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T. S. ELIOT'S 'LONG UNLOVELY STREET'

T. S. Eliot's *Preludes* have not been subjected to the same degree of close criticism that has been accorded to most of his other poems, partly because they are slighter, and partly because they are, or seem to be, unusually simple in comparison with almost any other example of his verse.

The simplicity may, however, be deceptive. The four poems have a unity that extends beyond the numerous verbal repetitions (the feet and the hands, the street and the vacant lots, the newspapers, and so on) or the echoes (blinds, shutters, and shades) that link the parts to one another. It is worth asking why they are called *Preludes* and what they prelude. Is there any importance to be attached to the quintuple structure? for the poem falls into five clear sections, the last *Prelude* being a double one with its two parts at least as distinct as any of the other divisions. This five-fold partition, what Sir Thomas Browne in his *Garden of Cyrus* called a 'Quincunciall Ordination', is common throughout Eliot's poetry. (Other examples are *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men*, *Landscapes*, *Five-Finger Exercises*, *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages*, *Little Gidding*; in fact, among all the poems that are divided or are readily divisible into sections, virtually the only exceptions are *Portrait of a Lady* and *Ash-Wednesday*.) Is this chance, or is it due to an inherent sense of dramatic structure expressing itself in an equivalent of the five-act division? Or must it be, as Browne claimed of the number five in the fifth and final chapter of his work, 'Mystically considered' in the light of 'all the mysteries and secrets accomodable unto this number'. The author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (lines 640-54) enumerated the five fives of the perfect Christian: the five fingers, the five wits, the five virtues, the five joys of the Virgin Mary, and the five wounds of Jesus. Did Eliot graduate from the earlier to the later in the course of his development, from 'a grace of sense' (*Burnt Norton* II) to a sense of grace? Did he pass from the depiction of the phenomenal world perceived by the senses to the evocation of the noumenal world, from a concern with realism to a concern with reality, that 'reality' which 'human kind | Cannot bear very much' (*Burnt Norton* I), from the acceptance of the secular, diurnal round to the faith in 'the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life' (*Religion and Literature*, 1935)?

Whatever the answer, one thing all these poems have in common is a new principle of organization, what might be called the principle of structural discontinuity. Like the technique of *montage* as first developed in the films of Eisenstein, for example, it involves the surprise juxtaposition of seemingly unconnected sequences whose randomness hides a deeper intention. According to De Quincey, and his view is typical of the followers of Coleridge, this double mode of operation exemplifies a principle underlying all mental activity. There are 'organizing principles which fuse into harmony, and gather about fixed pre-determined centres' all those 'irrelate and incongruous' 'ideas, images, feelings' which by mere chance of association occupy the upper 'layers' of the brain (*Suspiria de Profundis*, *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*). From such an approach, Eliot abstracted an aesthetic technique, the virtue of which resides not only in its correspondence to the way the mind operates, but also in that it demands the

creative co-operation with the poet of the reader, if the work is to yield up its meaning and to reveal itself, as a good work of art should, as possessing some kind of unity, whether of theme, form, or effect.

The *Preludes*, like *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, describe the end of a culture-cycle, and like Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* or Yeats's *The Second Coming*, raise the issue whether the end is a prelude to a new beginning on a higher level, or whether it is merely another turn in the everlasting merry-go-round, a purposeless circling that leads nowhere. The first two sections show Eliot as virtuoso in the evocation of the five senses. The opening poem sets the key, and builds up the mood of the city as night falls and the year draws drearily to its close in 'the burnt-out ends of smoky days' (compare 'The smoky candle-end of time | Declines' in *Burbank with a Baedeker*). The imagery throughout is factual, objective, and depersonalized, but the last line, coming after the unrelieved bleakness and misery, introduces a new syntactical pattern which seems to suggest a sudden change: 'And then the lighting of the lamps.' Does this imply hope renewed of light? Or is the lighting of the gas-lamps a 'last twist of the knife'? The tone is decidedly ambiguous.

The second section parallels the first, and describes the city as dawn breaks. The gap between the two corresponds to the intervening black-out of consciousness in sleep, while the link is provided by the lowering and raising of the blinds as the dwellers of the city withdraw from its life and then face it again. But is the raising of the blinds just one more illusion, another of the 'masquerades | That time resumes'? Will the shutters let in the light of a new day? The question remains an open one.

The third *Prelude* modulates from the sight of the street to insight into the individual soul, and from this insight into a 'vision' of the meaning of the street. The angle of view has shifted from out of doors to one of the thousand furnished rooms inhabited by the citizens of a mean city, transients and solitaries who have no roots. There a woman has dared to confront the nature of her being and plumb the sordid depths of the personality. After the dark night of the soul, self-understanding is the prelude to 'a vision of the street', of the meaning of the city. Sitting in the morning light in the posture of a Yogi in contemplation, her vision, however, remains passive, feminine. Can the twittering of the sparrows in the gutter really be the appogiatura prefacing a new music?

In the fourth *Prelude*, the day has revolved once more. Again it is evening, four, five, and finally six o'clock, the hour at which the first *Prelude* began. This time, the theme is a man's soul presenting the masculine point of view. He too arrives at his vision, not however as an observer but as a participant, through complete identification with the world of fact. The sordid images are now externalized in terms of social experience and understanding. He *becomes* the city; it is he who is stretched on the rack above the city blocks, as it is he who is trampled by the feet of the workers issuing from them. He *is* the workers with their little satisfactions, and their convictions that they will come into their own. Immersed in the events of the day, he takes upon himself the 'conscience' of the city, the prelude to coming to grips with the issues of power and responsibility in society. But again the self-confidence and assurance raise a doubt. The life of the city is symbolized by the street which is befouled by the muddy feet and is 'sawdust-trampled' from the pubs. Its conscience is a 'blackened' one. The certainties are based on the evening papers

that record the sensational and the passing, and that are discarded to litter the vacant lots, to curl the hair or light a fire.

And now, at the very end, the poem for the first time drops into the first person. The poet himself trembles on the edge of vision, stimulated by understanding, like Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, both the male and the female points of view. He has given beauty and form to their images of the street and the room and to their separate visions, curling them in fancies as the woman had curled her hair. He has felt their feelings, and made them types of those who open the shutters to let in a new day and take up the challenge of reality. They are only temporary lodgers in houses not their own, but they may perhaps have achieved an awareness of value and meaning in the world and a belief in social justice. And so he too is moved to a hope of redemption compounded of sympathy and teleological purpose.

Quickly, however, he regains his scepticism, and dismisses this sentimental lapse as an alcoholic fancy. The vulgar gesture of wiping the mouth with the hand recalls the beer-drinking in the pub alluded to in the second section. The end of the day and the end of the year, the lighting of the lamps, the raising of the blinds, these are not preludes to a new dispensation. The visions were not true epiphanies but vain delusions, the revolution of the day and night and of the year are mechanical and meaningless, a monotonous going round and round in circles, 'round the prickly pear', not a progression towards some goal. 'In this street | There is no beginning, no meaning, no peace and no end' (*The Rock*, Chorus 1).

The poem has rounded back to its beginning, catching up the image of the 'vacant lots', of fruitless change recorded in the evening press. The burnt-out winter days are refuelled with the debris of civilization, the 'rubbish' of the waste land; the fates, like the ancient 'weird sisters' of *Macbeth*, stoke up the fire under the cauldron of 'toil and trouble'.

The essential advantage for a poet is not, to have a beautiful world with which to deal; it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror and the glory. The vision of the horror and the glory was denied to Arnold, but he knew something of the boredom. ('Matthew Arnold', *The Use of Poetry* (1938), p. 106)

T. S. Eliot saw 'the boredom and the horror', and in the *Preludes* he rejected 'the vision of . . . the glory'. He was not yet ready to follow up his premonitory glimpses of an 'infinitely gentle infinitely suffering thing'. The city was still that of Blake's *London*, not of his *Jerusalem*; it was a city of chartered streets, of economic exploitation and sordid misery which the blackened conscience of the Church did nothing to lessen. As with Hopkins's industrial man at the hour of despair between 'the last lights of the black West' and the springing of the brightness in the East, the modern city to Eliot was 'seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil'. The day of witnessing God's Grandeur had not yet arrived.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot was to embrace his conversion to a secular faith, and in later poems this faith was to be directed into specifically Christian channels. Ironically, the *Preludes* turn out to be indeed preludes, prophetic anticipations of the change from scepticism to belief. But before that could come about, the pattern of his thinking had to set more firmly.

II

Five years after writing the *Preludes*, Eliot again heard 'a wizard music roll' as he explored the 'shadowy thoroughfares of thought' (*In Memoriam*, LXX). Again he

hovered on the edge of a vision of the street in *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*. Again the title is enigmatically musical ('Where words end music begins' said Heine; it should be remembered that Eliot's friend at Harvard, the poet Conrad Aiken, with whom he discussed the need for a new poetry, wrote *Preludes*, a *Tone Poem*, and *Symphonies*). Again the poem divides into five sections: 'Twelve o'clock'; 'Half-past one'; 'Half-past two'; 'Half-past three'; and finally 'Four o'clock'.

A rhapsody suggests a romantic composition created in a single jet of inspiration rather than a formal, intellectually conceived work. ('My taste is possibly too romantic', Eliot confessed in his Preface to the *Selected Poems* of Ezra Pound, 1928.) The unbroken flow, both of space and time, is clearly part of the meaning of the poem. The street is compared to a river, and its reaches are dissolved and blended into a single, unified impression by the moonlight. Similarly, the distinct components of the past, the divisions and precisions and levels of memory are dissolved and flow into one another under the hypnotic effect of the moonlight. Order and sequence yield to the undivided stream of reminiscence, from which the power of association draws up the flotsam and jetsam impressions registered in the past.

'I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure', wrote Eliot (*The Music of Poetry*, 1942). In the *Rhapsody*, the rhythm and the structure are provided by the alternations between moments of stasis and phases of kinetic movement, between analysis and synthesis, between the narrow field of physical sight and the whole world of imaginative vision, between the immediate perception and the evoked recollection. The lamps punctuate the flow with their own insistent rhythm. Their intervals re-assert the divisions, beating 'like a fatalistic drum' in the music as they sputter in the gusts and break discordantly into the incantatory whispering of the wind in the moonlight. These are the same figurative drums and musical structures that come in another poem written at the same time as the *Rhapsody*, the *Portrait of a Lady*:

Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins
Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,
Capricious monotone
That is at least one definite 'false note'.

The drums, the lamps, create the false note as they intrude into the music of the natural elements and grate upon the sound of

That exquisite nocturne, with which we explain
The night and moonshine.

(*Conversation Galante*)

But in poetry, 'Dissonance, even cacophony, has its place'. The artificial light of the lamps is carefully contrasted with 'the spaces of the dark' between them, which come under the influence of the natural light of the moon. The two lights and all they represent set up what Eliot calls 'a rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole' (*The Music of Poetry*). The glare of the lamps creates patterns in the present, in both senses of the word 'present', and establishes the world of sensory perception and of *realia*. The moonlight, on the other hand, calls up the flux of the past diffused in the magic spells of romance. It brings into operation the peripheral areas normally excluded from the attention, those unfocussed and semi-formulated thoughts hovering just beyond the direct

experience. Around the nuclei of the immediate images, it builds up its own little patterns of association from its own resources. Thereafter, the two patterns work in counterpoint. The verbal echoes that reverberate through the five sections hold them together in a synthesis too: the dead geraniums; the eyes of the woman, of the child, of the moon, and of the peerer into the lighted rooms; the series of smells; the water images of the reaches, the beaches, the quay and the pool; and above all, the action of twisting and the shape of twisted things.

The two kinds of illumination, the one focussed but artificial, harsh and realistic, the other diffused, but natural, flowing and romantic, correspond to two kinds of time in the poem. The first is chronological time which is analytic and objective, the second is psychological duration which is synthetic and subjective. The one is measured by the conventions of the clock striking the hours and half-hours, and it forces upon the attention those impressions that impinge upon the physical senses; the other is based on private, internal rhythms, and ranges widely from association to association dredged up from the whole of past experience. The intermittent intersection of the two is that of

a moment in time and of time,
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call
history; transecting, bisecting the world of time, a
moment in time but not like a moment of time.

(*The Rock*, Chorus VII)

The temporal principle and often the very images used to convey it show an uncanny resemblance to those in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and *Mrs Dalloway*.

One of the first things to strike the attention is that the wind mentioned in the title does not appear explicitly in the poem at all; it is, however, the efficient cause of the whispered spells of the moonlight and of the sputtering and muttering of the gas-lamps. Wind, the breath of life, spirit, soul (*anima-ame*) — the analogies, etymologies, and standard symbolism are suggestive. But the madman and the dead geranium — the flower appears twice in the poem — are more problematic. The general effect is clear enough: memory straining to bring back motion and life into the beautiful, fragrant ghosts of the past. Midnight is depicted as a madman, a lunatic, under the influence of the moon. It is the witching hour when graves do ope, and the dead revisit for a while the earth they have left, when memory brings back the ghosts of the past. The twisted beam of light reflected in the woman's eye starts off two distinct streams of imagery: one is of twisting things and culminates in the last twist of the knife, like memory that twists remembered things out of their true nature, and that can operate only when the things remembered are past, dead; and the other is of eyes, seeing or seen, eyes that are blank or that peer or wink feebly. The broken spring too is like memory — a shape with no strength, retaining the outer form of original impressions, but without the force that once accompanied them.

In the next section, the lamp starts off a new train of ideas which ties up with the previous trains. The common element now is the 'automatic' action of 'slipping out' the tongue, or the hand, or a twisted claw, to seize some desired object in itself undesirable or worthless. Another element, stated or implied, is the vanity of trying to enter other realms of existence or the minds of other beings, such as the mind of a child, or the world of a crab. The failure is symbolized by the eyes

in the dark street 'trying to peer through lighted shutters', the eyes of the peeping Tom.

Over a century earlier, another poet was meditating on the modes of memory, and analysing the nature of his revelations in another *Prelude* to a projected philosophical poem. The turning-point in Wordsworth's life came with his breaking away from the city where 'The face of every one | That passes by me is a mystery!' (*The Prelude* (1850), vii, 628). He too had had the feeling of everything blending and dissolving,

Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end.
(vii, 726)

He too had had a vision, provoked by the eyes of a blind man, 'an apt type . . . of the utmost we can know, | Both of ourselves and of the universe' (vii, 644). The situations have their similarities, but the outcome was different. Wordsworth was made aware by his experience of an 'under-sense of greatest' (vii, 735), Eliot of smallest.

The fourth section opens with the superior and contemptuous comment of the lamp on the moon whose light is feeble compared with the local but concentrated glare of the gas-lamp. Though the moon is too silly even to bear resentment at the competition, the realist of modern life is disdainful of the old-fashioned romantic who has 'lost her memory' of facts, and can only recall emotions, the fatal attractions of past delights now stale or dead. She still tries to arouse desire, winking, smiling, stroking the hair (all flesh is grass), but she has been abandoned by her lovers, and there is no one to respond to her faded charms or to be tempted by her raddled complexion. She is alone, like the hesitating woman of the earlier section, alone with her meaningless souvenirs of forgotten balls and the perfumes of long past parties. The 'lunar incantations' once again 'dissolve the floors of memory', and the solitary walker in the city of dreadful night recalls times when he was not alone; recollections of shows or concerts, of other walks in other streets, of other rooms and other nights, flood in upon him. He has been one acquainted with the night, and now he returns from his voyage to the end of night, back to his lonely room. The moon is shut out and memory brought under control as he enters the house lit by a lamp. The imperatives of present reality accumulate, the immediate duties and automatic routines, the sleep of the spirit which those who live call life. The twisting memory of the past has been replaced by the culminating irony of the greatest distortion of all, the fatal twisting of the personality by present realities. Custom lies upon us 'with a weight, | Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!' (*Intimations of Immortality*).

In his great Ode, Wordsworth was lamenting the passing of a stage of his life, 'the hour | Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower', and Eliot was later to feel the words chime in his mind:

Because I do not hope to know again
The infirm glory of the positive hour.
(*Ash-Wednesday*)

A comparison of the two poets may serve to bring out an important point of similarity and difference between them. Eliot, in the preface to his selection of

Ezra Pound's poetry, employed the metaphor for 'the relation of the poet's technical development and his personal development as two curves on a graph which sometimes meet'. Such moments of convergence, he claimed, constitute the 'high peak' of artistic achievement which we call a masterpiece. Religions based on the doctrine of historic revelation suggest other values for the curves such as have a validity for certain kinds of mystical and religious poetry too; they may be summed up as the conjunction of temporal and extra-temporal, and physical and metaphysical, dimensions of experience.

Wordsworth's high peaks, his moments of revelation and vision, were what he called the 'spots of time' outside the 'round | Of ordinary intercourse' which give to the mind its 'profoundest knowledge' (*The Prelude* (1850), XII, 208 ff.). They occurred when he was in a specially receptive frame of mind, when he was 'blank', or else when he had been shocked out of habit or routine by terror or fear or a feeling of loss into an awareness of other modes of experience. Such a feeling was often precipitated by wandering alone, or by meeting with or thinking of a solitary, a wanderer, a discharged soldier, a female vagrant, a blind man, a gipsy, a leech-gatherer, a pedlar. At these moments, into his historical continuum, his own time-series, there irrupted an extra-historical interpolation of an event or a person. The intersection of two distinct time-series seemed thereupon to open out into a sense of revelation, as though a divine dimension had cut across the human. 'Only through time time is conquered' (*Burnt Norton* II). Such 'spots of time' cannot be assessed in historical terms only, but must be plotted in relation to two axes, one temporal and one non-temporal. Wordsworth's solitaires and wanderers affected him like visitants from another world beyond time; like the leech-gatherer,

In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.

Some such intersection of two time-series seems to typify the special mode of experience that underlies the later poems of Eliot. In the *Rhapsody*, the intersection is there, but both the lines or curves are secular. The event from out of time, the person from out of time, the miracle and the revelation of the divine, have not yet crossed his line of life. The visions of the street are still confined to the temporal 'as . . . if the street were time' (*The Boston Evening Transcript*); they are not yet, to use a phrase of Blake, 'Visions of Eternity' (Letter to Trusler, 1799). The street's argument of insidious intent leading to the overwhelming question has not yet been fully clarified, and the question itself not formulated fully enough for an adequate answer to be attempted. It is still the street of the 'unreal city' of *The Waste Land*, inhabited by those whom 'death had undone', whom 'Richmond and Kew undid', trampled by the living dead, not the *via dolorosa* that promises to lead through death to the true life.

But below the progression of the imagery on the aesthetic level, below the criticism on the social level, there is in process of formation at the metaphysical level a pattern which is beginning to assume the significance of a world-picture. A series has been started, one which may already justify the extrapolation of the later preoccupation, for better or for worse, in poetry, prose, and drama, with a more orthodox conception of the relations of God, man, and society.

III

In his essay on *The Music of Poetry*, Eliot wrote that 'a form grows out of the attempt of somebody to say something', a perfectly true, if not startlingly profound observation. In response to his own need to clarify his outlook on life and assess the parallax of his particular angle of vision, a constellation of images took shape. This controlling pattern, 'Though rear'd upon the base of outward things', constituted what Wordsworth described in a memorable phrase one of 'such structures as the mind | Builds for itself' (*The Prelude* (1805), VII, 623). It served, without his being fully aware of it, as his means of creating his world and of probing those 'frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist' (*The Music of Poetry*). It was also his way of reaching that state of mystical transport that Wordsworth tried to express by the image of that 'central peace, subsisting at the heart | Of endless agitation' (*The Excursion*, IV, 1146), and Eliot, by the image of 'the still point of the turning world' (*Burnt Norton* II, and *Coriolan* I).

Only by the form, the pattern
Can words or music reach
The stillness.

(*Burnt Norton* v)

In the earlier part of Eliot's literary career, the structure was still the instrument of, to quote Wordsworth once more, his 'feeling intellect' (*The Prelude* (1805), XIII, 205). Later, with his deepening interest in Christian doctrine, he became more conscious of its theological implications; he came to use it for his arguments rather than allowed it to use him.

A number of distinct items are involved in this image cluster, and they are already present or implied in the two early poems we have been discussing. They can be subsumed under the following broad headings: the image of the 'intersection' of contrasting planes of experience; the analogy between poetry and music; the 'vision of the street'; the relations of tense, time, and timelessness to convey the deeper understanding of 'both a new world | And the old made explicit, understood' (*Burnt Norton* I); and finally, the aspiration to a state of grace when we may 'Redeem | The unreal vision in the higher dream' (*Ash-Wednesday* IV).

The symbolism of the street of 'the timekept city' (*The Rock*, Chorus I) may owe something to the seventh lyric of *In Memoriam* which describes 'the long unlovely street' in which Hallam had lived, and which, so Eliot tells us, affected him powerfully as a portrayal of 'a universal emotion related to a particular place' (Introduction to *The Poems of Tennyson*, 1936). It may likewise owe something to De Quincey's obsession with the 'nodes of intersection' when 'the path of truth will often intersect . . . the erroneous path' (footnote in article on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits: William Godwin*. The phrase was used to describe the chance meeting after forty years of Dr Johnson and a friend, both inveterate walkers of the streets of London.) The 'nodes' came to serve as a symbol for De Quincey both for what he termed 'the general idea of a search and a chase' of a dream (Preface to *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, enlarged edition of 1856), and for the vision of the lost Eden; each links up with his constant preoccupation with the relation of time and eternity and of literature and music. In *Little Gidding* II, the node comes between night and morning, at the meeting point of three districts, where the paths of the poet and

the dead master cross. It is akin to what Blake called the world of generation, the state of experience in time which follows that of primal innocence and precedes that of organized innocence. Or it may be compared to Wordsworth's years in London, the state of Paradise Lost between the earthly Eden of his childhood in Grasmere and his later return to his 'Eden vale', the spiritual state of Paradise Regained in his years of full maturity. For poor Susan, the song of a bird transformed Cheapside into a Cumberland valley. De Quincey too had looked up every intersection of Oxford Street for a visionary glimpse of the lost paradise of his childhood, 'up every avenue in succession . . . to the fields and the woods'. Unlike Wordsworth, his hopes were mocked, and his return to Grasmere was to be not a rebirth but the 'second birth of my sufferings'.¹ Eliot's street intersections similarly stand in contrast to the garden of 'our first world' (*Burnt Norton* 1), which will also be the last thing we discover (*Little Gidding* v). The secular realism of the one is opposed to the spiritual reality of the other, and it must be remembered that, as Eliot insists, humanity cannot endure too much reality.

There are, however, rare moments when the two realms cut across each other 'In concord at this intersection time | Of meeting nowhere, no before and after' (*Little Gidding* 11). It is from 'the impossible union | Of spheres of existence' (*Dry Salvages* v) that the redemptive vision is born. The street then is intersected by other axes which are intimations of other orders of being. The analogical image of the intersecting lines for the points of contact of different planes of experience is variously applied by Eliot to history,² to language,³ to the experience of a poem,⁴ to the high peak of creativity when a masterpiece is born,⁵ to the writing of poetry in general.⁶ Above all, he came to apply the image of the 'nodes', the 'spots of time', to those moments of mystical intensity when, like Wordsworth in *Tintern Abbey*, 'we see into the heart of things', and reach beyond time to timelessness, and beyond place to placelessness:

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

(*Little Gidding* 1)

We have passed beyond the 'actual' where 'time is always time | And place is always and only place' (*Ash-Wednesday* 1). We have in effect realized Coleridge's 'reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities' (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter xiv), his doctrine that 'Extremes meet'. 'Visible and invisible, two worlds meet in Man' (*The Rock*, Chorus ix); only when he responds to this meeting can the soul of Man 'quicken to creation'; only then we 'shall see the Temple completed'. These

¹ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-eater, Collected Writings*, edited by David Masson, 14 vols. (1896-7), III, 376.

² 'History is a pattern | Of timeless moments' (*Little Gidding* v).

³ 'The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection; it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association' (*The Music of Poetry*).

⁴ 'The experience of a poem is the experience both of a moment and of a lifetime . . . There is a first, or an early moment which is unique, of shock and surprise, even of terror (Ego dominus tuus); a moment which can never be forgotten, but which is never repeated integrally; and yet which would become destitute of significance if it did not survive in a larger whole of experience, which survives inside a deeper and a calmer feeling' (*Dante*, 1929).

⁵ See the Preface to *Selected Poems* of Ezra Pound.

⁶ This demands a 'sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together' (*Tradition and the Individual Talent*).

are the climaxes of being, 'where the dreams cross | the dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying . . . the time of tension between dying and birth | The place of solitude where three dreams cross' (*Ash-Wednesday* vi).

But, as Wordsworth repeatedly lamented, these moments transcend the limits of verbal expression. The supreme matter for poetry cannot find poetic form:

The moments of happiness . . .
 the sudden illumination —
 We had the experience but missed the meaning
 And approach to the meaning restores the experience
 In a different form.

(*Dry Salvages* II)

Between the light and the verbal symbol for the light, between the reality and the image, falls the shadow.

The obvious application of this illumination, this intersection of the human and the divine, to Revelation and to Christology in general brings poetry into clearer relation with Christianity. 'What I want', wrote Eliot in *Religion and Literature*, 'is a literature which should be *unconsciously*, rather than deliberately and defiantly Christian'.

. . . to apprehend
 The point of intersection of the timeless
 With time, is an occupation for the saint.

(*Dry Salvages* v)

It is also an occupation for the Christian theologian trying to explain the doctrine of the Incarnation:

Here the impossible union
 Of spheres of existence is actual,
 Here the past and future
 Are conquered and reconciled.

(*Dry Salvages* v)

What Eliot, even in his earliest poetry, and long before his conversion, was trying to do was to make the apprehension of the intersection an occupation for the poet. The poet-mystic, if he can 'Resign my life for this life . . . Living to live in a world of time beyond me' (*Marina*), if he can

While time is withdrawn, consider the future
 And the past with an equal mind
 At the moment which is not of action or inaction

he will then achieve 'the one action . . . | Which shall fructify in the lives of others' (*Dry Salvages* III). Only he, so Eliot held, who can establish some degree of equilibrium between the three illuminations, the artificial light of the lamp, the natural light of the moon, and the inner light of revelation, who can arrive at the intersection of the objective, chronological time, the subjective, psychological duration, and the supra-personal timelessness, can hope to create the masterpiece.

How far Eliot himself achieved this ideal is a matter of dispute. In much of his poetry, and most noticeably in that of his earlier period, one may detect an ironic detachment from himself and others, a cool, uninvolved objectivity, that derives less from Imagism and the influence of Hulme than from a failure in 'Love', in the neo-Platonic sense of the word. Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, defined Love as the going outside the Self to establish contact with the Non-Self. It was the belief in

Love as the mainspring of social sympathy and of communion with the cosmic forces informing nature that gave warmth to his mystical animism and contributed to his feeling that sensation and life are immanent in all things. Eliot's street poems, like Blake's and Wordsworth's, reveal his awareness of

The tendency, too potent in itself,
Of use and custom to bow down the soul
Under a growing weight of vulgar sense,
And substitute a universe of death
For that which moves with light and life informed,
Actual, divine, and true.

Wordsworth at least was aware of the weaknesses in himself which rendered him susceptible to the danger, and he countered it by fostering his feeling for and with and into whatever, though not always whoever, was outside him.

To fear and love,
To love as prime and chief, for there fear ends,
Be this ascribed.

(*The Prelude* (1850), xiv, 157)

Eliot likewise recoiled from the threat of the 'universe of death' (Milton's phrase appropriated by Wordsworth is applicable here too), but he sought to counter its terrors by evading rather than conquering it. The rarity of the word 'love' in his vocabulary, whether in the personal, metaphysical, or Christian sense is no doubt related to what he called his 'Impersonal theory of poetry' (*Tradition and the Individual Talent*, 1919), no less than to his world outlook. He did not regard as legitimate matter for poetry that which is 'Felt in the blood and felt along the heart'. 'Poetry', he insisted 'is not a turning loose of emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality' (*ibid.*). If in his earlier poetry he excluded 'personality' and 'personal emotions', in his later poetry he rejected 'Secularism' and the literature that concerned itself 'only with changes of a temporal, material and external nature' and 'with morals only of a collective nature' (*Religion and Literature*). He not only insisted on 'the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life', but demanded of poetry, as of criticism, that it give expression to 'religious feeling' and 'a definite ethical and theological standpoint' (*ibid.*).

Eliot thus came to seek the mystical oneness with God without passing through Wordsworth's intermediate stages of sympathy with nature and love of man. He affirmed his pessimistic conviction of 'a total decline of culture' (*Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, 1948, Chapter 1), and expressed 'a doubt of the validity of a civilisation' which created 'bodies of men and women — of all classes — detached from tradition, alienated from religion and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob' (*The Idea of a Christian Society*, 1939).

In 1931 Edmund Wilson in *Axel's Castle* had already detected a 'fear of life and fear of vulgarity' in the early poems, and attributed 'the straining after religious emotion' to the need 'to replace a failure in human emotion'. The suspicion of the 'natural life', the distrust of modern society and values, the dislike of the masses, the 'mob', led Eliot to create a poetic persona of one who stood apart. Especially in his earlier poetry, he dramatized himself as a kind of Jamesian observer, watching everybody, including himself, but remaining detached from everybody, including himself. From the outset, he held that the allegiance of the individual is

to a tradition rather than a group, and his concern was always for 'the needs of the individual soul' rather than for the needs of 'the masses' (*The Idea of a Christian Society*).

Forster's epigraph to *Howard's End* was 'Only connect . . .' but the unrooted and homeless by conviction, those who shrink from the experience of the street, are not just solitary but isolated. They are too fastidious to connect, to be other than parthogenetically creative. Eliot projected a self in his poetry that figuratively never found a home in the city, but was a dweller in one of its 'thousand furnished rooms', or in its 'one-night cheap hotels', or, like Gerontion, stiffened 'in a rented house'. Perhaps this was because he was never truly at home in town or country, or indeed in any country. Eliot gives the impression of remaining something of an expatriate in spirit, never wholly belonging to the mid-West where he was born, or New England where his forbears came from and where he was educated, or to France or to England. So many of the characters in the earlier poems are international wanderers from country to country with little allegiance to any.

Eliot's landscapes are those of the Waste Land, but known theoretically at two removes. His recurrent dreams of the garden of childhood innocence and happiness are too dimly remembered. He revolted against the 'universe of death' as symbolized by the street; he recoiled from the physical proximity of the city into spiritual isolation, but without achieving the monastic gift of full seclusion. Perhaps the vision of God can be reached only through the vision of Man, and the way to Eden leads, as Wordsworth found, through the heart of the City. The evidence of the Tiresian *voyeur* and the peerer into lighted rooms cannot serve as a substitute for the devastating personal experience of the Waste Land; for axioms in philosophy to be convincing, they must first have been felt on the pulses.

JERUSALEM

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