering has named no systematic similitude, but, through tone-leading, generated a sequence of contiguous tonal zones which in sum make palpable an evolving state of mind. The ministering frost is not the metaphor strictly speaking so much as the occasion, the *site*, in fact, where consciousness comes closest to sensing its own substance and representing that new found sense to itself: "'Tis calm indeed! so calm that it disturbs / And vexes meditation with its strange / And extreme silentness" (8-10). When the



poem rounds back to the compositional present tense, the here and now of the process of perception, back to an awareness of "the secret ministry of frost" (73), it is not a sense of metaphorical closing with which we're left, but the letting go, moving out towards the field. Thus, metaphor is used heuristically to explore consciousness, not to accommodate experience to some notional given to which the metaphor refers.

Furthermore, the structural integrity of the poem does not finally crystallize until the entire syntagmatic chain is achieved. Without any overt or covert initiation of some traditional overall form, the poet articulates the environment in which he finds himself, initially as a particular, concrete place (the cottage), the specifics of which quickly accumulate and multiply the play of meaning, and, by fits and starts, a sense of the whole, drawn, in this instance, primarily from Coleridge's sense of his past, his hopes for the future and, implicitly, his conception of Nature as mentor. These accretions of meaning do not produce that sense of repose in a shared, encompassing cosmology for which the poem is now a radiant metonym; instead, the poem insists on foregrounding the process of its articulation, in other words, the presence of consciousness itself, and makes available the heuristic drama which consciousness enacts (Richards 1934, 1950: 118-119). The closural limit of the play of meaning in the poem occurs as consciousness 'contacts' Nature. And although the loosely circular form of "Frost at Midnight" gestures towards metaphorical closure of the traditional sort (which M. H. Abrams seizes upon in order to appropriate the poem as a sub-genre of lyric [Abrams 1965: 528, 550]), the actual heuristic structure glimpsed in the sudden shifts of awareness, of intensity of feeling and

shock, makes *possible* a formal openness which Coleridge cannot yet fully achieve. He cannot yet *fully* achieve it because even amidst the development of a new poetics Coleridge felt the inertial drag of the formal, especially closural, imperatives exerted by the doctrine of genre and mode.

The classical order of things insisted on a poem's mimetic nature--the poem as an imitation of a Natural order, an order culminating in a comprehensive and knowable cosmology. A poem's coherences were programmatic, in the sense that they were sanctioned by the prior and absolute coherences of the cosmology. The poem's whole final form came into being from the opening word as a contracted debt progressively and inevitably amortized. A poem like Milton's "Lycidas" defaults on the debt, leaving a structural 'residue' which cannot be made sense of generically (Ransom 1961: 64-81). That 'residue' can only be interpreted when the poem is no longer seen simply as an episode in the internal life of a genre, but re-inserted in the concrete history to which the poem's tonal structure gives us access, not simply as a way of finding in the poem actual references to 'events' but in the way concrete history twists and makes over the form of the elegy as a function of Milton's *attitudes towards*, to use Richards' definition, the particulars of that history. In other words, the classical view of genre does not discriminate between 'pastoral elegy' and 'pastoral elegy written in a period of heavy episcopal censorship' (Hill 1977: 50-51).

If the classical mode of representation limited the heuristic possibilities of metaphor, it had also enclosed the notion of 'voice' in poetry within the rule-governed semantics of genre and decorum. In

romanticism, this categorical limitation gave way to a sudden dilation of the possibilities of signification when, with the accession of the new metaphysics of consciousness articulated by Kant and Hegel in their various ways as the quintessence of the human, 'voice' was rethought as the sign of the presence of individuated Being rather than as the sign of an allegiance to a particular corporate orderliness. Indeed, the multiplication of voices in Rameau's nephew is perceived by his interlocutor as the sign of derangement (Diderot 1761, 1966: 103-104). The 'music' of these voices is cacophonous and the opera the nephew performs singlehandedly simply bewildering (cf. Alldritt 1978: 53). In this text of the 1760s, we are poised at one of the moments when the notion of rhetoric is encompassed irretrievably by the romantic idea of style (Barthes 1971: 3-4). The control of what Richards and Eliot would later call 'tone' was no longer ratified by an absolute signified (a reigning cosmology) through generic and modal categories; control derived from a newly privileged inwardness and authority tied to the power, expression, and presence of solitary individuals. 'Tone' was thematized in romanticism through the semantics of sincerity and authenticity (Trilling 1972: 92-100).

Eliot's early work, influenced by French models, attended the funeral of sincerity. 'Tone', as a critical category, came into view with the derangement of the romantic complex of ideas, of self, authority, expression, and authenticity, the collapse of the autonomous subject as absolute signified, a collapse that breaks over the early poems, up to "Ash Wednesday." In that key text, Eliot acknowledges the historical church as the transcendental signifier of a necessary, absolute signified.

It is necessary as the guarantor of semantic closure and centredness, an extratextual limiting framework that closes the anarchic play of meaning and reference (Margolis 1973: 137; Gordon 1977: 132-133).

Indeed, such a commitment to closure and unity constitutes implicitly a stable "reality" beyond the text that Eliot's later work, from "Ash Wednesday" on, culminating in *Four Quartets*, explores and ratifies.

This "reality" coincides in part for Eliot with the social reality of everyday life; the religious settlement that encompasses this "reality" functions as an absolute framework that Eliot takes for granted after "Ash Wednesday" and its guarantees allow Eliot to take particular attitudes towards "reality." These attitudes constitute not, as Richards would have it, a particular tone towards "reality" as an internal projection of the text, simply a feature of its intrinsic meaning, but something much more active and outward. And it is the purpose of this study to investigate the particulars of that activity and that outwardness. For tone is not just simply a formal category; it points, albeit crudely in the conceptualizations of formalism, to a fundamental and concrete relationship between text and world.

Having an *attitude towards* something in life is not a simple, self-contained, personal, internal state of mind or feeling; it is a social practice, and, if that *attitude towards* audience or thing is inscribed (in a poem, say), then it is also a cultural and, perhaps, even a political practice. Eliot, I believe, came to realize this. His imaginative works, like his essays, were conceived and written in a spirit of social and cultural engagement; indeed, I will go so far as to say that their primary purpose was polemical in the context of

English life in the first half of the twentieth century. Although I will not be looking at *Four Quartets* in this study for reasons that will become obvious as I proceed, I would like to close this first chapter with a brief look at one of the most influential formalist interpretations of "Burnt Norton" in order to illustrate how the richly productive development of an intrinsic criticism was not matched, in the twenty years after *Practical Criticism*, by a comparably rich and detailed development in the analysis of the relations between text and world. In the context of this illustration, I also want to begin putting in place some ideas, drawn from the sociology of knowledge, that might make this long-delayed critical development finally possible in a way that does justice both to the intrinsic complexity of the individual text *and* to the lived densities of history.

In his earliest critique of *Four Quartets*, F. R. Leavis begins his discussion of the three poems that had been published in 1942 by endorsing D. W. Harding's comment that the authority of "Burnt Norton" lies beyond the attractions to thought of any "given intellectual and doctrinal framework":

The genius, that of a great poet, manifests itself in a profound and acute apprehension of the difficulties of his age. Those difficulties are such that they certainly cannot be met by any simple recomposition of traditional frames. Eliot is known as professing Anglo-Catholicism and classicism; but his poetry is remarkable for the extraordinary resource, penetration and stamina with which it makes its explorations in the concrete actualities of experience below the conceptual currency; into that life that must be the *raison d'être* of any frame--while there is life at all. With all its positive aspiration and movement, it is at the same time essentially a work of radical analysis

and revision, endlessly insistent in its care not to confuse the frame with a living reality, and heroic in its refusal to accept. (Leavis 1943, 1965: 103)

To arrive here Leavis (and Harding before him) penetrated to a level of analysis which seemed to reflect the level at which the poem was being composed, or to put it another way, the level *anterior* to strata where the poem, gathered up into the conceptual apparatus of its socio-political and cultural milieux, might be heard to be making simple doctrinal points in elusive language. Leavis saw the poem's "immediacy" of experiential contact as the "equivalent in poetry of a work--to do by strictly poetical means the business of an epistemological and metaphysical inquiry" (94). We should note in passing that Leavis' "life" and "living reality," if these terms have any precision at all, borrow their philosophical substance from the metaphysics of Being crystallized in the period between Hegel and Max Scheler (Leavis 1932, 1954: 94-95; 1972: 20-21). Indeed, the choice of these formulations to describe the enabling context of Eliot's 'inquiry' is significant in a number of ways. "Life" and "living reality" are uttered with a confidence sustained by the underlying one-hundred-and-fifty-year philosophical tradition that gives them their specific gravity. Yet, while they seem to draw a boundary around some particular zone of objective reference, when the boundaries of that zone are actually sought, they recede like the horizon. In his final reading of the *Quartets*, published in 1975, Leavis, living in a time more severely concerned with definition and with the intent behind the use of such generalizations, attempted to develop his sense of the actualized structure of Eliot's "reality" along a line of thought suggested by

Michael Polanyi as the tacit dimension of knowledge (Polanyi 1974: 121-207; Leavis, 1975: 39, 243). It is this latter development in Leavis' thought that provides this study with one of its points of departure.

Putting to the side for the moment the question of the "reality" to which the poem refers, the actual structure of Eliot's poem, its concrete movement from word to word, line to line, that is, the poem's positive structure, proceeds tentatively in an evident diffidence and hesitancy of assertion. The effect of this *procédé*, Leavis writes, is a certain quality of "unseizableness" (1943, 1965: 95), a quality that we might have called 'ambiguity' in the 1950s and 1960s and today might call 'polysemy', though Leavis' word carries, perhaps, a greater flavour of the particularity of his encounter with the poem. His analysis of the opening of "Burnt Norton" is famous for its sensitiveness to the pressures and shifts of thought and feeling in the movement, the continuousness, of the verse, catching "the specific indeterminate status of the experience" (95). He sees this fundamentally as the "complex effect of a de-realizing of the routine commonsense world together with the evoking of a reality that is hidden among the unrealities into which life in time, closely questioned, paradoxes itself. . . ." (96).

In the "Burnt Norton" opening, the sudden slippage, after the propositional assertiveness of the first ten lines, at

But to what purpose  
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves  
I do not know. (CP 189)

and, superadded, the attendant anxiety of slipping further, once the stays are pulled, into a more radical rupture, a felt anxiety, figured

even in the lineation, that gives the word "Disturbing" its faintly menacing note, is marvellously conveyed by Leavis as a "sudden drop to another plane, to a distancing comment, that brings out by contrast the immediacy of what goes before, while at the same time contributing to the sensuous presentation of the whole" (96). The "sensuous presentation of the whole" is negotiated by the spatializing action of the "sudden drop," the result of a progressive widening of the discourse of philosophy, a speculation inaugurated by "Footfalls echo . . ." widening, finally to a fully achieved iconic space--the garden--"our first world." That world becomes the abstract site where certain 'takes' of self and identity condense as the result of the special coherences permissible in heightened states of perception, reverie and dream, in this case the dream of origins. It is these specific condensations, however feelingly enacted in all their preternatural harmony, that press us, reprovingly, towards the real, not to an artificial paradise won back from memory. Leavis hears the reproof and accepts it as having the force of incontestable truth. To put it baldly, however, literary criticism does not demand an enquiry into the truth of Eliot's final assertions, but it does demand an appreciation for their contestability. Yet in the poem's echoes, vertigoes, intermittances, pauses, hesitations, its "unseizableness" in short, "reality," Leavis writes, is sought as an "absolute reference" that confronts "the spirit with the necessity of supreme decisions, ultimate choices, and so give[s] a meaning to life" (97). In the need to close the poem by reading out a referent structure (Chatman 1980: 41-42) from some deeper level that actualizes a 'meaning of life', Leavis abandons his original, and most potentially productive, *aperçu*, the very



"unseizableness" of the poem's organization. This quality does not scatter, diffract, or dissolve the poem's meaning. On the contrary, the poem's "unseizableness" marks its practical engagement with reality and, therefore, constitutes a semantic feature. Leavis hears only the unavoidable elusiveness that attends the uttering of gnomic counsels. For him the poem's "unseizableness" obstructs meaning rather than produces it. For us there is no need to read the poem as an intensely felt, but otherwise simple, proposition about a generalization called 'life' or 'reality'.

Critical closure of this sort, the *sine qua non* of formalist criticism, needs some absolute referent to limit the play of meaning. But such closure rationalizes a text's microstructural diversity, evident from line to line as a multiplicity of organizations, by re-writing the poem's unique and irreducible details and sequences in terms of more or less resounding cultural commonplaces without recognizing that the texts so re-written are themselves comments on the commonplaces into which they are resolved. Formalist re-writing of a work contains determinants that obscure the work's detailed relationship to the social and historical process, the concrete history in which it is lodged, by recasting the work's utterances as statements about states of affairs in general: "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" is not a bald proposition with which we ought or ought not agree (Leavis 1975: 177). Nor is it, as Leavis would have it, quasi-scriptural. The meanings of "reality" and "human kind" are not absolute denotations; they are, in fact, usages which particular men and women at particular times under particular conditions privilege as part of a wider social practice. This practice

involves the appropriation of a network of 'absolute' references as a validating condition and limiting case of an historically determined structure of signifiers. This structure of signifiers and their references, conventionalized over time, constitute an intelligible universe.

No one can argue that the sort of formalist reading we see here is not attentively and feelingly done; Leavis' actual responsiveness to the shifts and movement of the text are paradigmatic for practical criticism. Where the weakness lies is in how these shifts, word choices, linebreaks, syntactic pressures are to be made sense of, how the delicacy of the poem's positive structure, as it is sensitively constructed, is to be interpreted. The appeal to "life," "living reality," or any other reification of the lived complexity of historically active social structures and processes cannot function as adequate interpretation because its explanatory power is hidden from sight, is simply implicit and unnamed in the shared intersubjectivity of the lived. Having won a magnificently complex sense of the poem's positive activity, Leavis closes his eyes when he turns to the world about which the poem seems to be making some point. He closes his eyes by collapsing the irreducible complexity of the social world to which the poem refers into generalized concepts--"life," "living reality"--with contents that are never made explicit. Criticism needs to grow eyes in order to examine more closely what a phrase like the "concrete actualities of experience" actually names in a poem. Clearly, a poem cannot deliver in some unmediated form experience itself. The question is how we are to account for the mediations which transform experience into a poetic object.

Plainly, the poem's language assembles and mobilizes, to some

extent, attitudes towards the experiences which it presents. But no language comes into a poem that has not already had a vivid life and history in a variety of recuperable social discourses, discourses that can be mapped across a real social terrain (Bakhtin 1929, 1973: 163-167). Thus, how we are to take the donnish tone of the opening of "Burnt Norton" will depend on what attitude we think the poem is asking us to take towards it, an attitude which can be made sense of as a function of that paradigmatic set of attitudes towards dons and their professional discourses which can be recovered from the common intuitive life of a particular community. This line of thought obviously foregrounds a poem's language, but not language in some abstract sense, not the system of language (what structuralism calls *la langue*). Instead, the verbal medium of the poem is language as *la parole*, language as it is used in particular times and places. Language in this sense is constitutive of the entire contents of what I am calling the common intuitive life of a community. One cannot use language outside the associations, denotations, connotations, histories, meanings, etc. that make up this shared intuitive life (Halliday 1978: 8-35, 211-235). Thus, to use any locution is to establish a relation with the purposes to which that locution or tone or syntax has been put in the socio-verbal history of the community. If we read the opening lines of "Burnt Norton" solely for their propositional content, or, in other words, for what they might or might not say about "Time," we miss the same dimension of the poem that we miss in Rene Magritte's famous painting of a pipe with its legend "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" (*The Treachery (or Perfidy) of Images*, 1928-1929), if we think the representation there *is* a pipe.

Language does not simply reflect, but actively constitutes, social reality; that is, language is not an autonomous order of signs that parallels an autonomous order of things; nor is it narrowly stipulative. Although the relation of signifier to signified in language is arbitrary, the relation is nonetheless conventional and, more or less, historically stable (Williams 1977: 43-44). Furthermore, as Benjamin Lee Whorf suggests, "we dissect reality along lines laid down by our native languages":

And every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.  
(1956, 1978: 252)

In an important article in 1962, William Haas defined the relation between the structure of signifiers and the *panta rhei* of things:

It is of course, ultimately, some relation of linguistic expressions to other things that constitutes their meanings. The question is: What sort of relation? My point is that it is not, and cannot be, a relation between two distinct orders of thing. The alleged confrontation of language with facts, the alleged reference of expressions to things uninvolved in language--this we cannot make sense of. If we divide language from other things in this dualist fashion, both are dissolved in a general blur. It is only in their active interplay with one another that either assumes determinate shape; and it is this *interplay*--this active co-operation of utterances with things--that constitutes the meaning of utterances. (223)

Whorf and Haas are not talking about some special reality, but of the reality of everyday life. And poems, too, like *Four Quartets*, are

meaningful only within the context of the semantic intersubjectivity of the everyday. Deviations from the reality of everyday life are clearly marked and are meaningful only in the specifics of the concrete relationship set up between finite provinces of meaning and the cohesive, intelligible, linguistically generated and maintained paramount reality of everyday existence (Berger and Luckmann 1979: 39). Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world; that is, the reality of everyday life is apprehended as an ordered reality (Berger and Luckmann: 33). This paramount reality is organized around the here and now of the present; the past and the future, and the ways in which the grammatical category of tense discriminates their varieties, no doubt exist, but they exist in terms of differing degrees of closeness and remoteness from the present. In other words, the 'past' and the 'future' are only sub-categories of, or attitudes belonging to and deriving from, the present, which are therefore radically contingent upon the present. This may seem to be only a statement of the obvious, but too often formalism has treated notions of the 'past' and the 'future' as absolutes--unchanging, essentially incontestable transcendentals--instead of the socio-historic, specific, human, productive, contestable, quotidian notions they really are. The reality of everyday life further presents itself as an intersubjective world, a world shared with others (Berger and Luckmann: 37). The primary modality of this sharing is narrative (Havelock 1963: 87-89; Jameson 1981: 74-102), although with the specialization of function in society certain ways of sharing the world are inscribed by non-narrative means, for instance, the discourses of science. Compared to the reality of everyday life,

other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. "All finite provinces of meaning," Berger and Luckmann write, "are characterized by a turning away of attention from the reality of everyday life."

While there are, of course, shifts in attention *within* everyday life, the shift to a finite province of meaning is of a much more radical kind. *A radical change takes place in the tension of consciousness.* In the context of religious experience this has been aptly called 'leaping'. *It is important to stress, however, that the reality of everyday life retains its paramount status even as such 'leaps' take place. If nothing else, language makes sure of this. The common language available to me for the objectification of my experiences is grounded in everyday life and keeps pointing back to it even as I employ it to interpret experiences in finite provinces of meaning.* Typically, therefore, I 'distort' the reality of the latter as soon as I begin to use the common language in interpreting them, that is, I 'translate' the non-everyday experiences back into the paramount reality. This may be readily seen in terms of dreams, but it is also typical of those trying to report about theoretical, aesthetic or religious worlds of meaning. The theoretical physicist tells us that his concept of space cannot be conveyed linguistically, just as the artist does with regard to the meaning of his creations and the mystic with regard to his encounters with the divine. Yet all these--dreamer, physicist, artist and mystic--also live in the reality of everyday life. *Indeed, one of their important problems is to interpret the co-existence of this reality with the reality enclaves into which they have ventured.*

(39-40, my emphasis)

It is an assumption of this study that the aesthetic experience, the writing and reading of poetry for example, constitutes just such a finite province of meaning situated within paramount reality and acting upon it. As a finite province of meaning, art can comment on, attack, support, subvert, and revise paramount reality symbolically.

The general concept for our purposes here is that experience of the world constitutes an experience of a reality that is very different from the order of 'things' to which unmediated experience is supposed to give us access. We may enjoy, at the elementary physical level, immediate sensory contact with the material world around us, but each such contact has no existence in the social universe except in the envelope of meaning which makes the contact intelligible in the context of paramount reality. Materiality cannot evade semiotic appropriation (Eco 1979a: 22-24). As a system of constitutive signs, the social universe organizes the 'world' around man and creates a fully realized common intuitive life (Lotman and Uspensky 1978: 213). Our making of the common intuitive life occurs by virtue of our individual use of language in the context of the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men (Marx and Engels 1845-46, 1970: 19). In other words, language is a way of opening us towards the social universe, transforming, practically, the silence and namelessness of things. All experience, the instant it is socialized, is always already inscribed with meaning by prior knowledge of the words which traditionally encompass and envelope it.

The inadequacy of Richards' concept of tone as the critical access to the relation of text to context should here be plain, for it is to the constructed, 'man-made' reality that words like "reality" and "human kind" in "Burnt Norton" actually refer. They actualize in the variety of their uses a latent potential for meaning which the social universe offers as the common intuitive life. Thus, Eliot's use of a phrase like "human kind" is significant, not because of its abstract denotation--a positive meaning that is imagined by formalism to exist in a universal, neutral or

absolute space--but because such a phrase exists instead in a semantic space whose contours are marked by all the phrases and formulations with which "human kind" shares, relations of synonymy, hyponymy, antimony, or incompatibility, etc. (Lyons 1977: 270-335). The phrase also trails the ideological accumulations which usage of all these pairs and sets of terms has inscribed in the paradigm they constitute. Similarly, the significance of the precise syntagmatic positioning of "human kind," in this case the coupling, as a momentary but possibly significant opposition, of ". . . bird: human . . ." (CP 190), is effaced when the array of articulations and conjunctions in which it appears are enclosed by critical expectations and assumptions of absolute or generalized reference. This is not to argue that no statements of general reference are permissible; clearly they are. But what must be insisted upon is that criticism should not be seduced into taking for granted the absolute status of the reference; a general statement should first be examined for the function it serves in particular contexts of utterance: linguistic, literary, social, political, ideological, etc.

These contexts help constitute the 'world', not the 'world' of unmediated experience, natural objects, physiological processes; those entities and processes *as such* are meaningless, but, set back in specific contexts, they share in the plenitude of meaning which the 'world' as a whole makes possible. Thus, Eliot's poems (and all poems) are not organizations of experience, but are, as it were, organizations of meaning, that is, forms that actualize potential meaning in the common intuitive life. They make plain Eliot's own grasp of and attitude towards not simply "audience," but the specific forms of life in which his poems and



his experience have their sense, an environment with all its privileged orders and hierarchies, its historical accumulations and condensations of significance, its legitimating sanctions and conditions, its possible discourses, literatures, cognitive styles, voices, and, finally, its systematic, and significant, 'cooking' of physical nature:

Laughing should, if its expression does not come by nature, be carefully taught. Nor need there be any artificiality in this, for, after a while, it becomes as natural as the correct pronunciation of words after a series of elocution lessons, and, as everybody knows, distinct enunciation does not come by nature. But who could describe it as artificial? In the same way the pretty harmonious laugh is a second nature with many. The only thing to be guarded against is that the inculcated laugh is apt to grow stereotyped, and few things are more irritating than to hear it over and over again, begin on the same note, run down the same scale, and consequently express no more mirth than the keys of the piano. (Humphrey 1897: 13)

Formalism directs our attention in a poem, no less than in a laugh, to the internal organization of the text's positive form. However, a second and more important organization emerges in the dialectical interaction between the work, conceived of as a signifying practice, and the common intuitive life to which it refers and on which it operates. The poem, from this perspective, is defined by what it does in that arena. And what the poem is doing is foregrounding, not immediate experience as some accounts of poetry would have it, but the way experiences are represented, that is, inscribed, in the common intuitive life of paramount reality. A poem, a literary text generally, explores the significations which experiences carry in the common intuitive life of a particular society. The procedures it employs to do this are many and complex.

The uniqueness of literary discourse lies in just the way it transforms ordinary language. The doctrine of *le mot juste*, to digress for a moment, underscores this view of the literary text rather well. Rather than think of *le mot juste* as a kind of felicitous accuracy of expression snatched from the air, we might now understand the nature of its accuracy. *Le mot juste* is accurate not because of any intrinsic access it has to the reality it is naming (remember how many such words and phrases quickly become clichés), but it is accurate precisely because of the implicit, yet still powerful, critique of the conventional locution or cliché which it triumphantly displaces. The uniqueness of literary discourse, then, lies in the work of transformation. In this respect, the conventional relationship between signifier and signified is often subverted or overturned so as either to provoke a new vision of the world or, as in the case of T. S. Eliot, to restore some older order of signification in the common intuitive life. This dialectical action produces the poem's negative structure.

It is negative because it urges criticism to take notice of the environment as a formative and transformative matrix of possible meanings, some of which are chosen and some of which are refused. "Human kind," in the lines discussed earlier, is a phrase that has both a positive, denotative meaning, but actively excludes its near synonyms, such as 'the masses', or 'the general public', 'body politic', etc. Choosing some one particular formulation is an act both positive and negative, both an inclusion and an exclusion. And the choice cannot be explained on formalist principles alone.<sup>12</sup> *To choose one thing over another* implies an attitude towards those things that have been rejected and the

wider social meanings the rejected carry with them. That which is excluded and the process of exclusion, conscious or not, shape the overall form of a work; they are often the things a text cannot, or refuses, to speak about: "the value of [Jane] Austen's fiction thrives quite as much on its ignorance as on its insight: it is because there is so much the novels cannot possibly know that they know what they do, and in the *form* they do" (Eagleton 1976: 71).

'Tone' provides access to the external relations, or negative structure, of the literary work, relations that tend to *de-form* the abstract symmetries towards which a work's internal development, usually arrayed by the generative action of a dominant theory and practice of literature, leans. To recast Richards' earlier formulation, "tone," then, is an effect of the way a poem concretely signals only the existence, but *not* the articulated form, of several complex links, links between writer (or speaker) and audience (Richards 1929, 1946: 182), writer (or speaker) and the dominant discourses by which the audience has already inscribed intersubjective experience in the past, and writer (or speaker) and the dominant ideology of his or her time. I give the term 'ideology' the sense in which Fredric Jameson has recently used it. Basing his definition on Louis Althusser, Jameson writes that ideology is "a representational structure [representation = *DARSTELLUNG*] which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History" (1981: 30). The actual form of these links, described crudely by Richards as an attitude towards an audience, can be more inclusively described as a writer's, and a text's, attitude towards

that in the environment which the text faces, and beyond that, the complex relations into which a work enters as a signifying activity, or raised to a higher power, as a social or political practice. In other words, to use our earlier terminology, the literary text is a kind of comment (generic, modal) about the way certain particular experiences, objects, events ("our first world") have been or are normally inscribed in the reality of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann: 152-153). But the form this comment takes is not the simple re-experiencing of that which has already been inscribed; instead, it takes the form of a revision, which, in the case of modernism, incorporates the rhetorical strategy of presenting the revision as giving access to the seed experiences obscured or perverted by the original inscription. The form of the revision is determined by the attitude the writer chooses to take towards the way experience is being or has been 'cooked' in paramount reality in the past. The site of this revision is a finite province of meaning. It is important to note, and this is an assumption of this study, that a writer's or text's attitude towards the common intuitive life is always to be understood as an attitude to an environment always already organized, densely inscribed with meaning and structured in depth. So that, for example, an attitude towards "reality" or "human kind" or "truth" is always an attitude towards the way these signs already exist in the world.

## Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> The most influential attacks on historicist and contextual approaches to literary criticism in our era (since 1940) are the following: Ransom 1972; Leavis 1962: 182-194 and 195-203; Welleck and Warren 1973: 71-135; Wimsatt 1954; Frye 1968; 1973; Culler 1975; de Man 1979; Riffaterre 1978. But see Eagleton 1983: 51-53 on William Empson.

<sup>2</sup> By Anglo-American formalism I mean the text-based literary criticism widely practiced in the academies of the North Atlantic world from the 1940s to the 1970s, although its theoretical foundations were laid two decades earlier. In the 1960s and 1970s, primarily in America, its unevenly developed conceptual and categorical base came under intense scrutiny by a new generation of formalists and a more systematic (i.e. rule-governed) formalism, now called "structuralism," was proposed in its place.

<sup>3</sup> The principal conceptual inhibition for Anglo-American formalism has been its reticence in dealing with 'intention' in a text. We cannot think 'intention' as a semantic or formal element of a text without some notion of an active signifying context. Formalism's self-inflicted myopia on this question can be corrected if our view of language acknowledges language's inseparability from the semantics of the social process, no matter to what special uses language is put. "An intention can only be deduced by a hearer or reader from language and situation, and moreover it cannot simply be assumed that intentions are always fully known

to a speaker himself, even when it is not his intention to conceal his intention" (Turner 1973: 147). The whole discussion of context in chapter five of Turner's book is particularly lucid and written from a literary, rather than a linguistic or philosophical, perspective. Of course, there are many excellent linguistic discussions of context. In the area of semantics John Lyons' recent summaries and discussions of the notion are now the best introduction to the complexities of the issue (1978: 570-635). For an excellent brief summary of the contemporary literary views of 'intention' see Chandler 1982: 464-465n.11.

<sup>4</sup> Since 'tone' as a critical concept is rarely discussed explicitly within a developed literary theory by practical critics, it continues to orient interpretation silently. It provides implicit critical control on interpretative judgements seemingly derived from a survey of intrinsic features. The most interesting examples of the silent reading of context through the concept of 'tone' are F. R. Leavis, in most of his practical criticism, and Cleanth Brooks in most of his, but especially visibly so in "The Case of Miss Arabella Fermor," in (1947: 80-104).

<sup>5</sup> Lodge 1970: 367; and see also Eliot's comments on George Wyndham in *SW* 24-32, but contrast Eliot's remarks on another gentleman-amateur, Charles Whibley, whose religious sentiments were more congenial to his own, in *SE* 439-440 et seq. Stead 1967: 52-53.

<sup>6</sup> I have derived my knowledge of the late and post Victorian literary scene and situation from many primary and secondary sources over a number of years, having first studied the early modern period as a senior undergraduate. However, C. K. Stead's *The New Poetic* (1967) still seems to me to assemble an accurate account of the literary

environment of the time and the common intuitive life which writers and their publics shared. His account of the place of the Georgian poets on this landscape and of their intellectual and moral commitment to liberalism remains unsurpassed (86-87). I have also profited greatly from reading two excellent social and political histories of England in this period: Donald Read's *England 1868-1914* (1979) and Richard Shannon's *The Crisis of Imperialism, 1865-1915* (1974). The relevant sections and chapters of Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (1958, 1961) and *The Long Revolution* (1961) first spurred my interest, years ago, in this period.

<sup>7</sup> The pre-romantic view of a poem's function, that it delight and instruct, is logically linked to poetry's rhetorical basis and its consequent orientation towards the author-audience relationship. See Stone 1967: 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that when the "new criticism" itself became the reigning orthodoxy in the 1950s and 1960s it forced the critical approaches it had challenged to re-vitalize their own disrupted, and in some cases discredited, methods. Deconstructive practices, for example, represent, to some extent, the renewal of a conceptually more daring and psychologically aggressive philological tradition. This is especially visible in the work of those trained at Yale in the last two decades; see, for example, Parker 1979: 19. Deconstruction, in fact, might be characterized as philology's revenge on close reading. Other traditions of reading scattered by "new criticism" have also profited from a period of self-examination. Rhetorical analysis, for example, has re-surfaced in the last decade or so and won back, to some considerable

extent, its pre-formalist virility, bolstered by the empirical authority of modern and post-modern perceptual and cognitive psychologies. In this respect, Angus Fletcher's study of allegory (1964) is a work whose methodological importance equals the brilliance of its analysis of a discursive mode. Rhetoric's interest in a reader's reception of discursive affects has been powerfully recast by Stanley Fish, under the name of "affective stylistics," as a phenomenology of the reception control apparatus in a text (1972: 383-427). Renewed interest in the figurative aspects of the rhetorical tradition has also directed attention to schematic processes in figure and trope. See Barthes 1971; 1976; de Man, 1971; White, 1973. Indeed the old biographical approach, which bore so much of the weight of Eliot's, and formalism's, tongue, has also been renewed in a number of forms, notably as psychobiography, say Sartre on Flaubert, or, as what can only be called ecobiography, of which the sole exemplar so far is Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971). Marxist critical practice has also profited from the challenges of "new criticism," challenges first taken up by an Italian, though his work dealt extensively with Anglo-American literary and critical practices: Della Volpe 1960, 1978.

<sup>9</sup> The standard discussion is Abrams 1958: 235-241, but see Immanuel Kant's own comments in "The Final Purpose of the Natural Dialectic of Human Reason," in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), translated by Kemp Smith, 1929, 1968: 549-570. See also the first part, on Being, in Hegel's *The Science of Logic* (1929: 79-197).

<sup>10</sup> Henry Fielding acknowledges this new authority in mid-eighteenth-century legal practice as a 'modern' opinion. See *Joseph Andrews*, 1742,



1980: 85.

<sup>11</sup> John Hollander has suggested that specifically professional and personal praise of the actual musician is clearly visible at the end of the seventeenth century in the "musical odes" of John Dryden (1970: 422). My point about Beethoven is that by 1800 the shift of attention that Hollander describes can call for support on an achieved philosophical tradition of the Subject.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot understood very well the semantics of 'choice'. See "The Function of Criticism," in *SE* 14-15.

## Chapter Two: The destruction of "literature"

T. S. Eliot's early prose and poetry are entirely devoted to the transforming of the common intuitive life of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie. This project, of course, did not spring fully formed from Eliot's forehead. It gathered force slowly in several areas of endeavour --his philosophical studies, literature, criticism, and later, his socio-cultural criticism. Remarkably, it began to take shape very early in Eliot's life, as early as 1910-1911, the winter he spent in Paris as a student and first encountered the formative ideas of Charles Maurras, the winter of the first version of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (Kojecky 1971: 58-62; Gordon 1977: 54). This renovatory project focussed certain recurring themes, which I will be examining in the next few chapters. But equally as important as these themes are in understanding his early work is the audience to whom this work is addressed and which must be kept constantly in mind. I will be arguing that Eliot spoke to and for an important segment of society, briefly the Anglo-American bourgeoisie, and through them to the wider bourgeois culture of Europe (Harrison 1967: 27, 159-160; Kojecky 1971: 47-52, 117-120; Eagleton 1976: 145-146; Gloversmith 1980: 36). It is for the transformation of the common intuitive life of that class that Eliot's work has its primary social significance. The fact that he cast his thought in universalist terms indicates clearly the proximity of this social region to authority and power, a proximity that gives to bourgeois consciousness the notion

that it occupies a privileged point-of-view in casting a directive eye over the social order as a whole (Miliband 1977: 49-65; Lowe 1982: 28-29). In short, Eliot's work gains in point and force through its detailed work on the affective life of the social class that came to occupy the commanding heights of society during the nineteenth century. It was conceived and executed as a war on the hearts and minds, as it were, of this class during, what seemed to him, to be the moment of its deepest crisis, in the first decades of the present century. After 1930, Eliot devoted more and more of his intellectual energy to the larger debate on culture and society that developed within the bourgeoisie as the crisis intensified in the interwar years before the sea-change after 1945.

However, it was in his early literary work that those later concerns found their first expression. Very early on, Eliot was appalled by what he saw as the moral and intellectual weakening of the directive elites into which he himself had been born (cf. Pound 1917: 6-7). He recoiled, for example, from a situation in which Anglo-American literature was made intellectually moribund by the persistence of a pallid romanticism, etiolated in theme, in technique, in poise, in sensibility. He recoiled just as vigorously from a parallel socio-political situation in which the 'natural' stewards of state power were dribbling away their authority through the 'softheaded palliatives' of liberal reform, through the surrender to the political push from below in the form of a variety of democratic tendencies, through the evasion of the ideological responsibility of maintaining a symbolic canopy of values, beliefs, and customs sacramentalized by a national church (Berger 1969: 134). His early literary work, then, was aimed at the destruction of what he saw as the

tainted legacy of the immediate literary past. The critique of this legacy can be seen at work in one of his greatest early achievements, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." But before I look at this signal poem, I want to make a first approach to the literary romanticism Eliot helped to rout in these early years.

William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* closes in the final books by turning back on the terrain it has crossed in order to situate itself as a whole within a greater encompassing totality, a totality that verifies the ultimate and programmatic connection of consciousness and Nature in a strenuously won repose (Abrams 1965: 558; Hartman 1966: 148-149; Wasserman 1968: 218). The characteristic movement which defines *The Prelude* is that of distancing, of gaining perspective (hence the importance of mountains), by situating intensely experienced particulars in the philosophical totality that authenticates them. This philosophical 'solution' was, of course, no solution at all. By thematizing the framing totality as the connection between consciousness and Nature, Wordsworth helped put in place the conditions which brought about what Robert Langbaum has called the "poetry of experience" (1963: 35-36). The characteristic psychic movement of this kind of poetry, as in *The Prelude*, is the final surmounting of the intensely experienced existential by access to the metaphysical frame that raises the 'accidents' of experience to another plane where experience, now recoded to a higher, universalizing semiotic, can be assimilated to an accumulating store of transcendental wisdom (Abrams 1958: 131-132). What is 'left behind' in this ascent is a world or reality that the languages of philosophical idealism cannot make sense of, except through the doctrine of the real

as illusion.

In this disjunction between the real and the ideal, the notion of the world as an irredeemable chaos, born in Plato's work, re-appears in romanticism (Durrant 1969: 101), but carries a contemporary content, shaped by the social and economic facts of an industrialism taking mature form in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The social and political thematics which this philosophical idealism helps inscribe subsumes the linked attitudes of contempt and pity towards those, the 'masses', the 'mob', 'human kind', ensnared in the heavy chains of the "lower prison," to use the neo-platonist terms of Malcolm Lowry's "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession."<sup>1</sup>

The 'solution' philosophical idealism offers in the context of the first era of mechanical production is ideological (Williams 1961: 48-64; 1975: 155-156, 174; Hobsbawm 1962: 296, 321). It allows the managerial and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie to avert its gaze from the social catastrophe that the long adjustment to industrialism caused in the early 1800s and, consequently, to widen the social distance between themselves and the new wage slaves standing by the machines. It also served to vitiate the bad conscience of those who had helped to set up the conditions by which ancestral communities, and the lived density of the social and cultural relations that existed in them, were disrupted and, in some cases, irretrievably smashed. The well known effect of these 'structural adjustments' was the displacement of a rural people to the mob societies of the great mid-Victorian conurbations (Deane 1967: 260; Hobsbawm 1970: 93). This is what makes the 'liberal' abolition of slavery in the Empire in 1838 unintentionally ironic.

Of course, in this process romantic poetry and its underlying idealism played an important ideological role in the social and cultural spheres. It helped link three skeins of thought that smoothed the way for the bourgeois mind to surmount the contradictions into which its economic practices during industrialization had placed its emancipatory and libertarian rhetoric. The high value placed on Nature both as an object of experience and as a metaphysical abstraction (Willey 1940, 1967; Abrams 1958: 105-106; Litz 1977: 470-488) combined with a second development, namely the socio-economic construction of the atomic individual in the nineteenth century (Tawney 1922, 1977: 179-196; Lukes 1971: 65), complemented by the notion of the experiencing subject as the essential unit of consciousness (Lukács 1923, 1971: 124-125; Horkheimer and Adorno 1944, 1972: 82-83). However, the logic of this conjunction tends towards an encompassing materialism which bourgeois thought was not entirely ready to formulate to itself, although bourgeois economic *practices* were irrevocably based on materialist assumptions about the nature of society. Why bourgeois thought felt compelled to hold on to the notion of the transcendence of the material in the de-sacralized form of philosophical idealism makes for an intensely interesting episode in the ideological demands put on the new governors of the civil world by the old (Goldmann 1973: 43). For the bourgeoisie, idealist philosophy was to do the work of legitimation that religion had accomplished for the *ancien régime*. This ideological episode was translated into a third definitive development in the making of romantic aesthetics. The idealist distancing of experience helped preserve romanticism from the materialist abyss towards which its political and economic practices seemed to

'condemn' it. Thus, the movement of the experiencing subject towards Nature was reversed by a reciprocal distancing of the subject, accomplished by the abstraction from the concrete contact of consciousness and Nature of the ideal form of that contact. This move installs the ideal as the greater encompassing totality, the totality that authenticates experience and, ultimately, rejects it.

In reaction to this conjunction of ideas, early modernist poetry, the poetry of the scrupulously and closely observed particular, deliberately refused to so distance itself by heading for the 'higher' ground of the kind *The Prelude* endorses. It also refused to inflate the value of 'personality' (the cliché into which the metaphysical abstractions of the Kantian 'subject' had dwindled at the end of the romantic epoch [Hobsbawm 1962: 296]) and, finally, refused to find salvation in Nature or the natural by siting itself in the urban and man-made.

The marks of those refusals can be found in most early modernist poems.<sup>2</sup> "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," for example, is an intensely realized poem that from its first refusal to ask the "overwhelming question" to its final placing refusal: "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" defers the question of the larger framework. The poem does not locate its semantic and its syntagmatic orderliness in the benign closures of some higher realm through the operation of a master code, like a theology, that both situates the matter and manner of the text and encourages a particular attitude towards it. Instead, the specific coherences of Eliot's poem are located in the action of a fully realized social speech that leads interpretation to the common intuitive life of a particular social scene within the wider bourgeois

ethos, rather than attenuating the poem in terms of aesthetic essences or other forms of idealism. Further, "Prufrock's" devices are directed towards unveiling the poem's own compositional procedures, and thus the subverting of the Romantic notion of artistic creation as an impenetrable mystery. Coleridge in "Frost at Midnight" could only take this step symbolically, through the metaphor of the "ministering frost" which both illuminates the nature of the imaginative process, and, finally, veils it in order to preserve the myth of its origin in some non-social, non-human essence. "Prufrock" takes this step without hesitation. This compositional level is the level where we become aware of the poem's negative structure, as a relation between a specific communal life and the poem's positive structure. The resulting production of a placing tonal structure allows us to recognize the particular sound-shape of the speech of a particular social community. Formalist criticism of the "Prufrock" sound, however, has tended to pursue it in those literary places which the poem itself deliberately displaces (Edwards 1976: 44-45).

Hugh Kenner hears this speech in almost entirely literary terms, as a sort of duet between Tennyson and Edward Lear (1966: 6-8). The "Tennysonian medium" or "norm" (8), however, is clearly the *forte* voice in the Prufrock speech. "He learned to *use* it," Kenner wryly asserts, "he never made the mistake of trying to think in it" (9), thus escaping the especial Tennysonian "fatuity" (8). The poem, according to Kenner, presses out a "monotonous emotional pedal-point" (10). The famous long section on Time (CP 14) simply "reverberates . . . while . . . portentousness overlays mere sonority" (10).



What "murder and create" may mean we cannot tell, though it is plain what the phrase can *do*; the words have lost their connexion with the active world, lost in fact everything but their potential for neurasthenic shock. "Time for you and time for me" is as hypnotic and as meaningless as a phrase on the 'cellos. (10)

In many ways this account of the Prufrock sound remains unsurpassed in the criticism and is still extremely persuasive in its phonic "embryology" (7). Yet, though persuasive, this account cannot say why Eliot bothered in the first place. When Kenner suggests we know what a phrase like "murder and create" can *do*, even though we may not know what it means, we can hardly agree that what we take away from this state of affairs is the sense that "the words have lost their connexion with the active world." If by knowing what a phrase 'can do' *within* a particular text, that is, *do* something in the construction of the text's sense, then it is rather difficult to understand how *this* sort of 'doing' can be distinguished from a text's intrinsic meaning, unless we want to separate "meaning" from "meaning function." But if a phrase or utterance can be said to 'do' something *distinct* from all those 'meaning functions' which words, phrases, clauses, syntax, pauses, etc. 'do' in constructing something that might be construed as intrinsic meaning, and thus making a phrase like "murder and create" meaningful, then such a phrase must 'do' something beyond the text's margins, *in* the "active world," not as a turning away from it. Indeed, if we believe it is legitimate to ask why Eliot bothered in the first place, legitimate to ask what sort of privilege Tennyson or Lear or Coleridge or Swinburne had in the late nineteenth century that suggested to Eliot that "Prufrock" was for some reason worth

doing, we might have the beginnings of an answer to how the text connects with the active world.

Indeed just such a critical project is implicit in Kenner's description of "Prufrock." While speaking of the world of words that Tennyson and Swinburne bequeathed to the younger generation of poets, he makes this general 'structuralist' point:

Coherence was obtained by exploiting the sounds of the words and the implications concealed in their sounds; "A cry that shivered to the tingling stars" would be a strikingly impoverished line if the English language could be suddenly purged of the words "twinkling" and "tinkling." (7)

No doubt it would. But is the strikingness of the line simply based on the sound equivalences or "implications" that exist in the sound-image paradigm which Kenner alertly constructs? Doesn't this give, however, too narrow a sense to his word "implications"? Substituting "twinkling" or "tinkling" in the place of "tingling" makes suddenly a line by Rupert Brooke. Doesn't "tingling" carry its major semantic charge, not from the plasticity of common phoneme paradigms, but *against* "twinkling" and "tinkling" and the way they are used in texts, like the Georgians', that were perceived, before modernism's attack on Georgian poetics, as having a certain *social* privilege and prestige, perhaps even a prestige clinging to them as a consequence of their users' and consumers' proximity to power in Edwardian England; after all, who *did* make Rupert Brooke the darling of the Edwardian middle class? "Tingling" is more than a refined musical effect; it carries, negatively in the rejections and refusals it makes, from outside the Edwardian poetic and verbal norms, a statement about

those norms and the "active world" for which these words act as metonyms. In other words, to use a word like "tingling" carries out beyond the margins of the line an attitude towards not only the aptness of words like "twinkling" in the same linguistic contexts, but also an attitude towards those texts and the regions that valorize them, where words like "twinkling" settle comfortably in the collocational norms (Firth 1957: 194-196) that characterize the verbal culture of those regions.

Kenner's linguistically subtle description is still the best by a major critic. At least Kenner does not waste his time trying to actualize an identity for a character named Prufrock; at best 'Prufrock' is a "possible zone of consciousness" (35). Gertrude Patterson, who quotes this passage in Kenner approvingly, spends several pages of her *TSE: the making of the poems* trying to show where in the text some stable identity she calls 'Prufrock' is to be located. What she adopts as a persona for Prufrock, persona in this context defined as a set of "conflicting emotions" which are given "'a name plus a voice,'" to quote Kenner again, is a formulation which she borrows from Yvor Winters, a term Winters uses in *In Defense of Reason* to attack Eliot's modernism. "'Prufrock,'" Patterson writes, "is more specifically an assembled Qualitative Progression, heightened by irony" (1971: 116). For Winters, "Qualitative Progression" means a paratactic sequencing almost lower on the scale of syntagmatic sophistication than listing (Winters 1947: 31ff.). What Patterson means by it is the articulations of the poem itself in all its gaps and discontinuities that constitute Prufrock's elusive identity; in short, 'Prufrock' *is* the poem, the poem's form being compared to a Cubist painting (117). Patterson's laborious formalism

obscures for her the more productive way of asking the question about the 'Prufrock' persona. What did it mean in 1911 and 1917, when the poem was written and published respectively (Gordon 1977: 45), to do the persona of a speaker in a poem in this way? What relationship can be specified between the elusively constituted 'Prufrock' and the strenuous, male speakers of Henry Newbolt's imperial trumpet blasts? From where does such a 'personality' derive? And what kind of social privilege does it carry in the environment where it could not help but be compared to the norms of poetic voice, identity condensation, and even gender specification?<sup>3</sup> With the privileging of the experiencing subject in the thematics of romanticism and with the further valorization of the 'voice' as access to the substance of personal identity, what does it mean, in the period of the appropriation and thus the institutionalization of romanticism, that Eliot should present--of all things-- a 'Cubist' persona? The question has been well asked of the persona in Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, where the historical Propertius is 'done' in deliberate contrast to the 'honking' of Imperial apologists, like Vergil (Pound 1926, n.d.: 228, 230). The relevance of the Propertius persona, as done by Pound, would not have been lost on the apologists of the British imperium, which helps explain the harsh contemporary reaction to the 'translation'. It would have been more productive, perhaps, to approach the issue of the identity constituted by a text, if not in terms of a sociosemiotic approach, at least psychologically by some such schema as Anton Ehrenzweig's "ego rhythm" that he believes underlies and individuates all creative work (Ehrenzweig 1976: 120-121).

But even Gertrude Patterson's ponderous formalism is more interesting

than Ann Brady's claustrophobic generic schemata. Where Kenner hears Tennyson and Lear in the Prufrock sound, Brady notices a blending of satire and lyric. For her, the satire is almost entirely substantiated by the "use of rime" and the lyric by the use of "rime and refrain" (1978: 13). These terms are so general in reference that it is difficult to discriminate exactly what sounds they are supposed to convey. Even when Brady identifies the "satiric use of rime" (13) by pointing to the music hall phonics of "platter-matter," "flicker-snicker," and "ices-crisis," one can hardly expect to make much sense of them in *this* poem by simply calling them "satiric" in one breath and "lyrical" in another.

As varied, in alertness and sensitivity of response, as these critiques are, they do all share one thing in common. They conceive the text as a discrete, autonomous, and static object into which certain influences cataract from the appropriate, literary contexts. Whether the influence is of a particular writer or style--Tennyson say--or a particular textual precipitation of historically and culturally specific notions of personal identity, or of a particular historical genre, mode, or rhetorical routine, the external influencing process is seen principally as a system of internal projections on the formal orders of the work. These orders (characterized by Jakobson as orders of formal and linguistic equivalences [1964: 358-359]) function as a kind of cinema screen where the projections are resolved in some more or less mimetic form. The variability of the mimesis effect is controlled by the conventional standards of intelligibility in a given society. This tacit conception of the work of art underlies also the most important, recent critique of "Prufrock," in which a formalist account of the Prufrock

sound as social speech is attempted.

A. D. Moody's account of the sound-shape of some lines from the poem are a convenient place to begin. He discerns, as others have before him, that "a metrical substructure [mainly iambic in pulse] . . . is overlaid by natural speech rhythms, which follow the phrasing, and in which the phrase is shaped by its pattern of stresses" (1979: 31). Then he settles in on the famous refrain:

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo. (CP 14)

For Ann Brady the refrain primarily offers evidence of the "touches of lyrical grace" in the poem (13). Moody's analysis of the two lines is considerably more sophisticated.

In the first line, the first and last phrases match, and the middle one is a variation. The second line, though apparently lighter in weight, is in fact precisely equivalent. The long phrase 'of Michelangelo' has the same duration and stress-pattern as the latter two phrases of the same line, which it accurately echoes. *Thus we have* a perfectly correct couplet, elegant, languidly drawled, and with the form in miniature of its social scene and ethos. One hardly notices the presumption of its being so much at ease with Michelangelo: rhythmically, in sensibility, he seems perfectly subdued to the drawing-room.  
(31, my emphasis)

No one can seriously dispute Moody's conclusion, but what that conclusion has to do with the preceding prosodic analysis is difficult to see. His point about the interplay of metrical pattern and the language's 'natural' phrase and clause structure can be made about *any* piece of poetry, even of the most 'regular' couplets turned by the poets of Queen Anne's reign.

Why the lines may be "elegant" or "languidly drawn" has nothing specifically to do with whether "the long phrase 'of Michelangelo' has the same duration and stress-pattern as the latter two phrases of the first line, which it accurately echoes." There is no reason to believe that echoing is a distinctive feature of "elegance" or the unmistakeable sign of the languid. What has happened here is that an accurate judgement, or at least an arguable one (the lines *do* feel as if they ought to be languidly drawled), suddenly pops out and is presented as the conclusion (*Thus* we have . . .) for an empirical analysis that on closer inspection does not really support it. Moody's conclusion here is the actual conclusion to a silent reading not of the poem's positive, but of its negative, structure, that structure of external reference which the poem's tone signals. Moody is so familiar with the sociosemantic environment of the fragment of Anglo-American society "Prufrock" maps, hearing silently in his head, as we all do if we share, or learn about, this social context, the precise accenting of the vowels, the sardonic weariness of the drawl and what it signifies in the represented context of situation, the choice of Michelangelo himself and of the syntax in which his name is embedded within the acknowledged emptiness of salon chatter--all this, and more, constitutes Moody's competence to make any sense of these lines at all. Yet at the same time, he is committed explicitly to the autonomy of the poetic text, an isolated order of words that generates and contains its own meaning (Moody: 79). Thus, he imagines an irrelevant empirical analysis to cover saying something he knows tacitly from his own interactions in the world and his acquired knowledge of the Edwardian social milieu that "Prufrock" enacts.

His intimate knowledge of the Prufrock world, however it may have actually been won, is an undeclared given of his reading. He may be going through the gestures of 'deriving' the knowledge, in the proper positivist mode, but that is an empty exercise with little real meaning beyond the function it plays in the interpretative community (Fish 1980: 171) that valorizes it. In essence, Moody's reading of Eliot seems to split into two parallel critical activities. The critique slips from one to the other as need requires, at one moment doing various feats of induction as a necessary (because valorized) prelude and context for judgements derived silently from elsewhere. His concentration on prosody underlines the text's literariness, emphasizing the poem's *difference* from ordinary discourse, its disengagement from the verbal culture of the social relations the poem mimes. This critical operation widens the distance between text and social context by emphasizing the verse-specific distinctive features of the text and provides him with a universalist critical register or idiom that isn't, embarrassingly, contingent on tacit knowledge of this local social context articulated by specific social interactions. But it is a 'reading' of those interactions enacted as specific social relations in the poem, now set back, silently, in the history where they make sense, that provokes his conclusion. It is a particular self-inflicted blindness that has prevented formalists themselves from seeing the illegitimacy of a somnabulist criticism that walks all around the neighbourhood while insisting it has never left its own chaste bed. At bottom, this peculiar contradiction results, I think, primarily from a literary training in recent pedagogical traditions that refuses to pursue language beyond the no-man's-land of the literary and



to investigate it in the places where its magic powers run up hard against the world. In this respect, the methods of the Greek rhetoricians are in advance of the reigning formalism. They, at least, had found a way of listening to men *talk* while walking from the Academy to the *agora* and back again. And the actual talk they heard, they soon realized, was not a self-contained oral text, a simply or elaborately ornamented container of information plus effects, but "a strategy for encompassing a situation" (Burke 1941, 1961: 97). In other words, when speaking about a poem (or any text for that matter) we are not referring primarily to an object, but to an activity in the world. This activity is semantic and interacts with the world as sociosemiotic reality, a reality maintained by 'texts', which inscribe common intuitive life (Halliday 1978: 125; Berger and Luckmann 1979: 172-173; Jameson 1982: 74).

Nor is this verbal action all there is to it. For all these words are grounded in what Malinowski would call 'contexts of situation'. And very important among these 'contexts of situation' are the kind of factors considered by Bentham, Marx, and Veblen, the material interests (of private or class structure) that you symbolically defend or symbolically appropriate or symbolically align yourself with in the course of making your own assertions. These interests do not 'cause' your discussion; . . . . But they greatly affect the *idiom* in which you speak, and so the idiom by which you think.  
(Burke 1941, 1961: 96)

The words of "Prufrock" are grounded in a particular context of situation, a social context that is historically recuperable and to which the poem refers in its content, in its formal procedures, and in its assumptions. The critical task, then, is to conjoin several lines of thought: 1) the kind of attitude the text in its compositional

procedures directs us to have towards the literary conventions and norms of its day; 2) the use the text makes of the idioms in which identity, subjectivity, and experience are discussed, that is, assigned a place and a value in a socio-ethical order; 3) the identification of social groups in which these specific idioms originate; and 4) the range of forms opposition to the system of social norms takes at different levels of society. For example, in a society powerfully dominated by a landed 'aristocracy of the sword', what form does opposition take to its socio-ethical idioms and norms from within its own precincts? Or what different forms would opposition take in that situation from a parallel, administratively able, but socially slighted 'aristocracy of the robe', or opposition from a materially prosperous, class conscious, but socially peripheral, urban merchant elite? What I am saying, of course, is that attention to "Prufrock's" literariness is only one part of an adequate reading of the poem and that a critique which programmatically limits itself to the literary distorts the nature, range, and importance of Eliot's achievement. As I've tried to show with Moody's recent analysis of the poem, this sort of limiting action in criticism is actually impossible. Interpretation cannot avoid drawing heavily on context, and this is no more true than in the case of the interpretation of concepts, ideas, or poems that are essentially contestable (See Gallie 1955: 167-198 and Taylor 1971: 3-51). These considerations have grown in importance ever since the decline of a poetics and a criticism based on classical rhetoric in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Classical rhetoric, its authority privileged by a communally sanctioned, transcendental signified, schematized only the relation of

speaker to hearer, writer to reader, in terms of a calculus of suasive effects. However, these effects did not have to exert their force in a social context of plural signifieds, signifieds articulated from often contradictory points-of-view within the larger notion of society as a product of human agency rather than as a non-human given (Eagleton 1981: 101-106). Instead, the older rhetorical tradition operated in a social context characterized by rigidity in the social positioning of individuals, by the cosmological legitimation of the politically important social codes, and by the monopoly concentration of literacy in the hands of a socially cohesive few (Douglas 1978: 45-54).

With the development over time in Western European cultures of a pluralism of the absolute, there resulted the progressive de-reification of the 'natural' privilege which pre-Enlightenment social systems carried, a process often called secularization (Wilson 1966: 221-223; Berger 1969: 105-125; Glasner 1977; Douglas 1978). The actual forms of human relationships, material, social, and moral, were seen no longer as 'natural' or divinely constituted and maintained, but as man-made;<sup>4</sup> thus, the writer-reader model of rhetoric no longer had a secure base in a communal cosmology. In fact, what is being called for in this study is a new kind of 'rhetorical' theory as the basis of literary criticism, a practice, in short, that in its analyses of author, text, and history provides a more delicately discriminated and authoritative analytical model for Moody's defensible judgements about "Prufrock" than the thin and irrelevant 'evidence' his critical perspective, choked by a naive empiricism, makes possible (Cf. Eagleton 1983: 205-206).

In the rest of this chapter I am going to sketch briefly several

concepts that, although formulated originally in the analysis and interpretation of social texts, can serve as useful critical ideas to help in the development of a critical practice that is situated in the conjunction of individual, language, and social structure.

Earlier I suggested that Moody's reading of "Prufrock" involves two parallel critical activities. One is an enumeration of a number of 'literary' surface features of the text; the other, more benign, is sighted in his critique only in his placing judgements, but it goes on underneath the surface manoeuvres and stems from Moody's close and intimate knowledge of the "social scene and ethos" (Moody: 31) of the Prufrock world. This second, subcritical, activity is an unannounced given of the project. How he's come to acquire this knowledge and intimacy would require a very close examination of Moody's own interactions with the realities of everyday life, including such things as his own class position, his sense of his own class position, his education and his own valuation of it, the values he assigns to certain sorts of 'knowledge', his knowledge of the status of those values in everyday life and in the subuniverses or finite provinces of meaning he occupies, the value he places on these occupations, his knowledge of the values the others, the non-specialists, place on them, and so on. As interesting as it would be to pursue these questions, of one thing we may be sure, Moody does share to a considerable degree a close knowledge of the very local and limited socio-cultural milieux which Eliot enacts in "Prufrock." Basically, he seems to share the same fundamental assumptions about the Prufrock world as Eliot, for nowhere does he raise the questions of who exactly it is Eliot is writing about, what kind of social relations these

are, why they are worth doing this way, and where they occur in the social system to which they are native, and, therefore, recognizable, either as social routines or bits of spontaneous play. Furthermore, he doesn't pursue why Eliot took the attitude he did towards them and doesn't ask whether this was a normal attitude at that time or deviant in some way. The fact that he suggests the voices of the poem incorporate 'natural' speech rhythms (31) is further evidence that he recognizes and accepts uncritically the Prufrock world as Eliot enacts it. After all, from some perspectives the speech rhythms of "Prufrock" are far from 'natural'. One, in fact, would be hard pressed to find any speech rhythm that was 'natural', in the sense of it being pre- or subsocial. And if we take it as axiomatic that all speech rhythms are social and vary from place to place, geographically and socially, then it is important for criticism to investigate the voice speaking for the signs of what region, geographical or social, it must be placed in order for it to be fully understood. Moody hears the voices of "Prufrock" quite clearly, but the level of analysis I am suggesting here is almost entirely bypassed. To repeat, then, in Moody's criticism we can discern the interplay of two kinds of critical activity, but coded, in the words of the British sociologist of language Basil Bernstein, as two orders of meaning.

Bernstein along with his colleagues at the University of London began working with the idea that individual experience, language, and social structure (our conjuncture) are all fundamentally linked. He came to recognize that the organization of particular social groups is associated with distinct forms of speech. Linguistic differences, other than dialect ones, were seen to occur in the normal social environment and

these differences were systematic, so that status groups, socio-economic levels, could be clearly distinguished by their forms of speech. Study of these forms resulted in the elaboration of the idea that the different types of language-use orient the speakers of each type to distinct and different kinds of relationship to objects and persons, irrespective of the level of measured intelligence. He found, for example, that the typical, dominant speech mode of the well-educated middle class in Britain is one in which speech becomes an object of special perceptual activity and a 'theoretical attitude' is developed towards the structural possibilities of sentence organization (Bernstein 1974: 133). He was gradually able to distinguish in the variations of linguistic behaviour in society, variations mapped principally along class lines, two fundamental orientations to meaning by which individuals are able to make meaningful their interactions in the social contexts they inhabit. He called one order of meaning "universalistic" and the other "particularistic." The first provides access to transcontextual social reality, the reality, for example, that sustains and is sustained by the discourses of an inductive, empirical, and formal tradition, such as the discourses of the academy. The other orientation to meaning, Bernstein found, is context-dependent, organized around tacit conventions and with little interest in symbolizing intent explicitly or of making visible the display of its own conventions, resources, processes, such as, for example, the orders of particularistic meaning that characterize the idioms of intimacy, or the fully expressive, but syntactically and lexically restricted, language characteristic of working class semiotic behaviour.

From this evidence Bernstein theorized that the two orientations to

meaning are organized according to different speech 'codes', which he called 'elaborated' and 'restricted' respectively. The codes are so called because in the elaborated version the speaker selects from a relatively extensive range of alternatives, and in the restricted version such alternatives are, according to Bernstein, severely limited. A pure form of the restricted code includes most ritualistic or routinized modes of communication; hence, "individual intent can be signalled only through the non-verbal components of the situation, i.e. intonation, stress, expressive features, etc. Specific verbal planning will be minimal" (77). The social forms which produce the restricted code are of the kind where there is "some common set of closely shared identifications self-consciously held by the members, where immediacy of relationship is stressed." Its background is therefore communal. How things are said is more important than what is said, and the content of this speech is likely to be "concrete, descriptive, and narrative rather than analytical or abstract" (77). The major function of the restricted code is to reinforce the *form* of the social relationship by restricting the verbal marking of individuated responses. Where there are opportunities for an individuated response, as in humour, the display of wit, or a joking relationship, the effect of the individuated response is to reinforce the solidarity of the social relationship. The elaborated code, on the other hand, "becomes the vehicle for individual responses." A major purpose of this code is the preparation and delivery of "relatively *explicit* meaning." It promotes a high level of structural organization, word selection, and verbal self-monitoring. The code promotes a tendency towards abstraction (93-95).

The problem with this distinction lies in the fact that Bernstein seems to be suggesting that the two codes neatly divide along class lines, that the middle-class speaker's whole verbal performance is elaborated, whereas the working-class speaker's language is entirely restricted. This is not true, of course, as Bernstein's more recent papers make clear (See Bernstein 1981). Indeed, the two codes do not cleanly mark the linguistic habits of different classes. Restricted forms of expression are fundamental to all classes, at all levels of society; the child of a nobleman is born into a group whose primary orientation to meaning takes the form of a restricted code in exactly the same form and degree as a child born to a factory worker. But, depending on class position, or the operation of a meritocracy, or the relative openness of a market economy, individuals can gain access to the elaborated codes of a society, codes which constitute the meta-languages of control, power, and authority. Individuals are educated to the use of the elaborated codes of a society the closer they come to the centres of economic, political, cultural, and social power. Whatever particular class or social group dominates those centres, it will seem to 'possess' the elaborated codes of control and knowledge, as if they constitute the 'natural' speech of that group, and will educate others to their use. However, the 'natural' speech of all social groups takes restricted form and thus restricted codes primarily constitute the specific languages and idioms of the common intuitive life of particular groups of society. Elaborated codes, on the other hand, are the principal means by which those who govern at all levels of society manage, articulate, and reflect upon paramount reality.



From this perspective, then, we can make some sense of Moody's dilemma. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is written in a relatively restricted code ('relatively' because there are references--e.g., the literary ones--in it of a universalistic nature and function), but Moody, because of the privileges of the elaborated critical code he wishes to speak, must talk of the poem *as if* the poem, as well as his own discourse, is elaborated fully. His access to the Prufrock world occurs at the level of the restricted code, at the level of the particularistic order of meaning, an interaction without much privilege in the scholarly world, but, nevertheless, the level from which his real conclusions about the poem come. The irrelevant inductions satisfy the criteria that control the elaborated code, which code he knows the probable reader (other scholars) of his performance expects and demands. His actual judgements or conclusions have to be raised to a higher order semiotic or else, lodged in the restricted code of the fraction of the class system that Eliot enacts, they court dismissal as being merely subjective. Thus, in order not to have to bring to light this interaction, and, in addition, not to have to deal seriously and concretely with the structure of the very "social scene and ethos" he invokes, he reverts to mystification: "'The sequence of the musical phrase' is everywhere the best guide to the sense" (31). His 'conclusions' arrive from his 'silent' and 'blind' reading of the poem's negative structure, but his 'analysis' is entirely of the poem's positive presences.

Curiously, however, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" addresses the very issues and questions raised by Moody's conclusion. The text of the poem, and this is its placing characteristic, registers, positively,

the failure of its language to re-write knowledge derived from a close and intimate 'reading' of a particular social context in the idiom of some privileged, elaborated code. The voice in the poem asks: "And how should I begin?" (CP 15). Begin what? What else than the burden of making subjective intent explicit, of elaborating his experience in a bounded, even closed, social world densely articulated with meanings which the experiencing subject of the poem takes as potential judgements. That the poem records this 'failure' is, of course, an arguable judgement; some might hear in the hesitations, revisions, and withdrawals an essential 'reluctance' or 'embarrassment'. It is interesting, nonetheless, that the various attempts, systematically vanquished, to elaborate knowledge derived from experience to a higher order semiotic take the form of searching the past, of history, in order not only to find an efficacious context-independent idiom but also some privileged substantial self that corresponds to it: the choices of possible identity the poem enacts are a familiar set--Jules Laforgue, Guido de Montefeltro, Hesiod, Michelangelo, Lazarus, Marvell, Hamlet, Polonius (Cf. Schuchard 1976: 208-223).

This failure or reluctance extends to the laborious effort of the poem to put in place an overarching analogical structure as an historically efficacious elaborated code, privileged by the literary tradition; that ambition is shipwrecked in the second and third lines of the poem. These promise a specific reference, independent of the context of the poem, for "evening," but deliver only a private, particularistic figure--"Like a patient . . ."--that acts to displace the *process* of figuration itself and to disrupt the conventional mimesis of the tropic activity.

This 'figure' has the proper linguistic form but instead of tracking a systematic, historically privileged similitude, accessible at the level of an elaborated, literary code, or, even beyond that, accessible as the signifier of a coherent suprahistorical cosmology, Eliot selects, in completing the similitude as he does, a figuration which refers not to a universal order of meaning, but to a highly personal feeling-state of the speaker himself. This figure functions, at the level of semantics, like what Bernstein calls a "condensed symbol" rather than the fully elaborated figuration the form of the sentence promises.

What comes into view is a displaced paradigm, the paradigm which the syntagmatic sequence--the chain appropriate to a simile--seems to be assembling: what *are* the usual or normal sets of resemblance suggested by ". . . evening is spread out against the sky / Like . . ." (Cf. Edwards 1976: 8-10). Whatever they are, the actual 'simile' Eliot chose--". . . patient etherised upon a table"--establishes an eccentric set whose terms cannot easily be adduced, a set that is decisively particularistic and context-bound (Williamson 1953, 1965: 59; Unger 1966: 20; Hargrove 1978: 49). Moody suggests a paradigm in which "in this context *aethereal* may lie just beyond 'etherised'" (32; cf. Kenner 1974: 131-132). True enough. But Moody introduces this opposition as a way of having the poem *do* what the poem patently refuses to do, that is, ascend to "a higher reality corresponding to his state as does *aethereal* to ether" (32). Unfortunately, this runs dead against the *actual* choice Eliot makes. If *aethereal* is part of the paradigm which the whole context of the poem suggests, the more appropriate question is why Eliot could not bring himself to say *that* and, further, to ask what

are the implications of his refusal? In a poem by A. R. Ammons, "Corsons Inlet" (1968: 27), the developing argument brings the poet to the brink of having to use the word 'God'; instead, at the last moment, he substitutes the word "Overall" (line 30) in 'God's' place. As important as understanding what Ammons means by his invocation of deity in general, it is equally, if not more, important to ask why he invokes deity *that* way and why he cannot utter his culture's usual name for God. To suggest, then, that "God" lies just a little beyond "Overall" and, in fact, is Ammons' discretely oblique way of allusively saying something he hasn't said is to miss entirely the force and drama of Ammons' actual speech. So too with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; *aethereal*, in its phonics and semantics, is quite clearly associated with "etherised" but by actually choosing "etherised" Eliot is not simply hiding 'aethereal' up his sleeve; he has said *no* to such words and to their particular deposits of meaning, particularly, no doubt, their use in late romantic and *fin de siècle* verse where the word and its vague reference functioned as a facile access to a debased spirituality, a spirituality more gestural than real, originating ultimately in the displacements effected by the romantics, but which could only be invoked ironically in 1917, the connotative distance between "etherised" and *aethereal* asserting precisely the sum of that irony.

This compositional procedure which anchors 'stylistic' choices in contrastive sets whose meanings are socially and culturally coded occurs at all levels of the poem, from the lexical, as in the case of "etherised," to the discursive. At the discursive level, "Prufrock" reasserts the primacy of a social life activated semantically in terms of a restricted

code. The most general condition, we might recall, "for the emergence of this code is a social relationship based upon a common, extensive set of closely shared identifications and expectations self-consciously held by its members . . . [in which] *the unique meaning of the individual is likely to be implicit*" (Bernstein 1974: 127-128). Eliot's poem refuses to brew from its fragmentary materials anything approaching a Prufrockian identity coded as an explicit subjectivity. The poem feints in that direction but consistently and deliberately falls short of that goal, as criticism has already told us. But the spur to such a representation of defeat, the spasms of an aborted elaboration of a substantial self, is not, as criticism unfortunately goes on to say, a sign of the tragedy of modern man paralyzed by the existential horror of modernity, a tragedy that "mirrors the plight of the sensitive in the presence of the dull" (Smith 1974: 15). There is no evidence that Eliot ever really thought of the human enterprise in those terms, being much more clear and tough-minded than that (*FLA* 50 and *SE* 363-364, 374-375). None of his poems trade in generalized regret or pity for "the plight of the sensitive"; they are much more pointed in thought and feeling once the social and literary environment in which they appeared is recalled.

"Prufrock's" point begins to emerge as a function of its differences from the literary paradigm that a poem like *The Prelude* inaugurates in nineteenth-century romanticism. "Prufrock" is impossible in a world that has not already established *The Prelude* and its ideology of self-generating and self-absorbed subjectivity as a norm. This norm oversees a confident and aggressive egoism, an entrepreneurial egoism of self-construction and self-verification, and, beyond that, the greater egoism of belief in the

capacity of the self for evaluating the form and content of subjectivity from within subjectivity itself. *The Prelude* ennobles the 'self-made man' by installing him not as an aristocrat of the sword, nor one of the robe, but as a new bourgeois aristocrat of feeling, measured not by external, institutional, objective, historical criteria, but by intrinsic qualities of sincerity and authenticity penetrable only to self-reflection. "Prufrock" appears in a common intuitive life inscribed by the norms of this pervasive egoism, which, having spilled over into paramount reality from a privileged literary province in the nineteenth century, operates to encode feeling, conduct, and the notional life of a particular social class.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a rather slight poem outside the boundaries of this situation. What focusses the poem is its systematic nay-saying to the penetration of this normative egoism in everyday life and as one of the principal foundations of literature. We hear a literary "voice" in the poem (cf. Schuchard 1976 and Linett 1978). Criticism tells us it is a "voice" that, while self-delusively enacting a series of comic gyrations, comically thwarted, intends to induce the appearance of a canonic self on the romanticist model. But all this "voice" actually speaks is the restricted social codes of bourgeois drawing-room small talk. What the poem vividly brings to our ears is the stammering into which the elaborated codes of romanticism have degenerated by century's end. We don't have a "voice" and an elusive or ambiguous subjectivity we can only partially capture in criticism. Nothing could be more plainly spoken by Eliot; the "Prufrock" persona is an exact enactment typifying the wreckage of a kind of

"literature" and the forms of life that the enabling principles of that literature helped shape. Stripped of all its typical psychic manoeuvres the romantic self is offered as a rather puny and ordinary thing. This is a devastating critique of a crucial skein of thought in romanticism, a critique that shears away an elaborated literary and social idiom of considerable power in the history of bourgeois perception (Kenner 1974: 54-75). The sympathy we are asked to feel in the poem is not for the characteristic agonies of modern man hoping to have a heart-to-heart conversation in a world of chit-chat, but something more important than that. What the poem does is lament the absence of a standard or measure of conduct beyond the self, the absence of an historically elaborated intersubjectivity, inscribed as objective and impersonal rules and representations, and, further, the absence of an institutional locus for human agency through which the human subject wins a corporate condensation of self. "Prufrock" is the negative moment of a romanticism that has seeped into the everyday life of the directive elites of society, the guardians, we will see later, of objectivity. The poem's 'argument' proceeds by stripping bare an imposture, not of a single man, but of a whole form of life, and, further, the argument accomplishes this through the erection of a structure of differences with the romantic paradigms which it assaults. The poem, in fact, makes its whole point by unmistakably refusing to reproduce the conventional effect. Its impact is entirely one of a motivated negation of a normative ideology. Eliot has subjected these norms to a process of transformation which distances them from within, providing a 'vision' of them at work so that, within the poem, the reader is to an extent divorced from the habitual mental

associations which the norms foster and reinforce.

This has been accomplished through making us hear the elaborated codes of that ideology die on the lips of a typical representative and, hence, reveal to us the social domain which these 'universalistic' codes attempt to inscribe in other, more glamorous, terms. What we hear in the subtext of the poem is the actual speech of this domain, the restricted codes of a privileged, but nerveless, bourgeoisie.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is not a pure form of restricted code; no work of art ever can be. My point is that its micro-structural organization comes into view in the tension between restricted and elaborated codes. Those factors that pull the text in the direction of elaborated forms of expression include, primarily, the poem's deft 'literariness', such features as its display of the remnants of a tattered literary technique (Moody's "perfectly correct couplet") and culture (the debased spiritual, confessional mode of the *fin de siècle*).<sup>5</sup> Its range of literary references also tends to shift the code's centre of gravity. The poem gestures towards a tropic design that never manages to encircle the poem's themes within the play of appropriate metaphors and similitudes. Those features of the text that pull toward elaborated forms of expression are never permitted their full potential as universalizing, context-free, general and abstract orders of meaning. Instead, that movement is hobbled throughout by the text's quite evident inability to surmount the inclusive and the implicit in the social relations that envelop the speaker and the meanings to which he has access and which he cannot abstract from their contexts. "For I have known them all already, known them all--" is a statement which can only be understood



by those already fully cognizant of the social and ethical context in which such a statement can be uttered in just that way.<sup>6</sup> It is *that* knowing, implicit, particular, inclusive (the poem's tropic design cannot make it explicit) which allows us to hear accurately the line's 'tone' and thus have access to the world the sequence signifies. What the speaker has "known" does not need to be specified, in fact needs no specific references, although some, rather cryptic ones, are provided, because what he has "known" is part of the context and thus accessible to all those who share the restricted code that silently names *this* "known." Bernstein: "The speech will tend to be *impersonal* in that it will not be specifically prepared to fit a given referent. *How* things are said, *when* they are said, rather than what is said, becomes important" (1974: 128).

How and when things are said produces "Prufrock's" tonal organization, making audible the poem's embedded restricted code which its fragmentarily deployed 'literariness' works to obscure. *All* poems begin at the level of the restricted code, the discursive form of the concretely experienced. There the fundamental acts of perception, knowledge, and proprioception occur within a particular, socially and historically determined environment. The poet's task, until the advent of modernism, it seems to me, has been to re-write the particular knowledge derived from concrete experience in an elaborated code which gives poet and reader access to the grounds of experience and in which principles, conceptions, operations, the schematic diagram of knowing, in short, are made explicit. Here the work of the historians of ideas is very useful, for they do provide the notional schemata of a period by which

the kind of transformation I'm talking about is effected and given its proper values.<sup>7</sup> An awkwardly negotiated 'trans-figuration' of this sort accounts for the dissonance many hear in the 'moral' that concludes Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" or in the tonal swerve in the first eight lines of "Dejection: an Ode," a dissonance that Donald Davie was the first to name (1955, 1976: 69). I am speaking here not of different types or intensities of thought or feeling, but of the different ways of writing out thought and feeling, of the way they are 'done' in texts. In the poetry of the classical moment, the individual, the concrete, and the particular are not lingered over, as Rosamund Tuve has shown (1947, 1968: 314), but are 'trans-figured' in the elaborated code for which the reigning cosmology destines them.

But such a cosmological framework is only a cosmology in an abstracted sense, useful to mythographers perhaps,<sup>8</sup> but not productive critically. From the point of view of the actual social environment for which it provides an absolute reference, the anchor against paradigmatic drift (it specifies what goes with what), a cosmology is simply an 'ideology', or that network of meaning potentials that are organized as a system of enabling and sustaining rules, principles, and techniques to hierarchize and make stable a given social system, and, further, to represent that particular hierarchy and stability as natural or divine (Williams 1977: 65-71; Berger and Luckmann 1979: 140-143). Though it acts primarily to legitimate what *is*, the 'cosmology' legitimates, also, types of 'trans-figuration'. A social system that is settled or calm at any one time sees its literature 'trans-figure' the 'raw' into the 'cooked', the restricted into the elaborated, without serious systemic

perturbation; when framing 'cosmologies' contend, or one is being displaced by others, which is the typical form of the contention, then, in literature, the primacy of the restricted code is reasserted. The idiosyncrasy, volume, and amplitude of tone and tonal organization measurably increases. Ideological perturbations are not simply phenomena of the framework; of course, they eventually resolve as mutations of frame, but they are fought and won in the domain of restricted codes. There the first, fundamental, material and cultural relations (including sexual ones) are first *represented*, and in being represented are defined, characterized, valorized, hierarchized, in short, 'cooked' (Eagleton 1983: 171-173). And, through that process, the initial representations are 'trans-figured' into an elaborated code. Idiosyncrasies of tone and extended tonal range, emerging from the restricted codes (with their syntagmatic dislocations), signal ideologically unsettled periods. It is not surprising that a phenomenon like 'metaphysical poetry', with its noisy foregrounding of the whirring machinery of its own tropic processes, should be the discursive prelude to civil war (Eagleton 1981: 12). Similarly, we cannot be surprised by the narrowness of tonal amplitude, the well-plotted syntagmatic flow (Kenner 1966: 133-136), and the stylistic marks of the fully arrayed elaborated codes of Augustan poetry.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" takes as its starting point the legacy of elaborated literary codes, in the particular condition that Eliot found this inheritance in the first decade of our century. Indeed, he later wrote *The Sacred Wood* (1920) to examine what he had inherited. In "Prufrock" he lets us hear the fracturing and see the dissolution of each attempt to establish the system of similitudes that

validates both the existential and the cosmological planes. This process can be seen in the poem's individual parts.

And indeed there will be time  
 To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'  
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair--  
 (They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')  
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin--  
 (They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')  
 Do I dare  
 Disturb the universe?  
 In a minute there is time  
 For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.  
(CP 14)

The passage begins by reasserting, with the conjunction "And," the paratactic mode of connectedness between sections after continuity has been broken by the repeated 'couplet'. Parataxis, in contrast to the syntactic sophistication of hypotaxis, acts to narrow syntactic variability, a characteristic of restricted forms of expression. Parataxis also measurably suppresses the delicacy of logical and categorical discriminations and all those hypotactic features that make explicit in their form the way sentences make sense. Paratactic constructions require a densely articulated ethos of shared assumptions, beliefs, and rites as background in order to become fully expressive, as Eric Havelock and Norman Austin have shown in their seminal studies of the paratactic cultures of pre-Socratic Greece (Havelock 1963; Austin 1975).

In "Prufrock," the opening line of the section quoted above carries the lexical and syntactic markings of an elaborated code: "indeed"--a logical intensifier characteristic of rationalist and academic discourse; "there"--the generalized agent of the clause, a structural dummy that

permits postponement of the theme; "time"--entrance of the main subject, in the complement position; and then the placing question, that acts to crystallize an individuated speaking self in the sequence "Do I dare?." The questions do not refer us to the possibility of answers at the level of the elaborated code on which the sequence seems to be operating (cf. the opening of "Burnt Norton" [Davie 1970: 65]). They deflect us instead to situation and context, to certain enacted negotiations with an environment dense with signs that swamp the experiencing subject in anxiety and fear. *What* "They" say--"'How his hair is growing thin!'"--is really rather trivial and not too important (Kenner 1966: 21), but *how* they say it is all. And knowing *how*, that is, knowing how to interpret the 'how' can only be effected by those who know the immediate social context intimately, not this particular one, but the social location of which the "Prufrock" *scena* is the complex sign, where such things are said in just *that* way. Eliot in *The Sacred Wood*: ". . . and if we are to express ourselves, our variety of thoughts and feelings, on a variety of subjects with inevitable rightness, we must adapt our manner to the moment with infinite variations" (80). The attempt to re-establish the elaborated code and the universalistic connections to which it points ends in a comic collapse:

Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?

The disengagement of rhetorical structure, the spare or deliberately eccentric use of simile and metaphor, and of other overt analogical patterning, clearly a technical legacy from French *symbolisme* (Davie

1970: 73-74), releases the poem into, what I called earlier, the compositional present tense, where the poem's primary generative contexts feed into the action of the language itself, now well beyond the structural pull of traditional verse forms and beyond the constraints of a problematic metaphysics. The particular sound-shape of "Do I dare"--three syllables isolated in a single line at the end of the passage above--is controlled here not by generic or modal requirements, nor by the needs imposed by an underlying philosophical idea (as is the backward floating distantation in Wordsworth's response to Bartholomew Fair in Book VIII of *The Prelude*) but the specific accumulated anxiety which the preceding lines constitute, so that when the verse line contracts suddenly on the three syllables, they are not only a sign of an individual's suddenly crystallized abjectness--the poem has done everything to obscure the edges of the speaker as 'character'--but also a sign of the deliberate refusal of the poem to raise itself to some unifying, universalistic order of meaning, some privileged elaborated literary code that a man like Edmund Gosse, for example, might duly recognize as a 'real' poem, as 'real' as any of Rupert Brooke's or A. E. Housman's productions. I can hardly doubt that Eliot meant the poem to function in both ways and that, in fact, Edmund Gosse and others like him were the audience the poem actually had in mind. Eliot's other, sympathetic readers, of course, read the poem, not as such, but with the situation of its reception centrally in mind.<sup>9</sup>

We no longer simply have a poem that represents a conventional literary world, whose thematics, and their accuracy as representations or diagnoses, we can discuss and have differing opinions about; we have

more properly a poem that, through its negative structure, discovers the actual concrete world in which it occurs. This world can be discerned in the text's visible procedures for making sense, its recuperable and culturally significant choices and its mutations of overall form, mutations that either express solidarity with, or hostility to, the socially privileged forms in the given culture. The poem seen in this perspective is not simply making a comment on the contents of reality, but foregrounding the organization of reality itself, the way society, in all its inscribed forms, thinks, reflects, imagines the real to itself.

## Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Lowry 1961: 103 and see Plato's *Republic* VI: 493 where the Sophists are gored for pandering unconscionably to the fickle multitude's whims and opinions.

He the Sophist learns by heart all the beast's whims and wishes, how he must approach, and how touch him, when he is dangerous and when he is tame, and why; learns his language, too--what sounds he usually makes at what, and what sound uttered by another creature quiets him and what infuriates him. The keeper learns these lessons perfectly in the course of time by living with him, and calls it wisdom: then compiles a handbook of veterinary art and sets up as a professor. He knows nothing, in truth, about these resolutions or whims of the multitude, whether any of them is beautiful or ugly, good or evil, just or unjust, but gives a name to each according to the monster's opinions, calling beautiful what pleases him the monster and evil what annoys him; he has no other principle whatever in all this, but he calls necessities just and beautiful; and how really different by nature necessity is from good he has never seen himself and he is unable to teach another. (Plato 1956: 291)

The attitude towards the 'beast' and the beast's 'keepers' which the text assembles soon loses the pedagogical relevance Plato gave it and comes down to earth, becoming simply a *social* attitude that eventually comes to enjoy a long and distinguished career in Western political culture. This attitude comes first to be associated with aristocratic disdain for unreliable *demos*. With the liberal Enlightenment and its institutionalization in the nineteenth century, when the bourgeoisie decisively distance themselves from the *hoi polloi* for good, through



the development of class consciousness and the formulation of class-specific practices, they appropriate this way of seeing. This way of seeing *demos* functions as an inwardly experienced legitimating gesture of the new power they hold, borrowing from the aristocracy they've empedestalled one of its constitutive moral attitudes, little realizing that it is as the manageable, but socially odious, 'keepers' of the 'beast' that the bourgeoisie themselves have been generally regarded by an economically marooned, but socially aloof and contemptuous, aristocracy.

<sup>2</sup> An unsigned contemporary review of Eliot's *Ara Vos Prec* (1920) in the *Times Literary Supplement* hits the nail on the head, insisting that Eliot's poetry, and modernism as a whole, "is all refusal." However, the reviewer, who recognizes and seems to accept the late Victorian decline of romantic poetics, finds Eliot's "anti-romantic" procedures appallingly self-defeating. "But all this is mere habit; art means the acceptance of a medium as of life; and Mr. Eliot does not convince us that his weariness is anything but a habit, an anti-romantic reaction, a new Byronism which he must throw off if he is not to become a recurring decimal in his fear of being a mere vulgar fraction." Earlier in the review he recognizes immediately the source of Eliot's transformative practice, although he misreads the purpose.

So the young poets of to-day are apt to insist that they will make poetry of what they choose; but their choice is not always so free as they think. It is conditioned by reaction, disgust, *ennui*; they want no more of "La belle dame sans merci," or of King Arthur or Pan or Prosperpine, just as they want no more of rhythms such as 'By the tideless, dolorous, midland sea--' so they choose themes and rhythms

the very opposite of these. Often they seem in their poetry to be telling us merely how they refuse to write poems and not how they wish to write them. It is like the bridge-movement of the Choral symphony; a continual rejection of themes and rhythms, but without anything positive to follow.

Mr. Eliot is an extreme example of this process. His cleverness, which is also extreme, expresses itself almost entirely in rejections; his verse is full of derisive reminiscences of poets who have wearied him. As for subject-matter, this is also all refusal; it can be expressed in one phrase; again and again he tells us that he is 'fed-up' with art, with life, with people, with things. Everyone for him seems to be a parody of exhausted and out-of-date emotions. To read his verse is to be thrown deliberately into that mood which sometimes overcomes one in the streets of a crowded town when one is tired and bewildered, the mood in which all passers-by look like over-expressive marionettes pretending to be alive and all the more mechanical for their pretence. In such a mood one is morbidly aware of town squalor; everything seems to have been used and re-used again and again; the symbol of all life is cigarette ends and stale cigarette smoke; the very conversation is like that, it has been said a thousand times and is repeated mechanically; in fact all things are done from habit, which has mastered life and turned it into an endlessly recurring squalor.

("A New Byronism" 1920: 184)

<sup>3</sup> Gordon 1977: 45n, suggests, on the authority of a personal interview Eliot gave to the *Grantite Review* 1962: 16-20, that he "used the notion of the split personality, which was first studied and widely popularized in his youth." The problem here is that we are not given much sense of what social meaning the notion of the 'split personality' carries, as a widely and popularly discussed idea, as "Prufrock" passed through its various revisions in 1911, in 1915, in 1917? Who were its champions and what did they represent for those among whom the idea was "widely popularized"? Against what constellation of ideas and attitudes did those who took up this doctrine, either as professionals (theoreti-

cians and clinicians) or popularizers, aim it? How does this encompassing popularity for the notion of 'split personality' appear in the poem? What kind of intellectual, moral, and social allegiances are unavoidably set up by the use of *avant-garde* psychological ideas, such as this one, in Eliot's day?

<sup>4</sup> This development in European thought is a product of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, as is well known, and can be seen in its early form in the work of Giambattista Vico. See Fisch 1968: xxix.

<sup>5</sup> See F. W. Bateson on the "mental dishonesty" of Lionel Johnson's "Oxford" (1950: 235-240) and F. R. Leavis on Johnson's poetry of "specialized poetical experience where nothing has sharp definition," in *Living Principle* (1975: 84).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kenner 1966: 11, for a reading of these lines that assumes everyone knows what they refer to.

<sup>7</sup> Here a book like Rosemond Tuve's *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (1947, 1968) can be very useful in surveying the cognitive topography and the paradigmatic and combinatorial procedures of the literary mind in the period she examines. Indeed Tuve's spur in writing the book in the first place was her dismay at the programmatic new critical ignorance of the relevant social and aesthetic contexts of English Renaissance writing (5). Read in conjunction with accounts of the social dynamics of the time, say, a work like David Mathew's *Ford Lectures at Oxford in 1945, The Social Structure of Caroline England* (1948), Tuve's book helps us reconstruct the appropriate sociosemiotic environment, one in which a rule-governed system of symbolic representations allows us to perceive the operative semiotic of levels, roles, and

events in the social structure of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century aristocratic life in England.

<sup>8</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard in his *Elizabethan World Picture* for example.

<sup>9</sup> See Bradbury 1971: xxxiii-xxxv and for a more uncomprehending account of writer-reader relations in early modernism, see Taylor 1967: 179-180.

### Chapter Three: Undermining the foundations

In "Prufrock" Eliot strips "literature" bare of its conventionally romantic literariness and of the privileges bestowed on individuality as the source and test of all experience. Of course, it is not only that one poem which shares in this purpose; in fact most of the poems in Eliot's first volume, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), work within the enterprise announced by "Prufrock." Indeed calling the texts in that volume "observations," rather than poems, itself suggests a crucial refusal, or negation, of the literary. "Prufrock," however, remains the major document in this process of transformation. This literary historical process ends in that poem laying bare a social voice speaking the restricted idiom of its social class in the context of a wrecked literariness, some of the effects of which--music hall rhymes, the self-conscious tropes, etc.--still cling in a mixture of irony and nostalgia to the poem's social speech. But this state of affairs does not represent a *sudden* break in the literary uses of voice and tone in nineteenth-century poetic practices. Browning and Clough experimented with an extended range of tone and voice beyond the romantic norms in some of their strongest work.<sup>1</sup> And, of course, for Eliot especially, the extended tonal range of *les symbolistes* in France is a well-documented influence.<sup>2</sup> In English poetry, though, it was the "Prefaces" to the *Lyrical Ballads* that culminated the influential critique of Augustan poetic diction in the latter part of the eighteenth century, arguing

that real poetic speech must stay close, lexically, syntactically, and generically, to the social speech of real men in the real world. The attack on Augustan poetic diction by the romantics, although fought in the name of the common tongue, initiated not the overturning of poetic diction as such, but a lexical and formal shift towards a new poetic diction based on the privileging of a certain type of poetic sensibility that rooted its authority in the nature and process of imaginative experience rather than in the polished mastery of the literary and social resources of an achieved civilization. A hundred years later, "Prufrock" enacts the ruin of romantic sensibility in the terms suggested in the previous chapter, in the same way that Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," in its very compositional process, self-consciously displaces the neo-classical poetic norms. "Prufrock," oddly enough, completes the revolution in poetic diction which the *Lyrical Ballads* announced in 1798. However, with the shearing away of romantic literariness, "Prufrock" does not lay bare a new *literary* domain based on some new rhetoric or a new metaphysics. The social voices of *Prufrock and Other Observations* instead lay bare the bourgeois world to which these voices are native. And in that social world lay the more important bourgeois orthodoxy, the socio-economic and philosophical progenitor of romanticism: the liberal legacy of the European Enlightenment (Jameson 1974: 94-95).

Freed from the gravitational pull on poetic form of an ancient rhetorical tradition and from the subjectivist thematics of a surpassed metaphysics, early Eliot, and modernism in general, began that transformation of the elaborated discursive codes of the Whig liberalism in which English society from the 1820s and 1830s had learned to represent

itself to itself. In the English nineteenth century, the legacy of the Enlightenment, and its extensions into the aesthetic regions of ideology through the poetics of romanticism, was thoroughly institutionalized at every level of society. This penetration in depth of the bourgeois structure of feeling focussed and legitimated liberal assumptions and institutional behaviour. In its most elaborated form, the discursive practice of the liberal world-view runs from Locke, through Adam Smith and the early Burke, the Hartleyan psychologists, Bentham, and the Mills down to L. T. Hobhouse and J. A. Hobson in the late Victorian and Edwardian decades. This genealogy is very well known and has been much described, analyzed, and commented upon.<sup>3</sup> I am of course not simply taking liberalism in its political and economic manifestations as the particular thematics of either a formal philosophy or a parliamentary programme. The central commitment to *laissez-faire* economics weakened and strengthened its political form according to the requirements of the day. What Eliot was interested to understand and, eventually, subvert, was the way the full array of liberal reflective and discursive practices had penetrated the semantics of the social reality of everyday life.

*Laissez-faire* was the battle pennon under which a hundred politicians entered the lists at Westminster,<sup>4</sup> but it was also a suitable text that could legitimate (to himself) a shopkeeper's decision not to extend any more credit to a bankrupt.<sup>5</sup> Of course, *I have not said that a discursive practice alone can cause an agent to act*, but it does help explain and legitimate action, or at least, deflect attention from concrete determinants to a higher level semiotic where the actual interactions of agent and patient are either clarified or obscured depending on one's

orientation to the practice (Habermas 1973: 77). At another level, it is only a poetics dominated by the liberal-romantic over-valuation of personal identity and the *voice* as access to Being (Abrams 1963: 37-42; Derrida 1967, 1976: 22) that can give the quest for an authentic voice and identity, the central concern of, for example, Clough's *Amours de voyage* (1858), its moment and point.<sup>6</sup> Eliot, from his earliest works, set out to disrupt, alienate and, indeed, subvert the dominant ideological settlement effected by liberalism in the nineteenth century, and all its distinctive intellectual and affective themes,<sup>7</sup> through a transformation of its elaborated discursive practices.

Eliot's great originality as a subversive stems from the fact that he grasped better than most what was required to displace a dominant ideology. His reading of Durkheim at Harvard in 1913-1914 (Costello 1963: 74-75) no doubt supplied him with an understanding of the structure of everyday social reality and the practices that sustain it. He knew that to shake the foundations of a particular system of ideological representations and legitimations it is necessary to perturb it in depth.<sup>8</sup> This means shifting attention from elaborated discursive practices with their finely discriminated abstractions to the local, the individual, and the mundane. *Prufrock and Other Observations* operates entirely in this domain, offering oblique perspectives on the domestic interiors of that liberal upper middle class in which Eliot was raised (Gordon 1977: 10-11). Many of these poems resemble those peculiarly vulnerable moments, when, on opening a door, someone catches sight of some one or thing that suddenly makes vividly clear some hidden secret or hypocrisy or self-delusion:



The Dresden clock continued ticking on the mantelpiece,  
 And the footman sat upon the dining-table  
 Holding the second housemaid on his knees--  
 Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived.  
 ("Aunt Helen," CP 31)

The poems in this volume are dense with knowledge of the textures, decors, voices, glances, restricted speech codes, in short, the entire physical, moral, psychological sediment--the "dust in crevices" ("Rhapsody on a Windy Night," CP 28)--of a whole way of life. Moreover, it is important to note that the details in a poem like "Aunt Helen" do not function metaphorically, constructing an analogical canopy that raises the straightforward presentation of some incidents in a household to a higher level of abstraction. They function metonymically; that is, they defer metaphor by shifting the interpretative focus to the social ethos from which the poem draws its props.<sup>9</sup> A "Dresden clock" is both a Dresden clock and a decorous metonym for a whole way of life, a life that Eliot clearly knew his readers would instantly place, and thus hear the poem aright. All the details in the poem function metonymically to situate the lived density of this way of life, and not only the *objets*, but also the small social acts, such as the open ease of the footman and housemaid in the absence of their mistress. In addition, the poem itself, as an artifact, functions metonymically. The poem focusses the difference between its own weary, sardonic knowingness (no doubt a sound almost wholly derived from Laforgue and Corbière [Bergonzi 1972: 7, 52]) and the earnest agonies and exertions of much late Victorian verse, English and American, where the 'music' of domestic interiors was strained, comically to Eliot's ear, to commit strenuously banal splendours.<sup>10</sup> Coventry Patmore:

Dead Millicent indeed had been most sweet,  
 But I how little meet  
 To call such graces in a Maiden mine!  
 A boy's proud passion free affection blunts;  
 His well-meant flatteries oft are blind affronts;  
 And many a tear  
 Was Millicent's before I, manlier, knew  
 That maidens shine  
 As diamonds do,  
 Which, though most clear,  
 Are not to be seen through;<sup>11</sup>  
 . . .

"Aunt Helen's" flat music takes all its resonance from this placing contrast, or its American equivalents and imitations. That Edmund Gosse was inspired by Patmore's poem to enthuse that "'Amelia' gives evidence of a talent for interpreting in most dignified language the homely emotions of mankind" (Patmore 1948: 18) indicates the critical standards to which Eliot was also eventually driven to respond.

The first theme in the critique of the socio-cultural ethos that gave rise to the twinned destinies of a Patmore and a Gosse was the re-conquest of language, a language perceived to have been 'polluted' by the semantic accumulations of liberalism. Eliot's well known fastidiousness in definition (see the opening pages of *The Sacred Wood*, on the words "organized" and "activity") carries a double polemical charge: a fake schoolmasterly concern for denotative precision and a thorough cleansing of what he saw as the language's accumulations of semantic grit in the liberal epoch. Eliot well knew that language is not an innocent, neutral medium, into which only the meanings speakers and writers explicitly intend get stuffed (Kenner 1966: 116). He knew that words trail networks of connotative connections with action, thought, and feeling in particular contexts. The denotative serenity of the dictionary did not lull Eliot

into assuming that words are simply stipulative devices (Kenner 1966: 119-120). Words *only* exist in specific contexts and always, loudly or softly, activate social meaning (Bateson 1950: 80). He knew that the use of a word like "activity" by a leading liberal critic was an attempt to borrow the prestige with which Enlightenment ideology had endowed the positive sciences (*sw* 8). That such a rhetorical manoeuvre could be unconscious or at least semi-conscious suggested the extraordinary power and control exerted by a settled, established ideology through a society's speech codes, not just a dictionary of words, but a repertoire of 'texts' (Jameson 1982: 73). A deeply and 'finely' inscribed common intuitive life can make the dumb speak; it could, in fact, Eliot was to argue, make some memorable plays 'happen' to several minor Elizabethan hacks.<sup>12</sup> He would have understood, no doubt, Gabriel Pearson's important point:

Words are not only 'echoes and recesses' of their own literary past. They are equally social deposits and repositories of social acts. Moreover, the disposition of words that makes them 'echoes and recesses' is itself social fact. The words of the solitary poet implicate a society in which they once had meaning and being as communications. They imply a past in which audience was once community; while, of the present audience, some were once of that community and conscious of being so, some are unconscious that they were, while some have never been so. All these states of audience are present in the totality of the poetic act. (1970: 83)

That Eliot knew his audiences well, knew them better than they knew themselves, is not yet a critical commonplace, which is perhaps surprising seeing that the polemical mastery of his prose writings is.<sup>13</sup> Habituated to addressing the well-educated middle and upper middle classes of all persuasions, whenever he ventured to address other classes, such as the

working class in *The Rock*, Eliot was a disaster. Restricted to his 'natural' audience, the audience who could hear and accept the embedded restricted code of his formulations, he was devastating. His main tactic in the supplanting of the liberal discursive hegemony was to activate a deeper layer of individual response than the layer of intellectual and affective sediment a hundred-odd years of liberal 'talk' had deposited in the collective psyche of the educated classes.<sup>14</sup> This deeper layer, absorbed in feudalism and the age of faith, with its roots in pre-Enlightenment cosmologies, social hierarchies, and scholastic notions of Natural Law and rationalism, could be activated if enough of the liberal sediment were blasted away. Eliot's assessment of the figures of the past, especially those who were ideologically influential, was precisely determined by their attitudes towards, and their activities in savaging, the superficial encrustations of the Enlightenment 'mind'. Of those whose efforts in this regard were not up to the mark, he offered only his unique form of disdain. To illustrate, I would like to glance at Eliot's most important essay on Matthew Arnold, the one he called "Francis Herbert Bradley":

On the other hand, the *Ethical Studies* [by Bradley] are not merely a demolition of the Utilitarian theory of conduct but an attack upon the whole Utilitarian mind. For Utilitarianism was, as every reader of Arnold knows, a great temple in Philistia. And of this temple Arnold hacked at the ornaments and cast down the images, and his best phrases remain for ever gibing and scolding in our memory. But Bradley, in his philosophical critique of Utilitarianism, undermined the foundations. (FLA 58-59)

Eliot clearly sees himself as continuing the more effective tactics

of Bradley in the vast work that Arnold was not well enough equipped to carry on. Eliot's interest in Bradley, although stimulated by the importance of neo-Hegelian idealism in Anglo-American philosophy (Wollheim 1959: 18-19 and 1970: 169-193. See also Bolgan 1973: 110-115), very soon developed into a wider appreciation of the Oxford philosopher as a *cultural* influence, an influence nonetheless deserving of the same notice and stature as the better known, but fuzzier-minded, Victorian sages. Possessor of a more distinguished intellect, of a more refined sensibility, and of a more lucid and incisive prose style than either Arnold or Ruskin, Bradley came to represent for Eliot the true resistance to the swagger of "Whiggery" (SE 18). Not that Arnold or Ruskin did not also resist what they saw as the encroaching materialist 'barbarism'; they did, and Eliot acknowledges their efforts, but they were efforts largely wasted, because done superficially from confused premises and assumptions. What was required was precisely Bradley's attack on the "foundations."

The point, for example, was not to convince some conventionally rational person that Darwinian evolution was 'wrong', but that *to believe it* was the symptom of a deep-seated disease in the social system as a whole. The social semantics of Eliot's tone, inscribed in the restricted speech codes of the middle classes he normally addressed, carried the topic beyond the reach of mere debate. The intent was always, in the early, as in the late, Eliot, to penetrate below the conceptual currencies (SE 250 and see Eagleton 1983: 39-41): here is "Dry Salvages" (1941)

It seems, as one becomes older,  
 That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere  
     sequence--  
 Or even development: the latter a partial fallacy  
 Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,  
 Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of disowning  
     the past. (CP 208)

What are the *social* semantics of these lines? The tentativeness of "It seems," the tone of this donnish filler functioning as a sign, allows the conventionally educated and conventionally refined to recognized one of their own, an identification re-inforced several times in the sequence. First, the sinewy conversational syntax itself underlines the identification. Then the display of conventionally rational arguments gathers to a minor climax in the preliminary dismissal of "mere sequence"--a dismissal no one with any pretensions to a sophisticated view of history could possibly challenge. Our assent to it--of course "the past" is not "mere sequence"--prepares the reader for the more important dismissal that follows: "Or even development." But this is clearly a more serious tack running dead against all the 'liberal-romantic' connections of this key word: 'organic', 'progress', 'growth' to higher forms of existence, the social value the middle class assigns to 'complexity' in maturation (Thomson 1981: 51), are all brought into crisis by Eliot's sudden erasure of "development." But the assault is too pointed, the anxiety it provokes too alienating; the qualification that follows the colon softens the blow by assigning the abuse of the notion of evolution, a notion which has not been explicitly rejected yet, to the "popular mind," the codeword for the grasping intellectual aspirations of the socially inferior--D. E. M. Joad's mob. The social distance which the phrase

"in the popular mind" marks accomplishes the final disarming of the educated middle class reader the poem addresses. It is the intellectual *arrivistes*, it turns out, who wallow in "partial" fallacies and superficialities, not our lot. The key liberal notion of developmental evolution has not really been erased, but having it comfortably inside one's head has now become impossible. Hardly anything has been said, but the effects are memorable. The restricted speech codes of the educated middle class here achieve the status of lyric song.

The attack on the legacy of the liberal Enlightenment had to be engaged at the point of contact of discourse and experience. The speech habits an educated 'elite' had come to use to represent history, social reality, and art to itself had to be re-written.<sup>15</sup> In that operation, perception and cognition themselves become battlegrounds. The prize? Nothing less than *the system of representing* the reality of concrete experience (and of course the representations themselves). Eliot did not write or utter a word at any stage of his life about concrete experience that wasn't finely tuned, explicitly or implicitly, to the words and texts that already lay on men's tongues to hold, define, characterize that experience (cf. *PP* 22). It seemed impossible for him not to write, in Mikhail Bakhtin's term, "dialogically" (Bakhtin 1929, 1973: 163-167), that is, to actively modify the structure, meaning, and use of an utterance in order to take account of the use of words in the utterances to which his is a response, or in the use of words in responses yet to come, which his own utterance seeks to solicit. Eliot never writes without the context and audience of his words fully in view, altering and qualifying his poetry or prose in the light of probable reactions.

His text is, within such a dialogical practice, constantly looking over its shoulder and ever sensitive to the words of others. It is subject, in short, to incessant modification and adjustment. Used in this way, his work reflects and effects a particular set of socio-historical relationships between writer and reader within language itself and can only be fully understood when its functioning within the context of such relationships is properly appreciated. Thus, his work is not only absorbed by the 'direct treatment' or presentation of concrete experience, but also by the knowledge that it is always already enveloped in words and so already thoroughly inscribed with meaning to which any new contribution must be patiently and scrupulously adjusted. This accounts for the shaping of the piece of "Dry Salvages" analyzed above. There Eliot is writing for a member of his own social class, on whose directive intelligence, or so the assumption goes, must rest the proper functioning of the social system as a whole, although the voice in the poem knows this class has some bad ideas (about evolution, for example) in its head, which, unless extirpated, will hasten the decline of the class from within (*Idea* 1939: 7-24, 25).

The world the young Eliot lived in, as Lyndall Gordon has instructed us in detail, was thoroughly upper middle class in the tradition of the New England Brahmin. He learned early, as did 'Miss Helen Slingsby', the "secret codes" of his milieu (1977: 18). But as Gordon shows, his attitude towards this milieu was ambivalent. He both enjoyed the benefits such a world had to offer him--a Harvard education, study abroad, etc.--and he loathed them. Enough at least to grasp any excuse not to return to it when he got away to Europe and England in 1914.



There he skirted the London bohemia, settling for a time in 'Bloomsbury', before his changing religious sensibilities moved towards socially more central affiliations. His connection with Faber's gave him that institutional substance that must have been the norm to which he had been bred among the institution-building-and-maintaining Eliots back home. Indeed, there was a rough equivalence between Eliot's social destination in England and his social origins in America. However, he experienced this cross Atlantic translation not as a horizontal movement so much as a vertical one. He did not go from one fully achieved culture to another, substituting one for the other. His experience of immigration from America to England was keyed by his sense of America as "a family extension" of England (Gordon 1977: 14), so that his immigration was a movement from the peripheries of a culture back to its centre, from the surface to the deep structure.

From this view of its origins, America had come into being as the consequence of a number of generative transformations in England in the seventeenth century. In isolation, it had erected a sort of culture on the least promising fragments of English social and religious life in the seventeenth century; the *émigrés* were people who could not stomach or survive the political and social settlements in England of the latter part of the century. These fragments, whose affective life was determined by its genesis in opposition to the established continuities of English royalism, also turned out to be the most open to Enlightenment ideas in the eighteenth century, in which the hinterland finally glimpsed an acceptable future for itself. As an Enlightenment extension of Europe,<sup>16</sup> having never lost its sense of inferiority to the

source culture, American social life stiffened in institutional roles and behaviour cut to a pattern invented in the Home Counties. Upper middle class social life in nineteenth-century America, in its manners, its dress, its physical and psychological decor, bore the same relation to the Home County template as does Rossini's *Guglielmo Tell* to trans-alpine political history. Indeed, if Eliot's New England poems, those in the *Prufrock* volume, are any indication of the texture and density of life in his class, he experienced it as if it were the provincial version of a slightly out of date tragicomic opera come down from the capital for a short run, a production full of mechanical armwaving, conventional vocal ornaments, and a rather limp libretto:

You will see me any morning in the park  
 Reading the comics and the sporting page.  
 Particularly I remark  
 An English countess goes upon the stage.  
 A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,  
 Another bank defaulter has confessed.  
 I keep my countenance,  
 I remain self-possessed  
 Except when a street-piano, mechanical and tired  
 Reiterates some worn-out common song  
 ("Portrait of a Lady," CP 20)

Quotidian banality rises to its lame crescendos in the conventional hysterics of melodrama:

Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise--  
 Fling them to the ground and turn  
 With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:  
 ("La Figlia Che Piange," CP 36)

It is no surprise that an American writer like William Carlos Williams, whose commitment to a culturally autonomous America reached

the level, almost, of a religious faith, could not stomach the vision of a clumsily and embarrassingly derivative American social elite to be found in the *Prufrock* volume, a vision limply and sardonically told by one of its more privileged sons.<sup>17</sup> Eliot, in his turn, was never to notice such things in the upper middle class milieu to and for whom he was destined to speak from the vicinity of the Gloucester Road tube station; from there, his eye, famous for acute observation of the single placing detail, fell rather on the *métèques* (Gross 1972: 144), Eastern European Jews, the Liberal *arrivistes*, and pushy *petit bourgeois* house agents' clerks. For his British audiences, his enactment of what he experienced as the inner life of their American counterparts must have only confirmed and satisfied the complacent British clichés about the 'make believe England' raised precariously on the banks of the Charles.

Characteristic of his social experience in the New England of his student days is "Mr. Apollinax."<sup>18</sup> This is a particularly important poem as it places 'England' and 'New England' side by side. "Mr. Apollinax" is conventionally read as Eliot's response to the visit of Bertrand Russell to Harvard in early 1914. The relation between the "irresponsible foetus" (Apollinax) and Boston gentility, among whom Apollinax's "centaur's hoofs" beat "over the hard turf," is sharply delineated. Russell is "laughter," a blend of "Fragilion" and "Priapus," "submarine and profound," "the old man of the sea . . . Hidden under coral islands," a head "grinning over a screen / With seaweed in its hair." He is a mercurial figure, physically, intellectually, to be experienced in all the sudden and delightful aspects his capacious and capricious wit showers on his startled hosts. He embodies an energy only metaphor can hope to

enclose, as he beats round the shrubbery and the teacups, provoking in the anxious "Mrs. Phlaccus" and the uncomprehending "Professor and Mrs. Cheetah" polite retreats. The conception of the 'real thing' in terms of myth is also interesting as it anticipates the attempted integration of symbolic totalities in *The Waste Land*. But, for the time being, myth here functions socially, not epistemologically. It provides an absolute reference, both rational and rapturous, Apollonian and Dionysian, to be juxtaposed--with humour and with more than a little satisfied disdain--to the appalled smiles of the Cambridge marionettes. If the abounding energy of 'Apollinax' can only be enclosed by the play of metaphor, that associates him with an authentic profundity, intellectual and mythic, his elaborate and alarmed hosts are contained metonymically, in the minor props of their world: such things as "a slice of lemon," "a bitten macaroon," and the brittle talk: "'He is a charming man' . . . . 'There was something he said that I might have challenged.'" While his "dry and passionate talk" *devours* the afternoon, the sere, oppressive social milieu answers only with incomprehension and impotence. The dead husks of conversation at the end of the poem do not simply register fear and dislike of "Apollinax," but express in the restricted speech code of this class the social affirmations and solidarity of a closed group, putting aright their little world recently violated and bruised.<sup>19</sup> Of course, Eliot's loathing of the Cambridge ethos passed with time; he grew indulgent, even faintly fond. When he had thoroughly immersed himself in the new element and celebrated his re-connection with the English Elyots in "East Coker," he laid to rest the American ghosts in "Dry Salvages."

When from the 1940s he looked back to the New England of his youth, he no longer heard the edgy voices of October evenings: "'I have been wondering frequently of late . . .'" ("Portrait of a Lady," CP 21). He recalled instead "different voices / Often together heard":

the whine in the rigging,  
The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,  
The distant rote in the granite teeth,  
And the wailing warning from the approaching headland  
("Dry Salvages," CP 206)

And, of course, different people came to mind: "anxious worried women / Lying awake," but not because they are alarmed at some gaffe in etiquette, but because their men are "all those who are in ships, those / Whose business has to do with fish" (CP 211). Of course, even in his youth he had known these "fishmen" (*The Waste Land*, CP 73), but only as socially distant characters beyond the walls. When he did turn to them in the early poetry, he idealized them, as in "The Fire Sermon" (CP 73) under the walls of Magnus Martyr, or more extensively in the rejected longer version of "Death by Water" in the Valerie Eliot manuscript (*Facsimile* 1971). There the long section on the storm at sea is an awkward mixture of the self-consciously folksy ("Marm Brown's joint") and the self-consciously literary-mythic ("A triton rang the final warning bell" [1971: 55-69]). In the 1940s the mannered observers of social boundaries had finally melted away into the historical oblivion that had devoured their carefully ranked, categorized, and separated world.

It was not *that* world's ranks, categories, and separations Eliot rejected. Prufrock's is not the voice of the romantic hero who can

strenuously devote himself, without hope of satisfaction, to the pursuit of an end that always eludes him, of an end, after the barriers fall, towards which desire tumultuously and tragically pours. The meaning of such gestures is in the actual breach of the boundary. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the flood of desire simply breaks and dissolves at the foot of the wall. But the social and emotional walls that divide the Prufrock world seem to have no historical authority (Douglas 1973: 15). They enclose a world where certain conventions are observed ("And how should I presume?") but where other crucial ones (Michelangelo as the subject of salon chit-chat) are not.<sup>20</sup> It is a world whose lived density, its socially significant inner structure, its typical roles, voices, and discriminations seem the product of an ultimately motiveless, perhaps even malign, caprice. And for a young man who was about to announce to the Harvard department of philosophy that his "practical metaphysic" impelled him "toward the Absolute," this world would not do (KE 1915, 1964: 169).

In Boston Eliot was on the edge, where the centrifugal force of the source culture was weak and flaccid. At best, life there was a mime-show; it was life at a distance. In London he was at the centre.<sup>21</sup> But life here had had its 'natural' ranks, categories, social boundaries obscured by a century of liberalism, the socio-political text of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The upper middle class elite in whose stewardship the discriminative delicacy of a social system largely lay, or so Eliot thought (*Idea* 1939: 26-28, 35-43), had had its deeper, 'natural' rationalities collapse. The texts of this 'more profound rationality' were the social texts of an established national church, hierarchy, authority,

paternalism (Kojewky 1971: 126-141, but cf. Harrison 1967: 152-160).

The boundaries and divisions of society are maintained symbolically; in his reading of Durkheim, Frazer, and Harrison, Eliot would have learned that the origin of this social segmentation is always religious. The attempted integrative function of the 'mythic framework' of *The Waste Land* (1922) has its origins in this perception. In fact, I would go so far as to say that Eliot's reading in the anthropologists of his student days was ultimately much more important than his philosophical training.<sup>22</sup> Philosophy clearly had an early influence, but it was the texts of the anthropologists that had the more profound effect throughout his life, an effect that can be seen even in his late *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948).

What these early anthropologists taught about the social organism was not to look so much to the thematics of the way a society represents itself in its most elaborated form, but to read its symbolic representations as a kind of machinery for maintaining its social structure at the microcosmic level. Eliot also took in the lesson that the social segmentation of space and time originated in religio-mythic consciousness. For him a society that cleanly reflected the sacred origins of its divisions was in a healthy, 'natural' state. The liberal-democratic notion that the erected structure of a society came as a consequence of an original 'social contract' was for Eliot simply a perversion of the origin.<sup>23</sup>

Modern structural anthropology has taught us of course "that all boundaries are *artificial* interruptions to what is naturally continuous" (Leach 1976: 34). The boundaries zone social space both horizontally

and vertically. At the notional level, to move from one zone to another is simply to switch categories; marriage is an example of such a re-categorization. But at the level of social action zone-switching is the focus of considerable social attention, either in terms of socially regulated rituals of transitions, for example, rites of initiation, wedding ceremonies, funeral rites, etc., or in terms of unregulated zone-switching, which challenges and undermines the efficacy of the traditional zoning. The number and kind of such divisions are immense for any one social system. Segmentation of social space occurs at the macro level in such social institutions as property ownership and the carefully marked and regulated borders of the national state. But the fully articulated structure distinguishes and divides at the micro level in much greater density. In this way we can "distinguish domesticated areas from wild areas, town from country, sacred precincts from secular dwellings, and so on" (Leach 1976: 34). Time also is segmented in similar ways and the same principle holds for psychological and ethical space.

This densely articulated structure is actualized and maintained symbolically in the reality of everyday life. The most important sign-system in this operation is language. Language both codes the social boundaries with meaning and helps us 'retrieve' meaning; it 'retrieves' meaning in one of two ways: (a) in a restricted speech code that simply *operates* the meaning potential of the social zones, the borders and the crossings, and (b) in an elaborated speech code that makes explicit, notionally or metaphorically, the structure of the meaning potential realized in action (Halliday 1978: 108-126). Thus the bounding of social and psychological space implies a series of metaphoric equivalences which



allow us to retrieve meaning in elaborated form: normal/abnormal; time/eternity; clear-cut categories/ambiguous categories; periphery/centre; secular/sacred; natural/artificial; healthy/ill and so on (Leach 1976: 35). Although language actualizes and maintains the meaning potential of the social structure, it can also disrupt and change the inherited discriminations.<sup>24</sup> Eliot's great insight in the face of these two facts was a dialectical one; if language could disrupt what language had once sustained, then language could disrupt the disrapture. It is this sharply focussed sense of the social function of language that accounts for the characteristically dialogical openings of many of his literary essays, namely their concern to foreground the semantic obscurity into which the vocabulary of criticism had fallen in his time:

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence. We cannot refer to "the tradition" or to "a tradition"; at most, we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is "traditional" or even "too traditional." Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archaeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology. (SW 47)

This paragraph not only examines a word's definition, but conveys how that word is normally used and, thus, makes us aware of the small fragment of the common intuitive life which the word occupies. The intent is not simply to clarify, disinterestedly, the meaning of the term, but to transform that bit of the mental life of society. Clearly the paragraph on "tradition" foregrounds the connotative tissue which

connects the content to the social space it segments, where it serves a variety of purposes. It is one small example of the way segmentation of social space is coded in the common intuitive life. The examination of the word in just this way invokes, as a strong subtext, the presence of a small part of that densely articulated structure in which all who belong to a society participate and which is actualized through the operation of language in everyday life.

The poems of Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations* and the following *Poems 1920* function precisely in this way. They do not rest uncritically within an established set of social and aesthetic norms. The poems do not innocently reproduce concrete experience. They foreground the powerfully determinative substrata of conventionalized meanings, customs, beliefs, ideas of beauty, manners, sounds, and the like in order to challenge and change them. This for me is clearly the thrust of "Prufrock" and what raises that poem far above the level of a mildly interesting, but ultimately forgettable, vignette of typical middle class anxieties. The anxieties are there, but they are there in order to foreground and destroy the traditional literary and affective system of representing them, a system romantic in aesthetics, comfortably subjective in outlook, that has drained life, Eliot implies, of its courage, intelligence, and taste. The importance of "Portrait of a Lady" in the same volume and of a poem like "Gerontion" in *Poems 1920* lies within the scope of the same purpose.

Again, in "Portrait of a Lady," a poetry is made by the avoidance of poetry, or more precisely by the ironic foregrounding of all the materials of poetry in the immediate late romantic context, here for the

purpose of unveiling the psychological disaster into which romantic attitudes towards love have driven the bourgeoisie. And this ironic foregrounding is unrelenting. It pervades, for example, the rhythmic shaping of the lines and makes the possibility of an innocent and conventionally 'beautiful' music impossible.

-- And so the conversation slips  
 Among velleities and carefully caught regrets  
 Through attenuated tones of violins  
 Mingled with remote cornets  
 And begins. (CP 18)

The rhythmic effect of the fourth line is self-consciously subsumed in the wider irony, and thus a possibly beautiful line is transformed so that we hear the effect itself as a sign, Eliot will have it, of a certain kind of commonplace poeticizing typical of a debased romanticism, which only an ear coarsened by such an aesthetics could still find 'beautiful' or 'charming' and not discern the ruin of the line's beauty in the incorrigibly pervasive banality (cf. "A New Byronism" 1920: 184). By raising its own often masterfully constructed effects as a sign of a debased literariness, the poem is able to focus more clearly and more devastatingly the etiolated and disembodied character of the personal relationship it enacts. The epigraph from Webster with its evocation of Biblical ethics--"Thou hast committed--" and the brutal candour of the following word, accentuated by the pause--"Fornication . . ." (CP 18) contrasts the "velleities" of a submerged eroticism that cannot find any possible outward expression, except in oblique and deflected forms, in, as it were, symbolic couplings, like "friendships."

'You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends,  
 And how, how rare and strange it is, to find  
 In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends,  
 (For indeed I do not love it...you knew? you are not blind!  
 How keen you are!)

To find a friend who has these qualities,  
 Who has, and gives  
 Those qualities upon which friendship lives. (CP 18-19)

Here is the carefully calculated speech of the bourgeois salon (Kenner 1966: 22), formulaically sincere, alert also to all the subtle shifts of feeling which the words cue and shape, silently conveying an unspeakable duplicity at work of which the male persona is only obscurely aware. The tentative and precarious movement of the woman's conversation proceeds by repetitions, interruptions, qualifications, and an exacting syntax, all of which are the signs she offers of "a life composed so much," but not, as she says, of "odds and ends." This tactical evocation of a distracted spontaneity veils the actual severity of the composition, subcutaneously signalled in the exact affective shaping of the syntax-- "To find a friend who has these qualities, / Who has, and gives / Those qualities . . ."--the phrase "and gives" here catching up the merest ghost of a possibly concrete demand, to be immediately dissolved in the generality that follows. Design has become the hidden origin of authenticity. We return to the epigraph from this like a drowning man. Among the windings of these violins all that seems solid one moment in the next melts into air. The memorableness of this process, however, is impossible without the value personal authenticity and candour acquire as the affective medium of intimacy at the beginning of the bourgeois century (Trilling 1972, but cf. Adorno 1964, 1973: 122-130). Of course, what the poem does is unmask the subtle and delicate shell game that underlies

the genuine. In the distance between the Biblical-Elizabethan candour of "Fornication" and the 'candour' of the love affair which the poem enacts lies all the transformative force of the poem. Clearly the blunt tone of the epigraph functions as the measure against which the false notes of the poem are set, a difference which speaks to an audience that, Eliot presumes, will recognize and accept, within the province of the common intuitive life of the bourgeoisie, the greater efficacy of the epigraph's tone as a sign of a more genuine candour, a more genuine social speech, and a more musical poetic speech, than the dessicated husks that are the signs of an exhausted romanticism (Eagleton 1970: 146).

What the poem makes visible are the codings of the social boundaries; the experiences enact a typifying social drama that 'makes strange' ritualized bourgeois social relations. The inertial drag of the ritual, a weight that progressively paralyzes the male speaker, provides a baseline for the play of an ambiguous eroticism which the woman commands. These social rituals and boundaries become the occasion for the provocation of desire, rather than functioning as both the guarantors of the meaning of human acts in terms of a non-human absolute signified, and the historical referents of that absolute signified. This ambiguous eroticism comes to life when the woman's talk, or the man's, seems to threaten transgression of these boundaries, in what amounts to, for this context at least, a risky testing of the tolerances between the pressure of a possibly anarchic desire and the always coyly deferred promise of its concrete fulfillment in some actually genuine human contact. Eliot's epigraph cuts through these tangles like a clean wire. The voice in the epigraph mobilizes the attitude we are being asked to take towards the represented

events. In its Biblical and Elizabethan evocations it also serves to 'locate' historically the poem's enactments, to remind us, in short, of that pre-Enlightenment world in which the codes, which regulate and make sense of conduct, were not assumed to be arbitrary or contingent. With their Biblical and religious origins obscured, these codes are now only devices for the artificial stimulation of desire, and, worse, the poem suggests, not even for the purpose of its final fulfillment, but for the purpose of observing its disembodied motions. This drawing room pornography is decisively rebuked by an earlier form of moral life for which the tone of the epigraph serves as metonymic sign. Later in Eliot's developing critique of bourgeois forms of life we shall see him assign the major blame for this state of affairs to Enlightenment thought. The consequences of the location of a new absolute signified in history and the Enlightenment notion of a self-sustaining human Reason as the quintessence of a specifically human form of Being are taken up in one of Eliot's greatest lyrics, "Gerontion" (1920).

Criticism has loquaciously paraphrased and debated the issues which the poem raises. History, uprooted from the soil of a divine *telos*, becomes a labyrinth of blind corridors, a wilderness of mirrors leading to human futility, vanity, and moral paralysis (Smith 1974: 61; Rajan 1976: 10). Social life cut off from a transcendental signified as foundation and guarantor of the everyday is emptied of significance. There is no overwhelming evidence, however, to suggest that the poem exactly reverses the sacramental meanings which Eliot saw as underlying all experience. The gesturing of the four character-types near the beginning of the poem does not add up to the furtive celebration of a

Black Mass, as Hugh Kenner tentatively suggests (1966: 112-113). The names are "eerily suggestive," but they are suggestive metonymically of a deracinated and idle international bourgeoisie. The passage doesn't really convey "some rite, not innocent" (Kenner 1966: 112) which seems to unite them. At least if they were united in such a "rite" it would imply the motivated negation of a still vital sacramentality. Such an intent led Eliot to praise Baudelaire in his famous essay (1931) on his French precursor. Clearly, Mr. Silvero and the others are not extended the same kind of praise. As in "Portrait of a Lady," the social ceremonies and boundaries of a sacramentalized cosmos ("the word within a word," *CP* 39) lose their meaning in a world in which the absolute or transcendental signified has been relocated within history. The real "moral suicide" (Kenner 1966: 113) of these character-types is neither their active evil, nor their *acedia*, but a corrupted relationship to the objects and rituals and discretions of a sacramentalized conception of cosmic and social reality. These objects, ceremonies, discretions are not the objective correlatives of feeling, the processes that culminate and gratify desire. They are handled, as in "Portrait of a Lady," as the props for its artificial stimulation, for the self-contemplation of one's own desire rather than its effective discharge in the achieved unity of human subject and God, signified through a ritual observance that connects the two. Thus, all that can be validated by "Christ the tiger" being "eaten," "divided," and "drunk" becomes the occasion, instead, for the obscene stimulation of aesthetes (Mr. Silvero), denatured cosmopolites (Hakagawa), the professionally superstitious (Madame de Tornquist), and the fashionably neurotic (Fraulein von Kulp). The traditional 'signs'

of the *presence* of the absolute as the target and satisfaction of desire now convey not its *presence*, but its *absence*. "Signs are taken for wonders" still, but the sentence has acquired a new and corrupted sense. These "signs" have become the media of a limitless narcissism, not the guarantors of the presence of a higher reality. The "signs" through which one once caught glimpses of God now fetishistically render the ghostly bodies of ungratified desire. That is why, as Kenner notes, the syntax obscures whether Mr. Silvero's hands are caressing *something*, or are simply hands of a caressing kind (1966: 112).

The poem has usually been celebrated for its ethical daring and the suppleness and muscularity of its phrasing; but its real force lies in the implicit recognitions the bourgeois reader makes of where the poem's voice locates its ethical substance along the experiential continuum specific to that class. I am speaking, of course, of the *poem's* voice, not simply the voice of the character-type whose tonalities the voice of the poem enacts. It is this more inclusive voice that is dialogical. Ever sensitive to the intuitive life of the bourgeois reader, "Gerontion" situates the ethical centre of that life not in the flight towards a renewal of human subjectivity, but in the flight away from it. The subjective as ethical centre, through the growing influence of the moral relativism it implies, eventually collapses in narcissistic promiscuities. The voice of "Gerontion" is located on the journey back towards the disciplines of belief, "after such knowledge." Its assertions gain their transformative authority not from the familiar Christianity they recommend, but from the life-weariness such assertions signal has been overcome and, also, from the routine literary sophistication which the



poem's unvarnished speech rebukes. It is in this way that a 'style' can have an ethical content. This procedure clearly works to perturb the intellectual and ethical sedimentations of the common intuitive life. For Eliot, the sediment at the beginning of the present century represents the disturbing legacy of Enlightenment ideas on the mentality of the national elites, ideas that disrupted a unified, stable, Latin-Christian civilization that had lasted for two thousand years.

Undermining the foundations of the disrapture in the name of an upper middle class national elite became, then, the project at the centre (Stead 1967: 114-115; Bergonzi 1972: 61-62). And this meant, principally, winning the elite back to a religious conception of society as the 'natural' state of the social whole, the state where the divisions on the social ground are rooted to absolute authority, and the signifiers that mark them to an absolute signified. The vision of such a society, first fully articulated in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), is evident everywhere in Eliot's work before that summary statement. Eliot used the word "Idea" to suggest its Platonic associations, that is, 'Idea' as generative form or ideal conception (Kojevsky 1971: 134-135). The 'Idea' was of a society "in which a finely conscious elite," exercising a monopoly over the elaborated codes of that society, "transmits its values," not by transmission of the elaborated codes, but "through rhythm, habit, and resonance to the largely unconscious masses, infiltrating the nervous system rather than engaging the mind" (Eagleton 1976: 147). This is a vision, of course, transplanted to the twentieth century from Coleridge's late social and religious writings and his notion of the 'clerisy' as the primary collective subject in the transmission and

control of culture (Kojacky 1971: 131-132). The major difference between Coleridge and Eliot lies in the social situation they both addressed, thus affecting their texts' mood and tone. Eliot had a clearer view, in the 1930s, precisely against what constellation of principles and social actions his 'Idea' had to contend; after all, his text came at the end of the liberal era, whereas Coleridge's *On the Constitution of the Church and State* . . . (1830) was drowned in liberalism's rising tide.

Liberalism, however, in Eliot's time, was not an entirely lifeless socio-political force either. An important locus of 'liberalizing' thought, feeling, and action with which Eliot had close contact was Bloomsbury (Gordon 1977: 85 and passim). Bloomsbury represented "a specific moment of the development of liberal thought," restating and extending "the classical values of the bourgeois enlightenment" (Williams 1980: 165). But what kind of "specific moment" in the history of British liberalism does Bloomsbury represent? First there is "the remarkable record of political and organizational involvement, between the wars, by Leonard Woolf, by Keynes, but also by others, including Virginia Woolf . . ." (Williams 1980: 155). Public, engaged work stimulated by a specific sense of "social conscience" and, in another characteristic phrase, a "concern for the underdog" should colour all our perceptions of Bloomsbury. But as Raymond Williams notes

. . . what has most carefully to be defined is the specific association of what are really quite unchanged class feelings--a persistent sense of a quite clear line between an upper and a lower class--with very strong and effective feelings of sympathy with the lower class as victims. Thus political action is directed towards systematic reform at a ruling-

class level; contempt for the stupidity of the dominant sectors of the ruling class survives, quite unchanged, from the earliest phase. The contradiction inherent in this--the search for systematic reform at the level of a ruling class which is known to be, in majority, short-sighted and stupid--is of course not ignored. It is a matter of social conscience to go on explaining and proposing, at official levels, and at the same time to help in organizing and educating the victims. The point is not that this social conscience is unreal; it is very real indeed. But it is the precise formulation of a particular social position, in which a fraction of an upper class, breaking from its dominant majority, relates to a lower class *as a matter of conscience*: not in solidarity, nor in affiliation, but as an extension of what are still felt as personal or small-group obligations, at once against the cruelty and stupidity of the system and towards its otherwise relatively helpless victims. (1980: 155)

Eliot saw clearly the contradictory character of such commitments and increasingly said so in *The Criterion*, in *For Lancelot Andrewes*, and in *After Strange Gods*, although he never unequivocally challenged the political activities of his friends in Bloomsbury. *The Idea of a Christian Society* represents his attempt to vitiate these contradictions by resolving the genuine commitment of intellectual elites to the pursuit of truth and justice with their responsibilities for the governance of a society and to the wider governing class from which such elites are normally drawn. The feelings of sympathy for the poor, the downtrodden, the victims of a cruel and unresponsive socio-economic system were for Eliot a dangerous line for an influential fragment of the governing class to take, whether it was members of Bloomsbury, liberal clerics, or educators. In his prose he was quite clear about this issue and he grew increasingly distant from the liberal minded intelligentsia, symbolized by Bloomsbury, as his hardening religious commitments in the twenties

challenged in too uncompromising a manner the root values of these elites. In his poetry the portraits of the so-called "victims" of British society among the working class and the *petite bourgeoisie* more glibly challenged and denied what would have seemed to him the squishy romanticizing of such characters by wet-eyed liberal dreamers. "Apeneck Sweeney" (CP 59), the broad-footed "Doris" (CP 45), and the cast of character-types in *The Waste Land* are his answer to such illusions.

Sweeney addressed full length to shave  
 Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base,  
 Knows the female temperament  
 And wipes the suds around his face.

(The lengthened shadow of a man  
 Is history, said Emerson  
 Who had not seen the silhouette  
 Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.)  
 (CP 44-45)

If, as Williams argues, the liberalism of "the Bloomsbury fraction" represents the moment of social conscience and concern within the governing class itself, Eliot's portraits of "the silent vertebrate[s]" (CP 59) represent an uncompromising and even jeering response to that impulse.

To conclude this chapter, I want to look at a fragment of *The Waste Land* (1922) from the perspectives developed so far. This first 'take' on the major literary achievement of Eliot's early work anticipates a fuller treatment of the poem in Chapter Five, but will be useful at this point in allowing me to show the relevance of the notions here developed to that large work. Because this perspective defines a text as a

signifying practice always entangled in an active, transformative relationship with the common intuitive life readers carry around in their heads, I will also look at one of Eliot's best readers, Cleanth Brooks, reading this fragment of the poem. I mean by "best" in this context something like the kind of reader who brings the appropriate literary background, tacit social assumptions and beliefs to the poem which the poem itself requires in order that its transformative work proceed unhindered. In addition, we need a reader who brings a keen understanding of the way experiences--and ways of talking about them--are valued and hierarchized, in other words, a reader who brings to the poem, at a minimum, a tacit knowledge of the underlying socio-ethical codes which give meaning to representations of experience in a particular cultural context. In the later chapter, I will also have more to say about the 'mythic framework' of *The Waste Land*, but, for the time being, I would like simply to extend the insights of a number of commentators (Craig 1960: 241-252; Harrison 1967: 148; Eagleton 1970: 138-178; Hamilton 1970: 104) by seeing the poem's 'mythic form' as a formal device that deflects attention from the actual structure of the poem in the name of a higher order mythological semiotic jerrybuilt from a heterogeneous, and handy, heap of mythological and romance allusions. Indeed, I will come to examine the poem's use of myth as an integrative, closural gesture that is better read as part of the poem's 'content' than as a seed-pattern generating the poem's form.

Only when *The Waste Land* is returned to the social region and situation where it originated and where it had to make its way does its structure become visible. The critical debate about the poem's form

(what I've been calling its positive structure) which has raged since 1922<sup>25</sup> has of late sputtered to a stop as professional interest in the poem has dropped off to what seem to be mopping-up sorties in the poem's more obscure allusive recesses.<sup>26</sup> The question of the unity of the poem's form cannot be thought by Anglo-American formalism. The poem, at most turns, defeats its own manoeuvres to put in place some integrative symbolic unity which formalism can retrieve.<sup>27</sup> Instead, the poem's voices lapse into a small repertoire of restricted speech codes that do not help us retrieve an exclusively aesthetic textual unity, but rather make visible the pressure points, the very principles of social intelligibility, of an encircling extratextual social context of situation: "the words of the poem refer us out to, and bring into play, elements and attitudes of the culture we share with the poet" (Nowotny 1962: 160). In short, the poem's meaning as an activity in a particular social place in English society accounts for the final determinations of its structure. The sociosemiotic structure of that social place, which is independent of the poem, is of more account in the shaping of the poem's processes than any particulars intrinsic to the poem.

The verbal and formal authorial choices which account for the content of the poem only make sense in the social contexts from which they are chosen and which they actualize, the paradigms, in short, that give the actual choices their particular resonance and meaning. The sequencing decisions<sup>28</sup> are also controlled by the contrasts they set up with orders of loquacity, continuity, coherence privileged by the prevailing literary culture for the society as a whole. An account of the form of the poem that tracks the poem's microstructural interactions

with the common intuitive life in which it 'makes' sense (Halliday 1978: 126) dissolves not only some of the accumulated universalist prestige, but also the critical commonplace that the poem *must* be written to a single "marvellously intricate plan" (Hamilton 1970: 110; cf. McGrath 1976: 22-34).

In fact, the poem is quite incomprehensible unless we already stand with it at the social place from which it speaks, either because that is our own social place or because we were educated to it or, perhaps, because we aspire to it. The poem is not an heroic text attempting to grasp immediate, concrete experience across a culturally determined, experiential anaesthesia, as F. R. Leavis thought in his *New Bearings in English Verse* (1934), but a poem, like "Prufrock," that 'does' certain identifiable social relations, from a particular point of view, not simply to display them vividly, feelingly, or whatever, but to comment on and judge them without raising the poetic discourse to the status of a visible elaborated code. And in that process the poem's silences are just as important and active semantically as the poem's actual words.

To illustrate: just such an active silence occurs in "The Fire Sermon" section of the poem, the section in which the seduction of the typist is presented. But by saying that the seduction is what the passage is 'about' I'm already losing touch with the actuality of the text. The 'seduction' is not presented as a moment of lived experience, but rather as a complex attitude towards such a situation and such characters.<sup>29</sup> We are only interested in the clerk and typist, the text implies, as types, not as fully realized individuals, because Tiresias constitutes, at this moment, the text's substantial experiencing subject; he is fully

realized, on the margins, by what he observes and suffers through. His location in the text is 'above' the events he witnesses, but his observing and suffering, carrying a major universalist charge, are hardly 'above' it all, especially if he 'sees' this scene in *this* way (Craig 1960: 246-247; Bergonzi 1972: 101). What we want to retrieve in fact is the social ethos where 'doing' the seduction in *this* way makes sense. We should take note of the strategy (Eliot presents it as that in his notes to the poem) of mythologizing the experiencing subject. Whatever else Eliot intended, 'Tiresias' actually functions to obscure the clarity of the social tone and thus its interpretability.<sup>30</sup> The note to Tiresias (CP 82) invites us to see through his eyes; the restricted speech code tells us *how* and *what* to see. Instead, we *hear* in the stilted diction and syntax of the description of the seduction the hiss of sarcasm as an undertone, playing against the 'Tiresian' foresufferance, *rather* than being asked to visualize or feel, even in all its sordid horror, the scene "Enacted on this same divan or bed . . ." (CP 72). The 'fore-sufferance', of course, by suggesting this specific feeling-state, controls the way of seeing the "substance of the poem" (Notes, CP 82). What the text teaches us to respond to is not the fact that beyond a line such as "Endeavours to engage her in caresses" something is actually happening; rather we notice and acknowledge, perhaps not even fully consciously, the dismissive social gesture and the irony that the language of the description ("The time is now propitious . . .") represents, in fact, the very language clerk and typist, or characters of *that* type, believe to be socially correct and literate (Kenner 1966: 145).

What 'types' Eliot had in mind is made perfectly plain in the early



drafts of *The Waste Land*, where clerk and typist are situated socially by more clearly coded, typifying detail. As a 'reader' of social codes Eliot was inimitable:

The typist home at teatime, who begins  
To clear away her broken breakfast, lights  
Her stove, and lays out squalid food in tins,  
Prepares the toast and sets the room to rights.

Out of the window perilously spread  
Her drying combinations meet the sun's last rays,  
And on the divan piled (at night her bed),  
Are stockings, dirty camisoles, and stays.

A bright kimono wraps her as she sprawls  
In nerveless torpor on the window seat;  
A touch of art is given by the false  
Japanese print, purchased in Oxford Street.

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs,  
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest,  
Knowing the manner of these crawling bugs,  
I too awaited the expected guest.

A youth of twentyone, spotted about the face,  
One of those simple loiterers whom we say  
We may have seen in any public place  
At [almost any hour of night or] day.

Pride has not fired him with ambitious rage,  
His hair is thick with grease, and thick with scurf,  
Perhaps his inclinations touch the stage--  
Not sharp enough to mingle with the turf.

He, the young man carbuncular, will stare  
Boldly about, in "London's one cafe",  
And he will tell her, with casual air,  
Grandly, "I have been with Nevinson today".

Or else a cheap house agent's clerk, who flits  
Daily, from flat to flat, with one bold stare;  
One of the low on whom assurance sits  
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.

He munches with the same persistent stare,  
He knows his way with women and that's that!  
Impertinently tilting back his chair  
And dropping cigarette ash on the mat.

The time is now propitious . . .  
 (Facsimile 1971: 33)

"London's one cafe" is identified as the Cafe Royal by Valerie Eliot, "a favourite London rendez-vous of writers and artists (Facsimile 1971: 128). "Nevinson," of course refers to the Royal Academician C. R. W. Nevinson. "The painter was an habitué of the Cafe Royal" (128). The clerk's feigned snobbish attention to fashion in knowing "London's one cafe" marks him not simply as a typical *petit bourgeois* clerk on the make, but a *petit bourgeois* clerk who fancies himself something of an 'artist'. The "bright kimono," "nerveless torpor," and "false / Japanese print" of the typist mark her as modishly up-to-date as the clerk, a fit 'artistic' consort for the young literary man staring boldly about the Cafe Royal.

Edwardian and Georgian literary life was not unfamiliar with this type of fringe character. George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) had already contributed to an understanding of the socio-economic mutations which had brought a new kind of practitioner into the literary world, much to the annoyance and contempt of the older generation and of those who felt themselves to be the principal guardians of truth, goodness, and beauty in literature. Indeed, the degree of contempt in which the pushy hack was held is rather well captured by Eliot in the quoted passage. Pound's caricature of Arnold Bennett in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1922) remains, of course, the famous dismissal. Eliot's "young man carbuncular" is no Arnold Bennett.<sup>31</sup> But the social and literary conditions which make a Bennett possible at one end make possible, on the fringes, residual "scurf" that in its pretentious aspirations and its hunger for the

'right' sponsorship (the reference to Nevinson) comes to cultivate an entirely ersatz existence, a life devoted to the consumption of public images as the vocabulary of a new conception of fame, the publicist's notion of celebrity. The styles, the gestures, the *objets d'art*, even inwardness itself can be commercially 'had' as a conscious mimicry of the cultured and refined. The typist, no less than the young man, purchases the 'props' of, for example, *la vie boheme*, on Oxford Street; Oxford Street had already acquired its connotations of vulgar commercialism and 'popular' taste in Eliot's time. Eliot makes us aware not only that the objects themselves have been purchased, but, more importantly, the metropolitan sophistication they signify. She has purchased her 'sprawl' as surely as she has bought herself a piece of the public taste for 'oriental' effects. Such public consumption of imagery and 'effects' raises up a system of fashion, whose codes are inculcated by the new journalism.<sup>32</sup> This system prescribes the outward, and inward, rituals of consumption by which the commodity fetish wishes to be worshipped (Benjamin 1955, 1978: 153). Eliot's satire unmasks and vilifies not just the typical emptiness of such a life, but, very presciently, the psychological reality of a consumer-based capitalism which was beginning to take shape at the turn of the century (Hobsbawm 1970: 192-193).

There can be no doubt that the greater amount of blame for this state of affairs was placed not on the underlying mutations of British capitalism, very difficult to perceive in its midst, but in such highly visible and contentious 'liberalizing' activities as the (London) Education Acts of 1902 and 1903 (Read 1979: 436), which gave greater access to secondary education to students from 'the lower orders'. The

appearance in society of the "young man carbuncular" was Eliot's portrait of the typical product of such 'liberalizing'. J. A. Hobson, an important and widely read Liberal ideologue in this period, had argued in *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909) for extension of social and cultural equality to all: "It is a broad, easy stair, and not a narrow ladder, that is wanted, one which will entice everyone to rise, will make for general and not selected culture" (quoted in Read 1979: 250). Eliot's young man and typist were not an answer to such thoughts; they were his furious rebuke. The literary pretensions of the young man and the attainments of a general culture in Hobson's terms are put on the same level as the typist's consumption of fashionable sprawls and cheap prints. In the era of accessibility, literature, its media and techniques, are subject to the same commodity fetishism as the decorative styles of the Ballets Russes, to use another contemporary source of once fashionable and consumable imagery. The clumsily self-conscious 'literary' language of the seduction enacted in *The Waste Land* has its origin in precisely these identifications.

The short seduction fragment enacts a recognizable discursive voice making the typical sounds (in phonics, diction, and syntax) of the strained literary language of late nineteenth and early twentieth century popular narratives. It is a language of stylistic residues, those that signify the conventionally literary as it was received by the "low" ascending Hobson's broad and easy stair, a reception which Eliot always interpreted as entirely a matter of the uncomfortable assimilation of consumable effects. The more important elements of this debased literariness are the lexical and generic residues of Augustan literary prac-

tices, especially the stiffly laborious effect of a non-ironic use of periphrasis; the clotted 'Miltonic' syntax with its awkwardly positioned modifiers and obscure sentence agency; and, finally, the studied exploitation of simile (lines 233-234), the trope most familiar to cheap journalism and literature's only gift to that species of composition. It is the same voice Joyce parodies for its humour in the "Eumaeus" section of *Ulysses*. In *The Waste Land*, it is not the humour of such speech that stands out; here it functions as a social sign of cultural and moral destitution.<sup>33</sup> Thus the double irony when, after the typist "with automatic hand . . . puts a record on the gramophone," we hear, following a short pause in which the mixed tone of pity and contempt is allowed to take shape, the rare music of *The Tempest*--"'This music crept by me upon the waters'" (CP 72)--instead of the kind of music the text leads us to believe *this sort* of woman is more likely to want to hear. The quotation picks up the 'music' of the preceding scene, made explicit by the gramophone, a scene sounding its own kind of mechanical and stiff 'lyricism', and twists it, by ironic comparison, with the music of the enchanted isle, and then twists it again into the "pleasant whining of a mandoline" a few lines later, heard beside a "public bar in Lower Thames Street."<sup>34</sup> Although the music directs our attention to contrasting senses of what constitutes value (through the internal socially determined hierarchy of values in the paradigm from which they are drawn--the gramophone does not have value, *The Tempest* does), this is nowhere made explicit, except as we decipher the 'music' of the tonal structure (Craig 1960: 243-244).

To do that, *our* general attitudes towards society as a whole,

towards *petit bourgeois* sexual relations in particular, and towards idealized, but socially distant, characters like the "fishmen" lounging at noon under the walls of Magnus Martyr, must coincide with those attitudes that the tonal structure of the passage consciously enacts. When that coincidence takes place, the potent transformation which takes us from the knowing dismissiveness of the gramophone to the acceptability of *The Tempest* as social reference occurs in the silence of the gap that separates them, occurs without having to be specified. This 'seduction' syntagm reveals in its syntax, continuity, and its lexical choices a certain attitude towards the social and sexual relations of a particular class of people *from* another, quite distinct, social vantage. Although generally acknowledging the class identification of typist and clerk, criticism has largely ignored the possibility that Eliot's tone *only* makes sense when another class position, Eliot's own, is heard as the place from which the voice of the poem comes, the voice (called 'Tiresias' by the poem) that produces the sound-shape of the parody in the language of the 'seduction' itself. Most critics have chosen to hear the voice as coming from some place 'above' or 'beyond' society that measures conduct by a universal and natural authority. This is an ideologically determined way of obscuring the restricted code really being spoken in these lines. Sharing Eliot's social views about such events as are represented in the passage, critics quickly 'raise' the text's class-specific attitude towards the 'seduction' to universal status. Allan Tate: "The scene is a masterpiece, perhaps the most profound vision that we have of modern man" (1959: 345). Anne Bolgan: "The joyless and dreary automatism of contemporary sexuality . . ." (1973: 87). Nancy Duvall

Hargrove: "The dark stairs down which the young man gropes his way upon departing are symbolic, suggesting the blackness and vacancy of his soul as it descends into moral and spiritual blindness" (1978: 76).

What is interesting about these traditional judgements is the absolute terms in which they are formulated. They are made often in a matter of fact, it-goes-without-saying tone that can only be explained by the fact that the critics believe they are not controversial; thus they do not have to be formulated in another way, one sensitive to the relativity of Eliot's own placing judgement. Everyone, on this issue at least, speaks the same language. Stanley Fish's notion of "interpretive community" is relevant here, especially his sense of that sort of community as being essentially a *social* formation. (1980).

As a social formation an interpretative community occupies a place in society, a place where, for example, a reference to Greek mythology carries a particular privilege and prestige that does not need specifying because it is a component of the restricted code which members of these particular social formations use to communicate their allegiance to the community to which they belong, by re-inforcing one of its touchstones of value. The case of Cleanth Brooks is typical:

The fact that Tiresias is made the commentator serves a further irony. In *Oedipus Rex*, it is Tiresias who recognizes that the curse which has come upon the Theban land has been caused by the sinful sexual relationship of Oedipus and Jocasta. But Oedipus' sin has been committed in ignorance, and knowledge of it brings horror and remorse. The essential horror of the act which Tiresias witnesses in the poem is that it is not regarded as a sin at all--is perfectly casual, is merely the copulation of beasts. (1939: 156)

Since the *specific* sinfulness of Oedipus' relationship with Jocasta is that it offends the incest taboo, the comparison Brooks decides to make with the clerk and typist becomes absurd: the clerk is not the typist's son. Clearly that is not what Brooks wants to say. What in fact he intends comes down to this: sexual relations should not be casual and if they are, they make the participants no better than beasts. Of course, that assumes that the sexual relations of beasts are 'casual', an entirely illegitimate assumption. The word 'casual' only activates meaning in the human world, and it is only to that world which the word refers. Its eccentric amplification by Brooks in the "copulation of beasts" makes no biological or logical sense; the phrase is simply a term of *social* abuse, which, in the context of Brooks's paragraph, is opposed by the courtesies paid Sophocles. The shade and shape of Brooks's 'eccentric' amplification of the tone is controlled by the ideology the text silently activates, an ideology that valorizes the social position where Brooks finds himself by a visible and, he must feel, acceptable contempt, not of fully realized participants in the 'seduction', but the sort of people they represent metonymically, who, in fact, can only be thought of in class terms. And who exactly are these people? The message of the voicing of the 'seduction' itself is plain enough. The restricted speech code of the poem is saying that this is the way people of this sort *textualize* their experience, that is, in terms of the stilted and clichéd formulations of the literary hack, isn't it pathetic of them? From here the political point is not much further up; these are the people liberalism wants us to believe are our equals, isn't it absurd? In Joyce's parody of this style, the point is: isn't it *comical* the way Bloom's voice apes the



literary style he knows, adjusting to the situation of having to talk to a 'literary man' in a language Bloom thinks this 'literary man' will accept. The comedy lies in our knowledge that this 'literary man's' literariness is going through an identity crisis.

In the context of critical 'argument', Brooks's use of *Oedipus Rex* clearly functions to sandbag the conclusion he wants to proffer, which is, in effect, arrived at by a *silent* reading of the poem's tone, a reading he cannot make explicit because the thought processes he has gone through, if that is what they are, have no scholarly privilege, being simply and intimately bound up with the attitude of one class towards another (Martin 1970: 20). In fact, it might be useful to interpret Brooks's response to Eliot as the working out towards the reader of the intent of the poem, namely a cleansing of the egalitarian crud that has obscured the clarity and social obviousness of fundamental class distinctions. Moreover, his judgement is the result of the functioning of the restricted code which Brooks shares with Eliot and with other members of the interpretative community who understand and accept the implicit values, attitudes, opinions, privileges that characterize the code, in short, the common intuitive life of that community. What *Oedipus Rex* does in this context is work Eliot's social contempt free of the class-bound code in which it has its genesis and raise it to a higher station in an elaborated code that re-writes it as a comment on the 'decline of civilization'.

And it was as a diagnosis of the malaise universally afflicting European civilization that Eliot's first readers chose to read *The Waste Land*.<sup>35</sup> Of course, the idea of 'civilization' was not always qualified

by the adjective 'European', European civilization being taken often as civilization as such. That Eliot in later years attempted to deflect attention from this sort of reading by suggesting that the poem's genesis was wholly in private experience and that its intention was, at least partly, therapeutic<sup>36</sup> cannot efface the evidence of the poem itself, especially the evidence that can be derived from the way Eliot chose to enact his experience, private or civic. The publication of the *Facsimile* edition of early drafts of the poem in 1971 has only strengthened the argument, I believe, that the poem very clearly intends to compass an historical and cultural situation, to present a vision of its time and of the 'collapse' of the 'natural' discriminations and continuities of history and culture. The *Facsimile* also, I might add in anticipation, makes quite clear that it was Pound's suggested revisions which gave the 'mythological framework' of the poem the prominence it has. Indeed on the crucial question of tone, the revisions of this section of the poem did not change or revoke the specific jibes or their original thrust, only obscured them somewhat in the increased salience of a tone Eliot decided to call 'foresufferance', in the interests of subordinating social contempt to the rigours of achieving at least a mythological coherence for the poem.

The point of this analysis is to suggest that Brooks's reading of *The Waste Land*, like Moody's of "Prufrock," is the kind of reading the poem itself has been designed to provoke. The particulars of the poem--the typist's "half-formed thought" (line 251) for example--do not simply name some narrative event but evoke the concrete social context in which such an event carries an important ideological message. From this

perspective, then, the meaning and function of a style or poetic form cannot be captured adequately in literary terms, especially in Eliot's case, where the literary itself (in its late romantic forms) is remorselessly subverted and displaced. The choice of one locution over another in the characterization of a person or an event, within a modernism that has worked itself free of 'literature' and its traditional elaborated codes for the universalizing of moral experience, becomes a more overtly social act. Eliot calls the young man "carbuncular" and compares his assurance to a silk hat worn by a rich provincial *arriviste* (a source of regional power, one might add, of the Liberal party in Britain at this time [Read 1979: 160, 322-323]), in order not only to present the deplorable results of particular social developments, but, and this is the important point, he does it in order to knock any taste for the ideas and feelings that bring about such conditions clean out of a reader's head. What we traditionally mean by style and form requires considerable re-thinking from this perspective. In fact, what I will argue about *The Waste Land* as a whole is that the choices Eliot has made to unify the poem within an anthropological framework do not represent a description of the poem's unity at all but are an effect of a larger dialogical demand.

The unity of *The Waste Land* is neither notionally monistic nor does it correspond neatly to some *a priori* pattern. Every attempt to account for the poem's unity on some such bases has foundered because parts and elements always remain unassimilable or unintelligible to any reading that sites the unity of a text entirely in the text itself. *The Waste Land* deliberately resists assimilation to the conventional and traditional coherences of the immediate literary context. That is why it met with

such disdain from the established literary generation, who felt its most cherished aesthetic principles assaulted, indeed one might say deconstructed, by an approach to truth and beauty that threatened to dissolve them in what was thought of as the poem's gloomy naturalism (Squire 1923: 655-656). Instead the poem's unity lies in the coherence of its social practice as a motivated operation on the significations settled within a particular socio-cultural environment. In this drama, the known world's complex, but finite, diversity itself becomes the only possible structure by which the poem's own diversity, eclecticism, discontinuities, ruptures, voices can be finally seen to cohere. In fact, the poem's own closural moves, abstracted from the Cambridge anthropologists, *are themselves constituents* of the way the poem acts to transform a particular set of significations in the name of other, more legitimate ones.

Here, of course, the work of Sir James Frazer, Jessie Weston, and Jane Harrison is particularly important, but important in ways not yet realized by criticism. It is the social meaning which early Cambridge anthropology carries in late Victorian culture that is important for the formal action of *The Waste Land*. Briefly, Eliot appreciated more keenly than most (see his essay on Arnold in *For Lancelot Andrewes*) that the concerted action of scientific materialism during the liberal century across the whole scope of human knowledge (even theology) had deferred--where it hadn't destroyed--the acceptance of Christian explanations for the origin and source of European civilization. In the work of the Cambridge anthropologists, a signal product of the very scientific and materialist frame of mind he abhorred, he thought he glimpsed in what was unearthed of the earliest European cultures an opportunity to peel

back the fabric of modern life and reveal a mythological deep structure, carrying a greater legitimacy for minds learned in the scientific habits of thought sponsored by the Enlightenment and taught to discount, and even suspect, if not ridicule, Christian teaching on matters of history, society, and the foundations of culture. If 'science' itself had established that the origins of social life lay in the religious experience of pre-Christian peoples, then only a conception of society built on those ancient seed-experiences and the way they nourish the codes of the everyday life of a community could possibly be acceptable as the actual foundation of thought and action. The legacy of the Enlightenment had disrupted the operation of the ancient codes. *The Waste Land* was written to disrupt the settled calm of the liberal mind and to make it responsive again, through instinct and feeling, to the sub-rational pull of the ancient codes. But before we turn to a detailed examination of Eliot's masterpiece, we need to look more closely at the literary dimension of the problem as Eliot himself conceived it in his literary criticism.

## Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> I have in mind Browning's dramatic monologues and Clough's *Amours de Voyage* (1858), a poem which "Prufrock" echoes and whose main 'character', Claude, is a precedent 'type' for Eliot's Prufrock. The affinities between Clough and Eliot were first pointed out by Michael Roberts in his "Introduction" to the *Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936: 11-14) and in Bowers 1966: 709-716.

<sup>2</sup> The most recent scholarly survey is Perkins 1976, although Kenner's references to *les symbolistes* in *The Pound Era* (1974) are usually more perceptive, as are Keith Alldritt's (1978: 15-33). The third part, "Baudelaire: Modernism in the Streets," of Berman 1982: 131-171 brilliantly evokes the social, political, and cognitive contexts of *symbolisme* in France, widening many of Walter Benjamin's observations about nineteenth-century Paris. The fragments of Benjamin's famous "arcades" project have been published in English in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1973) and in *Reflections* (1978: 146-162). Berman's book as a whole is a most interesting study of the sources and culture of modernism and modernity.

<sup>3</sup> The best modern account of the intellectual origins of liberalism is Macpherson 1962; later developments of the liberal idea are traced in Bullock and Shock 1956. Rodney Barker's *Political Ideas in Modern Britain* (1978: 17-26, 50-68) is also a very good survey of liberalism in Britain. An interesting recent *apologia* for liberalism, by a writer

who has also explored Eliot's anti-liberalism (1958), is Kathleen Nott's *The Good Want Power: an Essay in the Psychological Possibilities of Liberalism* (1977). In *The Material World* (1980: 226-244), David Silverman and Brian Torode present an important deconstructive reading of a central text of liberalism, Locke's chapter "Of Property" in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690).

<sup>4</sup> For a survey of the legal and administrative consequences of the idea of *laissez-faire* see W. L. Burn's *The Age of Equipoise* (1965: 132-231).

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Bulstrode's conduct, before his fall, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) discloses the kinds of concrete enactments of *laissez-faire* theory within the common intuitive life the novel carefully and sensitively builds up, an environment characterized by the transition from one set of socio-economic relations to another. Bulstrode's 'punishment' enacts the still potent pull of ethical demands appropriate to an as yet unsurpassed *Gemeinschaft*, a community not yet wholly subject to the alien imperatives of the new economic order overtaking traditional forms of communality.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Hugh Clough, *Amours de Voyage*, Canto I, Letters VII and XI (1974: 98, 101). Contrasting the nineteenth-century 'grand tour', such as Claude's, a tour in which the young man 'finds himself', the eighteenth-century Grand Tour smoothed and polished an inherited public self (Sennett 1977: 45ff.).

<sup>7</sup> "What we want is to disturb and alarm the public" ("Observations" 1918: 69); and see his thrusts at the 'liberal' and 'radical' influences on education in "Modern Education and the Classics" (SE 455-458).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Eliot's account of Montaigne's effect and influence on Pascal--"by the time a man knew Montaigne well enough to attack him, he would already be thoroughly infected by him." From "The *Pensées* of Pascal" (*SE* 362).

<sup>9</sup> See Hans Osterwalder's *T. S. Eliot: Between Metaphor and Metonymy* (1978: 9-23) for the general relevance of this distinction to literature. The rest of Osterwalder's monograph explores the relevance of this distinction primarily to Eliot's plays. The following from Ezra Pound, written in 1917 as a review of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, suggests that this distinction is not entirely inappropriate and was recognized as early as 1917 as having a central relevance to Eliot's work:

Were I a French critic, skilled in their elaborate art of writing books about books, I should probably go to some length discussing Mr. Eliot's two sorts of metaphor: his wholly unrealizable, always apt, half ironic suggestion, and his precise realizable picture. It would be possible to point out *his method of conveying a whole situation and half a character by three words of a quoted phrase*; his constant aliveness, *his mingling of a very subtle observation with the unexpectedness of a backhanded cliché*. (1963: 419, my emphasis)

Pound goes on to warn other poets that this "method is Mr. Eliot's own."

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ezra Pound's little essay on Housman (1963: 66-67). This piece was originally published in *The Criterion*, January 1934.

<sup>11</sup> "Amelia. 1878," in *A Selection of Poems* (1948: 61).

<sup>12</sup> I believe this is an inescapable inference from Eliot's comments on the minor Elizabethan dramatists in *The Sacred Wood* and *Selected Essays*, a notion in fact that grows more explicit in his essays of the 1940s: see his essay on Kipling, for example, in *On Poetry and Poets*



(1957, 1969: 236). In the earlier period Eliot's remarks on 'convention' in "Philip Massinger" in *The Sacred Wood* are particularly apropos. This sense of the active, shaping influence of a culture's verbal habits also stands behind F. R. Leavis' *Revaluation* (1936, 1964), especially his comments on Carew (22).

<sup>13</sup> This is certainly an assumption on which Roger Kojecky's *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (1971) is based. Roger Sharrock examines some of the persuasive techniques in "Eliot's Tone" (1977: 169ff.). See also Robinson 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Eagleton 1976: 147 and Nott 1974: 204. See also her earlier and more polemical "Mr. Eliot's Liberal Worms" (1958: 105-139).

<sup>15</sup> See Eliot's important essay in 1945 "The Social Function of Poetry" (*PP* 15-25). For the practical critical treatment of the ideas in this essay, see "Rudyard Kipling" (*PP* 228-251).

<sup>16</sup> The standard text on this interpretation of American origins is Henry Steele Commager's *The Empire of Reason* (1977). Chapter Nine (176-197) is especially appropriate.

<sup>17</sup> Williams again and again returned to this theme (1918, 1971: 24; 1958, 1967: 30; 1951, 1967: 174; Whittemore 1975: 190-191; Mariani 1982: 249-250; 271-272).

<sup>18</sup> Gordon 1977: 15-36 (Chapter Two) is a detailed account of Eliot's psychologically awkward experiences as a student in New England.

<sup>19</sup> For "Mr. Apollinax" Gordon provides the relevant background: "The scene is a country house where he and Russell were guests of a snob called Fuller whom Russell despised because he and his mother aped the English manner. Eliot gleefully described Russell's assault on the gentility of

the professor's tea-party with his passionate talk, his grinning foetus face, and easy laughter. . . . Eliot immediately allied himself with the alien" (1977: 19-20).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Mary Douglas' analysis of Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* and *The Prime Minister* from the perspective of the social conventions which attend the drawing up of guest lists at dinner parties (Douglas and Isherwood 1980: 81-84).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gordon 1977: 66, 82-85. Although Gordon's book, *Eliot's Early Years*, is full of important and revealing biographical detail, her shaping of this material in the interests of what amounts to an 'authorized hagiography' of Eliot unnecessarily blinkers her perspective on the life and work. For example, Gordon never convincingly explains why Eliot, even in the face of much discouragement, chose to stay (some might say 'hang on') in London in the 1915-1919 period, if his life's principal thrust after 1914 impelled him towards a knowledge of God and, through God, a knowledge of himself (130). She does not illuminate why Eliot's spiritual development, aimed as it was towards "the Absolute," beyond the mere contingencies of time and place, necessitated that he stay in London and doggedly pursue social acceptance, for example, through an acquaintance with the socially better-placed Woolfs and their friends, even as he was thought of as a bit of "a family joke" by them (83-84). This requires a better explanation than Gordon provides. After all, it is no more necessary to seek the Absolute in the vicinity of the British Museum than it is to pursue it in the neighbourhood of the Fogg. In contrast, see Bergonzi 1972: 100.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Richter 1977: 135-138. This essay and Wollheim 1970: 169-193

are crucial in estimating the importance of the 'philosophical' aspect of Eliot's work. Professional philosophers have tended to minimize this side of Eliot's achievement, whereas literary critics and scholars have usually found Eliot's philosophical accomplishments very impressive. An amateur's overestimation of Eliot's philosophical sophistication is one of the few weaknesses in Kenner's otherwise fine book on the poet (1966). It entirely overwhelms less resourceful critics like Bolgan (1973). The important fact is that the *kind* of philosophy Eliot was doing in 1912-1917 was slowly and irrevocably being demolished by new schools of thought. The philosophical *avant-garde* of his time was not headed after Bradley. We do well to remember that it was precisely in these years that Wittgenstein was already pulling his *Tractatus* (1918), proposition by proposition, from his notebooks. Eliot's dissertation generally sees the problem of the immediacy of experience in the context of a neo-Hegelian epistemology, the famous "knowledge" of his title. But that was a way of conceptualizing the problem that was already obsolete before he finished his final draft in 1915. *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (1915, 1964) is a philosophical elegy to a bypassed metaphysical tradition. Its *concerns* were current (those concerns always are), but the terms and concepts in which philosophy would investigate the issue of knowledge and experience in the twentieth century were changing. With the wisdom of hindsight it is now difficult to read Eliot's "Conclusion" (KE 153-169) and not see that even as he was defending that tradition it was already in ruins all about him. The situation has been trenchantly described by Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*:

. . . both Russell and his closest ally, G. E. Moore, were in revolt against the British post-Hegelian idealists, notably Bradley. Yet their quarrel with Bradley was not so much with what he *said*; it was with his failure, as they saw it, to say anything significant at all. Absolute idealism was not so much a philosophical doctrine as an intellectual debauch. One could laugh at it . . . ; one could clear it out of the way and start again from scratch; but one could not contradict it, because its arguments were confused beyond the point of rational discussion. So Moore and Russell scorned to debate with their predecessors, and embarked rather on a 'new instauration'--a cleansing of the Victorian philosophical stables, to be followed by the reconstruction of philosophy in new and unambiguous terms.  
(1973: 209)

One wonders what Eliot made of G. E. Moore's brilliant "The Refutation of Idealism" in *Mind* (1903: 433-453), an essay that is as much a stylistic *tour de force* as an unanswerable demolition. Eliot does not mention it in *Knowledge and Experience*; the few references to Moore (KE 40-41, 47) are on technical points addressing the definition of terms. One wonders, too, how Eliot responded to the admiration of Moore in Bloomsbury, the literary circle to which he was increasingly drawn after 1917.

On Eliot's remark in the 1964 "Preface" to *Knowledge and Experience* that "to most modern philosophers" this work must seem "quaintly antiquated," we might comment that to many *in 1915* it would have seemed just as "quaintly antiquated"; certainly it would have seemed so to Russell and Moore. In this respect, of course, Eliot, the decisively modernist poet, resisted the *philosophical* modernism of his time. The problem with a book like Anne C. Bolgan's study of *The Waste Land, What the thunder really said* (1973), which rewrites the poem in the context of

Bradleyan metaphysics, is the lack of any appreciation that by the time Eliot came to Bradley, Bradley, philosophically speaking, was a dead letter and that Eliot probably knew or suspected as much. It is very difficult to believe that someone as astute, intelligent, and finely alert to the semantics of reputation as Eliot was would *not* know. We should not forget the fact that after 1917-1918 Eliot read Bradley mainly as a masterful prose stylist, commanding a style whose vigour and clarity came to have, Eliot thought, an ethical importance for late Victorian culture.

<sup>23</sup> Locke and Rousseau, of course, are the formulators of the mature form of such a notion of the origin and persistence of society.

<sup>24</sup> The efficient cause of such change occurs as a result of changes in a society's mode(s) of production. See Jameson 1981: 89-102, on the use of "the horizon of the mode of production" in the analysis of cultural objects and processes. I leave the very complex issue involved here to the side. It requires an extended and separate treatment of its own. For the 'classical' texts of modes of production see Jameson 1981: 89n. A useful definition is provided by Eagleton 1976: 45. "A mode of production may be characterized as a unity of certain forces and social relations of material production. Each social formation is characterized by a combination of such modes of production, one of which will normally be dominant."

<sup>25</sup> Typical questions which have been exhaustively debated include the following: does the poem cohere? is its principle of intelligibility "musical" (Bergonzi 1972: 91), "*symboliste*" (Kenner 1974: 133), "modal" (Bailey 1978: 3-8), "dialectical" (Bolgan 1974: 73ff.), "allusive"

(Williams 1968: 44-76), "experiential" (Rajan 1976: 30), "mytho-logical" (Smith 1974: 72-98), or is it held together autobiographically (as James E. Miller argues in his controversial *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land* [1977]) or, in more displaced form, as Lyndall Gordon argues, seeing the autobiographical material transmuted to a symbolic working out of "the trials of a life in the process of becoming [spiritually] exemplary" (1977: 110)?

<sup>26</sup> For example, Barbara Everett's recent "Eliot's Marianne: *The Waste Land* and its Poetry of Europe" (1980: 41-53) is a brilliant piece of detective work.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Eliot's own remarks on *The Waste Land*'s incoherences in the *Paris Review* interview with Donald Hall (1963: 96, 105).

<sup>28</sup> See Eliot's comments on the sequencing of images and the "logic of imagination" in the Preface to his translation of St. John Perse's *Anabasis* (1930, 1959: 9-10).

<sup>29</sup> Stead 1967: 165-166, provides the typical treatment of these lines, making a convenient distinction between "a detached account of an event" and "an enactment" of it. How the status of enacted contents, or the processes of selection and combination, change because a text 'enacts' rather than 'reports' is not specified. Stead rightly senses that the passage does not merely 'report', but by saying it 'enacts' an event, without specifying *how* the enactment works and how we recognize the difference, he does not clarify matters. What exactly *is* being 'enacted' in these lines? It is certainly not a self-evident and universal "image of human life" (165).

<sup>30</sup> Eagleton 1970: 161: "The objection which can be registered to

this is then the criticism which can be made of much of the poem: in so far as the limits of the mythology remain unquestioned, the whole projection (as its automatic rhythms tend to imply) is 'natural', and Tiresias's detachment the impotence of an observer of how life 'really' is; in so far as that social mythology is questioned, his detachment becomes, not a quality of response, but a quality of the tendentious mind out of which the incident is created." See also Hamilton 1970 on Tiresias: "Old, blind, bisexual. Why should we take these characteristics to denote unusual wisdom (especially about sex) when they can more easily be taken to confess unusual ignorance" (109)?

<sup>31</sup> This identification is not as far-fetched as it sounds. It occurred to Clive Bell in his review of *The Waste Land* in the *Nation and Athenaeum* (1923: 772-773).

<sup>32</sup> The commercial consumption of mechanically reproducible cultural commodities in the twentieth century was first described and analyzed in detail by the Frankfurt School. Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936, 1968: 219-253) remains the definitive starting point in the analysis of this process. Horkheimer and Adorno, in the context of their study of the Enlightenment (1944, 1969), developed and extended Benjamin's insights in the service of a critique of an industrially mature, profit-ruled "culture industry" as one of the limits of the Enlightenment, namely, the limit at which the emancipatory, anti-feudal project at the heart of the Enlightenment is turned by the "culture industry" in on itself and ironically defeats its own deepest purposes and aspirations. "Freedom to choose . . . proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same" (166-167).

<sup>33</sup> Bergonzi 1972: 101, finds that the language of the seduction has "a peculiar austere beauty," a response aimed at discomfiting Ian Hamilton's sense of these lines as unsatisfactorily prissy and fastidious. Hamilton has not recognized that the effect is intentional (Hamilton 1970: 109).

<sup>34</sup> Hargrove 1978: 76, ignores the linking function of the 'music' and connects the syntagmatic chain by reference to the geography of the City of London, the direction, in short, in which someone called "the protagonist" heads in order to end up in Lower Thames Street. Moody 1979: 92-93, acknowledges the music's connective function.

<sup>35</sup> "As Stephen Spender sees it, what Eliot took to Pound was 'a series of sketches in a modernist manner about modern life. What we get after Pound seemed to be about the breakdown of everything. There were a great many ideas about breakdown around at the time--Spengler's *Decline of the West*, for instance, and writers were concerned about the breakdown of public life and individual lives.'" Spender quoted in Herbert 1982: 20; see also Press 1966: 29; Bateson 1977: 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> T. S. Eliot, quoted by Theodore Spenser during a lecture at Harvard University (*Facsimile* 1) and James E. Miller (1977: 152-159).



## Chapter Four: An incessant activity

A man of ideas needs ideas, or pseudo-ideas, to fight  
against. ("Imperfect Critics," *SW* 46)

When we investigate the origins in 1910-1920 of English literary 'modernism' (Bradbury 1971: 69-105; Perkins 1976: 329-347, 490-526) we notice that, although it was an energetic and active movement among young writers and artists, it came into view less by its own exertions at self-advertisement than by the falling away, panel by panel, of the intellectual and affective synthesis which had given Victorian culture its look of unity and coherence. It was not so much, of course, that the Victorian era was unified and coherent by virtue of having only one thing to say; it was unified and coherent because all the contending voices spoke within a conceptual framework that they shared, what Walter Houghton has called *the* "Victorian frame of mind" (1957: xiii-xvii). Without that sense of the Victorian synthesis, it would be difficult indeed, if not impossible, to register the tone of a text like Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). But by 1918 the massive, even claustrophobic, enclosures of the Victorian synthesis had largely disintegrated, unable to survive the eventually impossible contradiction that joined a largely implicit belief in pragmatic materialism, the first wedding of empirical science and industry, and an explicit belief in transcendent aesthetic and moral values (Mott 1966: 215, and his comments on J. S. Mill, 220-221). But as the pace of English economic expansion slowed and political

confidence faltered in the period after 1865, social tensions began to perturb the Victorian 'equipoise' (see Burn 1965 on "contradictions" in late Victorian society, 298-332; Hobsbawm 1969: 172-194; Shannon 1976: 208-214, 221). The prosperity of Palmerstonian England and the moral and social authority of the dominant Whig liberal *haute bourgeoisie* obscured the conditions for the political, social, and economic crises that broke through the surface calm with increasing frequency in the last thirty years of the century. These were the years of political Liberalism's apogee and the prelude to its catastrophic decline after World War I. The fate of Liberalism, as a political force, was sealed in those years by the falling relative financial position of the Victorian middle class after 1881 (Shannon 1976: 212) which paralleled, inversely, the increasing social and political tensions in society as a whole.

Rather like dinosaurs at the onset of a new and uncongenial geological epoch, the generation at its prime in the 1860s, still at the head of affairs in the 1870s and 1880s, groped about in the wreckage of their familiar landscape, already being transformed and imposing new conditions of adaptation and survival. Gladstone's famous collision with Tennyson in 1887 over *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* aptly illustrates this sense of lurching mastadonic creatures thrashing about in the shallows of a swamp inexorably drying up on them.  
(Shannon 1976: 199)

In the cultural domain the result of these transformations was the passing of Matthew Arnold's and John Stuart Mill's dream of a national elite superintending a coherent, unified national culture (Williams 1961: 65-84, 120-136). Instead, dynamic cultural elements in English life abandon the central *social* position which the Arnoldian vision insisted

they *must* share with the political and economic elites in order to sustain values transcendentalized by their historical longevity (therein lies their "perfection," Arnold 1869, 1960: 68-69). During the last half of the nineteenth century a fragment of the British intelligentsia increasingly flourished in more or less deliberate opposition to Whig-liberal ideas, often finding in the past, the Middle Ages for example, or the future, spurs to creativity and a social critique of mercantile and industrial civilization. Some of these individuals and movements provided an intellectual ancestry, or, at least, part of one, for modernism. The continuing influence of the Oxford Movement from the 1830s and 1840s (see Arnold 1869, 1960: 62) through the writings of Newman and his circle, pre-Raphaelitism, the philosophical opposition to utilitarianism associated with the name of F. H. Bradley, the Arts and Crafts movement, the intellectual attractions of Guild Socialism, Whistler and the impact of continental movements in painting, the impact of French *symbolisme* through Yeats and the 1890s, and, finally, the impact of continental naturalism, were all positive expressions of new styles, programmes, and ideas, but, nonetheless, a positivity shaped by their purposeful differences from the intellectual underpinnings of Whig-liberalism (for recent definitive summaries of liberal thought, see Harvie 1976: 19-49 and McCallum 1983: 11-37). In their various ways these movements and individuals articulated direct contrasts and oppositions to liberalism's central articles of faith: namely, the centrality of the mercantile function as the loam on which culture's delicate blooms are permitted to grow to the extent that 'affairs' can 'afford' to keep them; the centrality of the empirical sciences and the inductive methods

that shape them for use in industry (Horkheimer 1974); and the centrality of the varieties of realism, in philosophy, in art, and in politics.

Pre-modernist movements and modernism itself are formulated consciously *against* the social and political dominance of such a faith:

Manifestations of anti-rationalism, mysticism, explorations of myth and its regenerative powers for mankind abounded in the 1880s and 1890s, with many interweavings with both aestheticism and 'back to nature'. One relatively simple aspect of it was a return to dogmatic Christian belief, abjuring anything in the way of rational aids or supports. Roman Catholicism especially enjoyed a vogue with many intellectuals who yearned for a rock of certainty. Huysmans himself ended his days in an abbey; and Wilde, Beardsley and the poet Lionel Johnson were converts. More complex were the various searches for the source of instinctual knowledge and its healing powers. Yeats was attracted by Madame Blavatsky's 'theosophical' mediations of Tibetan Buddhism, and sought for the origins of human creativity in myth, the 'Great Memory' of mankind. Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), a monument of Victorian evolutionary anthropology, was ironically a major source of materials for such quests. (Shannon 1976: 285)

The sense of such developments as growing in a spirit of opposition to a particular cultural settlement cannot be insisted upon too much. The problem with a book like Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* (1957) is that its treatment of the growing isolation of the artist in the nineteenth century does not sufficiently take into account the oppositional character of the process he traces (cf. Heyck 1982: 221-238). When an artist is marginalized by some network of particular social and cultural determinants, he does not, then, abandon entirely any connection with the socio-cultural context which he now experiences and knows from the margins. In fact, it is still there in all its density and settledness,

harbouring no strictly neutral place from which to speak, no place, in short, that isn't already fully pervaded by cultural and social meanings.

Indeed, one might argue that the socio-cultural context is *more* discernible on the margins than when one is centrally placed. Stimulated by Coleridge's and Arnold's notion of a cultural elite (Coleridge's 'clerisy'), an intelligentsia 'disbohemianised', as it were, Eliot saw it taking up residence in the *social* place from where it could perform its particular cultural, religious, and aesthetic functions. What is interesting about and peculiar to Eliot's pursuit of this idea is that while seeming to speak to a general audience about poetry and culture in the elaborated codes of literary criticism, he was speaking in a more restricted way about the function of the artist in society to the marginalized intelligentsia itself, arguing *to them* the necessity of moving consciously, and without dilution of basic principles, towards the centre of the society through the occupation of its centrally placed cultural and social institutions (Bantock 1969: 53-62). If language maintains the intersubjective reality of the divisions on the social ground, it is through institutions that these divisions are translated into the reality of social action (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 1979: 72). And in Eliot's time the 'institutions' of literature and criticism were dominated by romantic-liberal gentlemen like Edmund Gosse, Arthur Symonds, Leslie Stephen, Edward Dowden, A. C. Bradley, J. W. Mackail, and John Drinkwater, to name only a small cross-section. The problem with the lot of them from the perspective of an outsider was that they did not sharply enough appreciate their cultural irrelevance. To Eliot, the choice of Algernon Swinburne as their intellectual and literary mentor clearly signalled

their irrelevance. Swinburne's endlessly iterated romanticism, his Whig ancestry, his early political radicalism, and the eventual re-affirmation of his own essential Englishness provided just the correct mixture of an attractive early rebellion against the authoritarian mid-Victorian father, an Hellenic aestheticism derived in part from Walter Pater and the Whig valorization of ancient Greek culture (Butterfield 1931, 1968: 96; Williams 1983: 3), and an incontestable later period of social and cultural reliability as the last of the Victorian sages (Chew 1929, 1966: 292). Unfortunately, with the passing of Edwardian literary culture, it is difficult to re-capture the shape and savour of the literary authority Swinburne's work enjoyed in his contemporaries' minds in the two decades before the Great War.<sup>1</sup> His were the placing judgements of this literary situation and one situated oneself in some relationship to them if one wanted to be visible in this environment. The weight and flavour of Swinburne's position can still be sensed in James Douglas' biocritical entry in the third volume of the contemporary *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature* (1922):

In many respects, indeed, Mr Swinburne is more Elizabethan than Victorian. Like Ben Jonson he is 'passionately kind and angry', and like Marlowe he is 'all air and fire'. No modern poet is more utterly born and more utterly made a poet. There seems to be no thread of prose in his nature. His imagination is perpetually incandescent, his poetic energy always at white heat. He sees everything in terms of poetry. He has no gift of prose compromise or secular conciliation. His intellect is worked by his imagination so swiftly that it seems uncontrollable; but in reality he is a perfect master of his vehicle. It is possible for a poet to be too poetical for his time, for in all save the golden ages of literature, poetry is a foreign language to four men out of five and to nine critics

out of ten. Learning does not endow a man with the power of knowing poetry when he sees it. That is why so much modern criticism is preoccupied with the unpoetic elements of poetry--with its philosophy, its morality, its message to the age, its anecdotes, and so forth. Before poetry like Mr Swinburne's didactic criticism is dumb, searching in vain for the facile novelette, the easy platitude, the pious truism. He is a singer and nothing but a singer . . . .  
(674)

I have quoted at length in order to make clear the extent of the praise heaped on Swinburne and also to suggest through an actual contemporary text the terms and categories against which Eliot's early criticism was deliberately and aggressively aimed.

Put back into the context of the literary historical moment in which it appeared, *The Sacred Wood* (1920), rather than being a miscellaneous collection of essays from which a few profound literary *aperçues* have survived into our time, can be seen in its proper guise as the largely successful demolition of Swinburne's reputation as poet and critic. The book is also Eliot's first important, systematic assault on romantic-liberal ideas in literature and criticism. Although the book limits itself to literature and criticism, the larger prey, the wider social and political target, is everywhere implicated.

The central literary apologist of that wider concern with post-Enlightenment culture was of course Matthew Arnold rather than Swinburne and it is therefore with Arnold that the Introduction to *The Sacred Wood* begins. In his characteristically oblique way<sup>2</sup> Eliot takes the measure of Arnold as he finds himself able "to make amends to a writer whom one has vaguely depreciated for some years."

The faults and foibles of Matthew Arnold are no less evident to me now than twelve years ago, after my first admiration for him. . . . And what makes Arnold seem all the more remarkable is, that if he were our exact contemporary, he would find all his labour to perform again. (SW xi)

His ineffectual stewardship of the cultural inheritance was to remain Eliot's criticism of Arnold's work all through his life. Not only did Arnold ignore the central practical critical questions (the question, for example, of "why the author of *Amos Barton* is a more serious writer than Dickens") but Arnold also misunderstood the wider issues of literature and culture that underlay such questions:

In *Culture and Anarchy*, in *Literature and Dogma*, Arnold was not occupied so much in establishing a criticism as in attacking the uncritical. The difference is that while in constructive work something can be done, destructive work must incessantly be repeated; and furthermore Arnold, in his destruction, went for game outside of the literary preserve altogether, much of it political game untouched and unviolable by ideas. This activity of Arnold's we regret; it might perhaps have been carried on as effectively, if not quite so neatly, by some disciple (had there been one) in an editorial position. . . . (SW xiii)

Several points are worth taking notice of here. First of all, the implicit devaluation of Dickens in comparison with the "author of *Amos Barton*" stares dead in the face of that valuation of Dickens as the great and beneficent genius who through the course of a whole generation had held the minds of English-speaking folk spellbound. The tactic of using Dickens' proper name, as opposed to identifying George Eliot by the title of one of her *novelle*, deftly and cuttingly makes the point that it is the work of art itself rather than the celebrity of its author that



counts. The sentences on "destructive work" that follow emerge directly from the submerged tension the references to Dickens and George Eliot establish with the mental environment in which 'Dickens' is not simply the name of a well-known author, but the 'name' of a certain kind of settled complacency and diminution. The insistence on the work of critical destruction as an incessant activity signals to alert readers, those in fact of Eliot's own generation and temper, the nature of the essays to follow. The ridicule of "political game" will become programmatic in Eliot's life (see *Notes* 1948, 1972: 14-15n.) and emphasizes that it is the thinker who mints the intellectual currency of his society, which others, like politicians, debase and devalue (Chase 1973: 145). But from this reference to "political game" it would be a mistake to think, as many of Eliot's formalist commentators do, that he saw an unbridgeable gulf between a separate literary realm and life. Clearly in this paragraph Eliot perceives some relation of literary and critical practice to socio-political practices. His critique is not that the two are divorced but that the "destructive work" needs to be carried on at many levels by different sorts of intelligence suited to the operational tasks of the appropriate level. Arnold's intelligence should have been devoted to the master ranks of the hierarchy of practices, instead of spending itself on minor prey. The remark about the 'disciple' is particularly cutting because it not only dismisses a vast amount of Arnold's work as mere journalism, but dismisses journalism itself as a serious form of literary activity. The remark also shines a sardonic light on Arnold's tact and his inability to distinguish clearly the tasks appropriate to the master intelligence and those fit to be tossed to

minds of the second rank. Implicit in this, of course, is the ranking of different orders of intellectual endeavour. Occupying an editorial position on a mere newspaper, the parenthesis tells us, requires a lesser talent than, say, "establishing a criticism," or any of the other activities which are the proper business of a mind of the first order. The remark suggests as well the political necessity of having people of one's own 'party' occupying the culturally central institutions.<sup>3</sup>

*The Sacred Wood*, however, does not take direct aim at Arnold; Arnold's is the reputation on the horizon; the eye of this book falls on shapes and colours closer to hand. Raining, at the end of the Introduction, a series of swift blows on "Mr Edmund Gosse," Eliot pulls the reader within sight of the book's three principal targets: Swinburne, Swinburnianism, and the Swinburnians. Of them in general and of Gosse in particular Eliot gibingly asks, putting the question so that the answer goes without saying, "is it wholly the fault of the younger generation that it is aware of no authority that it must respect?" (SW xv), including, one hardly needs to add, an "authority" like Gosse himself. The precise sense in which we are to take the word "authority" is made clear some sentences on: "It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition--where a good tradition exists" (xv). The propositional confidence of this formulation backlights, momentarily, the hundred failings of Gosse's generation, as it looks ahead to the substance of the essays to follow. The form of the general statement should not obscure the polemical intent. The delayed defining qualification of the general statement concentrates the whole meaning of the sentence on the word "good," serving notice that the literary tradition as received

in 1920 from the hands of the older generation may not be a "good" one, and if not, it may not need preservation. But the re-examination of the literary tradition is not simply a question of re-reading the works of the past; before they can be got at they have to be rescued from the Babylonian captivity into which the critical practices of romantic traditions of reading have cast them (but cf. Lobb 1981).<sup>4</sup> Tactless in discrimination, impaired in perception and judgement, diffuse, naive in psychological understanding, the late romantic view of literature takes it on the chin in *The Sacred Wood*. Eliot holds up for display the catch-phrases and stock notions, in short, the romantic texts about the nature of the aesthetic object and the experiences it provokes. He set out to demonstrate that these aesthetic formulae have no roots in the deeper rationalities and articulations of human experience, and thus, have no "authority." Clearly this is one reason why his major statements on poetics have no theory of the Imagination to offer, an absence that has troubled many commentators.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the avoidance of such theory seems axiomatic, not that a theory of Imagination couldn't be formulated on acceptable principles, but in the moment of *The Sacred Wood* a loud silence on the issue is telling enough.

In *The Sacred Wood* even a forgettable formulation ("poetry is the most highly organized form of intellectual activity") of a second-rate literary journalist ("a distinguished critic observed recently, in a newspaper article") is savaged at length and with a vengeance (*SW* 1, 8-10).<sup>6</sup> The formulation as such is not the object of the attack; it is flicked off the shoulder by a deft sociolinguistic analysis of its terms: "'Activity' will mean for the trained scientist . . ." (8, my emphasis).

Eliot's aggressive ironies are reserved for the frame of mind from which the formulation derives. The texts in which that frame of mind is actualized are scored by the mental reflexes and commonplaces which inscribe the liberal ethos. Eliot here is attending to one of the central inscriptions: the one that makes "the vast accumulations of knowledge--or at least of information--deposited by the nineteenth century" (9) a text for the triumphs of science and its investigatory and analytical methods. For Eliot this becomes the text of "an equally vast ignorance" (9). The prestige of science in the liberal ethos is being used by the "inventor" (10) of the formulation as a stiffening agent in cooking his definition; he borrows a little of the stipulative hardness of science through the associations his choices of words, phrases, and propositional style carry. Against this privileging of 'science' in the liberal ethos Eliot leans Mr Arthur Symons and the privileges of romanticism.

Symons represents the other critical tendency in this ethos: the "aesthetic" or "impressionistic." Eliot's dismissal of this tendency in criticism is, of course, famous.<sup>7</sup> This sort of critic is simply trying to force a creative impulse, which should find its objective correlative in some creative form of its own making, into a critical medium that is unsuited to carry the energies of creation, but eminently suited to perform its own appointed tasks of *critical* analysis and judgement. Here again is the discriminative clumsiness of the romantic frame of mind, blurring the edges of adjacent, but clearly separated, domains. Unlike the 'scientist' whose borrowing of the lustre of science is an attempt to do by purely connotative legerdemain discriminative tricks that his intelligence alone cannot propose, the 'impressionist' melts

down the distinctions into an emotion-soaked vacuousness spun out of rainbow film and moonshot mist.

The juxtaposition of 'scientist' and 'impressionist' is of course significant. Eliot is clearly not interested in exploring these two positions in depth. For him both positions are known quantities; he has already encompassed them conceptually. What he is displaying for us are not serious theoretical alternatives, but the debased form of the critical practices that make up the framework in which poetics were thought in the nineteenth century. *The Sacred Wood* looks beyond this impasse, to a criticism which does not trade in sclerotic precepts and rules (11), but simply elucidates so rigorously that the reader can be trusted to "form the *correct* judgement for himself" (11, my emphasis). The 'correct' judgement cannot be formed by critical practices grown soft-headed through something Eliot calls "verbalism," a condition in which the fact that "words have definite meanings" is taken for granted, "overlooking the tendency of words to become indefinite emotions" (9).

But their corruption has extended very far. Compare a mediaeval theologian or mystic, compare a seventeenth-century preacher, with any "liberal" sermon since Schleiermacher, and you will observe that words have changed their meanings. What they have lost is definite, and what they have gained is indefinite. (9)

In essay after essay, *The Sacred Wood* tracks notions and words that Eliot judges ought to be brought down to earth, or at least dragged blinking into a light of his own shining, so that no one will err through ignorance of the actual state of affairs that surrounds them. His targets, of course, are all the nineteenth-century commonplaces and clichés about

literature and the literary tradition, saws deeply contaminated by romanticism, the first spoiled child of the Enlightenment, or as Eliot himself called it in 1923, the "Inner Voice of Whiggery" (*SE* 18).

Nowhere is that voice heard more clearly than in the achievements of minor but typical characters like George Wyndham, the "Romantic Aristocrat" (*SW* 24-32). This is a short essay that takes to pieces the liberal belief, derived ultimately from Renaissance notions, in the efficacy of the well-rounded individual applying common sense and tact to the affairs of life, the unabashed *amateur* whose existence supposedly unites many competencies:

From these and other sentences we chart the mind of George Wyndham, and the key to its topography is the fact that his literature and his politics and his country life are one and the same thing. They are not in separate compartments, they are one career. Together they made up his world: literature, politics, riding to hounds. In the real world these things have nothing to do with each other. But we cannot believe that George Wyndham lived in the real world. (26)

What begins as something sounding like praise swerves progressively into the ridicule of the final placing sentence. Of course the effect of Eliot's irony is more pronounced in the accumulating tonal structure of the whole Wyndham piece. The absurdity of Wyndham's pretensions are foregrounded even more in the next paragraph when the British politician is blandly compared to Leonardo da Vinci (the women come and go talking...) --"his writings give a different effect from Leonardo's notebooks" (27). However, the shaping of "A Romantic Aristocrat," the choice of placing words and epithets, the sequencing of the sentences are all determined

by the context of situation of the essay and Eliot's antagonism to the privileged place the 'talented amateur' has in that context. The essay deflates the text of the 'talented amateur' in that text's own idioms and accents. Wyndham, it is asserted, has the mind and feeling of a man who could compass a variety of activities, all the way from "a conspicuous career as Irish secretary" (26) to being "very sharp in perceiving the neglected beauties of the second-rate" (29).

Eliot's first readers would have been more in touch than we are with the specific ironies and tone shaping the word "conspicuous" to describe Wyndham's bungled activities as Irish secretary in Balfour's administration in 1904-1905. His indiscretions in the Irish Land Purchase policy of the time, his ill-fated appointment of a Catholic Home Ruler as his permanent under-secretary, and his final resignation in 1905 as a consequence of indiscretions committed by this controversial subordinate give the word "conspicuous" and the epithet "very sharp" their precise semantic force in the context (Shannon 1976: 367-368). The gifted amateur is not shown to be a graceful dilettante in politics and literature, but the Edwardian gentleman dabbler, who, planted "firmly in his awareness of caste" (*SW* 32), believes simply that just being a member of the gentry permits him to carry competently the responsibility for Irish affairs and permits him to speak with authority a "few words for Drayton" (30). The demolition is definitive, unanswerable.

The only question that this "destructive work" leaves is: why did Eliot bother? Why, in his first major opportunity to begin the process of establishing an efficacious body of critical principles did he bother to devote so many pages to such a slight and ridiculous figure? I think

there are two reasons. Firstly, Eliot wanted to demonstrate how the romantic "corruption" was not simply a misguided eccentricity of a few marginalized writers, hurting no one but themselves, but had in fact penetrated to men like Wyndham, penetrated the textures and trajectories of ordinary life. And it was dangerous, keeping in mind Wyndham's political affiliations and substance, to have the managers of affairs not living in "the real world."

Secondly, Wyndham's social centrality contrasts sharply with Eliot's own marginalized status as an intellectual without a firm class position in England. The fact that the Wyndham situation was assumed to be the normal state of affairs must have been galling to a highly trained intellect without a solid place to stand, as yet. As Eliot moved more decisively towards the centres of social and political power in England after 1927 his severity with men like Wyndham softened. His severity found other targets. But in 1920 Eliot's own socially peripheral position accounts, I believe, for the *particular* grasp he has of Wyndham's significance and the conclusion it provokes: "The Arts insist that a man shall dispose of all that he has, even of his family tree, and follow art alone. For they require that a man be not a member of a family or of a caste or of a party or of a coterie, but simply and solely himself" (32). This very unEnglish declaration, its French influences peeping out from underneath its stern assertiveness, is particularly interesting in the light of Eliot's own commitments and in that it seems to suggest Wyndham, or anyone else from his class, *could* willingly "dispose . . . of his family tree" and "follow art alone." It is curious, then, that twelve years later in *After Strange Gods* (1934), D. H. Lawrence, an



artist who did slip away from family and class to "follow art alone," is firmly cemented, by Eliot, to *his* class origins. It seems freedom is a lateral arabesque.

Lawrence, Eliot seems to be saying, cannot escape the cultural determinations of his class, whereas Wyndham, should he so choose, can. The difference here tells us precisely from which social place Eliot is speaking and it also tells us that one of the special skills of the class from which a Wyndham emerges is the ability to transcend the determinant structures that frame the ordinary experience of that class, a skill denied members of the class from which Lawrence comes. This is an inference that Eliot himself will develop and solidify in his notion of a national elite later in his life, an elite which has access to the grounds of experience in the elaborated codes which define its special universalistic competence, an access denied the 'lower orders' (Bantock 1969: 64-68).

But these are anticipations; *The Sacred Wood* is more clearly focussed on attacking the verbal culture of the liberal ethos. Though the book is filled with the turbulence of its underlying polemical intention, contending with many 'enemies', some named, some not, a kind of structural serenity does finally dome the work. The book has an overall connecting form, so that the thrusts at people, postures, and opinions are contained, or at least put in perspective, by the controlling structure.

. . . the essays taken together are planned to form a whole and give a statement of principles of general application--a study of past poetry for the appraisalment of the present.

(from the dust jacket of the first edition,  
quoted in Moody 1979: 52)

The title of the book, in fact, is the first hint of this larger perspective: it derives from Frazer's account of the priesthood at Nemi with which *The Golden Bough* opens. John Vickery was the first to catch sight of the structural relevance of the reference to Frazer:

The priest-king who guards the sacred grove ruled so long as he could defeat in ritual combat anyone who chose to oppose him. (GB, I, 9) When we remember that the volume is subtitled "Essays in Poetry and Criticism," and when we regard the composition of the volume--beginning with "The Perfect Critic" and ending with Dante, the perfect poet--it seems clear that if poetry is the sacred goddess, then criticism is her warrior-priest who defends her honor and sanctity, and whose function is to prevent inferior poetry and criticism alike from usurping unworthily the role of deity or priest and attendant.  
(1973: 234)

The use of such a title from such a source, with its melodramatic solemnity and its ridiculous pretension, the very same quality in others, George Wyndham, Professor Murray, etc., Eliot happily exposes, could not but have amused Eliot and his circle. For them the title and much of the incidental irony in the book probably constituted a closed code, to the same degree that much of Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* would have only been accessible to those 'in the know', or another book from the same social region, John Maynard Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), working the same ironic vein but with a smaller talent than Strachey for slapstick. Like Keynes's contribution to a generation's complaints about their fathers and grandfathers, Eliot's *Sacred Wood* carries a heavier charge of seriousness than Strachey's biographies after the knowing smile has faded. Eliot is, after all, defending a tradition of poetry that he believes has been lost sight of and must be

found again if poetry is to hold its traditional pre-eminence in the culture of Europe. This seriousness finds clear and sure expression in a short, and to all appearances very slight, review essay in the middle of the volume. Of course, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" expresses most forcefully and explicitly the kinds of poetics which Eliot wanted his contemporary readers to come to understand. But it is an essay that is very well known and its sustained attack on the idea of personality as the source of poetry has become canonic (Mowbray 1972 and Lee 1979). The essay I want to examine instead is "Euripides and Professor Murray."

If the whole content of the book is bracketed, as John Vickery has noticed, by two modalities of perfection, in the intermediate contents we find the diverse issues of imperfection and none of these comes in for more rebuke than Professor Gilbert Murray, the imperfect translator: ". . . and that he [Murray] should stretch the Greek brevity to fit the loose frame of William Morris, and blur the Greek lyric to the fluid haze of Swinburne; these are not faults of infinitesimal insignificance" (*SW* 74). The icy ridicule in the last phrase narrows to Eliot's famous dismissal a little later in the essay: "Professor Murray has simply interposed between Euripides and ourselves a barrier more impenetrable than the Greek language" (75). The barrier is the verbal legacy of late Victorian poetic diction.

However, as a prelude to these placing judgements, Eliot expands the essay to take in a much wider context where we glimpse the real intention of the volume, namely, a concrete diagnosis of the decay of the relation between word and event, sign and thing, and of the sclerotic

states into which the rhetoric of late nineteenth-century literature had hardened. But Eliot never believed that these conditions were the result simply of the localized indisposition of art alone. The decay of art, for him, was the visible sign of a distemper in the whole cultural organism. This organism is composed of complex, interwoven, layered, infolding networks of historically determined crystallizations of meaning and the enabling conditions for the generation of new meaning. The complex environment that results encompasses and permeates, in depth, the structure of relationships in the entire social whole, all the way from the fundamental relationships of material production to the ritual condensations in action of everyday life and on to the relationships that characterize society's meditations on itself through the self-reflexive activity of its subjects. Nothing exists that is not sited or lodged or in transit or in some specific region in the system as a whole. When Eliot speaks of society or culture as constituting organic wholes or when he speaks of "the mind of Europe," he does not expect his readers to act as if "the mind of Europe" were an undifferentiated, vague 'state' or a museum collection of empedestalled monuments. The "European mind" (73) is not made up of things; it is composed of meanings.

This is what makes sense of Eliot's sudden movements of thought, connecting a key metonym, say a specific, technical discussion of Professor Murray's translation of Euripides, and a contiguous meditation on the culture of Europe as a whole. For Eliot "the mind of Europe" is already fully articulated in detail and his critiques of specific texts are a tracing and re-tracing of the relevant sequences in the fully articulated whole, like following the curve of a river for a few miles of

its course, in order to make specific judgements about the status of the whole. He sees in parts the temper of the whole; he sees in what to others appears to be simply a heap of broken signifiers the distinguishing marks of a fully coherent signified. Each partial event or entity is like a dislodged piece of masonry from a vast building whose whole size and shape can be discerned from the interpretation of the nature of the fragments at hand. The acute awareness of these interconnections from part to whole and from part to part naturalizes for Eliot the often surprising shifts of attention from the particular to the general in his essays (see Lobb 1981: 113-115). So it is not surprising that, in a short essay discussing Edwardian translations from the Greek, Eliot shifts to a general meditation on the "European mind"<sup>8</sup> and, in keeping with the design of *The Sacred Wood*, formulates the ethical centre of the book, at mid-point in its course, as a vision of perfection:

But few persons realize that the Greek language and the Latin language, and, *therefore*, we say, the English language, are within our lifetime passing through a critical period. The Classics have, during the latter part of the nineteenth century and up to the present moment, lost their place as a pillar of the social and political system--such as the Established Church still is. If they are to survive, to justify themselves as literature, as an element in the European mind, as the foundation for the literature we hope to create, they are very badly in need of persons capable of expounding them. We need some one--not a member of the Church of Rome, and perhaps preferably not a member of the Church of England--to explain how vital a matter it is, if Aristotle may be said to have been a moral pilot of Europe, whether we shall or shall not drop that pilot. And we need a number of educated poets who shall at least have opinions about Greek drama, and whether it is or is not of any use to us. And it must be said that Professor Gilbert Murray is

not the man for this. Greek poetry will never have the slightest vitalizing effect upon English poetry if it can only appear masquerading as a vulgar debasement of the eminently personal idiom of Swinburne. These are strong words to use against the most popular Hellenist of his time; but we must witness of Professor Murray ere we die that these things are not otherwise but thus. (73-74)

Those are "strong words," and Eliot, in uttering them in "witness," courts being accused of melodramatic posturing, a possibility the beginning of the next paragraph acknowledges--but quickly overcomes--by shifting precisely to the right note of ethical seriousness: "This is really a point of capital importance . . ." (74). This concern for the whole of European civilization gives *The Sacred Wood* its coherence and authority, saving it ultimately from being mere pamphleteering, admittedly of a high order, but pamphleteering nonetheless. Many other passages have been cited by recent commentators to illustrate the pervasiveness of this concern (see Donoghue 1977: 20-41). But what I would like to pinpoint at this time are the ways in which Eliot communicates this concern without necessarily resorting to direct statement, not even as 'direct' as irony.

The semantics of juxtaposition are well known and much commented upon in Eliot's poetry and in the poetics of modernism generally. Juxtaposition has traditionally been treated as a technical innovation, as a technique for the more accurate presentation of the real in poetry. The rationale has gone this way: experience does not process along grammatical perspectives; language enfolds experience in layers of syntax, whereas experience constitutes consciousness and feeling paratactically. Syntax, in short, has more to do with the nature of language than with

the nature of experience. Thus, the juxtaposition of elements, normally aural and visual images, more accurately represents experience in language. Eliot's interest in Bradley's philosophy, as Hugh Kenner (1966: 35-59) and Richard Wollheim (1970: 169-193) have tried to show, stemmed in part from the fact that Bradley's form of idealism seemed to provide a coherent and sound epistemology for an aesthetics based on the view of human experience which the poetics of juxtaposition assumes. The pull of Ernest Fenollosa's interpretation of the Chinese written character for Pound originates in the desire to underpin with a sound theory the technique of juxtaposition without connectives. Moreover, juxtaposition opened for poetry a stochastic perspective that, again, seemed to capture more accurately the nature of experience, especially as it is negotiated in the city. This aspect of juxtaposition, more fully exploited by Dada, shifts the idea of surprise or shock, as an essential, perhaps *the* essential quality of poetry (SE 254), to experience itself (Benjamin 1968: 165). Juxtaposition also, and from my point of view more importantly, offered a way for the marginalized poet, for the *avant-garde* writer, to avoid speaking late Victorian forms of coherence and continuity, the syntagms and paradigms contaminated by the Swinburnianism against which modernism defined itself. Until forms of continuity could be imagined untouched by the suave volubility of Swinburne and Tennyson and their thousand crooning disciples, then the technique of juxtaposition permitted an idiom in opposition.

For Pound the technique eventually came to have an epistemological importance which defined the possibilities of a new sort of knowing, adjusted more sensitively to the contours of concrete knowledge derived

from the *periplum* of discovery; for Eliot, however, juxtaposition settled quickly into a technique for the management of the tonal structure of his poetry. He used it principally for a small number of poetic tasks. It becomes a way of marking the space of parody in some contexts or a way of comparing, or holding up to scrutiny, quotations or archival discourses or a way of enhancing the multiplicity of organizations which a reader experiences from line to line and section to section in a poem. It is also a way of managing the play of 'voices' in *Four Quartets* within a 'musical' positive structure (Alldritt 1978). It is also used, in "Ash Wednesday" for example, as a way of deferring indefinitely the final affective contentment into which the poetry of religious experience all too often threatens wanly to subside. Although much has been written on juxtaposition as a technique in the poetry, as a working method in the criticism, however, it has not been examined except, tangentially, in the microstructural terms of incident irony. My aim here is to look for a moment at the juxtaposition of units of discourse in *The Sacred Wood* to establish the central method Eliot uses to create the particular overarching contexts that make specific sense of the cultural and literary judgements that dot the book.

The arrangement of the contents of *The Sacred Wood* has clearly been done with an eye to design and the semantic possibilities of placement and juxtaposition (cf. Lobb 1981: 137). When perceived from this perspective, the placing of the two essays on Swinburne near the beginning and the end of the volume gives him a prominence that we might not suspect he has in Eliot's mind if we merely were to read the two short essays on him or if Eliot had combined the two into one longer treatment. Instead,



that possible single essay has been cut in two and the bulk of the contents of the volume interposed between them. Swinburne becomes a kind of bounding line that 'contains' the material in between, a bounding line that marks off a critical *champs de Mars* where Eliot attempts to wrest the tradition from Swinburne and the Swinburnians, over the terrain that Swinburne, in his many studies of Tudor and Stuart writers,<sup>9</sup> had made his own. It was the views in these books and other critical writings that constituted the dominant interpretative community of the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers in the years prior to the First World War. By cutting his Swinburne essay in two, Eliot makes us aware, obliquely, of the 'position' of Swinburne in the mental map of Edwardian culture. *The Sacred Wood* is best read as a sometimes direct but most often oblique dialogue with Swinburne. It is important to introduce Swinburne as a critic first because Eliot saw it was necessary to break Swinburne's interpretative grasp (and the grasp of his more influential critical disciples, like Arthur Symons) on the English tradition in poetry, language, and drama, a grasp that had shaped this material in a characteristically romantic way for a wide audience. In fact, it is important to keep in mind that it was not Eliot, as some commentators have supposed, who first brought attention to long-neglected Tudor and Stuart poets and playwrights; it was Swinburne's generation that began the process of making the earlier poets available again. Symons, Grierson, Swinburne himself, and others supervised the critical response to this body of 'classical' work in the English tradition.<sup>10</sup> For Eliot, however, their supervision, valuable in that it brought the material into currency again, had not been entirely salutary.

The attack on Gilbert Murray and his handling of another 'classic' text, as mentioned above, is specifically an attack on his Swinburnianism. And the adaptation of some lines from Swinburne's *Atalanta* by Eliot in the Murray essay to establish the sincerity of his attack--"but we must witness of Professor Murray ere we die that these things are not otherwise but thus . . ." (74)--is devastatingly ironic; especially so, because seventy-four pages later, Eliot delivers the unkindest cut of all. He blandly quotes the lines from which his adaptation is drawn, not as an authenticating sign, as above, but as an example of loosely choric poetry that unintentionally parodies the vigour and terse beauty of the chorus in Attic tragedy. Of the Swinburnian chorus, Eliot writes, that it is "sententious," and has not "even the significance of commonplace." His example?

At least we witness of thee ere we die  
That these things are not otherwise, but thus. . . .  
(148)

A reader who remembers the earlier use of these lines cannot help but be amused at the sudden reversal of meaning and function in their re-occurrence. The semantic charge that leaps across seventy-four pages of intervening text is a remarkable exploitation--for the purposes of subversion--of the possibilities of juxtaposition, even when the elements are widely separated.

There are many examples of this sort of incident play back and forth in the volume; all of it takes specific forms in response to, and as an argument against, certain attitudes and *idées fixes* in the Edwardian reading public. The cult of Shakespearean idolatry was particularly

virulent in the years in which these essays were penned and one of the major functions of *The Sacred Wood* is to locate Shakespeare the *writer* (not the Shakespeare of his uncritical devotees) in the context of the Elizabethan drama to which his achievement belongs and by which it can be best understood and appreciated (Kenner 1974: 442-443). Clearly, "Hamlet and his Problems" is a direct challenge to the idolators and, although it identifies a minor 'problem' of construction, the point Eliot makes in the essay only gains moment within the specific polemical context which the essay first addressed. Many commentators have acknowledged this state of affairs and the essay is now read as an important incident in the development of a text-analytical modern criticism (Wellek and Warren 1949, 1973: 209). However, Eliot did not write one essay on Shakespeare; he wrote two. The second one immediately precedes the "Hamlet" text in the sequence of essays. This other essay on Shakespeare Eliot called "Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe."

The 'negative' subject--Shakespeare--of this essay on 'Marlowe' emerges clearly in the last sentence of the first paragraph when the early Shakespeare is said to have borrowed extensively from Marlowe, a comment already treading on the toes of the idolators. But what must have galled the bard's devotees was the final clause of the sentence, where Eliot says of the borrowing that "Shakespeare either made something inferior or something different" of it (86). Eliot's refusal to mouth the received opinion that whatever Shakespeare borrowed he would have unerringly improved, would have made, in fact, something superior, not just merely different, gives to the closing of the sentence an acerbity and sharpness that one can perhaps still feel today when Shakespeare's

'perfection' remains a given in the common culture. And Eliot's comparisons of Marlowe and Shakespeare develop a deliberate, negatively structured affront to the idolators. The entire essay holds two edges of criticism in a fluctuating relationship: one, a bland, analytical discussion, in the academic style, of two Elizabethan dramatists, as if they are of equal importance and reputation, a critique that seems written by an intelligent visitor from Mars who does not know and thus cannot acknowledge the differences in esteem between the two poets; the other edge, a white provocative bitchiness by a man who knows only too well the scales in which reputations are weighed and wishes to discomfit the uses to which Shakespeare is put by pedant and fool:

The "vices of style" of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's age is a convenient name for a number of vices, no one of which, perhaps, was shared by all of the writers. It is pertinent, at least, to remark that Marlowe's "rhetoric" is not, or not characteristically, Shakespeare's rhetoric; that Marlowe's rhetoric consists in a pretty simple huffe-snuffe bombast, while Shakespeare's is more exactly a vice of style, a tortured perverse ingenuity of images which dissipates instead of concentrating the imagination, and which may be due in part to influences by which Marlowe was untouched. Next, we find that Marlowe's vice is one which he was gradually attenuating, and even, what is more miraculous, turning into a virtue. And we find that this bard of torrential imagination recognized many of his best bits (and those of one or two others), saved them, and reproduced them more than once, almost invariably improving them in the process. (SW 88)

On the ears of Eliot's readers more attuned to the conventional reading of the relative merits of Shakespeare and Marlowe, such a paragraph of 'analysis' must have fallen with the force of a personal insult. The suggestion that Shakespeare wrote 'rhetoric', even if in the passage

Eliot does not grip it in quotation marks, would have been easier to bear, perhaps, had not Eliot followed that up with the judgement that Shakespeare's vice is "*more exactly* a vice of style." What the distinction is, exactly, between "a pretty simple huffe-snuffe bombast" and "*more exactly* a vice of style" cannot really be specified without reference to the context in which the distinction is articulated. The implied distinction is one that asserts Marlowe's essential innocence (how serious after all is a "huffe-snuffe bombast"?) and a more deeply rooted "vice" in Shakespeare, a vice that, by contrast to Marlowe, seems less responsive to reform and correction. Injury is added to insult in the next line when Shakespeare is accused of "a tortured perverse ingenuity" and contamination by "influences" which did not touch Marlowe. The final affront comes with the suggestion that Marlowe was "attenuating" his problems and turning them into *virtues* of style. In the latter part of the paragraph, Shakespeare is not mentioned at all as Marlowe's happier development is described, leaving the uneasy reader with the impression that no such happy ending is possible in Shakespeare's case. That the usual commonplace phrase of popular Edwardian lore about Shakespeare--the "bard of the torrential imagination"--should then be applied shamelessly to Marlowe seems little more than out and out theft by Eliot. That the theft is one of the more resounding clichés about Shakespeare not only brings a smile to the 'knowing' reader but also helps us see the passage's double structure--the two edges of criticism--which the paragraph traces.

The things Eliot refuses to say or acknowledge, as a deliberate negative structure, opposed to his reading of the already fixed network

of meanings which Shakespeare's name and reputation activates, are as important in the tonal articulations of the "Marlowe" essay as the positive elements, the punctilious academic discourse which meets the criteria for the elaborated code in which such performances are conventionally spoken. But this idiom, although constituting the 'surface' of the essay, must be heard in invisible quotation marks; its semantic centre lies beyond the pool of meaning which the uncontextualized words themselves constitute. No single, unified semantic structure is possible within the limits of the essay as such; its meaning is everywhere decentered.<sup>11</sup> The essay's meaning extends beyond the limits of its verbal skin, beyond the self-sufficiency of its *symbolic* representations, out into the *field*, and its interactions with the relevant organized configurations of meanings (Halliday 1978: 181). But this interaction is never neutral or blind or innocent. The positive text carries with it specific attitudes towards the arena and its configurations which the text enters; it carries, also, a sense of the role it is playing in the sociosemiotic field (Halliday 1978: 142-145). This sort of structural reading takes note of the text's embedded restricted code. Only those who share the context of utterance, share the context's potential for concrete semiosis, can fully understand the text's whole form. The usual congruities of positivist criticism--the internal symmetries, ordered and resolved systems of equivalences, patterns of recurrence and repetition, the poetic equivalent of the Second Law of Thermodynamics--adequate as they are in mapping the distributions of the positive structure of a text, do not register a text's whole structure as here proposed. This is particularly clear in Eliot's essays, simply because a critical reading of an essay does make some

effort to include argumentative structure (necessitating an environment in which the 'argument' is meant to do something) as a category of criticism. In the next chapter I will try to extend this sense of form to *The Waste Land*.

The Marlowe essay is intentionally placed next to "Hamlet and his Problems" and Eliot's purpose in this juxtaposition should be quite clear from the perspective I have developed. Eliot intends that Shakespeare be taken seriously as a dramatist, not by the avoidance of close criticism of his actual productions, but by remembering, as Coleridge and Goethe could not, that a play like *Hamlet* is "a work of art," not simply a fascinating, complex character in whose stage existence the critic lives "vicariously" his "own artistic realization" (SW 95). The argument of this essay needs no lengthy description since it has become canonic and it is perhaps very easy to see in its semantic structure its activity in the environment it first addressed, an environment which is crystallized in the text's negative structure by a positive judgement: "We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him" (102).<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the structural anomalies of the play, as perceived by Eliot, if they are there at all, need not be characterized in this way. Eliot's *choice* of this placing judgement, put into these words, carries towards the context of utterance, ca. 1919, an interesting and characteristic tone. Firstly, the essay's analytical procedure implies that Eliot has come upon the structural problem in the play without any ulterior motive, simply through an analysis of the text's internal organization. Later this tactical procedure would be raised by Anglo-American formalism

to the level of a principle of aesthetics (Seldes 1922: 614-615).

Secondly, Eliot's choice of words and phrases implies no scientific objectivity, but a particular attitude towards the particular disposition on the issue of Shakespeare of a particular reading public, a public whose veneration of Shakespeare the essay quite clearly attempts to shake.<sup>13</sup> And thirdly, the air of objective analysis seems to absolve the critic of responsibility for the judgements that follow even though *how* he puts these judgements, his seizure of every opportunity to undermine his contemporaries' worship of the 'bard', ultimately withdraws the absolution. Also the closing suggestion of the determinant influence of Montaigne's *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* whets the reader's curiosity as it challengingly subordinates, in matters of feeling and thought, the Englishman to the Frenchman. That subordination is particularly galling in a moment of English history when English national pride is sore in the period after the First World War. From this perspective, Eliot's "Shakespeare" is not really the Renaissance Shakespeare but one more 'eminent Victorian' in need of appropriate deflation.

That Eliot understood precisely the close and intricate relations between a work of art and its environment and, moreover, that he not only understood but himself used, critically, the idea of negative structure is made explicit in the essay on Ben Jonson which follows "Hamlet." Contrasting the methods of presentation of character by Jonson and Shakespeare with Flaubert, Eliot writes:

The characters of Jonson, of Shakespeare, perhaps of all the greatest drama, are drawn in positive and simple outlines. They may be filled in, and



by Shakespeare they are filled in, by much detail or many shifting aspects; but a clear and sharp and simple form remains through these--though it would be hard to say in what the clarity and sharpness and simplicity of Hamlet consists. But Frédéric Moreau [*Education Sentimentale*] is not made in that way. He is constructed partly by negative definition, built up by a great number of observations. We cannot isolate him from the environment in which we find him; it may be an environment which is or can be much universalized; nevertheless it, and the figure in it, consist of very many observed particular facts, the actual world. Without this world the figure dissolves.  
(SW 111)

Or we might re-cast this formulation to say that as we sense a character change, his active relationship to the whole, actual world he inhabits also changes. Recently, in a review of Raymond Williams' 'cultural lexicon' *Keywords* (1976), the Cambridge political scientist Quentin Skinner made the same general point in terms of the definitions and uses of words, words like 'art':

So an argument over the application of the term 'art' is potentially nothing less than an argument over two rival (though not of course incommensurable) ways of approaching and dividing up a large tract of our cultural experience. Williams appears in short to have overlooked the strongly holistic implications of the fact that, when a word changes its meaning, it also changes its relationship to an entire vocabulary. What this tells us about such changes is that we must be prepared to focus not on the 'internal structure' of particular words, but rather on their role in upholding complete social philosophies. (1978: 213)

In a nutshell this is the principle that *The Sacred Wood* labours to demonstrate, although the book does so in more widely historical and cultural terms, an intention that doesn't emerge fully until the last two essays (cf. Sharrock 1977: 171). But the book's central principle must

contend with an already fully articulated literary and social context dominated by Swinburne's grasp of the English tradition. While John Vickery is right in pointing to the combatative significance of the title of the book (1973: 234), he has misread who Eliot intended the defender of the 'sacred grove' to be and who the attacker: Eliot does not see himself as the defender of the goddess of poetry, if she is to be Swinburne's consort; on the contrary, Eliot presents himself as the dislodger of the old priest of Nemi. Swinburne is, in fact, dislodged by Eliot's assault. Eliot, thus, becomes the usurper. The circle which the two Swinburne essays complete is itself contained by one of greater circumference, for what the struggle within the Swinburnian circle represents is the detailed demolition of that way of thinking about and practicing poetry. Beyond that inner circle lies the wider circle of 'perfection' occupied by Aristotle ("a man of . . . universal intelligence") and Dante.

The final two essays, on Blake and Dante, very clearly underline the point Eliot makes about Swinburne's 'world'. These two essays contrast the preceding one on Swinburne. The contrast can be most clearly defined by attention to the differences in the 'worlds' which the poetry of these poets projects. Swinburne's is a world in which "the object has ceased to exist," a world hallucinated, sustained by a "language, uprooted, that has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment" (149). Blake and Dante are set firmly against this practice and the theoretical and critical consequences and attitudes which result from it. Blake is pulled free of the Swinburnian *fin de siècle* view of him, which would have him "a naif, a wild man, a wild pet for the super-

cultivated"; Eliot does him instead as a remarkable and wholly original, but flawed, artist, whose limitations can only be glimpsed when his achievement is juxtaposed to the work of a true philosophical poet. Dante, too, is brought out from under his pre-Raphaelite celebrity, an image, or version, of Dante that tells us more about the structure of thought and feeling in a mid-Victorian bohemia than it does anything about Dante and his work. The opposition Eliot asserts in juxtaposing Swinburne and the two culminating figures turns on the contrast between an entirely closed, self-referential poetry, which has no productive connection with fruitful historical and intellectual contexts, and the poetry of Dante, which is nourished, as Carlyle said, by the voice of "ten silent centuries" and helps shape, not only specific literary practices, but historically central traditions of thought and feeling tied to a containing and enabling philosophical and cultural framework. "Dante appears great to us," Goethe remarked to Eckermann, "but he had a culture of centuries behind him" (October 20, 1828, quoted in Curtius 1948, 1973: 378).

Yet, while providing this contrast to Swinburne, the two last essays themselves contrast. Blake and Dante are themselves compared from the point of view of the totalities which their works form, both as literary wholes and as whole visions of the human and natural worlds they inhabit. In this, Dante is seen to be the superior artist. His superiority, as expressed in these two essays, and the culminating contrast they form, defines more clearly than anywhere else the ruling idea of Eliot's criticism. Nowhere again is this axiom put with more force, a force Eliot creates through designing the whole of *The Sacred Wood* in such a way as

to place this principle in the most effectively rhetorical position in the volume, outside the reach of Swinburne's influence and at the point where the whole structure of *The Sacred Wood* is decisively closed, while simultaneously asserting a new opening, the possibilities of a decisive re-evaluation of the "tradition," its true course now unearthed after a century of romantic obfuscation and irrelevance. This principle, as the wider bounding line completes the metaphor, is implied in the title from Frazer. Eliot asserts his own occupation of the 'sacred grove'. The Swinburnian universe is squeezed into a ball by Eliot's strategic encompassment. But what exactly is the principle by which the encompassment is effected? It can be most clearly seen by constating two short quotations from the two essays--first from "Blake":

Blake was endowed with a capacity for considerable understanding of human nature, with a remarkable and original sense of language and the music of language, and a gift of hallucinated vision. Had these been controlled by a respect for impersonal reason, for common sense, for the objectivity of science, it would have been better for him. What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet. . . . The concentration resulting from a framework of mythology and theology and philosophy is one of the reasons why Dante is a classic and Blake only a poet of genius. The fault is perhaps not with Blake himself, but with the environment which failed to provide what such a poet needed; perhaps the circumstances compelled him to fabricate, perhaps the poet required the philosopher and mythologist; although the conscious Blake may have been quite unconscious of the motives. (SW 157-158)

Without what Eliot calls the "framework of mythology and theology and philosophy" Blake's work constitutes an idiosyncratic psychography of

the forms and contents of individual consciousness, essentially similar to Wordsworth's less elaborated mapping of the developing consciousness, through the progressive displacement of the old rhetorical culture, and, thus, an accession in two directions, in towards the structure of the mind and out towards nature, the boundary between them losing its Cartesian sufficiency in the process. Eliot interprets Blake's narratives as the textualizations of the 'fantasia of the unconscious' through a personal cosmology with no cultural efficacy, that is, a cosmology without an institutional presence, in other words, a hallucination.

Dante, on the other hand, did not labour under Blake's limitations, limitations, I might add, which Eliot saw as environmental; the *Divina Commedia* is situated in a tradition of philosophical poetry that has its genesis in Parmenides and Empedocles (160; McLuhan 1976: viii-ix), culminating, in the ancient world at least, in *De Rerum Natura*. Had Eliot had the opportunity to read Eric A. Havelock's studies of Homeric and pre-Socratic literature, *Preface to Plato* (1964) and *The Greek Concept of Justice* (1978), he would have been gratified to see his apperception of the broadly philosophical and encyclopaedic character of early Greek philosophy and epic argued convincingly by the Yale scholar. He would have seen, as a consequence, an even closer intimacy between the early Greek metrical philosophers, the epic poets, Lucretius, and, finally, Dante. For Eliot, however, Dante's achievement in the *Commedia* far exceeded any single poet in the tradition in which Eliot places him. And Eliot identifies this superiority in terms which intentionally follow from, and contrast point by point, his remarks on Blake's faults. With Lucretius as his port of departure, Eliot asserts:

The philosophy which Lucretius tackled was not rich enough in variety of feeling, applied itself to life too uniformly, to supply the material for a wholly successful poem. . . . (162)

Dante had the benefit of a mythology and a theology which had undergone a more complete absorption into life than those of Lucretius. (163)

The idea of a "philosophy" which both poets tackle soon gives way to the notion, as in Blake, of a "framework" and its coherence:

But we must define the framework of Dante's poem from the result as well as from the intention. The poem has not only a framework, but a form; and even if the framework be allegorical, the form may be something else. The examination of an episode in the *Comedy* ought to show that not merely the allegorical interpretation or the didactic intention, but the emotional significance itself, cannot be isolated from the rest of the poem. (165)

Eliot is arguing here for a view of the total integrity of the work of art, an integrity won through, and permeated by, a unified socio-cultural environment which constitutes a network of meanings that the work actualizes in every detail. He is not simply arguing, as formalism has heard him saying, for the integrity of a work of art independent of its enabling contexts. Instead, he is linking the orderliness of a work of art to the appropriate common intuitive life: "We are not here studying the philosophy, we *see* it, as part of the ordered world" (170).<sup>14</sup> It follows then that the aim of the poet is "to state a vision" of life, "and no vision of life can be complete which does not include the articulate formulations of life which human minds make" (170).

It is one of the greatest merits of Dante's poem that the vision is so nearly complete; it is evidence of this greatness that the significance of any single passage, of any of the passages that are selected as "poetry," is incomplete unless we ourselves apprehend the whole. (170)

Here then is what the circle of perfection consists in: completeness of vision, a completeness that expresses the orderliness of the individual mind as a moment in the evolution of "the ordered world." And that means that the individual mind must have absorbed the standards of intelligibility established in a particular culture by which it inscribes its experiences, including the experience of inner processes (MacIntyre 1964: 126). From this perspective now we can see how the Blake essay functions: Blake, rescued from the grasp of the Swinburnians, among whom he was seen ineffectually and inappropriately as a culture-hero, the true romantic artist endowed with a limitless capacity for inward experience from which an Imaginative phantasmagoria poured littering art with a rich harvest of unique, personal images, takes the penultimate position of *The Sacred Wood* as a way of introducing negatively the outline of the positive argument which Eliot makes in "Dante." Against the romantic-liberal idea he posits an idea of greater historical substance and weight, not the cookbook psychography of the 'natural' man.

But Eliot does not finish here. At the end he recalls the reader to the contemporary situation in poetry, culminating in a skein of references that run through the volume's entire course. The quality of Dante's achievement, he avers, is something to which the modern poet can still aspire, aspire, in short, to a poetry of cultural and historical relevance and amplitude:

When most of our modern poets confine themselves to what they had perceived, they produce for us, usually, only odds and ends of still life and stage properties; but that does not imply so much that the method of Dante is obsolete, as that our vision is perhaps comparatively restricted.

(171)

*The Waste Land*, and later *Four Quartets*, attempt to approach the ideal of completeness of vision which Eliot ascribed to Dante.<sup>15</sup> Each is an attempt to totalize and situate the social world in the face of a liberal interpretation of the real, and later, in the 1930s and 1940s, the claims of historical materialism, after the liberal dragon had been slain. In *The Waste Land*, however, the ideal of completeness seems entirely contradicted by its fragmentary form, its technique of juxtaposition without connectives. This contradiction has troubled most of the criticism of the poem<sup>16</sup> and, in fact, no convincing account of the poem's form has yet been advanced. The poem does effect a totalization of sorts and although it is, in a formalist sense, a formal failure (Rajan 1976: 29-30), the poem does cohere but only within the kind of critical framework I have described. Its unity has little to do with those skeins of references--anthropological, mythological, Arthurian--that are usually advanced as the loci of the poem's internal connectedness. The poem's 'unity' consists of the coherence of the social practice it embodies as part of the ideological problematic that provides the poem with its specific totalizing vision. If the poem can be said to have a 'unity' (a term deeply contaminated by the work it does in formalist critical practice), it is a unity that comes into view with the poem's immediate socio-cultural environment, an environment in which the



material of the poem and the possible forms and sequences available have already been valorized, sorted out, and normalized by use. The method of juxtaposition which seems to fragment the surface of the poem becomes, in Eliot's working of it, a way of bringing into view, making us hear, a totalization of the social process from a particular coherent vantage in that social whole without having to make it explicit. Eliot understood that the audience of his work, whether they knew it or not, or wanted to admit it or not, shared that place with him in the social hierarchy. The "ordered world" provides a vocabulary and logic that makes sense of juxtaposed elements; it provides a meaning-full context in which no elements are semantically empty or adrift. The point was to blast away the thin layer of liberal-romantic 'claptrap' that had textualized the central human experiences--love, death, belief, power--for a century. The surface structure of the poem is a direct attack on the norms and standards of intelligibility of a particular social class--the *haute bourgeoisie*--deeply penetrated by the offending ideas; the discontinuities of the surface function as a kind of strategic, discourse-level ungrammaticality, in the name of older, deeper, more 'authentic' textualizations of fundamental human experience. This deeper level Eliot understood at first as the generative province of mythology; later it would be the institutional substance of Christianity. *The Sacred Wood* was part of the same project, attacking the very same 'claptrap', but in this case with the aim of breaking its grip, not over experience as such, but over 'reading' and the interpretation of the verbal monuments of the past. It proceeded in the name of two kinds of 'perfection', one critical, the other creative; their 'perfection' consisted in the 'perfect' consonance of three things:

(a) a keen individual intelligence ("Aristotle . . . in his short and broken treatise . . . provides an eternal example . . . of intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition" [SW 11]); (b) a finely textualized (textured) culture ("There is a book to be written on the commonplaces of any great dramatic period, the handling of Fate or Death, the recurrence of mood, tone, situation. We should see then just how *little* each poet had to do . . . . The great ages did not perhaps *produce* much more talent than ours; but less talent was wasted" [64]); and (c) a 'definite' language ("The poet does not aim to excite . . . but to set something down" [170]).

Wittgenstein commented in his "Notes on Logic," September 1913, that "Distrust of grammar is the requisite for philosophizing" (1961: 93). Oddly enough, Bertrand Russell brought these "notes" to Harvard with him in May 1914 and gave a copy to Harry T. Costello (Wittgenstein 1961: 93), one of the members of Josiah Royce's seminar that spring. Eliot also attended. There is no way of knowing whether Eliot ever looked at these notes by the young Viennese mathematician then working out the ideas that would produce his *Tractatus*, a work that did in fact "set something down." But whether he did or not, Wittgenstein's comment is a useful text, because it tells us precisely that one cannot think in a vacuum, but only in a framework or structure that is, or at least seems, prior to thought, and that thought begins when the frame itself comes into view. Eliot's thinking about literature and criticism in his early essays comes into being when the liberal-romantic framework is sighted as the horizon of contemporary critical practices. *The Sacred Wood* is the text of his distrust of the grammar of criticism as he found it in his day. Perhaps

in that dialectical situation we can see more clearly what 'meaning' means and the sense in which I use that word in this study.

J. R. Firth criticises "some scholars" who when dealing with meaning "have supposed single words listed in a dictionary and single sentences each bounded by full stops could be safely examined as to their meaning in complete abstraction from specific environment[s]."

Logicians continue to treat words and sentences as if they somehow could have meanings in and by themselves. Some linguists follow this centuries-old method of linguistic analysis merely because of the weight of philosophical and logico-grammatical tradition. (Firth 1968: 12)

Against this 'intrinsic' view of meaning, which corresponds in criticism to an Anglo-American formalism based on the radical autonomy of the literary text and the intrinsicality of its meaning, Firth posited an opposing view that presents a much more complex picture of meaning than the tidy formalism some linguists, logicians, and literary critics can entertain.

The meaning of any particular instance of everyday speech is intimately interlocked not only with an environment of particular sights and sounds, but deeply embedded in the living processes of persons maintaining themselves in society. 'Spoken language is immersed in the immediacy of social intercourse' [A. N. Whitehead], and 'voice-produced sound is a natural symbol for the deep experiences of organic existence.' The sounds of speech are *ex intimis*. They are not merely molecular disturbances of the air. It is not the acoustic disturbances which matter, but the disturbances in the bodies of speakers and listeners. The dominating interest of the immediate situation, the urge to diffuse or communicate human experience, the intimate sounds, these are the origins of speech. (1968: 13)

As a linguist Firth formulates his thesis in the terms of that discipline; its relevance to the study of literary texts should be quite clear when we put into a text's environment the discursive and cultural traditions in which its author is working. So that the notion of 'genre', for example, from this point of view, is an aspect of a text's *external* environment rather than an internally functioning generative programme. By this I mean that the meaning a genre carries is the kind of valuation it is given in its time: who uses it and why and for what kinds of discursive tasks? for the purposes of affirming a particular practice or of challenging it? what kind of statement is being made by a novelist in the ninth decade of the twentieth century if he or she chooses to write a novel like Thomas Hardy? As with genre, so, too, with the tropic and figurative traditions and conventions within which works are situated or within which they refuse to be assimilated.

Modernist interest in juxtaposition and parataxis as a working procedure can be understood as a method of generating new meaning in a common intuitive life already fully written in depth by recombining its signifiers in unconventional ways. The process of re-combination along the paradigmatic, syntagmatic, and semantic planes articulates in its tonal structure specific attitudes towards the appropriate region of the environment and the conventional modalities of composition, including the norms by which texts cohere or are intelligible in a society as a whole or in its finite provinces of meaning, the sub-universes in which the process of re-combination is operating. This then is the logical extension of Richards' definition of tone in *Practical Criticism* and the way in which 'tone' can be made a critical category of some discriminative

delicacy.

Because it must always work a sociosemiotic geography already in place, the method of juxtaposition functions, in part, as a device of seismic displacement, that is, a device that disrupts or distorts the already actualized meaning it encounters in the world in order to prepare the blank space where its positive structure will crystallize. For example, as I demonstrated above, the juxtaposition of the two final essays in *The Sacred Wood*, "Blake" and "Dante," outside the circle of imperfection bounded by the two essays on Swinburne, by simple conjunction, displaces the dominant view of William Blake formulated by Swinburne in Edwardian literary culture and reclaims him, flawed as he is, for the tradition to which his work actually belongs, the tradition of Dante. The important lesson here is that juxtaposition cannot occur in a semantically empty space. The world, as Yannis Ritsos writes, is a "deep *closed* song"

What can you choose? he said.  
How can you choose between the already chosen?  
(1979: 73)

The translation cannot catch the philosophical and radical resonance of the Greek word Ritsos chooses for the verb "choose"--"Ti na *dialexis*." Here again the frame comes into view, one of the limits of what can be thought and also the threshold to what can be believed. It is in this context that an annoyed rejoinder by Eliot to a classmate in Royce's seminar, 1913-1914, the proceedings of which were preserved by Harry T. Costello, can be fruitfully read:

We had another student in the group in 1913-14, whom none of us thought of as a genius. I spelt his name "Elliot" instead of "Eliot" in my early notes, and knew him later as Tom Eliot from St. Louis. But in course of time he was to make the name T. S. Eliot more famous than all the rest of ours put together. His first paper was on the interpretation of primitive religions. He had been reading Durkheim, Jane Harrison, and Frazer, and wanted to know what is "interpretation" as opposed to "description"? His year's work circled around this question of the truth of interpretations. He had been reading Francis Herbert Bradley, and said no simple statement was true. Brogan, of course, had to intervene to inquire if Eliot thought that last statement true? The argument waxed hot, and finally Eliot told Brogan, "You can't understand me. To understand my point of view, you have to believe it first." Royce intervened . . . (1963: 193-194)

Eliot spent most of the rest of his life trying to get his audience to *believe* his point of view in order to be able to *understand* it. In this endeavour conjunctive techniques were central, for, rather than being mere stochastic collisions of autonomous elements, they helped to foreground the "already chosen," helped to lay bare such framing structures as Eliot's notion of 'human nature' or 'original sin', fundamental data that mere mortals cannot choose not to choose. Thus, he recognized that if one takes for granted the assumptions on which an argument rests, the argument already dominates the field. Thus juxtaposition for Eliot becomes a device by which the reader of his prose and poetry is made intensely aware of the environment the reader seems to share with the poem or essay he or she is reading. The text, then, in all its parts, cannot choose not to function dialogically.

## Notes to Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne's eminence in the last decade of his life informs Samuel C. Chew's 1929 biography of the poet more by Chew's own hero-worship than by any specific references in Chew's text itself. Chew assumes his reader is aware of Swinburne's position. The best survey of Swinburne's reputation before and after World War I is Hyder 1933, 1963: 222-269.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Lobb (1981: 93ff.) prefers the term "reticence." I find the connotations of modesty or shyness that this word carries uncharacteristic of Eliot.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eliot in 1918: "The intelligence of a nation must go on developing, . . . every writer who does not help develop the language is to the extent to which he is read a positive agent of deterioration" ("Observations" 1918: 69-70). But see Robert M. Adams' comments on the 'politics' of this idea (1973: 131).

<sup>4</sup> The notion of a 'romantic' Eliot is not new. The latest champion of this tendency is Edward Lobb. Lobb (1981), like George Bornstein (1976) before him, argues that, in fact, Eliot is actually working well within the precincts of romantic aesthetics and of what might be called the 'romantic frame of mind'. Lobb's case rests on the observation that Eliot's criticism, especially in the unpublished Clark Lectures of 1926, betrays a yearning for a mythic Eden. This observation owes much to Northrop Frye's theorizing about the importance of Edenic yearnings in romanticism. As in most critical practices that see 'myth' as the

fundamental generative level of a work of art, a great deal of filing down of the rough edges, i.e. the untidy specifics, of a text is necessary to urge the work to resemble, formally, its generative pattern. Such an operation, which annuls the force of a work's concrete particulars by looking through them to an overly general mythic pattern, can usually make the work confess whatever the critic would like to hear it say.

<sup>5</sup> I refer here to Eliot's assault on romantic notions of Imagination in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," notions which find their clearest formulation in English in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. It is in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that Eliot comes closest to formulating a theory of imagination by way of the wonderfully deadpan wit of the famous chemical analogy, culminating in the final metaphor: "The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum" (*SW* 54). If we don't hear this droll proposition in the context of late romantic aesthetics in which the Coleridgean view of the power of the Imagination was repeated and embellished *ad nauseam*, we miss entirely the point, and splendid humour, of Eliot's critique. The best, i.e. most level-headed, modern account of this essay and Eliot's ideas on the imagination can be found in Lee 1979: 41-75.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams was the first to direct sustained attention to Eliot's "brilliance and nervous energy of definition" (1961: 227-228).

<sup>7</sup> In his essays and reviews for the literary press in London during this period Eliot indulged his knack for mimicry in very amusing parodies of the 'impressionistic' criticism he demolishes in *The Sacred Wood*. One of the very best examples is the opening of his interesting, but little read, essay on the "Prose-Poem" (1917: 157-158).



<sup>8</sup> Eliot's use of a metonymic mode of argument in his prose anticipates one kind of 'poetic logic' in *The Waste Land* which I discuss in the next chapter. Cf. Eliot's remark in the *Egoist* about Clive Bell: "Mr Bell will survive not as an individual, but as the representative of a little world of 1914" (1918: 87).

<sup>9</sup> Studies such as: *A Study of Shakespeare* (1880); *A Study of Ben Jonson* (1889); *Studies in Prose and Poetry* (1894); *Christopher Marlowe* (1914); and *Contemporaries of Shakespeare* (1919). This last title, edited by Edmund Gosse and Thomas Wise, appeared a year before the publication of *The Sacred Wood*.

<sup>10</sup> The necessity of establishing the corpus and canon of English literature as an area of scholarly investigation has been explored recently by Eagleton 1983: 17-53. A major study of this important aspect of the institutional organization of literary studies is examined in a work forthcoming from Oxford University Press by Christopher Baldick, called *The Social Mission of English Criticism* (1983). The standard account of the 'rise of English' before the current interest in this issue has been D. J. Palmer's *The Rise of English Studies* (1965).

<sup>11</sup> I am using this term in a narrower, rhetorical, sense than Pierre Macherey's use of the term in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978). The decentering of meaning through the force of the non-said in this essay is an entirely deliberate and conscious manoeuvre. Macherey employs the term to describe the effect on a text of a contradiction between figuration and representation, between what is said by the text and what is 'said', silently, and in spite of itself, by the text's relationship to ideology.

<sup>12</sup> Compare the tone of A. C. Bradley's few words about Shakespeare's "defects" (1904, 1956: 71-74) and his curious apology for these "defects" (75-78).

<sup>13</sup> See the anonymous account of why *The Waste Land* was awarded the *Dial* prize in 1922. This short piece begins with an assessment by a contemporary of the impact of *The Sacred Wood* (1922: 685-686). The publication of Eliot's views on *Hamlet* set off a considerable controversy in the early 1920s that continued, on and off, well into the 1940s.

<sup>14</sup> Eliot's comments here form an interesting contrast with recent thinking about ideology. Althusser: "Men 'live' their ideologies as the Cartesian 'saw' or did not see--if he was not looking at it--the moon two hundred paces away: *not at all as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their 'world'--as their 'world' itself*" (1977: 233). I am not saying here that Eliot was engaged, implicitly or explicitly, in formulating a theory of ideology. For him a "philosophy" in the world was still a philosophy. Today we would want to examine the work such a philosophy does in the world along lines suggested by Althusser and others.

<sup>15</sup> Sharrock insists on the close connection between *The Waste Land* and *The Sacred Wood* (1977: 173-174). In this he returns to an assumption that underlies most of the early criticism of *The Waste Land*, a criticism which saw the poetic enterprise as part and parcel of the critical one.

<sup>16</sup> The confusion over the unity of form in the poem began with its publication and has not abated for sixty years. Indeed *The Waste Land* probably has more accounts of its formal unity/disunity than any other poem in the language since *The Canterbury Tales*.

## Chapter Five: A deep closed song; or the argument of *The Waste Land*

To speak and write involves more than the giving and taking of information; to use language also means to define and acknowledge one's place in the world. 'The world' with which *The Sacred Wood* contends is the very 'world' of meaning in which *The Waste Land* also takes its place. The two texts define two modalities by which the orders of meaning in 'the world' are experienced and interpreted. For let there be no mistake about this: *The Waste Land* is an interpretation of experience, not a 'presentation' of it, as Eliot perhaps intended it to be on the evidence of his remarks in *The Sacred Wood* (64-65) and as so many of Eliot's commentators have simply and uncritically accepted it as being.<sup>1</sup> Not the least of these is Eliot's latest major commentator, A. D. Moody, who puts that view of *The Waste Land* with the conviction of a true believer:

There is no illusion or evasion; no rationalising and no sentimentalising. The speakers express their state fully and lucidly in the bare essentials. And this honesty, this articulate integrity, is the rarely heard voice of self-knowledge, giving a *direct vision of the life that is being lived*.

(1979: 94, my emphasis)

Eliot may have thought he wanted to "put an end to English romanticism" by meaning "to live the reality behind the [romantic] myth" (Moody 1979: 109), but what he accomplished was the disruption of the late Victorian version of the romantic rhetoric of feeling in the name not of "immediate" experience itself, but of pre-Enlightenment ways of representing

experience. What after all are the references and allusions to in *The Waste Land*: Chaucer, the Bible, Dante, the Roman poets, Augustine, and, beyond the European tradition, the Upanishads...? In *The Waste Land* value is assigned to all those texts that the spectral hand of the Enlightenment has not touched and to post-eighteenth century texts, those, like Baudelaire's, that Eliot believed deliberately rejected and undermined that faith (SE 373-375). That he chose to represent those earlier texts of experience as if they constituted *experience itself* is an important tactic, one that has clearly worked rather well if the widespread critical acceptance of this view is any indication. Those commentators who believe that *The Waste Land* simply presents experience so that the reader can feel directly the lived experience the text enacts are overestimating Eliot's estimation of them as readers. Clearly Eliot's religious views were not puritan in the theological sense of the word; in religion Eliot was an episcopalian, that is to say, one could not, without the interventions of an historical *ecclesia*, experience God or the manifestations of his divinity immediately with any hope of truly understanding the experience; more often than not, so the argument goes, that sort of transcendental experience leads to delusion.<sup>2</sup> Every man is not, according to Eliot, his own priest (ASG 58-59). Eliot could hardly be expected to trust that his readers could simply 'experience' correctly the 'lived reality' his poem 'immediately' enacts. Every man is not, according to Eliot, his own best interpreter (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1979: 129). Certainly he wanted to blow away the heady odours of romanticism that hung about men's nostrils, but not in the name of the immediate and the existential. More likely, he wanted to re-institute the

world of feeling Enlightenment rationalism, liberalism, and romanticism had obscured (see Eliot's comments on Hopkins in *ASG* 48).

In the prose criticism Eliot attempted to break the interpretative grip of this exhausted romanticism on the literary past. His thrusts in *The Sacred Wood* might be seen as acts of a proto-deconstruction, the unravelling of the century-old romantic textual weave, the romantic explanations, interpretations, and valuations of the past in which the nineteenth-century literary intelligence tended to wrap itself.<sup>3</sup> The attack was not in the name of a novel standard but of the scales of 'perfection' represented in criticism by Aristotle and in poetry by Dante. This is hardly revolutionary in the accepted sense of the word. The novelty advanced is, in fact, something very old, or so Eliot thought. And we should keep in mind that the suitability of Aristotle and Dante for Eliot consists in their capacity for capturing the relevance of individual feeling to the settled orders of meaning of an eternal whole. Thus the individual act of imagination necessarily shares in the orders of meaning which the social order enacts rather than occurring, as formalism suggests, in isolation and in forms of intelligibility specific only to the history and conventions of literature. What Eliot was later to call the purification of "the dialect of the tribe" ("Little Gidding," *CP* 218) has its origin in this submerged theme of *The Sacred Wood*: namely that literature must set experience down definitely in words that cannot be pared down further; thought, he says, "stripped to the essential structure" (*SW* 65) makes for a great *writer* and this means the avoidance of mere 'literature' (Sisson 1978), rumination, comment, special 'effects', fakery. To "present" the essential structure allows the irreducible truths of

nature, human and otherwise, to shine out. His first naming of those deepest rationalities borrowed the text of mythology; later his text would come from pre-Enlightenment (essentially pre-Deist) Christianity (cf. *ASG* 41). Notionally this is remarkably, astonishingly anti-modern; after all, while Eliot spent the 1920s getting acquainted with the Absolute, most everybody else was coming to grips with the idea of cultural relativity and with the completion of the revolution in human thought implied in Vico's revolutionary de-reification of the human in the eighteenth century.

The specifically modern experience of the universe of relative values which the conventional reading of the cultural history of modernity proposes, the anxiety and vertigo which the loss of the absolute status of framing cosmologies institute, is in fact not what Eliot sees as the fundamental problem. His own sense of modernity, that which begins to surface in *The Sacred Wood* and grows clearer with every subsequent prose work, is the notion that the experience of the relativity of value is simply an invention of the legacy of the Enlightenment, simply an obscuring of those eternal values that we glimpse in men like Aristotle and Dante (Nott 1958: 222). The point he makes again and again all through his life is not that we should seek an immutable faith, blindly accepting the fact that we inhabit a thoroughly contingent universe, but that the notion of a universe fundamentally contingent is no *fact* at all; it is simply part of the programme of the Enlightenment to believe that it is. This is a notional programme without 'natural' privilege, leading to the anxieties and uncertainties that characterise modernity.

In a negative liberal society you have no agreement as to there being any body of knowledge which any educated person should have acquired at any particular stage: the idea of wisdom disappears, and you get sporadic and unrelated experimentation.

(*Idea 41*)

The task is not to find an acceptable absolute faith *within* the chaos and silence of an indifferent universe. To actively oppose a world-view that obscures or devalues the essential orderliness of the world is the real project. Nothing comes into the field of knowledge, as real knowledge, except broken fragments, in a world in which "sporadic and unrelated experimentation" is the ruling heuristic mode (*Idea 16*). For Eliot the liberal legacy of the Enlightenment represented an historical regression and a socio-cultural philosophy that was at heart against nature, indeed even a pernicious perversion of nature. Generally, this is the burden of all his work from *The Sacred Wood* on. In his "Choruses" from *The Rock* this is made explicit: Enlightenment is dismissed as mere cleverness:

O miserable cities of designing men,  
O wretched generation of enlightened men,  
Betrayed in the mazes of your ingenuities,  
Sold by the proceeds of your proper inventions:  
(*CP 169*)

"Negative liberal society" runs counter to the determinations of human nature, determinations that "enlightened men" cannot simply and conveniently disengage. *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1927) sets out to rescue an older notion of human nature from what Eliot saw as its trivialization by the liberal ethos (cf. *ASG* and see Bantock 1969: 41-44). The essay on Niccolo Machiavelli, for example, comes to revolve around the idea

of human nature obscured by liberal "myth"; Machiavelli, Eliot declares, "merely told the truth about humanity. The world of human motives which he depicts is true."

It is therefore tolerable only to persons who have also a definite religious belief; to the effort of the last three centuries to supply religious belief by belief in Humanity the creed of Machiavelli is insupportable. Lord Morley voices the usual modern hostile admiration of Machiavelli when he intimates that Machiavelli saw very clearly what he did see, but that he saw only half of the truth about human nature. What Machiavelli did not see about human nature is the myth of human goodness which for liberal thought replaces the belief in Divine Grace. (FLA 50)

The "half" of human nature that Morley suggests Machiavelli saw is for Eliot the whole of it. The other "half," Morley's "half," is simply an invention of "liberal thought."

Choosing John Morley as an adversary, furthermore, is itself significant in a number of ways. Morley was an important Liberal politician, ideologue, and man of letters; his was the formidable ideological task of linking the liberal conscience, the ideas and moral energy of the Brights and the Cobdens, to the exercise of power during the Gladstone years (Shannon 1976: 173-176). In 1897 for the Romanes Lectures at Oxford he chose Machiavelli as his topic and this is obviously the text to which Eliot refers. Further, the Romanes Lectures themselves have a contextual significance that has largely disappeared as the polemical environment which helps shape Eliot's essay has changed. The Romanes Lectures as such no longer mean to us what they represented to the educated middle classes in the earlier part of this century. The Lectures are named



after George John Romanes, a nineteenth-century Canadian scientist, educated at Cambridge, friend of Darwin and one of his major apologists in the nineteenth century, professor at Edinburgh and the Royal Institution. The Lectures since their foundation in 1891 have served as a principal cultural platform for the articulation of the Whig-liberal view of science, art, and literature (Harvey 1933: 674). That they are named after a Darwinian gives bite to Eliot's invocation of Morley, the teeth marks of which come clearer in the context of his jabs and gibes at evolution and the evolutionary mentality in *For Lancelot Andrewes* as a whole.

For Eliot, the articulated forms of the liberal ethos and the mentality that sustains them constitute a kind of thick encrustation of peculiar and perverse growths and motifs that occlude 'reality' beneath. Whereas the essays in *The Sacred Wood* and *For Lancelot Andrewes* attack the propositional out-croppings and thematics of the liberal world-view and its philosophical and institutional points of view, *The Waste Land* moves closer to its subject and 'does' the inward, affective life of the liberal ethos. Thought and action that are not adjusted to the ethical, rational, and psychological demands of the foundations of existence (the domain of Divine Grace) are not grounded in 'objective' reality, but, like Swinburne's language, have adapted themselves "to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment" (SW 149). In the late 1930s he developed the argument at length, culminating, in his Christ Church lectures, published as *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), around the notion of a hierarchical society which achieves consonance at all levels of cosmology, institutional structure, individual psychology, and concordance in the

means of expression (Douglas 1978: 95). Eliot's own sense of this consonance, and its foundations, comes early in *Idea*:

Thus, what I mean by a political philosophy is not merely even the conscious formulation of the ideal aims of a people, but the *substratum of collective temperament, ways of behaviour and unconscious values which provides the material for the formulation*. What we are seeking is not a programme for a party, but a way of life for a people: it is this which totalitarianism has sought partly to revive, and partly to impose by force upon its peoples. (18, my emphasis)

Education, of course, constitutes the means by which a "way of life" is transmitted, but a transmission written as 'wisdom' rather than as the transmission of technical skills and procedures (TCC 90). For Eliot, the "substratum of collective temperament" and "a way of life for a people" were not vague abstractions; they were phrases that set down something concrete and total (ASG 18-19).

A social collective displays system and order. Every isolated aspect of a culture, or almost every aspect, is related to every other aspect in ways that may be direct and apparent on the one hand, or circuitous on the other. Moreover, these relations have a form or an order as well as contents. Social organization has a variety of limiting conditions, such as culture-specific forms of ideation (Needham 1972: 152ff.), the economic base, or the self-inflicted principles of social grouping, perhaps as legitimation structures for the validation of the rule of a particular class (Milliband 1977: 53-57; Habermas 1979: 178-183). But, within any particular culture, there always exists some element of free play, or of permissible content dissonance, some 'give'

in the system that permits disagreement and contention and localized renovation (Berger and Luckmann 1979: 142-143). Moreover, some cultural features are simply not compatible with others and thus set up the system of a culture's essentially contested concepts, for example, nominalism as against realism, materialism as against idealism (Gallie 1955-1956: 167-198). These very often set up contested limits and, also, suggest and propose directions, goals, or values. Certain dominant cultural features are frequently more associated with some values than with others, as, for example, emphasis on the irreducible integrity of the family as a social unit is a tenet particularly vital to Christian thinking about society (Bantock 1969: 82). This complex system is what an inhabitant assimilates day to day, year to year, within the confines of a culture. In gaining a measurable competence in the use of culture and in reading its codes the inhabitant is able to interpret the singular events and the sequence of events, physical, mental, and affective, that constitute the lived subjectivity of the culture (Leach 1976: 53-54). Not only is the inhabitant able to understand and act upon interpretations of the *content* of discrete segments of behaviour and event, but also he or she can interpret the *expressiveness* of the form of these contents. In addition, the native learns how to segment sequences meaningfully within the flow of social existence. The elasticity of a culture's 'give' can be and usually is marked and defined. We can tell when sound passes from music to noise, or to put it anthropologically, when sound passes from the combination of notes and tones which the culture accepts as 'musical' to those that it does not. We recognize and can interpret in a culture with which we are familiar the passage of a text from making sense to making

nonsense and begin to reconstruct the reason or purpose for the conscious and deliberate crossing of these conventional lines (Leach 1976: 51-52).

An inward familiarity with the scaled orders of meaning and value, with the theory and practice of social being that distinguish a given culture, is necessary in deciding (or reading) what constitutes not only consonance and concordance, but what dissonances, discontinuities, and incoherences are significant.

'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.'

'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?'

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

la la

To Carthage then I came

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

burning

(CP 74)

A. D. Moody tells us that the first fourteen lines of this fragment that closes "The Fire Sermon" section constitute a sonnet; Eliot is putting

"immediate life into the traditional verse form" (1979: 95 and see Harris 1974: 112-113). The strophes are "as simple and natural as speech can be, an inevitably right order of words bearing the common stress and emphasis" (95). This use of the Elizabethan form Moody reads as a renewal, as the bracingly direct re-unification of dissociated sensibility. Granted--the fourteen lines he marks are the same number as we find in a sonnet; but how are we to interpret the serious irregularities of the form? After all, it is a sonnet only in length and through the use of mixed Shakespearean and Petrarchan rhyme schemes. After those external features, how is it a sonnet? Metrically, it's a *pasticcio*, a ruin; it displays none of the internal developmental dynamics of theme and figure which is the entire *life* of the Elizabethan original. Indeed the poem as poem is dead, static thematically and figuratively, getting nowhere, even as the 'Thames-daughters' drift downriver. The 'sonnet' is still-born; rather than renewal of an Elizabethan form, this smells pungently of parody.

Its "simple and natural" speech is also rather suspect; after all, in terms of social dialect "supine" sticks out like a sore thumb, a fact Moody acknowledges. And it is rather doubtful that the "common" speech typically lapses into the sort of *Angst* which can push up from its depths "I can connect / Nothing with nothing." The social sound that the sentence makes resembles more the anxieties of the bourgeois couple in "A Game of Chess"

' . . . What is the wind doing?'  
 Nothing again nothing.  
 (CP 67)

than it does the kind of remark (if such a one could be conceived at all) that strikes so sharply to the bare essentials of existence that it transcends the determinations of the voice of place and intention. "The song [of the daughters] expresses a state of being," Moody insists, a state of being "as it is actually and immediately known. . . . the Thames-daughters are really suffering the failure and breakdown of sensual passion, and . . . the poet has placed himself (and his readers) inside their suffering. Judgement is consumed in a sympathy such as Dante feels for certain souls in Hell and Purgatory: a recognition that one is or might be as the other is. The Thames-daughters sing a common predicament, a permanent human state" (94-95).

What that "human state" is we are never told. The issue is not whether Eliot has put himself and his readers at the heart of "a common predicament," the breakdown, we assume, of sensual passion. That view, it seems to me, is simply trying to raise Eliot's contempt for the social and sexual relations of the lower orders to some universal order of meaning that claims for the poem the enactment for a more humanistic vision of human relationships, one that is achieved, in the bourgeois mind, paradoxically as a circuit through degradation. Indeed if we contrast this 'sonnet' with the splendid and stately passage about Elizabeth and Leicester which immediately precedes it, a passage clearly enacting a more vital vision of human passion, we can only conclude two things: either human passion was more vitally experienced among the Elizabethans than among contemporary inhabitants of London, or sensual passion is more vital the closer it is to political and social power. Trying to claim the 'sonnet' for a more hopeful view of human affairs

through a submerged "sympathy" which Eliot intends us to feel for these people is simply A. D. Moody's response to his own embarrassment in the face of Eliot's rather vicious attitudes towards the nameless Thames-daughters, laconically and remorsefully suffering through these sexual humiliations (cf. Drain 1974: 44).

The issue is why Eliot *chose* to represent the sexual relations of the sort of people these are (working class?) in this way? *For whom* is this interpretation of human experience typical in the common intuitive life Eliot inhabits? If one is concerned that such a question is somehow illegitimate in literary analysis, perhaps we can remind ourselves that it is the kind of question that is very often asked of the literatures of the earlier periods. If the social life and intelligence of a culture are entirely human products, the attitudes towards sexual experience do not simply gather inevitably in the air of their own obviousness; they originate somewhere in the human environment, in some social place, and are typical of the represented reality of some experiencing and knowing subject, either an individual or a group.

And what is *this way* of representing these relations? Firstly, there is the matter of the embedded 'sonnet' and what function it serves. Seeing that it is constituted only of the bare essentials of the form we can hardly believe its use as a renewal of a tradition. That these river 'nymphs' speak in sonnet form seems entirely ironic when we attend the voice that 'does' their voices. The irony is particularly well-defined as it comes after the "Elizabeth and Leicester" passage which locates at this particular place in the poem our locus of value, experientially, historically, and socially. The small barrage of fragments that

immediately follow the 'sonnet' in the sequence has stimulated in criticism either an assiduous search of the texts from which these fragments are derived (Smith 1974: 89-91) or have been treated as 'music', what Moody calls "a bridge-passage" (see particularly Harris 1974: 113-115). Neither of these tacks really addresses the issue of how one makes sense of them. Perhaps they cannot be made sense of in any conventional appeal to their intrinsic logic. One of the problems is that they demonstrate no development; they have no semantic movement. Indeed the entire passage that closes "The Fire Sermon," from line 266 to the end at line 311, has no semantic development. The contents, what the fragments and passages are about, are frankly not of paramount interest, but function as a kind of ballast. The contents of the passages are simply givens, all of them evocations (metonyms?) of other texts: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Drew 1949: 91-92), Froude's *Elizabeth*, Wagner's *Rheintöchter* in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the Anglo-Catholic Prayer Book, St. Augustine, the Buddha's *Fire Sermon*.

These givens do not function as the building blocks of conventional semantic sequences;<sup>4</sup> the approach here is not typical of rationalist modes of discourse, whereby the parts of the sequence act as immediate semantic environments for what follows (Ellis 1966: 84). Here we have the processing of meaning on entirely different grounds. The individual passages are cues to semantic environments beyond the text. What provides the connective tissue (one cannot call it a 'logic' of development) of the piece is the Voice that 'does' the voices (cf. Schuchard 1976: 220-221; Gordon 1977: 106; Linett 1978: 47-49). That knowing Voice has no internal positive structure that embodies it; the entire poem is its



embodiment. This knowing Voice, which speaks the poem as a whole, opens the poem's structure towards the deeper rationalities and nature--"the substratum of collective temperament, ways of behaviour and unconscious values"--that Eliot believed underlay "negative liberal society." The voices of the poem do not foreground their contents; they foreground the dissonances they set up with the liberal-romantic explanations of things.

The embedded 'sonnet' of the Thames-daughters is an intentional formal catastrophe,<sup>5</sup> a harsh discordance which, in turn, is the sign of the psychological catastrophes (the givens of the daughters' song) of "negative liberal society." The sonnet waits patiently (that is why it has none of the internal dynamics of a sonnet) for its authentic content in an age when we are all deceived (the deception of the *Rheintöchter* is the key allusion here). The backward glance to the Elizabethan Thames suggests, metonymically, the kind of social world in which an authentic content can be won again. Its positive articulation comes in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. The picture we have of society there is quite clearly an 'interested' conceptual snapshot of the social and political structure of Elizabethan society. Eliot's perception of Elizabethan society as one which achieves consonance at all levels of experience producing a corresponding consonance among the means of expression resolves society to a lucent social harmony, static, beyond the reach of history, and upset only by "impulses," of varying degrees of value, of greater vehemence and passion. In that picture "the substratum of collective temperament, ways of behaviour and unconscious values" constitute the 'natural' beyond the easy grasp of individual volition and thus constitute the norms and standards of intelligibility in the system.<sup>6</sup>

The discontinuities and dissonances of the sort which *The Waste Land* enacts first come to be intelligible (and intelligible they are) as emblems of a suspended or deferred or deliberately withdrawn intelligibility. The attack on the socially and aesthetically privileged forms of intelligibility is effected as a penetration of the intelligible, as the intelligible is conceived in the common intuitive life of the liberal-romantic world-view, a penetration to what Eliot took to be its fundamental incoherence. If we listen deeply enough to the noises that "negative liberal society" makes, we will realize that they make nonsense or they pervert 'natural' sense. Deeper still lies the "substratum" to which the violations and unveilings of *The Waste Land*, Eliot hoped, would drive us. *The Waste Land* knowingly makes itself the dialectical counter-image to the literary practices of his time (Jameson 1974: 35). The poem is not trying to say something as direct statement; it is trying to avoid making the noises that John Drinkwater was making, and, in that avoidance of 'literature', saying something rather profound. The poem's positive structure, its form, is composed of a multiplicity of figures, rhythms, defamiliarizations, suspensions of logic, and interruptions of the usual 'music' of verse, contrivances at the level of lineation, industrial images, all of them roughly and very successfully 'unified' by the mythological framework, a framework antagonistic to the perceived falsity of the liberal 'way of life' inwardly experienced. Indeed the recourse to myth as a framing structure is a moment in the process of the poem when the poem flinches, when it pulls back from the radical enterprise on which it is embarked. Yet this false step towards a positive unity of the text is swamped by the wider project; myth itself is done as a

dialectical other in the poem, for it is deployed in the terms of newly won anthropological understanding rather than in the context of *literae humaniores*, as it was reshaped for the Whig interpretation of history by Jowett and his disciples in the last half of the nineteenth century.

*The Waste Land* does not begin in a blank place, a place without features, silent, without geography or climate, without form and content; the poem begins against a fully articulated and assimilated backdrop which it refuses to re-produce as is and this refusal is marked by syntagmatic fracturing, the discontinuities which criticism has generally taken as comments on 'the decline of civilization' or as the structural stammering of the alienated consciousness (Rajan 1976: 37ff. is typical). In the dialectical antagonisms which the poem sets up, Eliot communicates his understanding of the ideological constraints of his readers and of the discourses which are privileged within the bounds of the accepted rationality. The effect of a fragmented surface structure on the coherence of the poem is to call on the reader to fill in the gaps from an already assimilated cultural competence. In commenting on this aspect of the poet's technique, Christopher Ricks in 1973 chose to consider Eliot's attempt to invoke the reader's implicit knowledge as the poet's manipulation of the reader's "prejudice." The report of Professor Ricks's public lecture at Oxford appeared in the *TLS*.

At Oxford on October 25, Christopher Ricks lectured on 'Tone in Eliot's Poetry'. He began by speaking of Eliot's prejudices (not excluding or excusing his anti-semitism), his interest in prejudice, and how in his poetry, Eliot exploits prejudice in the reader. Thus, the lines "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" utilize their reader's preconceptions. We *know* that people

never say anything interesting at parties. And yet, Professor Ricks pointed out, the lines are completely neutral: it is possible that the women were talking with the incisive verve "of, say, Lord Clark." (The laughter of the audience at this point illustrated the importance of tone--here, the tone of "say.") If, Professor Ricks argued, we add to the lines an adjective ("In the room the women come and go / Talking of marv'llous Michelangelo") they become an heroic couplet with recognizable satiric intent.

But Eliot deliberately left the lines *toneless*--they are a vacuum which has to be filled by a prejudice of the reader's choice. [Cf. Moody's comment]

Professor Ricks found the technique best exemplified in *The Waste Land*. "Quotations removed from their contexts and foreign languages create a hesitation in the reader--how are we to say them?"

([Ricks] 1973: 1345)

The correspondence in the letters columns of the *TLS* continued to the last number of the year and included quite heated exchanges among Ricks, F. R. Leavis, F. W. Bateson, Jack Lindsay, William Scammel, and Lucy Beckett. F. R. Leavis' final examination of *Four Quartets* in *The Living Principle* (1975) advances in a similar direction, but more seriously and thoughtfully.

Calling on the reader's tacit knowledge in this way cannot simply be dismissed as a manipulative tactic; it is not something dishonourable done to a defenceless reader. For Eliot the dishonour has already happened and the discontinuities and juxtapositions of *The Waste Land* are procedures for disrupting the discourses, such as Lord Morley's for example, of the liberal ethos, discursive practices that not only give information about some particular object from a particular point of view but affirm and validate (or attempt to) a way of seeing. *The Waste Land* operates within a particular system of social representations of human reality; the ruptures and fissures that disturb its aesthetic surface

function by shock effects to collapse the intersubjective solidity of the liberal way of seeing. By unravelling the intelligibility of the emotional life of that way of seeing, the poem unveils the deeper collective temperament which, if permitted to exert its entirely 'natural' influences all through the system, would reconstitute the social whole along what for all intents and purposes are feudal lines. Certainly most of Eliot's social criticism seems to be proposing a re-feudalization of society ("Eeldrop and Appleplex, I" 1917: 9 and Nott 1958).

Had Eliot wanted to redirect his arguments only slightly, he would have been encouraged in this kind of thinking by Emile Durkheim's and Marcel Mauss's classic text *Primitive Classification* published in 1903. For the inheritors of the European *Aufklärung*, in short, for *us*, Durkheim and Mauss write that social "space is formed of similar parts which are substitutable one for the other" (1903, 1963: 86), which is, perhaps, why bureaucratic forms of organization and the 'logics' that operate them are apt emblems of the structural intelligibility of post-Enlightenment societies. The situations of social life, and their representation, however, are quite different "for those who are called primitive" (85-86). For them, "species of things is not a simple object of knowledge," structured strictly in accordance with the laws of pure understanding and reason, available only to the intellect. Instead, things "are above all sacred or profane, pure or impure, friends or enemies, favourable or unfavourable; i.e. their most fundamental characteristics are only expressions of the way in which they affect social sensibility. . . . And it is this emotional value of notions which plays the preponderant part in the manner in which ideas are connected or separated" (86). This

"substratum" of object- or institution-dependent and positional *affectivity* is precisely the dimension of social life which post-Enlightenment rationalism, its logical categories, and its elaborated codes of discourse obscure or cannot fully register; this affectivity is measured in the positivist models as static interference or irrationalist 'noise'. Durkheim and Mauss go on to show that this "substratum" of affective values and the concrete social space it helps constitute "is profoundly differentiated according to regions. This is because each region has its own affective value system. Under the influence of diverse sentiments, it is endowed with virtues *sui generis* which distinguish it from all others" (86).

Eliot, unlike Durkheim and Mauss, did not believe that the two sorts of contrasted social realities were mutually exclusive. He read the social and psychological realities constituted by scientific rationalism as powerful and complicated chimerae. Beneath the impressive surface, beyond the material efficiency of scientism's first-order logics, lay the older, but now repressed, 'primitive' consciousness of the people, their "natural conservatism" in the words of Lord Hugh Cecil in 1912 (in O'Sullivan 1976: 124). It is to that level of consciousness that *The Waste Land* attempts to penetrate, the density and reach of which the poem attempts to enact (see *SW* 115). It is as a totalization of this domain that the poem is conceived and executed. However, Eliot was not working within a "primitive" society, but one thoroughly pervaded by all the features of 'developed' societies, including a hierarchical social organization whose religious sanctions had been naturalized to the prevailing rationalism and whose class character was fully in view, experientially

and conceptually. The formal problem Eliot faced was rather prodigious. He was trying to re-write the psycho-ethical infrastructure of a class society of a modern sort in terms of the "substratum" of affective values more appropriate to tribal societies where religious sanctions are still passively in place. The choice of myth as the formal framework of the poem is an important, and from his perspective an obvious, decision, but one unfortunately that is not consonant with the tonal structure of his treatment of contemporaneity. The individual enactments of the poem owe their tonal integrity and coherence to the structure of class attitudes which Eliot and his middle class readers shared.

The 'region', which for Durkheim is coincident with the effective occupation of its geography by a tribe (1903, 1963: 87), cannot be strictly applied to a plural class society. In class society there are many regions and not all coincide with class divisions or geographical locations (for example, see Williams 1980: 155-156 on the class character of Bloomsbury). Classes themselves are fractioned and constitute 'sub-regions', sometimes coinciding with a particular geographical locale, but most often overlapping physically with other social regions of the class structure, although in terms of social action the boundaries of the social region are clearly perceived, expressed, maintained, and, in more rigid societies, well patrolled by natives of each region. Eliot's social criticism, it should be remembered, aims to depoliticize these boundaries by assigning to them religious sanctions. His is not a social unity won by the erasure of social divisions and ranks, but a unity in which these divisions are sacramentalized. The structure, the procedures, the ceremonies, the sacred objects, and the privileged forms of connection

and sequence characteristic of each social region are intimately known by each inhabitant. What the forms and objects are, their importance in that context, and the attitude towards them are expressed in the restricted codes of place, codes whose central semantic category is deixis. Each social region has its own restricted code by which is expressed and affirmed the solidarity of the group. But each region within the context of a supra-regional, national culture has access to elaborated modes of expression by which the socio-political and scientific-bureaucratic abstractions are negotiated and kept in place.

What this description has left out, of course, is the effect on each region of its relationship to the structure of power in the social whole. Indeed social regions can be classified according to their proximity to and exercise of power. Some social regions are more powerful than others and the attitudes expressed within regions will be profoundly influenced by the power, or lack of it, which each region and which each individual within the region enjoys. The forms of the representation of other social regions, and of one's own, will depend on their proximity to the centres of power in the national society as a whole. The particular forms of representation of the most powerful group in the national culture will dominate (Marx 1970: 64-65) and be privileged by the elaborated codes of that culture; the restricted codes will not simply reproduce that privilege blindly, but 'do' it so that an attitude towards that privilege is silently, tonally, communicated to the other users of that restricted code (Bernstein 1981: 327-328). The "substratum of collective temperament," which is society-wide in primitive tribes, is class and sub-class specific in developed liberal society. Every native of a



particular social region assimilates the entire affective value and meaning structure of his or her region, and *has it whole*, and learns to recognize, acknowledge, use, and affirm the common intuitive life which the restricted codes express (Evans 1977: 173-174). Indeed, in having it whole, each native only requires the appropriate phrases or words or idioms, only needs appropriate fragments of the already known structure, in order for the whole of it to be implied or suggested.

For Kenneth Burke this recognition led him to think of *synecdoche* as the "basic" figure of speech, not metaphor. I have been using the term *metonymy* and *metonymic* in order to conform to contemporary use, but his remarks about *synecdoche* apply equally to *metonymy*.

The more I examine both the structure of poetry and the structure of human relations outside of poetry, the more I become convinced that this is the "basic" figure of speech, and that it occurs in many modes besides that of the formal trope. I feel it to be no mere accident of language that we use the same word for sensory, artistic, and political *representation*. . . . Stress upon *synecdochic* representation is thus seen to be a necessary ingredient of a truly realistic philosophy (as against a naturalistic one, that would tend to consider our sensory representations as "illusory"). As to artistic representation, the term needs no further comment: the colors and forms in the painting of a tree represent the tree. In theories of politics prevailing at different periods in history, there have been quarrels as to the precise vessel of authority that is to be considered "representative" of the society as a whole (chief, nobles, monarch, churchmen, parliamentary delegates, poet, leader, the majority, the average, the propertied, or the propertyless, etc.) but all agree in assuming there is some part representative of the whole, hence fit to stand for it.

(Burke 1941, 1961: 23, my emphasis)

I think Burke here overemphasizes somewhat the status of synecdoche/metonymy as the "basic" figure of (re)presentation. Tropic preference between metonymic and metaphoric modes of representation can probably be mapped along two axes.

The first is the axis defined by level of speech code in use, either restricted or elaborated. The metonymic mode of representation is "basic" (but not exclusive) to restricted forms of expression and is closely tied to the heavy deixis of that mode. The social monitoring of dress, for example, not as imaginative costume regulated by an autonomous system of fashion, but for the marks dress and dressing carry of the dresser's affiliations to a social region, requires metonymic reading. This reading only makes sense within the particular context of situation in which the event occurs, a specific sense that can only be expressed in a restricted code. Of course, the system of fashion isolated as an autonomous language, such as is attempted by Roland Barthes (but see Culler 1975: 32-40), is essentially a metaphoric enterprise, an enterprise which attempts to make the language of modishness speak an elaborated code. Metaphor is more characteristic of such elaborated forms of expression. This basis in metaphor helps to give elaborated codes a kind of trans-locational self-sufficiency. The metaphoric vehicles constitute a different order of reality, resembling in some way, no doubt, the tenor's domain, but nonetheless clearly separated from it. In this way, metaphorical sufficiency and autonomy can be thought, drawing attention away from the tenor's relation to the real and towards a world of the vehicle's own making. This world can *either* be linked to the cosmological assumptions of a culture, or, when such assumptions are

problematic, it can create an anti-world parallel to the real, perhaps even commenting on the real from afar (Halliday 1978: 177).

The second axis on which the prominence of metaphoric and metonymic modes of representation can be mapped is defined socially by the states of perturbations of a social system. In periods of ideological settledness, that is, in times when the cosmological assumptions of a society are widely shared and rarely questioned, discourse seems more absorbed by metaphorical modes: allegory, moral fable, *exempla* of various sorts, typological and analogical treatment of narrative are characteristic. The metaphorical bias of this sort of literature undervalues 'realism' because the 'real' is not thematized as the arena of contending ways of seeing. However, in a social system deeply traumatized by crisis, of whatever kind, where the representation and interpretation of the 'real' carry heavy semantic stress and the category of the 'whole' or 'totality' is revived from its theological slumber, 'representativeness' becomes a crucial and hotly debated theme, especially in the assigning of 'representative' status to elements of the perturbed whole.

Periods of social crisis occur when an authoritative class, whose purpose and ideals had been generally considered as *representative* of the total society's purposes and ideals, becomes considered as *antagonistic*. Their class character, once felt to be a *culminating* part of the whole, is now felt to be a *divisive* part of the whole.

(Burke 1941, 1961: 23n., his emphasis)

Modernism's anti-metaphorical bias, its stress on the direct presentation of the object, or the natural object itself as the adequate symbol (Pound 1964: 5), makes sense in terms of the schema outlined

above. In a period of great social disturbance and transformation, where the 'real' itself becomes essentially contested, it is not surprising to see an aesthetic so clearly grounded in metonymic modes of representation and a resultant poetry which speaks an aggressively defended restricted code of the object.

I am extending here my earlier exposition of Bernstein's theory of speech codes (see Chapter Two), an exposition that emphasized the point that restricted and elaborated forms of expression do not divide neatly along class lines. Elaborated speech codes are forms of expression used by a society's socio-economic elites *in addition* to the specific restricted codes into which members of these classes are born. Members of subordinated classes will or will not have access to elaborated codes depending on the relative openness of a society to the social mobility of its subordinated members. My connection here of metonymic and metaphoric figuration to these speech codes attempts to establish more clearly the literary relevance of these codes. It seems fairly obvious that a predominantly context-bound form of expression, deeply penetrated by the shared 'reality' of collective life, uses metonymy as a figurative norm (cf. Jakobson 1956: 80-81). The poetics of the restricted code tend to be, in short, the poetics of contiguity. The less context-bound a speech code becomes the more it tends towards abstraction, that is, tends to divorce meaning from a necessary dependence on an immediate concrete context. The more a speech code frees itself from context the more abstract, symbolic, even magical, become its characterizing operations. The perception of relationships of difference and similarity, or the identification of unity in diversity, or the delighted appreciation of

vivid symbolic mutations enacted figuratively as metaphor, or as other metaphorically based tropes and modes, constitutes a poetics of the elaborated code. Because most schools of literary criticism and scholarship are finely equipped to recognize and respond to a poetics of metaphor, a poetry whose figurative intelligence lies in metonymy often seems peculiarly unpoetic (in periods of change such as Eliot's, it can even seem aggressively antipoetic).

Similarity in meaning connects the symbols of a metalanguage with the symbols of the language referred to. Similarity connects a metaphorical term with the term for which it is substituted. Consequently, when constructing a metalanguage [an elaborated code in Bernstein's terms] to interpret tropes, the researcher possesses more homogeneous means to handle metaphor, whereas metonymy, based on a different principle, easily defies interpretation. (Jakobson 1956: 81)

For the literary intelligence soaked in nineteenth-century English literary culture, with its elaborated metaphorical practices, its universalist orientation to meaning, modernism cannot be anything but 'obscure' or 'unintelligible'. When an object "hath a code and not a core" (Pound 1926, n.d.: 63), there is no particular reason to confect a metaphor to enclose and express its *essence*; all such an object requires is to be 'read', metonymically, an object such as the "her" in Pound's "The Garden," who is the sign of "the end of breeding" juxtaposed to the sign of the inheritors of the earth, "a rabble / Of filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor" (1926, n.d.: 83).

Thus, we know *how* to read the detail that Mr Eugenides has "a pocket full of currants" (*The Waste Land*, CP 71), not simply as a 'presentation

of the object' (SW 149) but, more genuinely, as a presentation of an attitude towards that type of character, an attitude that can only be understood by those for whom this small detail, acting metonymically (along with the other details), implies the affective whole in an English mind an unshaven Smyrna merchant "with a pocket full of currents" inhabits. Frank Kermode's interpretation of this qualifying phrase, so obvious to him he presents it as a parenthetical afterthought--"base Levantine trade"--suggests the ease and specificity with which an implied whole swings into place as a total structure of meanings and values that makes sense of fragments and details (Kermode 1968: 73). To recognize and make sense of the references in the passage to the specialist register of the City import trade, the Cannon Street Hotel ("at this period a common and convenient meeting place for foreign businessmen and their British colleagues . . . ." [John Hayward, quoted in Hargrove 1978: 74-75]), and the Metropole ("had at the time a notorious reputation as a licentious pleasure spot for wealthy businessmen" [Hayward, in Hargrove 75]) suggest a necessary cultural competency available to a rather limited social group, namely, the Metropolitan middle classes and those on the fringes, who, knowing the restricted code of that class, aspired to a place in it. Indeed the expressive style of the language used to portray the "house agent's clerk's" seduction of the typist and the fuller portrait, giving a socially more definite picture of the kind of character Eliot had in mind, in the facsimile and transcript of the original drafts of *The Waste Land*, highlight more clearly the kind of social aspirations to which I refer, aspirations, it hardly needs saying, encouraged by the egalitarian doctrines of the liberal idea, fixed metonymically in the

poem by the clerk's "one bold stare" (repeated three times in *Facsimile*).

The unity of *The Waste Land*, as of any discourse based on a metonymic mode of representation, lies not in the positive text, but in the unity of its transformative action on the settled significations and signifying practices of the social 'region' to and from which it is written. In the literature of classical and neo-classical moments, the discernible unity of the text consisted in a unity achieved in and through the rhetorical programme, fundamentally metaphoric, of literature. Such a unity did not supplant or supersede the formal marks of the social region in which the text was produced. It simply repressed them or turned them to account in the positive formal structure which the system of literature encouraged and sanctioned.<sup>7</sup> With romanticism, the centre of unity of a text shifted towards the metaphysical notion of consciousness, its space subdivided into a set of sense-making potentials: fancy, imagination, reason, will, etc., each with its own objects of knowledge and its own mode of expression. The pressure of the social region on the form of the romantic text is not as easily or as smoothly naturalized as in the earlier literature.

Anglo-American formalism's hopeless fretting about *genre* in romantic literature<sup>8</sup> illustrates its inability to conceptualize a relation between the text and the common intuitive life of a real world. The reason for the relative efficiency of formalist readings of seventeenth-century lyrics lies, I believe, in the fact that the relation between textual object and semantic environment is clearly and consistently articulated by the rhetorical *system* of literature (Tuve 1947, 1968) through the tropic and schematic, always reader-focussed, design of the text.

Readers (and authors), it should be recalled, carry, more or less, the meaning potentials of the semantic environment around in their heads. Part of the horror one feels in *The Dunciad* occurs as a result of Pope's dawning awareness that the historical unity of the *system* of literature was rapidly dissolving in his time (1742: II, lines 347-428). Individual deviations in making the system work, in achieving the expected unities, are very often perceived and vilified as 'dulness', 'stupidity', 'incompetence' by those who superintend the operation of the older system. And when the 'grammar' of a system cannot hold . . . what then? Romanticism imposed a new unity in seeing the textual object as a mental event (Borenstein 1976: 24) within the context of a particular idealist metaphysics. The mind, unfortunately, was regarded by idealism as the construct of a series of formal ontological predications (Kant), rather than as a product of and agent in history. When the metaphysics on which this view of the mind collapsed, the romantic textual object suddenly seemed to become an untidy pathology of nervous gestures, which is the way Eliot and his generation treated the poems of that philosophical and historical moment and, of course, that moment's Victorian, late Victorian, and Edwardian diminutions.<sup>9</sup>

With modernism, the rhetorical tradition and the synthetic view of consciousness become archival; that is, when their remnants appear in a text, like *The Waste Land*, they are always 'quoted', presented as framed fragments of the past. Kenner on the rhyming of the seduction scene: "The rhymes come with a weary inevitability that parodies the formal elegance of Gray; and the episode modulates at its close into a key to which Goldsmith can be transposed" (1966: 145). In the same category



we can lump Moody's and Hargrove's identification of at least three embedded sonnets in "The Fire Sermon." These formal and metrical quotations are presented in precisely the same way an ancient Greek vase, lost to the context in which it was made and used and, thus, stripped of its original use-value, gains another kind of 'value' when it is placed on a pedestal in a glass case in a museum. Normally this new value in the case of a Greek antiquity isn't parodic as Kenner suggests the rhymes in the passage are. This empedestalling of the object utterly transforms it by a subtle rotating of the lens of observation away from a clear focus on the object in its environment, including the seeing of the marks of its making on concrete shape and structure, to seeing its features in terms of a developmental history of art articulated as an autonomous sequence of intricately related period mutations. In these new terms its value as an object is utterly transformed.

The question arises, however, from where does this new value come? The Whig interpretation of political history transposed to the history of art answers that question by positioning the vase in a particular historical continuum, displaying that vase as an important step or phase (formal and technical) in the progressive refinement of art and sensibility leading inevitably to the 'standards' of civilization acknowledged and celebrated, say, in the Home Counties, *ca.* 1910 (Hadjinicolaou 1979: 44-68). It was specifically against this view that Eliot formulated his own, famous notion of the simultaneous existence and order of the literature of Europe. The polemical sharpness with which he drew his picture of the "ideal order" of art in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (*SW* 49-50) indicates, negatively, the settledness of the Whig order of things.

Both Eliot and those against whom such a formulation is written acknowledged, in different ways, that the past always must be perceived from the vantage of the present (Butterfield 1931, 1968: 10-11). The problem is, of course, what sense does the 'present' make? For Whig thought, the 'present' always culminates, in a meliorist sense, the progressive movement of history. For Eliot, and the conservatism for which he speaks, the 'present', dominated in his time by the liberal version of reality, provoked resistance to the idea of progress and 'improvement'.

[The poet] must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe--the mind of his own country--a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind--is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsman. (SW 51)

The dematerialised sense of history sanctions the erasure of a work of art's actual historical context, in order to free it, not from *history* as such, but *from the role a work plays in Whig interpretative practices*.

This liberation of art from the services it renders liberalism is proposed in the name of a transcendental signified, an ideal order existing above and beyond material history. So goes the argument in Eliot's rescue of literary texts of the past, and if the nature, structure, and criteria of the "ideal order" remain somewhat vague, one hardly notices in the damage done to the Whig text on these matters. *The Waste Land* attempts the same rescue in terms of the representation of the profoundest human experiences: love, death, despair, surrender, trans-

scendence. As a metaphorical closing of the text's meaning potentials, *The Waste Land*, in an oddly anti-modernist flinching from the metonymic logic of modernism, proposes a ragtag collection of legends, myths, and references to the literary past as that generative matrix from which we can catch sight of an "ideal order" of experience. This 'feint' towards the imposition of a metaphorically based unity has been the source of considerable anxiety among the poem's commentators. The search for the master interpretative code, for which myth and its cultural cognates are the key, has gone on for fifty years without much success except in terms so general and vague that the exertions have hardly seemed worth it. No one has exerted himself in this direction more than Grover Smith, and his account of the poem's range of allusion to myth, romance, and the literary culture of Europe is as impressive as it is exhaustive. But Smith's final statement about the poem seems hardly in need of the scholarly edifice he has erected to house it. *The Waste Land*, he writes, dramatizes the speaker's "effort to appease the gnawing of fleshly and spiritual desire" (Smith 1974: 98). That may be so, but we hardly need to be brought to this *aperçu* by way of "the decay of . . . the Seven Churches of Asia" (87). Myth in *The Waste Land* is used as a metaphor of the "ideal order" of experience, or, put another way, a metaphor of the deepest layer of human consciousness, the nadir of which is reached in the successive DAs of the thunder, a descent to the primary syllabary of Indo-European civilization. Myth attempts to contain or encompass metaphorically a poem Eliot could not 'close'. He could not 'close' it because its execution was almost entirely metonymic, leading the sense the poem makes, out of the confines of its own unsteady metaphors,

towards the sociosemiotic field in which it is lodged, out to where its unity actually lies. This radically decentered activity suggests that the use of myth to designate the encompassing framework is itself metonymic, an emblem of the difficult search for an efficacious totalizing framework in a period when ideological disturbances run deep (Shannon 1976: 269ff.; Read 1979: 494-513).

The *melange* of mythical elements, labouring manfully to erect a convincing totalizing framework, is imposed on the present of the poem as a way, not of dehistoricizing the poem's enactments, but of dematerializing the history which they cannot avoid suggesting or implying. In other words, the poem, unable to find a possible totalizing framework in the contemporary present, dreams a discovery of that framework in myth (Eagleton 1970: 156-157). Yet the poem does disclose a totalizing structure linked to the present, one might say, in spite of itself, and discernible in the very 'incoherence' of the "chaotic" miscellany Eliot spread before Pound in Paris in 1921 (Kenner 1966: 125). Indeed, it is in that very 'incoherence' that the poem's modernity lies. Of course, by 'incoherence' I mean only the revised criteria for making sense that contrast and challenge the syntagmatic norms and conventions of late Victorian and Edwardian discursive practices. The deferral of a specifically textual semantic unity projects that substantial centre out into the common intuitive life which the mythic metaphor attempts clumsily to retroject. The totalizing framework that does link the poem to the present comes into view when we follow the poem's metonymic logic and see it as a signifying cultural practice (Eagleton 1976: 98), acting upon a specific social structure in which the *representativeness* of

certain ideological representations constitutes the principal theme.

To identify the totalizing framework of the poem with the 'present' in which the poem is lodged may sound like a critical manoeuvre that verges on the mystical and if I were to use the 'present' as a philosophical abstraction it would. For my purposes here I use the 'present' as an entirely social category (Mead 1932, 1980: 47-67). Thus I do not mean the 'present' as *concret Allgemeine*, the concrete universal, but, in a more homely sense, the 'present' as lived, in the particular conjuncture of history, class position, and personal psychology that it was the will and fate of Eliot to live. The cyclical world of thoroughly dematerialised "vegetation ceremonies," opportunistically adapted for the occasion, cannot convincingly assuage the difficulties of the contemporary world the poem invokes and of Eliot's ambiguous position in it, ca. 1920 (Bergonzi 1972: 73; Eagleton 1976: 148). The uneven, untidy intractability of history cannot be so easily schematized and history itself transcended in order to 'recover' its larger significance. In context, the poem's use of myth contributes a major element to the anti-language the poem speaks as a whole, and speaks it as if it were language itself (Halliday 1978: 171). Just as the poem enacts the psychosexual catastrophes of liberal society in order to scatter liberalism's meliorist optimism, myth, functioning as a metaphor of the mind's deep structure, gladly invents a recess to which the rationalist instruments of Enlightenment thought cannot penetrate. Thus the use of myth is controlled by the contrastive role Eliot wants it to play in the 'present' when set against the reigning rationalism. The editing of the poem which Pound and Eliot began in Paris in 1921 (*Facsimile* xxiiff.) had the effect

of raising the mythical elements to the level of the frame and thus 'objectifying' the point of view. The effect of this is to contrive a suprahistorical 'place' from which to speak which is not thoroughly implicated in the actuality of contemporary London. But of course the manoeuvre itself is thoroughly implicated in the history and social attitudes of its time and in the context of Eliot's immediate personal experience. After all, 'actuality' seems rather the problem than the solution from the perspective of an over-educated, underemployed Lloyd's clerk, on the fringes of the literary world, immersed in a claustrophobic marriage, and in the midst of a series of emotional crises (Gordon 1977). Later in his life, at the centre of the literary world, institutionally secure at Faber's, socially rooted, free of messy personal attachments, "now and in England" (CP 215) would seem an altogether more promising place from which poems might come. In *The Waste Land*, "now and in England" can only be looked at steadily from behind a leafy hedge of "vegetation ceremonies" (CP 80).

An examination of the earlier drafts, as published by Valerie Eliot in 1971, reveals the extent to which the poem was conceived in a concern for the social, historical, and polemical present. What the editing process excised more than anything else in the final version was precisely a large part of the specificity of the poem's social, satiric focus. Eliminated are representative personae like the Ladies Katzeegg (*Facsimile* 29) and Kleinwurm (23), the vignette of Fresca's morning ceremonies which opens "The Fire Sermon" (23-29; 39-41), as well as a number of other sections. Other parts of the poem which were retained underwent considerable change, for example, the "young man carbuncular"

played a more prominent, individualized role in an earlier draft than is his final fate at the last. The kind of material in which the poem was conceived provides a picture of London social life in the period around the first Great War.

It is a picture that is highly selective, as one might expect, but it is not selective in a way that is uniquely Eliot's. This view of things in that period was largely identical to the versions of social reality which right-wing, Conservative polemicists saw as the deracination and corruption of the English ruling elite and, thus, in the metonymic logic of conservatism, the corruption of English life itself (Jones 1974: 33). Of course, this was the message of much continental conservatism as well and Eliot no doubt came upon it as early as 1910-1911 in its French form (Gordon 1977: 54). His interest in Charles Maurras and the theory and practice of *Action Française* probably begins in that winter of discontent he spent in the French capital, whose politics still lived under the shadow of the Dreyfus case (Kojecky 1971: 59-60).

For conservatives in England the causes of English social decay were no mystery, though Whig politicians were often accused of obscuring them for sinister purposes with their race and colour blind ideas of equality and freedom. It was 'foreign', especially German-Jewish, elements that were principally the scapegoats on whom English conservatives typically decided to fix their attention. The immediate origins of this attack, carried on mainly in the press, were a series of dubious financial and commercial transactions in England and abroad that involved some more or less prominent German-Jewish participants, along with many others.

This corruption was linked by the Right with the activities and influence of what Garvin in the *Observer* termed the "plunderbund." This term he applied to the group of financiers and businessmen, mostly of German-Jewish origin (for instance, Alfred Moritz Mond, Sir Edgar Speyer, and Sir John Tomlinson Brunner) who were active in the radical wing of the Liberal party. The Right, as in Continental countries, denounced these men as aliens--worse, as traitors serving the interests of the national enemy, Germany. . . . This abuse had unpleasant undertones. Right speakers and writers (apart from the separate Chesterton-Belloc group) disclaimed anti-Semitic feelings, not very convincingly, but went on to assert that anti-Semitism was being generated by the antinational and corrupt activities of a few wealthy Jews, as well as by the economic competition created by destitute refugees from Russia who were crowding into the East End of London--with explosive effects twenty-five years later. (Jones 1974: 49-50)

That the earlier drafts of *The Waste Land* should contain a lengthy satiric attack on German-Jewish elements in English society is in itself nothing new from the sense we already have of Eliot's social and political attitudes (Harrison 1967: 149-152; but see Kojecky 1971: 12-13, 215); what is significant is the association between these men (and their families) and English Whig culture (Tuchman 1966: 18-19). Sir Alfred Moritz Mond had already made an appearance in an earlier Eliot poem still to be found in *Collected Poems*:

I shall not want Capital in Heaven  
 For I shall meet Sir Alfred Mond.  
 We two shall lie together, lapt  
 In a five per cent.Exchequer Bond.  
 (46)

Eliot's experience as a City banking clerk from 1917 to 1925 no doubt contributed to his views, especially since within English financial



circles the 'plunderbund' were seen primarily as fiscal pirates and buccaneers who after the war were thought to have unconscionably profited from the conflict (Jones 1974: 49-50). It was also widely believed among City men before the war that the German-Jewish financiers operated under the personal sponsorship and protection of the King, Edward VII (Blake 1972: 192). At the very heart, then, of English society the antics of Fresca, Lady Katzegg, Lady Kleinwurm, Bleistein (*Facsimile* 119, 121) and Sir Alfred Mond, Burbank, and Sir Ferdinand Klein from other poems (*Poems*, 1920) are not simply "cosmopolitan intruders" (Gross 1972: 154) cheapening and commercializing 'civilization' in some general sense of the 'decline of the west', *but are references of a more specific kind*. The obvious anti-Semitism here is not the major point the poem is exercising in the context of English social and political life. The contemptuous attitude towards Jews is, as it was in much European anti-Semitism, incidental. The polemical thrust of such sentiments was aimed at those 'authentic' elements in the national culture who were perceived to be sponsors and protectors of the decay and dilution of race and culture. (The famous reference to the Jews in *ASG* 19 is typical).<sup>11</sup>

As Maurras called them, the *mètèques* (gk. *metoikos*) had arrived in the European cosmopoli, cities overrun by men of mixed race and ambiguous social origins. In England the social proximity of wealthy, Whig-liberal Jews to the monarchy itself insured not only their commercial, but also their social, pre-eminence:

From which, a Venus Anadyomene  
She stept ashore to a more varied scene,  
Propelled by Lady Katzegg's guiding hand

She knew the wealth and fashion of the land,  
 Among the fame and beauty of the stage  
 She passed, the wonder of our little age;  
 She gave the turf her intellectual patronage.  
 But F[resca] rules even more distinguished spheres,  
 Minerva in a crowd of boxing peers.

(*Facsimile* 28-29)

Valerie Eliot identifies the Marquis of Queensberry and the Fifth Earl of Lonsdale as two "well-known boxing peers" (127); both men, needless to say, were also well-known Whig aristocrats. The point, of course, is not to prove that Eliot was anti-Semitic; that question has been and will be debated for so long as Eliot's reputation as a major poet persists. The more interesting issue is the particular semantics of the political and social context of London, ca. 1920, and Eliot's complex attitudes towards those meanings that account for the poetic decisions he makes at the level of the microstructure to give the poem the detailed shape it has.

No doubt most of Eliot's middle class readers recognized the satiric thrust of the poem, reading out from the placing metonymy the appropriate attitudes being brought into play and, reading back from those attitudes and targets, the social place from which the poem was coming. A revealing comment by Pound on an earlier draft of the poem perhaps illustrates this point. "The Fire Sermon" section, originally longer than the section which appears in the published version of the poem, was rather heavily edited by Pound. One example of this is visible in the following stanza from the typist's seduction, only half of which appeared in the final version.

-Bestows one final patronising kiss,  
 And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit;  
 And at the corner where the stable is,  
 Delays only to urinate, and spit.

(*Facsimile 47*)

Pound scored out the final two lines of the quatrain and added marginally "probably over the mark." M. L. Rosenthal suggests that Pound's comment acknowledges that the "best available reading public for poetry" in 1922 would not have been ready for such descriptive candour (1972: 189). Of course he is right, but the point should be pursued a little further. What exactly is the "mark" that this passage is "probably over"? Pound is not overly squeamish about such candour (cf. *Cantos* 14-16); the rest of the passage, in some places as equally candid, drew no ethical objections. Clearly Pound is referring to the tone of the excised lines; they are over the mark tonally and the difference between those two lines and the passage as revised points directly to the *intensity* of the contempt the lines express. The hatred and scorn for people of 'that sort', which in the earlier version stands out lividly as merely personal abuse, are pushed further back in the internal perspective and the Tiresian foresufferance allowed to muffle by just that right amount the free, but embarrassing, play of the speaker's feeling. Nothing the matter with the contempt, it just can't be paraded as openly as all that. Foresufferance is the gesture of a mind that has reworked the essentially social drama of what is presented in the earlier draft in order to avoid the consequences in the 'present' of its hatred. The hatred is not transformed; it is simply not disclosed in the framework of the social arena which is its origin. Its edges are blurred within the *mythological*

haven that, by definition, presents states of affairs in a form in which they can no longer be argued, though in this case the force of the speaker's contempt is unmitigated.

Harvey Gross contends that the revisions gave *The Waste Land* "the right amount of aesthetic distance," thus eliminating Eliot's "kinky expressions of disgust with the human animal and its undignified functions" (1972: 145). The absorption of a particular social contempt aimed at a particular class of people in the all-encompassing category of "the human animal" is typical of much criticism that shares these attitudes with Eliot. The revisions, Gross decides, were done with a view to what the poem's readers might stomach (145). The contempt distanced, "*The Waste Land* enjoyed an immediate literary success" (145). Since the contempt has not been eliminated from the final version, we might take Gross as saying that some of the revisions at least were done not primarily to come to terms with personal feelings of disgust towards certain sorts of people and to explore these feelings as expressions, not only of a personal nature, but feelings implicated in the hatred of one class towards another. Instead, these revisions helped make the contempt palatable, firstly, by cutting the rougher language and, secondly, by linking it all to a mythical framework that universalizes it.

Again my point is not to prove that Eliot hated the pushy *petit bourgeois*, but that *The Waste Land*'s coherence, and the coherence of modernist poems generally (and post-modernist ones even more so), lies beyond the text itself to the cultural and discursive practices in which it had to make its way. In the primacy of the 'present' as the encompassing and totalizing framework a distinctly modernist poetry gets its

start. Tone, then, becomes the principal first point of access to the poem's present, for tone is always situated in the here and now of the poem, a here and now that terminates, at one end of a continuum, in history, and at the other, in the act of composition itself, the compositional present as it were. In other words, distinctively modernist poems are written exclusively in the present tense of thought and feeling, even Pound's historical *Cantos*, the Chinese or the Adams sections. But it is a mistake to believe that the 'present' is simply an ontological notion, as does Lukács in his critique of modernism, taking modernism as proclaiming an antihistorical existentialism.

Lukács has failed to see that such a stance was in reality not a modernist article of faith, but a polemical weapon aimed against the liberal-bourgeois view of the past, viz. that all previous history simply existed in order to have given birth to the bourgeois order of things in Europe. Yet even Lukács must admit history's ineluctable demand on modernism:

A gifted writer, however extreme his theoretical modernism, will in practice have to compromise with the demands of historicity and of social environment. Joyce uses Dublin, Kafka and Musil the Hapsburg Monarchy, as the locus of their masterpieces. But the locus they lovingly depict is little more than a backcloth; it is not basic to their artistic intention. (1969: 21)

This is a very narrow view of 'history'; and certainly a man writing a novel is writing a novel, not an historical treatise that contributes to scientific knowledge. Novel and treatise are two very different types of discursive practices. Lukács is limited to searching through works

to see what can be easily translated to the elaborated categories of scientific thought.

*Ulysses* (1922) speaks the concrete history of its place in a restricted mode of expression, a mode in which every sentence and word and intonation is permeated by the orders of meaning, historically determined, that constitute the social environment. For example, who but a reader versed to a degree in the common intuitive life of Ireland and Dublin can read with accuracy the intended effect of the reference to John Howard Parnell in the 'Wandering Rocks' section of the novel, the section which is framed by the twin journeys of the priest John Conmee, S.J. across the north of the city and of the Earl of Dudley's viceregal procession in the opposite direction across the south. One of the many scenes which these two great arcs, emblematic of the powers that be in Dublin, ca. 1904, bracket is the scene of John Howard Parnell, Charles Stewart's brother, playing chess. Chess! The game of state and strategy. A game that Charles Stewart, in his time, lost when he misplayed the endgame. Against this, Buck Mulligan is toadying up to the Englishman Haines and the abjectness of that performance has its entire tone and resonance, its semantic structure, in the recognitions of the English cultural and political dominance in Ireland:

As they trod across the thick carpet Buck Mulligan whispered behind his panama to Haines.

--Parnell's brother. There in the corner.

They chose a small table near the window opposite a long-faced man whose beard and gaze hung intently down on a chessboard.

--Is that he? Haines asked, twisting round in his seat.

--Yes, Mulligan said. That's John Howard, his brother, our city marshal.

John Howard Parnell translated a white bishop quietly and his grey claw went up again to his forehead whereat it rested.

An instant after, under its screen, his eyes looked quickly, ghostbright, at his foe and fell once more upon a working corner. (248)

Parnell's stolen glance catches beautifully the ambiguity of his position; with his hand over his eyes there is the suggestion of the shamed man and, at the same time, the suggestion of the cunning man. His brother was both, though in the end the shame outplayed the cunning. But the scene itself doesn't rise to its true semantic substance until the Dudleys, representatives of the power in England that destroyed Charles Stewart and set back the cause of Home Rule for a generation, pass the D. B. C. There, while Buck, Haines, and the others strain to catch a glimpse of the procession, Irishmen paying what is obviously intended to be taken as shameless homage to the confident display of the oppressor, Parnell does not move from the chessboard: "From the window of the D. B. C. Buck Mulligan gaily, and Haines gravely, gazed down on the viceregal equipage over the shoulders of eager guests, whose mass of forms darkened the chessboard whereon John Howard Parnell looked intently" (253). No matter how "intently" Parnell looks at the chessboard, the game ends in precisely the same way. The specific shape of the political impotence of the Irish in the face of the English fact is entirely captured in a single word, the adverb "gaily." Clearly Joyce has chosen *this* adverb in order to set up a contrast with the modification of Haines's gazing, done "gravely." This contrast is neither simply an *imagiste* presentation of the object nor a simple parallel construction of no more significance than the striking of a textural chord--gaily/gravely--suddenly heard in

the movement of the music of the syntax. Undoubtedly both these perspectives are valid, but the specific meaning and the play of attitudes, in short, the tone of the passage, can only make sense in the political context of the Irish 1890s and 1900s. History does not need the conventions of 'critical realism' in order to act upon and modify "aesthetic intention."

The 'present', as I've tried to argue, appears as a fundamentally social category, as the product of an historical process that is everywhere visible, sometimes in the content of a work, but always in its verbal structures of thought and feeling. Language never occurs in a social vacuum, though it occasionally adopts for strategic purposes (purposes controlled by the situation in which it is lodged) the point of view that it does. The conventional affect of such a stance, intentional or not, is the desire or necessity the poet feels to penetrate to the level of immediate experience, the direct apprehension of the real and concrete beyond the conventional, dying forms which the time, history, and the dominant class have privileged in a particular place. The message of this approach is not that such an ontological project is achievable or even possible, but the rejection that it implies of the scales and orders of significance 'immediate experience' accumulates in time and of the languages in which that order is represented. In the case of *The Waste Land*, the traditional formalist account of the relationship of the text to its social and cultural environment has been to ignore completely the possibility that the poem is an emblem of the social world's intelligibility. More recent formalist accounts, however, responding to the pressure of a resurgent historicist literary criticism,



have sought to define a new relationship of text to world. A. D. Moody's formulation of this new relationship is characteristic of the tack formalism in general has taken:

If, [in the private agony of the poet] . . . the poem becomes a critique of its culture, it does so in order to give the fullest possible expression to the poet's own mind and feelings. What we are given is not a world 'in itself', as the anthropologist or historian would observe it, but the world as the poet sees it. And what he is seeing is primarily himself. He is completing the objectification and analysis of his experience by magnifying it into a vision of the world. If he presents a crisis or breakdown of civilisation, this has to be understood as first of all a crisis or breakdown in himself. If he achieves a cure it will be by reintegrating and transforming himself in poetry. Whether the poetic achievement will have any valid application to the state of civilisation is a very large question and one best left until we have the evidence of the poem quite clear in our minds. (1979: 79-80)

Here is criticism that acknowledges a solipsism so fundamental that when the 'poet' perceives the world "he is seeing primarily himself." Moody, however, limits this solipsism to the 'poet' for we learn that "anthropologist" and "historian," on the other hand, actually present "a world 'in itself'" and what they see and what the poet sees 'out there' are two orders of reality. As an idea formulated in 1979 this is astonishing, for it was precisely this notion, at the heart of romantic poetics, that modernism made it its deliberate destiny to defeat. The poet sees precisely the same world 'in itself' as anthropologist and historian, but sees its 'thereness' more clearly than they. The only region that counts, according to Moody's formulation, is the poet's inwardness, his psychology, yet, we learn, "this is no invitation to probe his private life"

(79). A curious criticism it is that, responding to the critique of formalism in our time, acknowledges, but then transforms, history into psychology and psychology into the formalism of old.

Language, to repeat, never occurs in a social vacuum. It always bears the marks of the social world and bears also identifiable attitudes towards that world. "April is the cruellest month . . ." because it reminds us of Chaucer and the medieval world, which, from as early as 1917, was the emblem of social and spiritual values and the deeper civic rationality and order that Eliot always sought for contemporary England ("Eldrop and Appleplex, I" 1917: 7-11; "A Contemporary Thomist" 1917: 312, 314; Nott 1958). In this sudden, surprising context, however, it is not Chaucer as such who is pulled into the poem but what 'Chaucer' had come to signify for the English (Lucy 1960: 64). This new context rescues 'Chaucer' from the clichés generations of Victorian schoolboys and Oxbridge men had acquired,<sup>12</sup> the clichés about the warm, comic poet laureate of a quaint, merry, orderly old England, the *first* national poet in whom that superior native Englishness is first discerned, the very Englishness, so the tacit national epic goes, that guided the showers of arrows at Agincourt and Crécy and the fiery salvoes of grapeshot and lead that shattered the French at Aboukir, Ushant, and Trafalgar and the Englishness also that bloodied the ditchwater of Passchendaele and Ypres. This picture, formed primarily in the nineteenth century, denies the real Chaucer's cosmopolitanism, the formation of his mind, not by a narrow provincialism (a medieval 'eminent Victorian'), but by his contact with and respect for Latin, Catholic Europe. *This*, as a challenge and as an affront, is the Chaucer that Eliot brings into *The Waste Land*.

The choice of "cruellest" also sharply actualizes, negatively, the aversion to and dissatisfaction with the voice and idiom of the villa Swinburnianism that would make of a line about 'Spring' beginning with "April" something sweet and sickly, something pathetic and vague. *In itself* the line, as Eliot wrote it, is no less vague than

My restless blood now lies a-quiver,  
 Knowing that always, exquisitely,  
 This April twilight on the river  
 Stirs anguish in the heart of me.  
 (Rupert Brooke, "Blue Evening," 1970: 130)

It gains its clarity and definition the moment a reader feels his or her way into the contrast which "cruellest" in this context establishes with the more 'poetical' diction from which "anguish" is normally drawn. The force of Eliot's rejection is not simply literary; it implicates the rejection of a whole view of literature and of the culture for which that view is privileged. He had spent the entire extent of *The Sacred Wood* dismantling its claims. Again the anti-Georgian 'nature' lyric that follows

. . . breeding  
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
 Memory and desire, stirring  
 Dull roots with spring rain.  
 Winter kept us warm, covering  
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
 A little life with dried tubers.  
 Summer surprised us . . . (CP 63)

is not simply a pained evocation of the seasonal cycle, vaguely gesturing to some as yet unspecified inward malaise. In the older rhetorical tradition such a set of seasonal references, meticulously displayed, would

have put in place the tropic and thematic patterning a reader would expect to see fully deployed and later resolved in the poem's development.<sup>13</sup> By the 1890s and 1900s those who still manipulated the old bellows of song had come to inherit a petrified and prettified literary language.

--Spring, dancing light-foot down the woodland ways;  
 Summer, the fragrant queen of long delight,  
 Languid with roses; Autumn, old and wan,  
 Wearily creeping graveward; and at last  
 Winter's oblivion.

(Brooke, "The Bastille," 1970: 174)

It was precisely this verbal vehicle that Eliot could not bring himself to drive.<sup>14</sup> Of course, this kind of poetry did not merely affront Eliot's more sophisticated taste, his scorn had a deeper draw; such poetry could not be made to speak the truth because it had utterly let atrophy "the discipline of feeling" (*SW* 58). The values it proposed were abandoned by the civilized mind in the 1820s (*SW* xiii). As Eliot argued, the matured discourse of the European nineteenth century was to be found in French prose and, later, the *symbolistes*. Stendhal, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Laforgue had made a literature that dryly turned its back on the tradition which 'culminated' in Rupert Brooke, a tradition left to smother in the carbon monoxide of its own exhaustion. Thus his changing of the 'seasons' is not a pageant of quaint personifications, but, by deliberate contrast, a pained, malevolent seething. His 'summer' is not a "fragrant queen of long delight," but a Baltic German protesting: "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch . . ." (*CP* 63).

*The Waste Land*, as I mentioned earlier, does not need to construct a world of its own; it finds itself in the world already, but not innocently. The poem finds itself in the world already armed with an attitude towards it: "[Myth] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" ("*Ulysses*, Order and Myth," 1923: 483). Critics have been so quick to seize on the 'mythical method' as the key to *The Waste Land*'s coherence and meaning that they've accepted as fact the more interesting and contentious remark by Eliot in the famous *Dial* review of *Ulysses*, namely, that contemporary history is an "immense panorama of futility and anarchy." The important question is not what formal strategies Eliot used to shape this chaos, taking for granted that it is a chaos, but why Eliot chose to view contemporary history *in this way* and why he used *this attitude* towards social and political reality in Europe in *The Waste Land*. Indeed to accept the *Dial* review's formulation of contemporary history is simply to collapse thought into journalism. Eliot was too acute to reproduce crudely journalistic clichés without some purpose in mind. The question remains: why take this attitude towards actuality when the 'order' or, simply, the historical reasons shaping the situation in Europe in the immediate post-war years were as available to Eliot as they are to us today, or available to Eliot's contemporary, John Maynard Keynes, who incisively and passionately outlined a version of that situation in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920)?<sup>15</sup>

The declaration by the Baltic German *Frau* may be some help here. Her claim to being German--echt deutsch--as opposed to being Russian

makes sense not as a general statement about personal identity, but as a specific reference to the situation in the Baltic states after the First World War.<sup>16</sup> These states and provinces, nominally part of the Tsarist empire before the October Revolution in 1917, were in reality economic and social appendages of the *Junker* nobility of East Prussia. After the defeat of Germany in the war and tsarism in Russia, the natives of the Baltic states took the opportunity to declare themselves independent of Russia. Because Germans had constituted the landlord and upper class of these areas, seen by the Germans as extensions of German culture, they were sometimes not treated with the respect they had grown accustomed to over the centuries of collecting rents from the seventy per cent of the Baltic population that were peasants and farmers (Watt 1968: 373). The native governments of the newly independent Baltic states, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, moved against some of the big *Junker* estates in an attempt to redistribute the land and wealth of the mainly German landowners. Undoubtedly the Soviet Revolution had inspired some of these land reform policies, though historians agree that the governments of these pocket states were controlled by the small merchant bourgeoisie in the cities.

When the war in the West ended, the defeated German armies began to return to the homeland, but as is well known, with the strategic withdrawal of the officer corps from the command structure of the German Army, many soldiers, left to drift, joined roving columns of armed men led by military officers who could command the personal loyalty of their troops. These *freikorps* columns became mercenary military formations ready to fight for whoever would pay. The hardpressed *Junkers* of the

Baltic states began to invite *freikorps* columns to their lands to protect their ancestral possessions. These columns of defeated and frustrated men took their revenge on the native populations of these states (cf. "Who are those hooded hordes swarming . . ." [CP 77]). The governments in Riga and Reval appealed to the victorious Allies at the Peace Conference at Versailles to help disarm the marauding remnants of the *Wehrmacht*. The British, apart from sending some warships to stand off the coast of Estonia, did nothing, seeing the victorious German columns as a bulwark against, what Churchill called at the time, "the baboonery of Bolshevism" further East (Taylor 1965: 137).

Although the Baltic states survived this crisis as political entities, their sovereignty was severely hedged by the imposition again of German hegemony. The integrity of the *Junkers'* lands was preserved and the relative weakness of the Soviets in Russia insured that old Wilhelmine Germany survived in East Prussia and the Baltic areas even during the palmyest days of the Weimar Republic. The woman's declaration in *The Waste Land* establishes her as a member of the German elite in Lithuania: her care in distinguishing herself from Russians is primarily a way of establishing her social credentials, though the Baltic German she is speaking (Edwards 1975: 18) undercuts her claims to social superiority. Why is it important to establish such a position? On the shores of the Starnbergersee, a favorite summer resort for the middle European aristocracy and *haute bourgeoisie*, or in the Munich Hofgarten, nothing could be more important. In the specificity of the Baltic voice, we have neither a simple physical fact, nor a piece of contrasting vocal 'music' (Edwards 1975: 18), nor a vague and general comment on the

decline and fall of the West through the decay of the European nobility (Kenner 1966: 136; Knust 1967: 8-9); rather we hear a concrete fragment of talk. Its concreteness is achieved by the kind of social self-definition that is being attempted, unsuccessfully, within the context of the world that the sentence, its accents, its overall tone, imply. In the context of the society of the Baltic states to be "echt deutsch" is to be everything socially. But to be socially well-placed in one of the social hinterlands of Europe does not carry much substance in the context of the more refined, elegant, and privileged world in the Hofgarten or on the shores of the Starnbergersee. The abject note of the socially peripheral character claiming a 'better' place in the finely gradated class structure of the European aristocracy, and clearly not convincing anyone, constitutes the lived density of particular class relationships. The Baltic German accents have a specific meaning that is lost when the lived density of the social text is vaporized in order to re-write its particularities in an elaborated literary code that silences the text's historicity.

The sudden change of perspective from the anti-Georgian nature lyric to the specifics of central European social and political reality in 1919 makes very little sense in terms of any of the usual literary codes through which syntagmatic incompatibilities such as this one might be said to cohere. If the passage from the first line of the poem to the break after line 18 constitutes an opening syntagm, then there is very little that allows us to move from an allusion to the opening of the *Canterbury Tales* to a fragment adapted from a book of recollections (*Facsimile* 125-126) of the central European aristocracy by Countess



Marie Louise Elizabeth Larisch von Monnich in the usual ways (see Morris 1954: 231-233 and Knust 1967: 3, 39-43, 53-55, 62-65). The syntagmatic connections in this opening sequence are all contextual ("The Idea of a Literary Review" 1926: 3). That is where their coherence lies, why the passage can be voiced or read as if it constituted a single connected utterance. The details and fragments of discourse, through the specific kinds of signifying oppositions with which they score the common intuitive life of the poem's 'here and now', accumulate a density and particularity of reference that accounts for the effective and lasting power of the rendering, irrespective of all the attempted re-writings of the here and now to a totalizing semiotic code in myth, or whatever. What is being referred to, though, are not simply the events and people of concrete historical contexts, but the environment in which these events are immersed and inscribed with particular meanings and values. The flow of details, discontinuous in terms of the intrinsic semantics of the text, finds its unity in the context of situation (and the wider context of culture) in which these details are lodged. And as the context of situation, semantically experienced and structured, is itself thoroughly textualized (we experience the object always already enveloped in meaning), the poem cannot help but be a cento of quotations highlighting, shading, suggesting an attitude towards the *semantics* of the field. The quotations, in addition, have two general modes of existence.

Firstly, they exist as mimicry of the set of voices and texts which map the collective socio-verbal consciousness, that is, the capacity to make and authenticate sense, of a particular era. This mimicry, a kind of subjectless ventriloquism, can be ingenuous (i.e. unreflexive), such

as we find in Rupert Brooke, or it can deliberately foreground these voices and texts as part of a wider critique, as in the opening eighteen lines of *The Waste Land*. Which it is to be is principally controlled by the relationship one intends, or wishes, to establish with the structure of material power in the society. This is essentially a metonymic voice.

Secondly, the quotations can set up an anti-language that establishes an antagonistic semantic relationship with the norms and standards of the semantics of the context of situation. This is not an *other* kind of language, making a completely different kind of sense; it is as much an instance of the prevailing sociolinguistic order as the language of everyday life (Halliday 1978: 164). It differs from it in the kind of relationship-specific instances of sense-making established within the prevailing discursive orders. This can mean simple relexicalization of language or it can mean the re-ordering of syntax and phonics; in short, it can mean the revision of discursive practice as a whole. Such an anti-language can derive from minority environments, as it often does, say, in the finite provinces of meaning of a criminal underclass, such as Dickens enacts in *Oliver Twist*, or of prison life (cf. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*), or an artistic bohemia (*symbolisme* for example). The 'pelting speech' of "the counterculture of vagabonds, or 'cursitors' in Thomas Harman's (1567) mock-stylish designation, a vast population of criminals who lived off the wealth of the established society" (Halliday 1978: 164ff.) in Elizabethan England is another example. An anti-language can also derive from the surpassed or forgotten discursive traditions of a culture or from minority traditions, especially ones that themselves had elements of semantic opposition about them, for example, the culture of

the Albigensians in the twelfth century, smashed as heretical by the upholders of the prevailing order. The crucial point, of course, is that the alternative intersubjective reality which an anti-language counterposes can only exist in a relationship with the meaning environments of everyday life as long as these persist. As they change or vanish so does the reality of the alternative. This is essentially a metaphorical voice (Halliday 1978: 174-175 and cf. Merrell on "metaphorization" 1980: 292).

If the first eighteen lines of *The Waste Land* quote in the first mode, that is, 'do' a set of texts (and voices) representative of a particular social environment, not in the form of *experience* as such, but *in the way* particular men and women in particular circumstances choose to talk about it, the next section of the poem, lines 19-42, contrastingly, quotes in the second mode. To put it another way, Eliot alternates two voices in the poem that quote in the two modes. The first voice is principally satiric and speaks his critique of the effects of philosophical and political liberalism on the mind and body of Europe by a satiric mimicry of representative texts. This is the voice that tends to suffer most in the revisions of the drafts. It is the voice Pound believed we should hear less of.<sup>17</sup> However, enough of it remains in the poem, precipitating the social world which Eliot, as a self-defined outsider, chose to see as corrupted by a variety of frauds, interlopers, and people whose "nerves are bad." Against this, a second voice claims for itself a *special* privilege, not contingent on the social world the satiric voice condemns, but gaining whatever significance it has by active eschewing of that world. It resembles the voice of the solo instrument in a classical concerto emerging as a single stream of notes

from the polyvocal background of the orchestra. The mythical framework of *The Waste Land* functions partially to authenticate this second voice. It is compounded of the prophetic strain in Blake and the Bible, and of the distinctive lyricism of Wagner's operas (Kenner 1966: 146-147; Knust 1967 passim; Harris 1974: 105-116).

This second voice occupies the wastes beyond the margins of the liberal middle class, against which it is arrayed as a speech more authentic than any available within that class. It is elemental: "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?"; it occupies the obscure hidden places of the urban world: the abandoned banks of the Thames, "round behind the gashouse," one of the more obscure of Wren's churches, "empty cisterns and exhausted wells." From these places in and beyond the margins of society, both voices 'do' Eliot's vision of the world, a vision made necessary by the perception, in the words of Eliot's Bloomsbury acquaintance John Maynard Keynes, that "the forces of the nineteenth century have run their course and are exhausted" (1920: 254).

These two voices, it is important to note, are not opposed to each other; they are complementary. They are two particular responses to the social and literary reality in England, ca. 1914-1922, that Eliot could not accept. Its literary aspect was dominated by a narrow provincialism, for which Swinburne provided one limit and his successors, the Georgians, provided the other; they were the analogues in literature of Whig liberalism in politics. The First World War destroyed the idyllic dreams of the Georgians, revealing, to the modernists at least, the sordid outlines of a grubbily mercantile civilization. The stripping back of the

Edwardian literary regime disclosed a culture steeped in its own special sentimentality and the soft-headed nationalism of men like Rupert Brooke, who, speaking of himself in the third person, wrote the following in *The New Statesman*, August 29, 1914.

He was immensely surprised to perceive that the actual earth of England held for him a quality which he found in A \_\_\_\_\_, and in a friend's honour, and scarcely anywhere else, a quality which, if he'd ever been sentimental enough to use the word, he'd have called 'holiness'. His astonishment grew as the full flood of 'England' swept over him on from thought to thought. He felt the triumphant helplessness of a lover. Grey, uneven little fields, and small, ancient hedges rushed before him, wild flowers, elms and beeches, gentleness, sedate houses of red brick, proudly unassuming, a countryside of rambling hills and friendly copses. . . . And continually he seemed to see the set of a mouth he knew to be his mother's, and A \_\_\_\_\_'s face, and, inexplicably, the face of an old man he had once passed in a Warwickshire village. To his great disgust, the most commonplace sentiments found utterance in him. At the same time he was extraordinarily happy. (1956: 199-200)

Performances such as these endeared Brooke to the English press at the outbreak of the war. Here was an England worth fighting for. With this England in mind Brooke and a million others were swept to their deaths. It was Eliot who helped describe the 'wasted' England to which the survivors returned.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation  
 Dragging its slimy belly on the bank  
 While I was fishing in the dull canal  
 On a winter evening round behind the gashouse  
 Musing upon the king my brother's wreck  
 And on the king my father's death before him.  
 (CP 70)

Those contemporary readers for whom *The Waste Land* was primarily a comment on the ethical ruins of a civilization and, thus, meant something they could hardly put into words because the poem made it clear that they, too, were implicated in that ruin, knew, as part of the culture that had formed their thought and feeling, exactly how to read the juxtaposition which these lines from the opening of "The Fire Sermon" set up *hors de texte* with the civilization and values on which the Brooke text rests. I am not arguing that Eliot's hostility was aimed at England as a whole. Nothing could be further from the truth. Eliot's attack sought to perturb the ruling ideas of a particular section of the metropolitan upper and upper middle class and the intelligentsia that articulated them, 'progressives' of Shaw's, Bennett's, and Wells's type (*SW* xiii-xiv), as well as softer-headed liberals like Brooke, the Brooke of the "Democracy and the Arts" lecture to the Cambridge University Fabian Society in 1910 (1956: 68-82). Eliot was never the anglophobe Ezra Pound became, the Pound of *Cantos* 14-16 and the war broadcasts from Rome. Indeed Eliot's own peculiar anglophilia had already begun to take shape in *The Waste Land* period and his specific socio-political allegiances already become visible. At one end, the content of these allegiances even led Eliot to publicly approve of, in a letter to the editor, the first mass circulation newspaper in England, the right wing *Daily Mail*; his letter, printed January 8, 1923, found the paper correct "on nearly every public question of present importance" (Gallup 1969: 209 and Jones 1974: 51).

The metonymic Voice 'does' the particular voices of the crisis of post-war Europe memorably and the poem's first readers no doubt heard them all to pointed effect. But if we move in closer to the Voice that

'does' or mimics the voices of the catastrophe, we can hear the hesitations of a deeper crisis, namely, 'the legitimation crisis'<sup>18</sup> of the poem's *saeva indignatio* (Kernan 1971: 261-262). This Voice cannot claim an inherited social place from which to speak, nor an inherited network of precedent meanings and discursive practices that enacts them, as, for example, Sam Johnson could when he wrote his Juvenalian satire, "London," in 1745, or the Elizabethan satirists of the 1590s whom a living discursive tradition supported. Eliot must validate his right to speak in some other way. It is as the psychologically daring explorer of the peripheral 'waste lands' of the liberal ethos that Eliot chooses to ground the genuineness of the gibing, mimicking Voice. With an ear quickly alert to the cognitive and perceptual dissonances on the underside of the reigning liberal order of reality, there, where the psycho-social wrecks and disasters are encountered, where the irreducibility of the suffering consciousness cannot be dissolved by the smooth manoeuvres of Enlightenment rationality, where the most appropriate lyricism is the Wagnerian lyricism of erotic misery, there Eliot chose to speak from. It is because the metaphoric Voice can sing

I will show you fear in a handful of dust  
(CP 64)

and can then perfectly adjust its tone and pitch with

*Frisch weht der Wind  
Der Heimat zu  
Mein Irisch Kind,  
Wo weilest du?*  
(CP 64)

that makes it possible to do the representative social voices of "A Game of Chess" with an *earned* authority. For this Wagner was a brilliant choice as one of the constitutive 'sounds' of the metaphorical Voice.

The legitimation of the metonymic Voice simply on the basis of the dubious privileges a Bohemian marginality claims for itself could make very little favourable impression on minds accustomed to the psycho-ethical rigidities of *Punch*, the *Standard*, "the *British Banner*, Judge Edmonds, . . . and the Commercial Travellers" (*FLA* 59). The persona of *le poète maudit* carried no special privilege as a social observer and interpreter in a world in which F. L. Lucas presided over the fate of literature in the literary pages of a major weekly (Lucas 1923: 117). Of course, we now recognize Wagner, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud as major artists, a position they did not occupy for their own time, a time which assigned them to a culturally unassimilable and socially irresponsible *avant-garde*. Wagner, however, gave the poem's metaphorical Voice, with its impressive Rimboldian and, of course, Baudelairian, subjectivity and intensity, an authority grounded in the mytho-anthropological framing strategy. The link of the intense inwardness associated with Rimbaud and Baudelaire and the scholarly objectivity of Jessie Weston, Sir James Frazer, and Jane Harrison *through Wagner* is one of the more amazing syntheses in twentieth-century poetry. Clearly it was Jessie Weston's remarks on the Wagnerian transformation, in psychological terms, of the ancient myths of quest and initiation in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) that suggested the linkage. The function this link served was to give the metaphorical Voice, with its prophetic and lyrical passions, an objective basis in myth as understood by an institutionally respectable,



but ethically objective, anthropology. F. L. Lucas was confounded, as was the whole Gladstonian generation of literary men, whose moral sensibilities had been formed in a comfortable English mix of contradictory thirds by John Morley's Cobdenite earnestness, Randolph Churchill's cynical realism, and Joseph Chamberlain's trade driven Imperialism. For Lucas, the anthropology meant nothing more than the sacrifice of art to "some fantastic mumbo-jumbo" (1923: 117), yet it was a mumbo-jumbo that *did* have the Cambridge University Press emblem on its title-page, a fact Eliot was not above exploiting in his notes to the poem (CP 80). But the anthropology served to establish for Eliot's primary (and most sympathetic) audience a new objective authority for the exertions of *le poète maudit*, a figure whose specific lyricism from the margins of society had come to signify an art of wearisome self-absorption, hysterical attitudinizing, and melodramatic shock effects (cf. Pound's *Mauberley*). Eliot clearly identifies his primary audience in the acknowledgements in the headnote to "Notes on the Waste Land": "To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, *one which has influenced our generation profoundly*; I mean *The Golden Bough* (CP 80, my emphasis). Whether *The Golden Bough* had had the effect Eliot claims for it or not (it probably hadn't), he was putting his own generation on notice that the old literary manoeuvres that had worked in the 1870s for Swinburne, and in the 1890s for his successors, could no longer be attempted in the psycho-ethical wreckage of the 1920s.

The authority of the metaphoric Voice with its roots in the deepest recesses of the collective consciousness legitimated the poem's representations of the social world, legitimated, in short, the 'representativeness'

of Eliot's selection of social detail, the figures, situations, texts, and voices which, metonymically, foreground the recognizable social semantics of contemporary London. "A Game of Chess" is *The Waste Land's* most sustained attempt to render through a carefully chosen ensemble of placing character-types, situations, master texts, and voices the subjective experience of the social whole, not as chronicle and physical event, but the experience of its intersubjective reality.

The conventional reading of "A Game of Chess" asserts that here the poem unequivocally laments the betrayal and dissolution of romantic passion at all cultural levels (Smith 1976: 79). But it does much more than that. Hugh Kenner has accurately observed that the crucial thematic element of this game of chess is the absence of the king. His absence is emphasized by the implied imagery of the stricken king drawn from the poem's incidental mythology. Without the virile presence of the king, the Grail legend tells us, a "frosty silence" (CP 76) grips the kindgom; the king's infertility becomes an "agony in stony places" (76). In "A Game of Chess" the absent king, an emblem of the travails of Amfortas, freezes the social world in three characterizing *verbal* tableaux.

Our attention is focussed on the queen (Kenner 1966: 131) and she, although a 'presence' in the section, is virtually stationary, reflecting in her inoperancy the effect of the king's absence, an effect that manifests through the social hierarchy that the 'game of chess' figures. The heroic-epic blank verse of the first thirty-three lines (77-110) is unable to settle in the substantial centre of the epic experience an heroic *action*<sup>19</sup> worthy of, or appropriate to, the 'elevated' rhetoric. The verse, instead, is all texture and effect; the swollen diction, the

syntactic polish, the nerveless metrics, are none of them the signs of a moral act (Kenner 1966: 132). We have only the *noise* that heroic poems make and, thus, no issue. Without the 'king' there is no speaker, no subject, who can authenticate the voice. When the scene changes after the line break at line 110, a break that appears in every draft published by Valerie Eliot, the blank verse totters on for four more lines, but the carriage and stichic solidity are already seriously impaired. White spaces appear, half and quarter lines close at the fissures, until single words--"Do" (121), "'Nothing?'" (123), "But" (127)--remain as the merest traces of the former massing. The change from the architectonic blank verse to this shifting metrical ruin is of course masterfully manipulated by Eliot and it more evocatively than any other writing of the time, except perhaps D. H. Lawrence's Swiss scenes between Gerald and Gudrun in *Women in Love* (1921), captures that panicky, frigid nervousness that characterizes the post-War exhaustion, what Micheál Mac Lianmóir, the Irish writer and actor, called in his autobiography "those far-off days of icy peaks and shattered nerves and billions of marks" (1947: 106).

The more definite line break after line 138 (again appearing in all published drafts), while clearly marking the decisive class division of society, also retrieves the verbal texture to continuous discourse, but the metrical salad that results offers no solution to the section's deliberately problematic textural effects. This metrical casualness is perhaps appropriate to the activity of the pawns. After the breakdowns and arrested states 'above', the poem shifts attention to what Eliot (in a rather middle class way) took to be the central working class social arena, the pub (cf. Bergonzi 1972: 100-101). But the overall impression

of the monologue that results is of a class not yet fully conscious of itself *as a class* and, thus, an historical entity of no importance. The publican's calls, as has often been remarked, are a quickening device; the monologue grows more rushed as the Time comes. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the calls and the quickening tempo gesture towards the pressure of history itself (cf. Smith 1974: 83)? "Time" is short, for the whole system, not just for part of it. Without its centre of gravity --the 'king'--the social whole is doomed to stasis. However, the issue of this quickening and intensification in the social semantics of the text comes to nothing: the pawns, Bill, Lou, May, et al., simply get up and go home to the rhyming of whole utterances across three centuries of verbal history (Smith 1974: 83). Eliot suspends the working class for the time being; it is there, in the 'game', but it is caught up in the snares of its own jealousies, limited commitments, anxieties. With the reference to the 'abortion' though, a more sinister element creeps in, for Eliot seems to be presenting this class in a state not only of intellectual, but of biological stasis as well, denying even the historical destiny to which the 'lower orders' have usually been assigned by the conservative myth of good order and 'natural' continuity (cf. Kenner 1966: 135).

When this section of the poem is immersed again in the historical context from which it was written, the resonances of its theme can be more clearly discerned. If we are justified in reading this section, metonymically, as Eliot's vision of the paralysis which grips the psycho-ethical life of the whole social system, a kind of snapshot of the inter-subjective reality of three principal social divisions, divisions

decisively marked in the text, we might learn much by asking why it occurred to Eliot to represent the lived density of post-War England in this way. Of course, there are some immediate observations that should be made. Chess sans king is a game without a motive for action, in other words, a game frozen in stasis. Extending this master metaphor to the social arena over which it spreads a canopy of attitudes and values, we might note that in fact the issue of defective and defecting leadership, of the passing of traditional kinds of authority, and of the crisis of the hero and the responsibilities of the public man of affairs were the themes that characterized, indeed obsessed, the literary and intellectual culture of Europe in those years. Eliot, therefore, is very much in step with many other writers and intellectuals of his own generation (see Wohl 1979: 229 and *passim*).

No single book more clearly underlines the crisis of action and leadership in the war years and after than Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). This was a book of moment in its time, and although it no longer carries the sting it did in 1918, its celebrity then highlights for us now an important network of meanings. It appeared at the moment of the greatest ideological disarray and confusion in that first post-Victorian generation, which, founding its authority on the values of the earlier epoch, saw them permanently deranged by the senseless carnage of the Great War. The generation in positions and offices of authority and power under Edward VII and George V were the sons of the 'eminent Victorians'. Strachey's generation were the grandsons and granddaughters. It was their fathers who had accepted the dogmas, values, beliefs, ideas, and standards of order and intelligibility from the

Victorians and tried, unsuccessfully, to apply them to radically changed circumstances. Although its positive theme is to elucidate the world of the grandparents, the book, read in the context of the physical and ethical disasters of war and the ensuing peace in 1918 and 1919, is, negatively, about the world of the fathers as well. Indeed the book of the grandson, the heir of all this, seems to be asking the father who has just sat through the War's carnage why he ever thought that grandfather (or grandmother for that matter) was anything more than an eccentric, psychologically unstable, ethical hooligan, both dangerous (Florence Nightingale) and clownish (Thomas Arnold) at the same time.

The final biographical sketch can be read simply as an account of an interesting personality in the annals of British imperialism in the nineteenth century. But no one alive to the military absurdities to which the successors of General Gordon on the Imperial General Staff had condemned hundreds of thousands of British soldiers can miss the biting irony of the concluding sentence of that essay:

At any rate, it had all ended very happily--in a glorious slaughter of 20,000 Arabs, a vast addition to the British Empire, and a step in the Peerage for Sir Evelyn Baring. (266)

In 1918, when the book appeared, the slaughter of millions of Europeans had nothing "glorious" about it, nor did it all end "very happily." The reference to Baring's cynical careerism, with which the book ends, is a direct attack on the old Victorian standards of virile leadership and productive action. Baring, like Milner in Southern Africa and Curzon in India,<sup>20</sup> was one of the great proconsuls of Empire in the last decades

of the nineteenth century, a type who came to represent in the popular imagination, textualized by Kipling and the Imperialist press, the epitome of the Victorian idea of manhood and authority. These men managed the colonial legacy with a mixture of aristocratic *hauteur*, hypocrisy, cunning, absolute ethical certainty, and the blunt instruments of coercive power. However, their moment in history had largely passed by the time the Allied Powers convened at Versailles in 1919; the Barings and the Milners had been replaced by Lloyd George, a leader of quite another kind.

In John Maynard Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920), nothing comes through more clearly than the utter defection of moral and intellectual leadership of the Allied leaders. His devastating portrait of Woodrow Wilson at the Peace Conference, a man "far too slow-minded and bewildered" (44) to be able "to cope with the subtle and dangerous spellbinders whom a tremendous clash of forces and personalities had brought to the top as triumphant masters in the swift game of give and take, face to face in Council" is still painful to read (39). The American President's "prestige and . . . moral influence" (38) were "stifled in the hot and poisoned atmosphere of Paris" (48); and from which they never recovered. And Lloyd George, more competent than Wilson in "the agilities of the council chamber" (43), is dismissed as an abject opportunist out "to do a deal and bring home something which would pass muster for a week" (226). That the Welsh wizard represents the best that political Liberalism could exalt to the highest political authority in England did not escape the notice of the younger generation (*SE* 16). If Keynes's text is the horrified response to the dishonourable deals 'done'

at Versailles, Eliot's "A Game of Chess" names the necessary psychological and ethical desensitization in which such deals *can* be done. The collective failure of leaders and the elites who sustain them was epochal for the younger generation (Wohl 1979: 206). It was not a matter of local surgery here and there; the whole corpse stank. And it had to be got rid of. For Eliot this meant returning to the origin, some fundamental cultural point of departure, which, textualized as myth, determined and validated the fusion of inward experience and objective reality. The first origin he settled on was a false one.

In "What the Thunder Said" the metaphorical Voice collocates Wagnerian lyricism (the Parsifal allusions), the Biblical-prophetic voice (apocalyptic imagery), and what Eliot at the time tried to advance as the impersonal, superhuman, objectifying voice of our culture's origin in myth, understood, of course, anthropologically. This is the voice which Eliot 'does' that discloses the primary ethical imperatives--give, control, sympathize--which he chose, at this time, as the ones that erect culture, and all its numberless discriminated forms and meanings, in the context of a sacramentalized *nature* (Leach 1976: 71-75). A number of excellent commentaries on the allusions and references to the myths, legends, and scripture from which Eliot abstracted key details for this fifth section already exist from a variety of quite interesting perspectives (Smith 1974, ethical; Bolgan 1973, Bradleyan; Kenner 1966, experiential). However, none of them tackles the crucial question that ought always to be asked when a text represents a cultural origin. Assuming that an origin is prehistorical, the point from which a recuperable history springs, it is itself unrecuperable empirically. From one perspective,



the origin can be made visible (or audible) in speculation from clues and hints offered by the deeper underlying patterns of the historical becoming of positive forms and relations; but we can never naively accept the historical validity of a represented origin. The origin cannot be recuperated, except perhaps mystically or mytho-logically; the logic of historical and material reality cannot retrieve the moment of its own birth. All the means by which a recuperation of this sort may be attempted are thoroughly implicated in the post-original concreteness of history and are themselves products of that history, rather than immediate products of the origin. But what sense, then, are we to make of the attempt to represent an origin? As we cannot retrieve the origin in itself, our reconstruction of it has no absolute significance, but it does have an important and telling significance in the present. This is an extension into prehistory of Robert Weimann's notion of the historical past always carrying a specific, concrete meaning for the present, a meaning that has more to do with the present than with the past (Weimann 1976: 173). Indeed, if historical representations can never be fully unburdened of the socio-political realities of the present in which they are formulated, neither can prehistorical representations (perhaps even more so) be free of similar constraints, conditions, and compulsions. Thus, we examine the representations of origin in "What the Thunder Said," not for what they say about some actual possible origin, but for *what they say about the present in which they are chosen*. From all the possible ways of representing the origin what purpose do *these* representations serve in the common intuitive life in which the text has to make its way and in which it gambles, in the case of the unorthodox text, that

it can and will make sense?

In the face of the conventional Christian and scientific representations of the origin, "What the Thunder Said" is decidedly unorthodox. Clearly such a representation would not make sense to all the poem's readers: F. L. Lucas was not alone. But it did make sense for Eliot's generation. Most of them would have been hardpressed to say precisely what intrinsic meaning this section (and the poem as a whole) has; yet Eliot's own generation gave the poem an actively sympathetic reading, seeing it in fact as a cultural artifact that was representative of its time.<sup>21</sup> Later, Eliot denied he ever had any intention of acting as the voice of a generation. Yet the fact remains that, even though the poem was not particularly well understood, it soon won for itself astonishingly virile apologetics. The key to this paradox lay in what the poem *did* in the socio-verbal environment that embraced and entangled author, text, reader. Eliot's first readers experienced and understood implicitly, in a way we never can again, the pointed oppositions and challenges to the established semantic orders of the liberal ethos inscribed in the section's negative structure.

First of all, the terms in which "What the Thunder Said" attempt to totalize European civilization are deeply offensive to liberal orthodoxy as regards how the social whole ought best be conceived and what exactly lies at the core of the culture of civilized Europe. For nineteenth-century liberalism, in its century long debate with the *socially* powerful and rooted, but *philosophically* dispersed, remnants of feudal ideas, the appeal, in the conceptual movement towards adequate social totalization, has always been to general principle and abstract ideal, the 'rights of

man' strategy (O'Sullivan 1976: 82ff. and 119-128). In "What the Thunder Said" the attempted totalization of culture is based not on abstract notions, but on the occupation by the suffering consciousness of the social and psychological margins of society. Ethical and spiritual extremes, symbolized by the references to Gethsemane and Golgotha (Smith 1974: 93), by the imagery of desert and mountain, of psychic terror ("Who is the third who walks always beside you?" [line 359]), of madness ("A woman drew her long black hair out tight / And fiddled whisper music on those strings" [377-378]) are the border regions from which totalization rises. These extreme states, individual and collective, legitimated by the poem's anthropological lore, stare dead in the face of that civic humanism, the essence of liberal social thought, badly shaken by the senseless armageddon of the Great War. The rational core of liberalism, nourished by Enlightenment ideas of reason and objectivity, and from which liberal thinking about society emerges, is here challenged and denied. "What the Thunder Said," in its grotesque mutations of the lyric voice, celebrates, Wagner-like, the eclipse of Enlightenment rationality. Instead of the lucid palace of abstract principles and ideals that houses social life and to which reason alone has access, Eliot does a voice booming up from the collective memory of the race, embodied in the primal myths of Indo-European culture, a source situated in the distant past and the distant places of experience. In comparison, the weedy voices of contemporary Europe are a meaningless, wailing gibber.

The collocation of the Christian "agony in stony places" and the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* as the culminating moment of the poem as a whole, as the moment in which the origin is glimpsed, gibes at the anti-

clerical and scientific thrust of nineteenth-century liberalism and at the 'general improvement' theology of the liberal stewardship of the English Church in Victoria's reign (Annan 1966: 150-156; Thomson 1983: 110). Lytton Strachey also aimed one of his sharpest darts at this morally strenuous and utilitarian brand of Christianity in his famous dismissal of Florence Nightingale's single excursion into the field of popular theology, her *Suggestions for Thoughts to the Searchers After Truth among the Artisans of England* (1860).

Yet her conception of God was certainly not orthodox. She felt towards Him as she might have felt towards a glorified sanitary engineer; and in some of her speculations she seems hardly to distinguish between the Deity and the Drains. As one turns over these singular pages, one has the impression that Miss Nightingale has got the Almighty too into her clutches, and that, if He is not careful, she will kill Him with overwork. (154)

But whereas Strachey's indictment of the Victorian temper spends itself impotently in an ultimately harmless slap-chic humour, Eliot's thrusts cut deeper and wider. Eliot is more interested in re-inscribing the foundations of human and social experience, an archaeological enterprise of far greater consequence and point.

To summarize then: *The Waste Land* is a poem that does not merely reflect the breakdown of an historical, social, and cultural order battered by the onslaught of violent forces operating under the name of modernity. For Eliot the disaster that characterized modernity was not an overturning, but the unavoidable, and ironic, culmination of that very order so lovingly celebrated in Victoria's last decade on the throne. Unlike the older generation, who saw in events like the Great War the

passing of a golden age, Eliot saw only that the 'golden age' was itself a heap of absurd socio-political axioms and perverse misreadings of the cultural past that had proved in the last instance to be made of the meanest alloy. The poem's enactment of the contemporary social scene in "The Burial of the Dead," "A Game of Chess," and "The Fire Sermon" exhibits the "negative liberal society" in which such events and people are typical. Eliot's choice of these events and people--Madame Sosotris, the cast of characters in "The Game of Chess," and the typist--as *representative* of a particular society is susceptible, of course, to a political analysis, which is to say, their representativeness is not self-evident, though they are presented as if it is. The "one bold stare" of the house agent's clerk, put back in the bourgeois context where staring is one of the major lapses in manners, does not hold up the mirror to a simple gesture, but illuminates the underlying conditions which make a mere clerk's swagger possible. What is exposed is the 'fact' that clerks in general no longer know their place. What we are to make of this 'fact' is pointedly signalled by the disgust which the specifics of the rendering provoke and the social distance generated by the Tiresian fore-sufferance. If the poem spoke the idiom of the positive moralist, then we might be justified in calling this procedure satiric. All we can really say under the circumstances is that these parts of the poem, and they have been previously identified, carry a satiric force. However, the authority they draw on, that gives weight to such a force, does not take the form of a known or an achieved civil and personal code. The authority on which *The Waste Land* rests is quite different and this difference accounts, I believe, for the revolutionary impact it made on its

first readers.

As its social critique was aimed negatively at the liberal ethos which Eliot felt had culminated in the War and its disorderly aftermath, *The Waste Land* could not visibly adopt some pre-liberal code of values. In the same way, the poem could not propose a post-liberal, historicist or materialist ethic without an historicizing epistemology. The poem's authority rested instead on other bases that provided, not a system of ideas as the primary form of legitimation, but a new lyric synthesis as a kind of experiential authenticity in a world in which the sacred cosmologies, on the one hand, had fallen prey to astrologers and charlatans, while, on the other, the cosmology of everyday life, i.e. the financial system (the "City" in the poem), had fallen into the soiled hands of racially indeterminate and shady importers of currants and the like, among them, of course, the pushing Jews of the Plunderbund. In the case of Madame Sosotris in the third section of "The Burial of the Dead," we have one of Eliot's more obsessive themes and character types. Later, in "The Dry Salvages," he would make more explicit the text that is only implied in the Madame Sosotris section of *The Waste Land*. There he would demolish, or so he thought, the liberal faith in pluralism by caustically enumerating a rich harvest of possibly virile, but irredeemably false faiths, which are balanced, and then outweighed, by what he calls in that poem "an occupation for the saint."

To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,  
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,  
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,  
Observe disease in signatures, evoke  
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm  
And tragedy from fingers; release omens

By. sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable  
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams  
Or barbituric acids, or dissect  
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors--  
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are  
usual  
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:  
And always will be, some of them especially  
When there is distress of nations and perplexity  
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.  
(CP 212)

As this part of "The Dry Salvages" amusingly alludes to a small section of Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, the list of false faiths and knowledge carries a double irony. Seeing that it was Montaigne's Pyrrhonism that provided an important impetus to Enlightenment ideas, it is ironic that Montaigne himself warns of the effects of an unattenuated pluralism in the midst of his argument for a radical scepticism that Eliot saw as one of the axiomatic roots of the contemporary intellectual promiscuity he vilifies in the passage. Montaigne writes:

. . . men no longer consider what the coins weigh and are worth, but each one in turn accepts them according to the value that common approbation and their currency give them. Men do not argue about the alloy, but about the rate of exchange: thus all things are accepted equally. They accept medicine as they do geometry; and sleight-of-hand, enchantments, ligatures, communication with the spirits of the dead, prognostications, horoscopy, and even that ridiculous pursuit of the philosopher's stone, everything is admitted without contradiction.

and then, after a discussion of palmistry, the decisive irony, a tonal pointedness that Eliot mastered early in his life:

I call you yourself to witness, whether with this  
knowledge a man may not pass in any company with  
reputation and favour. (Montaigne [1957]: 420)

Certainly, Madame Sosotris passes "with reputation and favour" in a society which can no longer distinguish the ancient and honourable offices of prophesy, suggested by the allusions to Ezekiel and Ecclesiastes, from the ministrations of the cardsharp.

But what kind of authority does the poem claim by grounding its placing judgements on what I have called a new lyric synthesis? The poem does not choose to contest on rational grounds the world view implied in its own metonyms, its choices of 'representative' events and character types. That terrain, progressively in the bourgeois era, falls to positivist, materialist, and instrumental conceptions of human reason, all of which Eliot found inimical to the Thomist conception he came to adopt (Nott 1958: 217; Kojecky 1971: 219). He closes off debate in that direction by choosing to submerge rational argument in a metonymic procedure that both advances the Concrete in all its supposed unanswerable obviousness while stealing a march on the General through the assumed representativeness of concrete metonyms. The poem attempts to penetrate below the level of rationalist consciousness where the conceptual currencies of the liberal ethos have no formative and directive power. Below that level lay the real story about human nature which "liberal thought" (FLA 50) perversely worked to obscure, by obscuring the intersection of the human and the divine at the deepest levels of consciousness. That stratum did not respond to the small-scale and portable logics of Enlightenment scientism, but to the special 'rationality' of mythic thought,



the 'logic' and narrative forms of which furnish the idiom of sub-rationalist, conscious life. To repeat: if not on the conventional rationalist basis, where does Eliot locate the authority of *The Waste Land*, an authority that can save the poem from mere eccentric sputter and give it a more commanding aspect? I think it was important for Eliot himself to feel the poem's command, and not just simply to make it convincing to sceptical readers; Lyndall Gordon's biography (1977) makes this inner need for strength in his own convictions a central theme in Eliot's early life. But to answer our question: the authority the poem claims has two dimensions.

The first is based on the aesthetics of French *symbolisme* and its extension into the Wagnerian music-drama (Black 1979: 81-84). Indeed the theoretical affinities of Baudelaire et al. and Wagner, that Eliot obviously intuited in the making of *The Waste Land*, can be seen now as nothing short of brilliant. Only in our own time are these important aesthetic and cultural connections being seriously explored.<sup>22</sup> From *symbolisme* Eliot adopted the notion of the epistemological self-sufficiency of aesthetic consciousness, its independence from rationalist instrumentality, and thus its more efficacious contact with experience, and at the deeper levels, contact with the divine through its earthly language in myth. From his French and German forbears, Eliot formulated a new discourse of experience which in the 1920s was still very much the voice of the contemporary *avant-garde* in Britain and, in that sense, it was a voice on the margins, without institutional authority. But here the ironic, even sneering, dismissal of the liberal stewardship of culture and society reverses the semiotics of authority-claims by giving

to the voice on the margins an authority the institutional voices can no longer assume since the world they are meant to sustain has finally been seen through in all those concrete ways the poem mercilessly enacts. *The Waste Land* is quite clear on that point. We are meant to see in "The Fire Sermon," for example, the "loitering heirs of City directors" weakly giving way to the hated *métèques*, so that the City, one of the 'holy' places of mercantilism, has fallen to profane hands. The biting humour in this is inescapable.

From *symbolisme* and the Wagnerian music-drama Eliot synthesized a new lyric voice that brought to his poetry an experiential intensity and candour that gained authority from the quality of its perceptions and, ironically, from its social marginality, that is, its isolation in a contaminated environment. It appealed to his own generation by the vivid contrast this lyric voice set up with the unravelled remnants of Victorian 'high seriousness', a tone the Edwardian sons and grandsons still thought worth adopting. But such a tone was already a dead letter by 1895, the year of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue, Wagner a new kind of seriousness shapes the voice and it is this voice, capable of wider and more delicate effects of irony and temperament, that informs the second section of "The Burial of the Dead," the first and most of the second sections of "The Fire Sermon," "Death by Water," and "What the Thunder Said."

This new lyric consciousness, marked by the extended tonal range that more accurately captures the experience and ironies of life at the end of an era, was designed to provoke those whose ear for the voice in poetry rested with the reigning Swinburnianism. Here the collocation

of *The Sacred Wood* and *The Waste Land* becomes particularly important. In addition to hearing this new lyricism as one more mutation in the development of the lyric voice in English poetry, we must hear in it, not just a new music, but a claim to authority operative in a particular polemical climate. In all the spiky relationships this voice, and what it is saying, sets up with the immediate common intuitive life of the liberal bourgeoisie, we hear singing the tone of a then unsurpassable authenticity.

The second dimension of the authority on which *The Waste Land's* critique rests involves the new discourse on myth that comes from the revolutionary advances in anthropology in Eliot's time associated with the names of Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and the Cambridge School led by Sir James Frazer and Jane Harrison. We know that Eliot was well-acquainted with these developments at least as early as 1913-1914. The importance of these new ideas involved rethinking the study of ancient and primitive societies. The impact of these renovations was swift and profound and corresponds, though less publicly, to the impact of *The Origin of the Species* on the educated public of mid-century Victorian life. Modernist interest in primitive forms of art (Picasso, Lawrence, and many others), and, therefore, the idioms and structures of thought and feeling in primitive cultures, makes sense in several ways. Clearly the artistic practices of primitive peoples are interesting technically to other artists of any era. Interest in the affective world or the collective mentality of a primitive society is another question altogether. That interest, neutral, perhaps, in scholarship, becomes very easy to formulate as a critique of practices and structures in the

present that one wants to represent as distortions and caricatures of some original state of nature from which modernity has catastrophically departed. Eliot's interest in the mythic thought of primitive cultures, beginning at Harvard, perhaps in the spirit of scientific enquiry, takes a different form in the argument of *The Waste Land*. There it functions pointedly as a negative critique of the liberal account of the origins of society in the institutions of contract, abstract political and civil rights, and mechanistic psychology.

The anthropologists delivered the key cultural production of primitive societies--myth--from the view that saw these ancient narratives either as the quaint decorative brio of simple folk, or if they were Greek, the narrative mirrors of heroic society. Instead myth, and not just the myths of the Greeks, was re-conceived as the narrative thematics of pre-rationalist cosmologies that provided an account of the relationship between the human and the divine. Myth was also interpreted psychologically, and Nietzsche is crucial in this development, as making visible the deeper strata of the mind. If the concept is the notional idiom of reason, myth is the language sub-rational, conscious life speaks. What Eliot intuited from this new understanding was that myth provided a totalizing structure that could make sense, equally, of the state of a whole culture and of the whole structure of an individual mind. In this intuition he found the idiom of an elaborated, universalizing code which was not entirely the product of rationalist categories. In addition, this totalizing structure preserved the sacred dimension of life by seeing it inextricably entwined with the profane. For the expression of this intuition in the context of an environment with a heavy

stake in the elaborated codes of a rationalist and materialist world view which had subordinated the sacred to the profane, Eliot adapted for his own use the poetics of juxtaposition.

The textual discontinuity of *The Waste Land* has usually been read as the technical advance of a new aesthetic. The poetics of juxtaposition are often taken as providing the enabling rationale for the accomplishment of new aesthetic effects based on shock and surprise. And this view is easy enough to adopt when the poem is read in the narrow context of a purely literary history of mutated lyric forms. However, when the context is widened and the poem read as a motivated operation on an already always existing structure of significations, this technical advance is itself significant as a critique of settled forms of coherence. Discontinuity, from this perspective, is a symbolic form of "blasting and bombardiering." In the design of the whole poem, especially in its own use of contemporary anthropology, the broken textual surface must be read as the sign of the eruptive power of sub-rational forces re-asserting, seismically, the elemental totalities at the origins of culture and mind. The poem's finale in an orgy of social and elemental violence, the "Falling towers," lightning, and thunder, unveils what Eliot, at that time, took to be the base where individual mind and culture are united in the redemptive ethical imperatives spoken by the thunder. What the poem attempts here, by ascribing these ethical principles to the voice of nature and by drawing on the epistemological autonomy posited by *symbolisme*, is the construction of an elaborated code in which an authoritative universalizing vision can be achieved using a 'notional' (mythic) idiom uncontaminated by Enlightenment forms

of rationalism.

Powerful as it is in the affective and tonal programme of the poem, functioning as the conclusion to the poem's 'argument', this closural construction is, at best, precarious when seen beyond the shaping force of the immediate social and cultural context. This construction, achieved rhetorically, in fact is neither acceptable anthropology, nor sound theology, nor incontestable history, but draws on all these areas in order to make the necessary point in a particular affective climate. The extent to which the poem still carries unsurpassable imaginative power indicates the extent to which our own time has not broken entirely with the common intuitive life that the poem addressed sixty years ago.

Eliot himself abandoned his creation as soon as it was formulated, migrating to a Christian orthodoxy in the Anglican church. This movement to an institutionally established authority displaced the special kinds of authority claimed for the perceptiveness and argument in *The Waste Land*. The same perceptions and the same argument were, in the mid-1920s, lodged in a social institution; the critique of "negative liberal society" continued without interruption, but no longer from the margins. The lyric voice, alloyed on the margins, was not abandoned however; it was adapted to the new situation within an historical institution and within the discursive and notional modes which institutional affiliation provided.

From this new social position Eliot's critique of the liberal orthodoxies of thought and feeling continued. The attack, as before, remains focussed on the liberal-romantic *account* of experience. Important as immediate personal experience seems to be in *The Waste Land*,

enacted in the lyric intensity of the metaphoric Voice, it cannot be taken as final or absolute. The sharp focus on experience in *The Waste Land* is primarily strategic in the service of the dispersal of the liberal-romantic hegemony of thought and feeling. He is more sensitive to the way men and women *talk* about experience, than experience itself. The brilliantly achieved collocation of lyric consciousness, myth, and Indo-Christian scripturality embosomed by a sacramentalized nature, a synthesis that would have done lesser artists for a lifetime, was soon itself dispersed in Eliot's announcement of his final theme, the one that he would carry forward for the rest of his life.

The escape from his own brilliant creation coincides in fact with Eliot's own changing social position in England. By the late 1920s, he had closed socially on what he felt was the centre of English life in its most important and guiding social fraction. His earlier ambiguous position in an established and stratified society, a hierarchy in which he had no inherited privilege and thus no access to a voice 'natural' to any one of its discriminated ranks, led him, as we've seen, to construct one. This new lyrical voice gave his middle class audience a vision of the reality which embraced them, from a place (on the margins) which was not implicated in the psycho-ethical impotence of the reigning order (see Bergonzi 1972: 100). But this composite voice was ultimately like Blake's, as Eliot described it in *The Sacred Wood*, adrift without an anchor in a "framework of accepted and traditional ideas," a voice "with a capacity for considerable understanding of human nature, with a remarkable and original sense of language and the music of language, and a gift of hallucinated vision" (*SW* 157-158), but without the historical

nourishment of an institutionalized cosmological tradition. Blake required respect for "impersonal reason . . . common sense . . . the objectivity of science" (sw 157). But the reason, common sense, and science which Eliot recommends here were not the orders of rationality which *The Waste Land* assaults. Eliot was not against reason, common sense, and science; he was simply against the way these were used in the liberal ethos. With the publication of *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1927) and "Ash Wednesday" (1930) Eliot moved decisively towards gaining the institutional authority he believed Dante to have had.

The name of Dante brings to focus a final, philosophical point. One of the many revolutionary intellectual impulses of Enlightenment thought was the progressive alloying of reason and freedom as constituting the two elements of a single human essence informing each and every individual. The consequences of this identification have been profound in every area of human life. But for Eliot this union of reason and freedom in the individual represented the crucial seed of discord in modernity, planted at the beginning of the bourgeois era. *The Waste Land* presents the consequences of, what seemed to him, a misguided faith. From *The Waste Land* on, he more explicitly moved to re-establish the notion that reason is intrinsic to, that it inheres fundamentally to, historical institutions, not to the atomic individual, and that an apostolic and historical Church embodies to the profoundest degree Reason as such, or at least a Reason which carries a non-human, divine authority. From this perspective, the individual, as conceived in Christian doctrine as limited and fallen, approaches Reason the closer he is to its sacred source and, in that way, and in that way alone, can guarantee his freedom. Having come



to this position, acknowledged in practice in 1927 by his acceptance of the Anglican confession, Eliot began to point his poetry in a different direction.

## Notes to Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> This line of critical thought has characterized formalist and new critical readings of the poem from John Crowe Ransom (1923) to A. D. Moody (1979). This view adopts, tacitly, the principles of *imagisme* as sketched by Pound and Flint in 1912-1913 and looks back to modernist valuation of immediate experience. Years later Wallace Stevens, in his re-affirmation of the modernism which underlay his own practice, could write:

The poem is the cry of its occasion,  
Part of the res itself and not about it.  
("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," in  
CP 1954, 1971: 473)

For Eliot, F. H. Bradley provides the necessary philosophical underpinning (see Bradley 1914: 173-176).

<sup>2</sup> Such a formulation is not unwarranted on a close scrutiny of Eliot's "Thoughts after Lambeth" (SE 320-342) and his major statement on the function of the clergy within the "Community of Christians" in *Idea* 25-44. Eliot's belief in the necessary guiding function of an historical *ecclesia* never wavered. Both Bantock (1969) and Kojecky (1971) comment at length on what I have called here Eliot's episcopalianism.

<sup>3</sup> Eliot returns to this theme again and again throughout his early literary journalism and critical statements. "The Romantic Generation, If It Existed" in the *Athenaeum* (1919) is a particularly pointed example of this. Writing in retrospect, Eliot recalled the literary climate in

London when Ezra Pound first arrived on the scene: "But I do not think it is too sweeping to say that there was no poet, in either country, who could have been of use to a beginner in 1908. The only recourse was to poetry of another age and to poetry of another language. Browning was more of a hindrance than a help, for he had gone some way, but not far enough, in discovering a contemporary idiom. And at that stage, Poe and Whitman had to be seen through French eyes. The question was still: where do we go from Swinburne? and the answer appeared to be, nowhere" (1946: 326-327).

<sup>4</sup> "The opulent Wagnerian pathos, with its harmonic rather than linear development and its trick of entrancing the attention with *leit-motifs*, is never unrelated to the methods of *The Waste Land* (Kenner 1966: 146). Kenner recognized twenty years ago that there can be no "linear development" of meaning in these sequences. However, thinking of these sequences 'harmonically' does not really make sense of them either. Yet, we 'know' what Eliot is saying here. How he makes sense lies in the tacit recognition of the voices we hear, which constitute the poem's texture at this point, and the social Voice, unified, coherent, repeating the typical social attitudes of a particular class.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Donald Davie on "Dry Salvages" (1969: 155).

<sup>6</sup> This deeper level of coherence and intelligibility, where fragmented and alienated consciousness coalesces into 'natural' unities, Eliot himself, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), described as "auditory," a level where the speaking voice enacts the deepest "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 origins and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality." Quoted in Hawkes 1977: 34-35 and see Hawkes's very interesting comments following (35-38). This study, of course, argues that the penetrative processes described here are neither unconscious nor blind, but highly conscious, motivated and meant to violently contest an affective terrain dominated by romantic forms of inwardness.

<sup>7</sup> The sort of literary practice I have in mind here is the common seventeenth-century technique of coding contemporary social and political events through typological patterns drawn from scriptural and classical sources. Such practices, working metaphorically, use the typological device to frame the contemporary content and to position the reader for its proper ideological reception. This is no more clearly seen than in poems like Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis" (1667) or "Absalom and Achitophel" (1681) in which ways of seeing important public events and personalities are rhetorically controlled through the metaphorical determinism of typological patterning. For a thorough examination of Dryden's 'metaphorizing' of history as an ideological practice, see Miner 1968: 3-35 and 106-143.

<sup>8</sup> An adequate understanding of 'genre' has been a problem since the romantics. Abrams 1958: 241-244 and Stone 1967 are still good attempts to give some order to a confusing situation as regards genre in the 1780-1820 period. Culler (1975: 134-138) attempts to reconstruct a theory of

genre from within a renewed, or neo-, formalism. Todorov (1977: 42-43) acknowledges the difficulties of generic criticism since the romantics, but asserts that the notion of genre is still useful in studying popular literature. However, the most interesting recent theorizing about genre as a useful critical principle is Fredric Jameson's "dialectical" sense of genre (1981: 141-147) which adapts, brilliantly, Louis Hjelmslev's "four-part mapping of the expression and the content of what he sees as the twin dimensions of the form and the substance of speech" (147).

<sup>9</sup> The New Critical 'disappearing' of Shelley, for example, reveals the conceptual narrowness of a formalist tradition of reading that refused to theorize the text's concrete, practical relationship to its meaning environment, a relationship stabilized, before the romantics, by the rhetorical system. A change in aesthetic orientation, such as the transition from neo-classicism to romanticism, cannot efface that fundamental and unavoidable relationship; it is always there; a poem must always do something with it. In romanticism, social meaning, for the first time, is fed directly into the *language* of the poem below the formal reach of whatever generic manoeuvres, unsurpassed remnants of the earlier orientation, occur in the poem's externals. This is the practical result of the revolution in diction in the period (see Eliot's comments in *Poetry* 159).

<sup>10</sup> Lyndall Gordon has recently put this view of the relation of myth and experience as baldly as it can be put. Stravinsky's music, *Ulysses*, *The Golden Bough*, she writes, led Eliot to see "that one might strip brute experience of its contexts and explanations, leaving the abrupt fact exposed, and simplify it further by showing the repetition

of the same experience along the continuum of history" (1977: 108). But see Lionel Trilling on this characteristically bourgeois notion (1972: 11-12, 108).

<sup>11</sup> The notion of the adulteration and degeneration of European culture through contact with non-European races was a politically potent theme in conservative polemics in the nineteenth century. Arthur de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1853) was the master text in this line of thought (Biddiss 1970: 114-115) and it provided one of the major intellectual influences for Charles Maurras (Biddiss 1970: 74). The notion of racial degeneration was picked up and magnified by Maurras in the first decades of our century: "Gobineau saw the place that is held in France by the *déracinés* and recorded how they work towards our decomposition" (quoted in and translated by Biddiss 1970: 74). This is the intellectual tradition on which Eliot draws in his early portraits of "jews" in the poetry and in his famous comments on the Jews in *After Strange Gods* and the *Criterion* through the 1920s and early 1930s.

<sup>12</sup> For a humorous account of the "natural tradition in English poetry" and the critical clichés that came to accompany it in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Connolly 1948: 166-167.

<sup>13</sup> James Thompson's *The Seasons* is the defining example. See Cohen 1970.

<sup>14</sup> It is this understanding of the socio-verbal context in which Eliot wrote that makes for the excellence of Hugh Kenner's *Invisible Poet* (1966).

<sup>15</sup> Indeed Eliot himself was no idle spectator in the political and economic transformation of Europe in the immediate post-War years. As a

member of the Foreign and Colonial Department of Lloyd's Bank with special (and sole) responsibility for "all the debts and claims of the bank in connection with the Peace Treaties" (Kojacky 1971: 50) he was *professionally* interested in an accurate and rational understanding of contemporary history, especially in the political and ideological battlefield of Eastern Europe (see Cook 1979: 341-355).

<sup>16</sup> The history summarized in the following paragraphs is drawn mainly from Watt 1968: 369-389.

<sup>17</sup> In comparison to Pound's own abilities in this respect, Eliot's attempts at reproducing the metropolitan voices he wants us not only to hear, but to dismiss, are rather crude. This same intention is more tellingly realized in Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920; rpt. 1926, n.d.: 185-204). Indeed in the domain of capturing accurately the defining tonalities of a particular literary sociolect Pound is clearly the master--*il miglior fabbro*.

<sup>18</sup> I have taken this useful phrase from Jurgen Habermas (1975).

<sup>19</sup> By "heroic action" I allude to Aristotle's emphasis on "action" as the object of representation in epic and tragic literature (Aristotle 1967: 38).

<sup>20</sup> Evelyn Baring (1841-1917), Alfred Milner (1854-1925), George Nathaniel Curzon (1859-1925).

<sup>21</sup> Wilson 1922: 611-616; Seldes 1922: 614-616; Untermeyer 1923: 453; Aiken 1923: 294-295; Bell 1923: 772-773.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to Michael Black's important essay (1979), Herbert Knust's *Wagner, The King, and The Waste Land* (1967) examines this synthesis in relation to Eliot. Harris 1974: 105-116 and Blisset 1978:

71-85 are also useful contributions to this aspect of Eliot's poem.



## Chapter Six: A very long perspective

Within a handful of years after the publication of *The Waste Land* Eliot closed the door on the "mythic method," perhaps recognizing the hopeless muddle into which a serious attempt to apply such an objectifying "method" can lead (Bergsten 1960: 129; Rajan 1976: 85; Traversi 1976: 23). Eliot in 1927 might have agreed, on this point at least, with Terry Eagleton's judgement of his use of myth.

The assumption of *The Waste Land* is that no principle of coherence can be found within Western culture itself: all classes of society, from debutantes and businessmen to clerks and working-people, are passively implicated in the same deep-rooted corruption. This is an attitude carried and expressed, not only in what is explicitly said, but in the 'totalising' framework which allows for such a detached and omniscient view of an entire culture. Yet while the attitude is the result of what this framework allows the poet to see, it is also the inevitable result: if you stand this far back, nothing will seem particularly valuable. The mythic structure can connect itself significantly with social experience only by first paring that experience to its own requirements. . . . (1970: 59)

The importance of the mythic framework to the poem is, in a sense, a late construction; the poem, in its earlier drafts, was far more rooted in Eliot's versions of the social world of post-War London (Smidt 1973: 13). The vast majority of the excisions was of parts generally social and satiric rather than bits drawn from the Cambridge anthropologists. After the major surgery of revision, the mythic elements grew far more salient, gradually constituting the whole framework that 'contains' the disinte-

grating society of contemporary Europe, and they help the reader to interpret its decline by putting it in a long perspective. A very long perspective. The limitations of such a structuring were manifest soon enough to Eliot, who, in his turn, began speaking of *The Waste Land* as a piece of personal griping, some "rhythmical grumbling" (*Facsimile* xxxiii), ensuring, in this oblique way, that he would not extend his blessing to those who heard in *The Waste Land* the voice of a generation prophesying The End of Western Civilization with an authority derived from the primal sources of that civilization.

We cannot know with certainty when Eliot decided that his use of myth in *The Waste Land* was no longer viable as an aesthetic practice; it probably coincides with the crisis in his personal life in 1923 (Gordon 1977: 123-125) and with the influence, perhaps, of William Force Stead who placed in Eliot's hand the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes in that year (Gordon 1977: 125).<sup>1</sup> In any case, it was in the five year period between the publication of the *Dial* review and the publication of *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1927) that Eliot swung decisively to an intellectual, affective, and social commitment to anglo-catholicism and to the institution of the Church of England. The visible Church gave him a thoroughly historical social locus which neither the notion of myth nor the "dehistoricized Hegel" (Eagleton 1976: 150-151) of Bradleyan idealism contained. Yet the Church, also, offered a transcendental signified that raises the Church's spiritual and cultural significance beyond mere contingency: it is both of the world and not of the world in a way that can adequately illuminate the relation of the historical *and* transcendental in a single visible unity. Neither the Bradleyan "felt whole in which there are moments of

knowledge" (KE 155) nor a "mythological framework" could work with the same efficiency and historically substantiated authority.

To the historical and spiritual synthesis that the institution of the Church and its body of doctrine represented for Eliot we must also add an aesthetic element. Eliot's was certainly not a puritanical Anglicanism; he was most decisively converted to the Laudian tendency of the Church of England. Indeed, on the second page of the volume in which his new allegiances are announced, and trenchantly defended, we find the Church under Elizabeth described in terms of a beautifully constructed *objet*, an *objet d'art* that reflects the "finest spirit" of Tudor England.

The *via media* which is the spirit of Anglicanism was the spirit of Elizabeth in all things;. . . . The taste or sensibility of Elizabeth, developed by her intuitive knowledge of the right policy for the hour and her ability to choose the right men to carry out that policy, determined the future of the English Church. In its persistence in finding a mean between Papacy and Presbytery the English Church under Elizabeth became something representative of the finest spirit of England of the time. It came to reflect not only the personality of Elizabeth herself, but the best community of her subjects of every rank. Other religious impulses, of varying degrees of spiritual value, were to assert themselves with greater vehemence during the next two reigns. But the Church at the end of the reign of Elizabeth, and as developed in certain directions under the next reign, was a masterpiece of ecclesiastical statesmanship. (FLA 12)

Putting aside for the moment its historical and transcendental aspects, the Church is here presented metonymically, in which we see reflected the whole of late Tudor culture. The actual shape of the description borrows

something from Henry James's delicacy in characterizing the mind's wry, startled tact in the presence of astonishing beauty, but pulls the passage back from mere aestheticism by the concrete polemical purpose which it uncompromisingly serves. This purpose can be summarized in a few words: the parenthetical aside to "other religious impulses" that asserted "themselves with [great] vehemence during the next two reigns" and which eventually led to the disfigurement of the Elizabethan "masterpiece" are not mentioned solely in the interests of historical fidelity and completeness. Later in the volume Eliot aggressively attacks some of the tendencies in English cultural history that led to the deformation of the Church and those forces which conspired, either wittingly or unwittingly, to block its renaissance as the "masterpiece" he claims it was in late Tudor times.<sup>2</sup>

The Church, as understood in that opening paragraph of the book, haunts the essays that follow; it hovers over the entire volume and gives a negative point to Eliot's judgements of the thinkers and writers he examines. The point is negative, in a dialectical sense, because, while the 'ecclesiastical masterpiece' has been effaced, its idea still lingers (cf. Margolis 1973: 106). In *The Waste Land* Eliot despaired for the absent King, the 'presence' which would authenticate the empty, gesturing voice at the beginning of "A Game of Chess." In *For Lancelot Andrewes* Eliot despairs for the absence of the living Church as the central ideal and institution of culture. Thus, the vision of the Church as the beautiful masterpiece at the opening of the volume is counterpointed by the incomplete "humanism" of Irving Babbitt at the end.

Mr Babbitt's critical judgement is exceptionally sound, and there is hardly one of his several remarks that is not, by itself, acceptable. It is the joints of his edifice, not the materials, that sometimes seem a bit weak. (FLA 106-107)

Against the poise, equilibrium, and "authority" of the Elizabethan Church, which made of its finest representatives--Gresham, Walsingham, Cecil, Parker, Whitgift, not to mention Andrewes, Donne, Hooker, Bramhall --the brilliant instruments of a unified purpose, Irving Babbitt offers, Eliot says, and, by inference, the best that a religion-less, humanistic modernity can offer, nothing more than the "individual" to whom there is nothing "anterior, exterior, or superior" (108), and on whom the full weight of objective values is precariously allowed to rest. Can a civilization function on such a narrow footing as the "individual," Eliot asks, if civilization is seen as "spiritual and intellectual co-ordination on a high level" rather than "material progress, cleanliness, etc." (109)? And in wryly offering his solution ("it is doubtful whether civilization can endure without religion, and religion without a church" [109]) Eliot gives Babbitt's weak-jointed edifice a gentle shove.

I am not here concerned with the question whether such a 'humanistic' civilization as that aimed at by Professor Babbitt is or is not *desirable*; only with the question whether it is *feasible*. From this point of view the danger of such theories is, I think, the danger of collapse. (FLA 109)

And when the dust settles, what the book leaves us with, if we return to the opening pages, is the vision of an Elizabethan Church, a splendid polished glass in which is reflected "not only the personality of Elizabeth herself, but the best community of her subjects of every rank."

The Elizabethan Church, functioning as a metonymic figure of social totality, projects *against* the *de facto* social pluralism (*Idea* 42ff.) and its political expressions of the 1920s (Barker 1978: 122-134), a vision of a social and cultural unity with a specifically *English* past, but one that was also "catholic and civilized and universal . . . . European and ripened and wise . . . ." (*FLA* 15, 59). But the vision and the social whole it represents are the products of a narrow reading of that past. Indeed, only an impaired historical insight could possibly lead Eliot into the several absurdities of *For Lancelot Andrewes* and its misshapen son *After Strange Gods* (1934). That he could exalt a minor seventeenth-century divine above the major achievement of Thomas Hobbes, whom Eliot characterizes in a curiously embittered tone as "one of those extraordinary little upstarts whom the chaotic motions of the Renaissance tossed into an eminence which they hardly deserved," is a lapse of judgment that suddenly lets glare the hard face of the rigid polemicist. This and other 'interested' readings of the English past betray Eliot's narrow, 'bookish' conception of England.

. . . It is certainly to the point to ask how well he knew the country and the people. . . . And if I read aright the mostly ungracious comments that may be culled from Englishmen of my own generation and younger, the consensus is that Eliot knew England and the English very imperfectly, after thirty years. Some of the evidence is too familiar to be worth dwelling on--such characteristically English voices as D. H. Lawrence's, Thomas Hardy's, William Blake's, Eliot showed himself more or less deaf to. But other features of Eliot's adopted Englishness may not be so apparent to a non-British audience; and in that sentence I have slipped in one of them already--"English" and "British" are not the same, and when Eliot welcomes "regionalism" in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, this is not going to satisfy people who

define themselves as Scottish or Welsh, let alone Irish. Among Eliot's British contemporaries, we need think only of David Jones, Robert Graves, and Hugh MacDiarmid, to be reminded how there are other ways of tying historic Britain in with European Christendom besides the one that Eliot impatiently or blandly took to be the one right way--through Canterbury and Lambeth. Eliot's sense of Britain is offensively metropolitan--and not of Britain, but of England too; his England is to all intents and purposes London, or at most the home counties.

(Davie 1973: 181-182)

Davie goes on to assert that even though the three English locales of *Four Quartets* are beyond the extent of the home counties, they are still places of pilgrimage, visited by an outsider, from London, or from St. Louis, Missouri for that matter. The England of the industrial Midlands, the non-metropolitan rural areas in the North and East, the ancient realms of the Celtic Fringe are for Eliot *terra incognita*, indeed, not simply unknown and unexplored, but actually despised as the seat of that narrow provincialism, crankiness, vulgarity, which for Eliot had its most obtuse and artless expression in what Donald Davie has called the "dissentient voice" in English culture. Interestingly enough, Davie finds the voice of religious Dissent consonant with the European Enlightenment (1978: 50). Perhaps Eliot's lifelong opposition to and ridicule of these "other religious impulses" (FLA 12) was provoked in part by his intuited recognition of just such intellectual and tonal affiliations between Dissent and Enlightenment.

Eliot's vision of England can be seen, in fact, to be entirely 'bookish', that is, derived from a thoroughly textualized experience of the English present, save in one particular, namely, the metropolitan social region he came to occupy. He knew the common intuitive life of

the Anglo-American upper middle class at first hand (Kojewky 1971: 218; Bergonzi 1972: 73, 100; Bateson 1977: 3, 7; Gordon 1977 *passim*). But for the rest of English life, his familiarity with the present was almost entirely limited by the idealist visions derived from the acceptance of certain canonic historical texts (the sermons of Andrewes, the poetry of the Metaphysicals, Samuel Johnson's two Juvenalian satires, late Coleridge, Bradley, the *Daily Mail*) and the telling rejections of others (Milton, the whole Dissenting tradition, romanticism, Bentham and his successors, Hardy, Lawrence). It would be a great mistake to infer from this fact that Eliot's allegiance to or feeling for England was conditional or incomplete. One cannot ever argue that Eliot did not *love* his adopted country. He loved it passionately and uncompromisingly, and the vehemence of his polemical engagements is achieved *only* in the context of this profound and freely-given love. But it is important to remember the point being made here. He could not hear the reach and necessity of Lawrence's voice, for instance, because he could not seriously accept the social and economic pressures, locally articulated, that helped form and deform the physical and social geography of Lawrence's England.<sup>3</sup> The England Eliot loved is plainly told in the opening pages of *For Lancelot Andrewes*, the third section of the opening movement of "East Coker" (CP 196-197), and the whole of "Little Gidding" (CP 214-223); it is this aetherial, Cavalier text of England that he took in. What he loved was a mixture of the real and the possible, a brilliant, responsive, but peculiarly domesticated, civilization, anchored in faith to its central, generative institution, the National Church, a civilization rising, not in ostentatious Baroque opulence, but closely knit in a finely sensible



common culture, rooted in Latinity, rising on the banks of the Thames, and, through the clear-voiced agency of an independent, but, paradoxically, obedient intelligentsia trained to the common intuitive life, radiating to every parish in the realm the imperatives of an achieved authority. The vision was ravishing, but it resembled too closely the visions of Don Quixote to be of much use in an England where most castles had already become inns and no amount of strenuously ironic polemic could turn them back into castles.

Eliot's meditations on this beguiling vision are presented in a way which broadly suggests that late Tudor and early Stuart times can serve as a sufficient model for the present. One cannot doubt that this is what Eliot actually thought. Indeed, the juxtapositions in *The Waste Land* of references and allusions to Elizabethan culture set against representative scenes from the contemporary world hardly make sense without our tacit understanding, which the poem carefully stimulates in its course, of the Elizabethans as a locus of supreme cultural values, an understanding which takes its primary meaning from the value given to Elizabethan England among the Edwardian and Georgian middle classes (Dowden 1910: 253) while, at the same time, redefining that value. When we put back Eliot's text of Elizabethan England in the time in which it was composed, we notice it was the period--the 1920s and 1930s--when historians like R. H. Tawney were having their first great impact, not only on the study of history, but on the popular conception of historical periods. Tawney's own revolutionary study of the Tudor epoch, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, although published in 1912, was read widely in the 1920s for the first time, as a consequence perhaps

of the impact which his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1922, 1977) had when it appeared and of Tawney's own visibility as an advisor on educational matters to the MacDonald ministries, before the General Strike.<sup>4</sup>

One of Tawney's principal contributions to this re-assessment was to vitiate historical studies and thinking in England of their essentialist and idealist orientations, and, instead, look more to political economy, to the infrastructural processes and contradictions of society, linking these processes to society's attempts to understand them in the notional framework to which it had access. In the mutations of dominant and subordinate modes of production and the material relations which they determine, Elizabethan and Stuart society hardly offered to Tawney the aesthetically pleasing and settled prospect Eliot chose to find. Which representation is correct is not my concern here. What is important is that Eliot's radiant vision of the Tudor Church and, by extension, of Tudor society appears at precisely the moment when revisionist historians, like Tawney, are bringing to light not a static, comfortably poised, imperturbable civilization, but a dynamic, materially and ideologically divided, untidy one. What this insurgent and assertive materialism tends to do to a conception like Eliot's, one dealing in essences and ideal forms, is switch a bright light on the way such a conception represents the logic of the system it totalizes, that is to say, the logic by which the society's critical elements and levels are connected. What is it that keeps a static society, such as the Elizabethan is presented as being, unified, coherent, and complete? Clearly the answer Eliot and a host of largely Tory historians and thinkers have traditionally given in

England is a socio-ethical one--loyalty to, obedience and trust in the paternalistic authoritarianism a governing elite practices in the context of a scrupulously divided and ranked hierarchical society (O'Sullivan 1976: 82-118; Nairn 1977: 57-83, especially 78-79).

Mutual and absolute trust, actualized in practice in an intuitive social network of intermediate loyalties encompassed by the larger, public rituals of fealty, people to king, king to God, naturalizes authority and the efficacy of the divisions and ranks of society, an efficacy purchased by a divinely supported confidence that social divisions and ranks conform, without exception, to the rule of Reason and to an essentially incontestable notion of Nature. That Eliot seriously believed that such a community could be nourished again on the banks of the Thames in the face of an England that was decisively set on a radically different course is a quixoticism so profound, and moving, that it must be the sign of a love for the late Tudor model as deep, as passionate, as clean as Alfonso Quixana's love for the radiant world he found in the chivalric romances on which he gorged his mind, his feelings, and his speech.

There are commitments and allegiances here that go well beyond his naming of his "general point of view . . . as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion," in the preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*. As is evident in what follows in the preface, Eliot was very aware of the impression such a profession could make on a sceptical audience he had helped acclimatize to irony and the placing pauses of the eloquent unsaid: "I am quite aware that the first term is completely vague, and easily lends itself to clap-trap; I am aware that

the second term is at present without definition, and easily lends itself to what is almost worse than clap-trap, I mean temperate conservatism; the third term does not rest with me to define" (*FLA* 7). Having taught his generation how to juxtapose the hollowness of Gladstonian earnestness and the pieties of liberalism against the cacophonies of the present, Eliot opens himself to the gibe of ponderous irrelevance. His agile qualifications, with their edge of bad-tempered exasperation directed at readers tuned to seeing through everything, acknowledge the risk of appearing ridiculous. After all, as the author of "The Hippopotamus" (*CP* 51-52), he had already struck an hilarious flat note in his generation's attitudes towards the very Church he now said he sincerely embraced (Bateson 1977: 3). The question of his sincerity in these new professions was as evident to him as it was to the startled expectations of his original readers. The occasionally cranky and rudely aggressive outbursts in the prose of the 1920s and 1930s, a measurable change from the controlled ironies of the early literary criticism, possibly suggest a new defensiveness.<sup>5</sup> His satiric, gibing voice fell short of mastering the imperatives of his new allegiances. It consequently withdrew from the poetry permanently and by "Ash Wednesday" (1930) it was no longer audible.

This poem is crucial for Eliot's subsequent development. The break with the tone of the earlier poems is now complete. A whole element has been subtracted. The moral duty to be ironical, which hangs over the earlier poems, is no longer recognized. It is as if the native earnestness had reasserted itself, and this time completely. What Eliot most wants he says he renounces. It is difficult to speak of the poem without entering rudely upon the man's inner integrity, which one cannot

know. But all criticism involves this presumption. One ought not to put the question quite in the form of whether Eliot in fact accepted the Christian faith as he hoped he did, for that would be to assume that one knows what the manifestation of such acceptance would look like. The question for the critic is whether we have in *Ash Wednesday* an expression of belief that carries us with it.

(Sisson 1971: 142)

The new rhythm and tension of "Ash Wednesday" probably cannot 'carry us with' its expression of belief, because the poem is too unsure of its own figurative footing, is too much an attempt to find a new aesthetic equilibrium before the ungainly fact of the public profession of religious belief, is too audibly listening to its own candour and its new approach to the common intuitive life, which now, as opposed to 1922, has Eliot's own previous reputation lying awkwardly across it. He finally achieves this new poise in 1935 in "Burnt Norton." However, "Ash Wednesday" is another matter.

First of all, it stammers.

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Because I do not hope  
Because I do not hope to turn

(CP 95)

It is not exactly clear what Eliot hopes to convey by this *procédé*; if it simply enacts in the manner the matter of the opening line, it is a rhetorical mannerism well below the demonstrated capacities of his technical skill. But in this new context, where only the purest simplicity will sustain the poem's professions, such a device is perhaps not inapt. Indeed the suggestion of a suspended or defeated floridness, a rebuke to both the smart glibness of the sceptical cosmopolite of the 1920s and the

yawning rotundities of Victorian devotional style, seems particularly apropos in the context of a resurrected passion and vitality. The marks of this simplicity are everywhere in the poem--in the narrowing, for example, of the lexical hoard to the small words with the greatest semantic draw: love, goodness, honour, brightness, hope. There is also a significant narrowing in the learning the poem wears (Bateson 1970: 43). Its range of reference is drawn from the common texts of his new allegiance: *The Book of Common Prayer*, the *Hymnal*, the language of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the *Anglo-Catholic Prayer Book*, the popular and literary devotional tradition, and, of course, on the horizon, the master texts of Dante. The direct, sinewy, anti-figurative presentational simplicity of *imagisme* is also turned to a new purpose in the composing of this new rhythm and tone. Gone also is the social ventriloquism and the feeling we have in his early poems that he spent a lot of time listening to the conversations in the next flat. In summary, we might apply to Eliot's style after his conversion what Erich Auerbach wrote of Augustine's after his. Auerbach's remarks about Augustine include his classic formulation of the effect of Christianity on the discursive practices of antiquity. Christ had not appeared to mankind as a king, hero, or rhetorician, but "as a human being of the lowest station."

Nevertheless, all that he did and said was of the highest and deepest dignity, more significant than anything else in the world. The style in which it was presented possessed little if any rhetorical culture in the antique sense; it was *sermo piscatorius* and yet it was extremely moving and much more impressive than the most sublime rhetorico-tragical literary work. (1974: 72)

Augustine "may well have been the first to become conscious of the problem of the stylistic contrast between the two worlds" (72-73) and accommodated his own impressive periodicity, acquired in the best rhetorical tradition, to the requirements of his new spiritual commitments.<sup>6</sup> "Ash Wednesday" may stammer, but the stammering is the 'music' of an unassailable candour.

"Ash Wednesday" represents an important mutation of voice in another sense. It acknowledges Eliot's stylistic commitment to the 'classicizing' tradition of High Modernism. By this I mean that he more clearly adopts and develops the approaches of Baudelaire and Mallarmé to the question of poetic language. Their concern to make a literary, and 'purified', dialect comes to preoccupy Eliot after "Ash Wednesday," a dialect which neither dissolves utterly in the many social voices of everyday life, nor exhibits that degree of artificiality and distance from the everyday we hear so palpably in the poetic diction of the lesser Augustans. The stripping away of romantic poetic diction which exercised him in his early work led to the polemical use of social voices. Eliot did not intend to develop a naive aesthetics of the common tongue, that is, to develop a poetic language which makes exclusive use of social voices and the discursive practices of everyday life. His use of such language was always in the service of a particular social and cultural critique. The lyrical synthesis in *The Waste Land* stays the drift of the poem to a kind of social ventriloquism, a drift to the 'musical' use of the many sound-shapes of actual speech. There is a Low Modernist tradition, however, which has, in fact, taken that course; its point of departure lies in the verbal practices of Arthur Rimbaud. It has culminated in our time in the

work of Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery at one end, and the "talk" poems of David Antin at another.<sup>7</sup>

With "Ash Wednesday" and its acclimatization of the lyrical voice of *The Waste Land* to the dictions and tonalities of Christian scripturality, Eliot moves decisively to the High Modernist tradition. His theoretical and practical efforts in this direction are well known. His recurring interest in the definition of the "classic," for example, is really an exploration of the possibilities of coining a poetic language and a notional idiom in which a "classic" literature might yet be composed in our time, a language that has the colloquial suppleness of the everyday, projecting a voice that is not narrowly the voice of a single class, and yet a language formal enough that it achieves an authentic, and 'high' seriousness (Kenner 1966: 229; but see Condon 1977-1978: 176-178 and Kwan-Terry 1979: 159). Some have argued that Eliot won through to just such a 'purified dialect' in *Four Quartets*.<sup>8</sup> The testing of these possibilities, the making of such a dialect, in which the personal, the communal, and the sacred are perfectly balanced, begins in earnest with "Ash Wednesday."

The practical accommodation to his new religious commitments in "Ash Wednesday" is very striking. Eliot draws widely on the corporate language of the Christian account of religious experience. The alteration of diction, syntax, and rhythm through the pull of the discursive practices of the English Church, as enumerated above, is, of course, not simply a stylistic 'choice'. If it is to count as more than 'manner', it must be the sign of obedience and conformity to a higher Reason. The texts of the Church contain the essential wisdom which the Church has to



offer, but they are not simply that wisdom distilled to the lowest common denominator. The simplicity of their presentation is as much a mark of their authority as their profundity is (cf. Kenner 1966: 227). The characterizing rhythms, tonalities, and formulaic phrases of *The Book of Common Prayer* or the Jacobean Bible or the Creeds embody more than a set of beliefs; they vivify a whole way of life. An individual lyric voice, within the compass of this all-embracing cosmos institutionally settled in the doctrines and formulae of an historical Confession, no longer needs an anthropological-mythic framework in order to legitimate its speech. "Ash Wednesday" accepts, conforms to, the discipline of an ecclesiastically established spirituality as sufficient legitimation of the lyric voice, now no longer in need of defining its authenticity by the semantics of its distance from an institutional order contaminated by liberal ideas. We can hear, in fact, a clear continuity between

'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 . . . ("The Burial of the Dead," CP 64)

and

Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,  
 Lilac and brown hair;  
 Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps . . .  
 ("Ash Wednesday," III, CP 99)

The lyric voice of *The Waste Land* was fortified by Wagnerian and romance mutations of ancient myth; most readers, however, probably found, and still find, the lyricism adequate as song without the need of a vast,

objectifying, mythic overlay. The lyric voice in "Ash Wednesday" is more firmly encompassed and subordinated to the new framework. The second passage, quoted above, from the third movement is contained by the spiritual exercises of a ritual purification of which *rejection* of the lesser lyric ecstasy is a necessary step towards the greater 'ecstasy of assent': "At the first turning of the third stair . . ." we jettison sensuous lyricism. This lyricism will be more matter-of-factly rejected again in "East Coker": "The poetry does not matter" (CP 198). In 1930 its ravishments are still potent and are reluctantly abandoned.

As several commentators have noted, the poem enacts the conversion process itself; that is, it enacts the convert's metaphorical 'death' to one way of life and his 'rebirth' in the new (Gardner 1959: 113-121; Unger 1966: 53). This includes, of course, the death of a certain kind of poetry and the birth of some new kind (Part IV in the poem). But what is most interesting about "Ash Wednesday" is not so much its thematics of faith and redemption, largely traditional in iconography, language, and attitudes, but its introduction, into the sonorities and coherence of an institutionally bound religious experience, of the procedures and techniques of modernism. Paratactic lineation, syntactic flexibility, the variable metrics and the line as a rhythmic unit, the continuing commitment to the technical precepts of *imagisme* and the practice of Mallarmé are all made to serve a new mistress.

## Notes to Chapter Six

<sup>1</sup> The "crisis" which Gordon examines can be felt in the occasional bitter, gibing sarcasm of the important critical statement, "The Function of Criticism," which, significantly, follows "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in *Selected Essays*. In "The Function of Criticism" the shape of Eliot's future social and political commitments comes clearly into view for the first time.

<sup>2</sup> See Eliot's comments in *For Lancelot Andrewes* on Thomas Hobbes (27-38), the Tory historian Keith Feiling (34), Matthew Arnold (59), and Irving Babbitt (99-112).

<sup>3</sup> F. R. Leavis' two books on Lawrence had the secondary (but intentional) effect of making us aware of Eliot's limitations in discerning a considerable dimension of English life.

<sup>4</sup> In 1939 Eliot acknowledged that he was not unfamiliar with Tawney's revisions of the history of seventeenth-century England (*Idea* 67).

<sup>5</sup> One thinks of "The Function of Criticism," *For Lancelot Andrewes*, "Thoughts After Lambeth," and *After Strange Gods* in this context.

<sup>6</sup> Auerbach's comments on Augustine are expanded in "Sermo humilis" (1965: 27-66 and 1967: 21-26).

<sup>7</sup> See my review of Perloff 1981 in *Ariel*, forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> I have in mind all those who argue that *Four Quartets* represents a culminating achievement in the *symboliste* tradition, most recently Alldritt 1978: 120-121.

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