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F. R. Leavis

ELIOT'S PERMANENT PLACE*

T. S. Eliot died only a few years ago, and he is the last great poet we have had in the English language—the last manifestation, indeed, in our literature of major creativity. It is not, then, paradoxical to call him a great writer of our time. I don't, however, think that he is very widely read today in the way that makes a great contemporary poet the important influence he ought to be. The general recognition he has enjoyed for many years has been accompanied by critical inertness; that is, it has been little marked by any perception of his immediate relevance to the present crisis of civilization. He is known as the poet of *The Waste Land* who, after establishing his reputation with that work, proclaimed his adherence to Anglo-Catholicism and became a religious poet.

Both these emphases seem to me infelicitous: separately and together they misdirect, conveying in either case an inadequate idea of Eliot's major quality. To class him as a religious poet is—the more so in that the Anglo-Catholic movement in the Anglican church makes a cult of him—to promote misconceptions of the way in which he should be found a source of stimulus today by all who are concerned about the possibility of man's survival—his survival as anything more human than an adjunct to the world's master-computer. To think of Eliot as the poet of *The Waste Land* is to make him the poet of the 1920s, a period that feels to us now a long way back in time and history.

It was of course the appearance of *The Waste Land* that established Eliot as a recognized figure in the literary scene.

* Text of an unpublished lecture delivered at the Catholic University of Milan (Italy), 18 April 1969.

It appeared in 1922 in the first two numbers of the *Criterion*, the quarterly he edited, and those of us who acclaimed it as an important event were certainly right. I think all the same that we saw in it a higher kind of creative achievement than it actually was, and a more authoritative significance than I (at any rate) now see to be really there. I shall not attempt to justify these obervations: an hour is so short and I propose to fill it in the way that seems to me most appropriate to the present occasion. For one thing, I want to have plenty of time for reading out Eliot's poetry; the critical purposes I have in mind seem to me to demand that—the more so since I am addressing an audience to whom the English language is not native, and for whom its subtleties of rhythm, inflexion and expressive movement may very well be elusive.

Eliot, then—and I make here an important critical point—had earned recognition as a remarkable young poetic genius five years before the appearance of *The Waste Land*. He had earned recognition, but he had not received it. That, it will perhaps be suggested, may by explained by the fact that in 1917, when the volume called *Prufrock* came out, the 1914 war was raging—was in fact, for England, after the murderous failure of the Somme, in its most tormenting phase. But even after the impact of *The Waste Land*, and even after he had achieved the institutional status, that may be said to have been safely his from 1930, the portentousness—the essential significance—of that early proof of Eliot's genius remained without general recognition. And the misleading emphases that have marked the conventional acceptance of him as a major poet since the middle nineteen-thirties have been associated with that fact—I am thinking of the emphasis on *The Waste Land* and the emphasis that makes him a religious poet peculiarly congenial to Anglo-Catholics.

In saying that he had achieved institutional status by 1930 I might seem to have admitted that he won recognition for his genius with notable ease, seeing how shockingly revolutionary he was found as a poet in the middle 1920 by the larger

cultivated pubilc (the once famous Dean Inge, for instance, who like the poet John Donne three centuries before him was Dean of St. Paul's, called him a 'literary Bolshevik'). I, who was concerned at that time, and later, to establish an intelligent critical recognition of what he had achieved, and where he stood in relation to the past of English poetry, have to report that there seemed to me to be the strongest resistance, which didn't quickly permit itself—if ever it did—to be satisfactorily overcome.

In order to explain this contradiction I must refer to a fact of the British cultural world in which Eliot, in the early 1920s, made his *debut* that is not, I think, unknown to you. When, after the armistice of 1918, the surviving young men came back and the life of peace-time started again, those who were interested in literature found that the social-intellectual coterie known as Bloomsbury was in power. It exercised a decisive authority in the field of higher cultural fashion and over the relevant currency of valuations. Originating at Cambridge (this was the England of more than half-a-century ago), it enjoyed the advantages of being a social elite—a very exclusive one (its leading male members were Etonians); and using these advantages to the full, it advanced confident pretensions to being an intellectual elite. Desmond McCarthy, himself an Etonian, was able to report that the young American poet had 'Etonian-type manners', and Bloomsbury took Eliot up. It was very characteristic of Eliot—and this is a point of great critical significance—that he should have allowed himself to be taken up very completely. The advantage is seen in the fact that it was the Hogarth Press, a Bloomsbury concern run by Leonard and Virginia Woolf, that published *The Waste Land* in the pamphlet form that preceded the inclusion in the later volume of *Poems*. It was as effective a launch as can be imagined. In the modish literary world, and among the young at Cambridge, Eliot became at once a major currency-value.

But Bloomsbury, for all its pretensions, was not intelligent,

at any rate about literature, and its sophistication ran astonishingly to cheapness. Its spiritual ethos is given away in the fact that it produced Lytton Strachey, and offered him to the world as a distinguished—even a great—writer. What it found congenial in Eliot was the obvious and impudent daring of the technique, the showy sophistication, and the ironical 'disillusion' that it could feel, without suffering anything that disturbed the habitual Bloomsbury complacency, to be both profound and its own. What I am thinking of is represented by such poems as *Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service* and *Sweeny Among the Nightingales* (with an epigraph in tragic Greek)—poems that associate comfortably with those in French, composed by Eliot in the then modish French manners, which are interspersed among them.

It was the poet of this phase—the phase of *The Waste Land*—who was the acclaimed modern poet of the 1920s. Bloomsbury's authority did indeed easily prevail. But Bloomsbury's interest in Eliot—or anything else—was not intelligent. And the poem I am going to read to you was not one of those which excited the admiration of the 'advanced' young when *The Waste Land* had made its impact. But it deserved to be seen as having demonstrated the presence of a portentous original genius—announced the arrival of a new great poet:

Now that lilacs are in bloom
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
And twists one in her fingers while she talks.
'Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
What life is, you who hold it in your hands';
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
'You let it flow from you, you let it flow,
And youth is cruel, and has no more remorse
And smiles at situations which it cannot see.'
I smile, of course,
And go on drinking tea.
'Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall
My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,
I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world
To be wonderful and youthful, after all.'

The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune
Of a broken violin on an August afternoon:
'I am always sure that you understand
My feelings, always sure that you feel,
Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand.

You are invulnerable, you have no Achiles' heel.
You will go on, and when you have prevailed
You can say: at this point many a one has failed.
But what have I, but what have I, my friend,
To give you, what can you receive from me?
Only the friendship and the sympathy
Of one about to reach her journey's end.

It is hard now to realize how remarkable and significant this was—should have been seen to be—fifty years ago. The versification and the language—portentous fact—are wholly of the twentieth century, and yet the rhythms and the metric are such that no one brought upon Victorian poetry should have had any difficulty in recognizing them as proper to verse. The significant and profound originality, the pregnant innovation is to be recognized in the living play of tone and inflextion, a kind of life that depends on the poet's use—which in its precision is unmistakably a poetic use—of the spoken language and the speaking voice.

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
Re-iterates some worn-out common song
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
Recalling things that other people have desired,
Are these ideas right or wrong?

This doesn't suggest Donne or any other poet of the seventeenth century, or any intense intellectuality. But actually the command of shifting tone and living inflexion means the possibility of the strong and subtle presence of thought, the never drugged or hypnotized nerve of intelligence that characterizes Eliot's finest poetry. Looking back we can see

that there is no paradox about the development that led from *Portrait of a Lady* to *Four Quartets*, his concluding and most astonishing creative achievement, which is in the most exacting way a challenge to thought.

The 'portentousness' of the early achievement represented by *Portrait of a Lady* is that it made such a development possible. Already in 1917 Eliot had demonstrated that something *could* happen in English poetry after Swinburne. For Swinburne, as Eliot in due course made us realize, had been a dead-end, and while his influence prevailed there had been a long arrest—that during which my schooldays were spent. The line of poetry inaugurated by Tennyson had its last term in Swinburne; there could be no fresh or significant poetic creation without a fresh start. And to make a fresh start requires genius. Writing of certain minor poets of the eighteenth century Eliot says: 'They had not the consciousness to perceive that they felt differently'—from what the established modes of expression dictated—'and therefore must use words differently.' As a young poet Eliot *had* the 'consciousness.' In his famous essay (one of his truly good ones) on 'The Metaphysicals' he remarks on the preoccupation of the Victorian poets with creating a poetic dream-world or other world; and what he says about Donne and the writers of the best dramatic verse of Donne's time makes plain with what positive intentions of his own he deplores the restrictive and devitalizing effect of the Victorian habits of diction and rhythm. 'The possible interests of a poet', he observes, 'are unlimited; the more intelligent he is the better; the more intelligent he is the more likely that he will have interests: our only condition is that he turn them into poetry; and not merely meditate on them poetically.'

The poetic that Eliot achieved excluded nothing that mattered to him (that is what 'interest' means) from his poetry. On the contrary, its creation and development were determined by his need to focus, define and register in words and rhythms his sharpest sense of life and

his profoundest searching of experience (which is another way of saying his 'thought'). Whatever his limitations and disabilities—and our immense indebtedness to his poetry includes its forcing us to recognize and ponder them—he was a distinguished spirit, deeply engaged in *our* world. I've said that to stress in the accepted way *The Waste Land* doesn't suggest fairly how much and in what ways he matters—should be recognized to matter—to us, now, who are troubled about civilization and the prospects for humanity. For a corrective I will read two passages, one from the unfinished *Coriolan* sequence and one from 'East Coker', the second of the *Four Quartets:*

> CRY what shall I cry?
> All flesh is grass: comprehending
> The Companions of the Bath, the Knights of the British Empire,
> the Cavaliers,
> O Cavaliers! of the Legion of Honour,
> The Order of the Black Eagle (1st and 2nd class),
> And the Order of the Rising Sun.
> Cry cry what shall I cry?
> The first thing to do is to form the committees:
> The consultative councils, the standing committees, select committees and sub-committees.

That is the opening of 'Difficulties of a Statesman', the second of the two pieces that form *Coriolan* as we have it. The following opens Section III of 'East Coker':

> O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
> The vacant interestellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
> The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
> The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,
> Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,
> Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark,
> And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha
> And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors.
> And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.
> And we all go with them into the silent funeral,
> No body's funeral, for there is no one to bury.
> I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,

The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness
on darkness,
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away—
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long
between stations
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of
nothing—
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

These passages differ in an essential way from each other, but they have a preoccupation in common. The first—and earlier—passage is comparatively simple. It evokes with intensity the world in which any but immediate ends are lost and forgotten in the complication of the machinery—administrative, political, economic, social and so on—and the intensity is protest, recoil and despair. Ends are lost and forgotten: look, I tell my students in England, at the leading articles, the letters and the poised commentaries in the *Times*, the *Guardian*, the *New Statesman*, the *Spectator*, and you will have to conclude that the public of the educated and enlightened that represents the wisdom of our politicians and statesmen and chairmen of commissions and committees on Higher Education knows of no higher end to be considered than a rising material 'standard of living'. As J. K. Galbraith, the critical American economist, says in his book, *The New Industrial State:* 'St Peter is assumed to ask applicants only what they have done to increase G.N.P.' We in England, of course, believe in fair distribution and something we call 'equality of opportunity', and in order to equalize opportunities are committed to letting standards in education look after themselves;

that is, to ignoring them—which, in a technologico-Benthamite civilization, means sacrificing cultural values, human signficances and what should be directing intelligence.

In the second passage the poet is engaged more completely—that is, with more of himself. The tone is no longer that of protest or satire, but of one who searches into his own inner plight and responsibility. Further, the passage belongs to a closely organised context, the totality of *Four Quartets*, the organisation of which is determined by a marvellously sustained constructive organization. 'The preoccupation'—I quote from a careful account I wrote a good many years ago—'is with establishing from among the illusions and unrealities of life in time an apprehension of an assured reality—a reality that, though necessarily apprehended in time, is not of it'.

We come here to the delicate question of Eliot's religious bent, its nature and its bearing on the aspect of the plight of our civilization, the spiritual Philistinism, he recoils from in 'Difficulties of a Statesman'. The last three or four lines of the passage I've just read from 'East Coker' might serve for an epigraph to *Ash-Wednesday*, that unequivocally religious poem, or sequence of poems, with which he surprised admirers of *The Waste Land*, disconcerting some of them, in the close of the 1920s. *Four Quartets*, of which 'East Coker' is the second member, were—or was, for the constituent four members form a whole—completed a dozen years later, during the war, and form Eliot's concluding and culminating work. The question of the nature of the religious bent expressed in the poetry is, as I've said, a delicate one. To make even a show of discussing it fairly is obviously, in the time at my disposal, not possible; but, on the other hand, it can't, without absurdity, be ignored.

Let me say, then that I am sure that any serious preoccupation with the plight of humanity in the technological age must invoke a religious depth of experience and conviction in a way uncongenial to the Bloomsbury ethos. It must involve in a decisive way the kind of recognition that D. H. Lawrence,

in the opening of *The Rainbow*, attributes to the farmer, Tom Brangwen. Of Brangwen, watching by the ewes at lambing-time under the night-sky, we are told: 'He knew he did not belong to himself.' It is disastrous for man, as he proceeds with his 'conquest of nature' (you are familiar with that phrase), to lose that sense—to forget that knowledge: my saying this doesn't mean that I myself find Eliot's way of being religious, congenial, and I had better say at once that I do not.

I point again here to the peculiar kind of importance I see in Eliot. Our indebtedness to him is, or (I think) should be, largely a matter of our being compelled in reading his poetry to say 'No! not just that!', or even 'Not that at all !'. Of course if he hadn't been creatively—poetically—so potent we shouldn't have been indebted in that way, and we couldn't have found him so potent if there hadn't been validity and reality in what he impressed us with. He was a distinguished spirit, with a great artist's sensitiveness of response to the human predicament—the profounder strains and starvations of the human psyche in his time—our time. The creative pressure behind his poetry, as behind all major art, was intense need felt as personal: we perceive that, with a poignant force of recognition, as we read him. But we also perceive, being compelled by his poetry to attend with a vigilant closeness, that the intensity hasn't the full general significance, the human representativeness that is implied: the distinctive pressure of need is not essentially in and of the human condition, *la condition humaine*, though the poet obviously counts on our sharing his implicit assumption that it is.

I said, you will remember, that, while we were right to be immensely impressed by *The Waste Land* in the 1920s, and to see it as an historic achievement, we attributed to the poem a higher status as an organic work than it actually realizes. Eliot's rapid acceptance as a major creative power was associated with the belief that the poem *was* what it offered itself as being: an achieved and representatively

significant work—significance here being something to be discussed in terms of the bankruptcy of civilization, the 'modern consciousness,' the 'modern sense of the human situation', and so on. Well, Eliot was born and brought up in the modern world and *The Waste Land* is full of references to it. But for all the use of Fraser's *Golden Bough* and of fertility-ritual allusions, the treatment of the theme of the dried-up springs and the failure of life hasn't the breadth of significance claimed and asserted by the title and the apparatus of notes. The distinctive attitude towards the feeling about the relations between men and women that predominates in the poem is morbidly personal one we know so well from the earlier poems; the symbolic Waste Land makes itself felt too much as Thomas Stearns Eliot's. A judgment of the same form has, at a higer level, to be passed on *Four Quartets*, that intrinsically very much more important work. It too is, in a limiting sense, more personal than it asks us to take it as being and (we can hardly doubt) than the poet knows.

I hope I shan't be misunderstood (for I mustn't offer to discuss the force the term has in this use) when I say that he hadn't the essential normality of the greatest kind of artist—the artist we can call great without feeling that there are grave qualifications to be urged. Where Eliot is inquestion, if we take him with the seriousness he invites and deserves, very grave qualifications are called for. In the place of 'intense' I might, by way of distinguishing his case, have, used another adjective: his sense of his need—the need itself—was desperate. It was desperate because it was the consequence of division and disorder in his inner being that defeated intelligence and made it impossible for him to achieve a complete integrity. He suffered from an insecurity, depressing to contemplate and paradoxical in so gifted and assured an artist, that made him (for all the irony in the passage I read out) assiduously intent on confirming and advancing his recognized social status as an 'eminent man of

letters'. He was in fact a pusillanimous snob. He identified his distinction with his social 'currency value' so completely that, in the use of his influence—and even as Editor of a critical quarterly that proclaimed itself *The Criterion*, he consistently showed himself more afraid of the essentially Philistine conventional world of eminences, performers and pretenders than of the spiritual authority represented by his creative gift. He was, indeed, the enemy of creativity to the extent of letting his prestige be used—of using it himself—against those who worked, and exposed themselves disinterestedly, to get real (that is, intelligent) recognition for his real distinction, disinterested critics being, in the nature of things, an insufferable offence to those whose approval he most cared about. In this way there was generated in him a profound contempt for himself and humanity and a festering guilt that, since something in him refused to let him recognize unequivocally their genesis and nature, disturbed and confused his preoccupation with the really real, the spirit and all that 'the fear of God' (a phrase he makes his own in 'East Coker') would seem to portend.

As I have said, to have been brought to these judgments, with the enhanced consciousness of the issues that that entails, is an important part of one's indebtedness. But the debt, of course, is not a mere matter of 'No!' The implicit form of a critical response to a work that affects one as a challenge that, having been taken, has brought notable profit is, in general, 'Yes, but ...' and the 'but' in one's response to *Four Quartets* couldn't have told so strongly in one's sense of gain if there hadn't been in it a very large element of 'Yes'. That, of course, is what one recognizes when one judges *Four Quartets* to be the work of a major and astonishingly original poet.

Nothing even remotely resembling it, I think, has ever been written by any other writer. It is essentially a creative work, such as only a great poet could have written, but, in the creative exploration of experience which it conducts,

analysis of extraordinarily subtle kinds plays a necessary part. In fact, the poem does, in ways that could be open only to a poet of genius, work that suggests an epistemological, or a philosophical, treatise. Eliot's religious poetry, I have said, is not what conventionally Christian appreciation makes it. The point to be insisted on is that Eliot, so far from affirming doctrine or belief, employs all the resources of his poetic mastery of English to explore and test experience non-affirmatively in the hope that the major affirmation will, at the close, stand there self-affirmed. Hope—he doesn't deny his Christian sensibility, with the nisus implicit in it; it is a basic datum, a given among those he starts with. But the poem shows no tendency to force anything, even if it is open to criticism of the kind I have suggested. It asks, 'What, concretely, is believing?', and the 'concretely' means that the question can without change of force take the form 'What do I (the poet) believe'?—which, re-phrased, becomes 'What that is really real can I apprehend—can I arrive at apprehending—with unequivocal firmness?' The exploratory process involves an inquiry into the nature of conceptual thought and the part played in experience, its evaluation, and perhaps its substance, by language.

As this account intimates, *Four Quartets* is complex, subtle and difficult, characterized as it is by a diversity of method and effect. The short poem I am now going to read, 'Marina', while it exemplifies what I mean by the creative exploration of experience, does so in a relatively simple way that presents, I think, no difficulty. There is no hint of Anglo-Catholicism or of theology, but there is the characteristic creative—if you prefer, constructive—quest of the real. You have, in simpler form, the same constructive process—the co-operative action of different orders of suggestion. The distinctive note is given by the title, Marina being the daughter in Shakespeare's *Pericles* who was lost and is found, a promise of continued life, personal and impersonal, for the father. You have working together that, the enchanted wonder of landfall

in a new world, a favourite Eliotic memory of childhood ('Whispers and small laughter'), the ship (representing the constructive effort—'I made this'), and, for foil, evoking what has to be escaped from, the tolling of the re-iterated 'Death' in the second paragraph. The epigraph is from Seneca's *Hercules Furens:*

> What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
> What water lapping the bow
> And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog
> What images return
> O my daughter.
>
> Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning
> Death
> Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning
> Death
> Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning
> Death
> Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning
> Death
>
> Are become unsubstantial, reduced by a wind,
> A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
> By this grace dissolved in place
>
> What is this face, less clear and clearer
> The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger—
> Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye
>
> Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
> Under sleep, where all the waters meet.

The only specifically Christian note there is the word 'grace'—'By this grace dissolved in place'. But the more important peculiarity of the poem is given in the title, the name of the lost daughter who was found. The note of tenderness goes with the distinctive resonance of the whole, and such a note where human relations are concerned is, I think, unique in Eliot's poetry. And telling oneself *that*, as one inevitably does in responding to the poem (for which the word is 'lovely'), one can't help commenting that 'daughter' implies relevantly to the theme of 'love', a number of relations,

emotional and spiritual, between human beings which seem not to exist for Eliot. Here I come back to the subject of his disabilities. Besides what I have said already, there is another, and, I think, closely related, constatation to be made; he shows himself unable to contemplate the relations between men and women with anything but distaste—except with the aid of Dante. His religious poetry, in fact, involves him in an essential dependence on Dante, who was a very different kind of religious poet from himself, and I think that the way in which he depends on Dante might reasonably be called illegitimate; that it justifies some severe limiting judgments regarding his own performance in the undertaking represented by *Four Quartets*.

The theme of Eliot's relation to Dante is at any rate a very important one, and an intelligent study of it would prove to be in more than one way very rewarding. But critics with the necessary qualifications are not common. I myself, in order to give as fair an impression as possible in my short hour of the diversity of Eliot's poetic modes, always so recognizably Eliot, will turn now to *Ash-Wednesday*, which appeared in its completeness a dozen years before the first 'Quartet'. *Four Quartets* is undeniably difficult. *Ash-Wednesday* is *not* undeniably that, but evokes an immediate irresistible response. Yet in fact it is major poetry that in preoccupation and technique leads straight on to the later work, though there is nothing intimidating about the subtlety, which therefore tends not to get the attention it needs: the obvious beauty, thus simplified, satisfies the reader. Let me then, before I read out the first of the constituent poems, ask you to notice how the spirit of the spoken language is there, ready to take command unmistakably, even where the diction and mode are so strongly liturgical and biblical. The definition of attitude, the significance, depends on the actual living control of tone and inflexion. That is, in spite of the apparently incantatory rhythm, this poetry demands the full attention of the waking mind; there is no hypnoidal effect. It registers a recoil from

the world of 'Difficulties of a Statesman', but the recoil isn't into anything in the nature of the Victorian otherworld or dream-world, but towards the positive constructive effort of *Four Quartets*.

The pervasive tone of the first poem answers to a sentence in the passage I read from 'East Coker'—

> I said to my soul be still and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing

—but with no violence to the essential logic, the note of effort is there in 'Consequently I rejoice having to construct something upon which to rejoice.' And you'll notice when in a moment I read the poem the logical *in*consequence of the 'Consequently.' Though the poem is composed of statements that have to be *read* as such, the relation between them is not that of prose at all. The poet's meaning requires both 'is' and and 'is not', and in the totality of the poem they don't cancel out. For Eliot's thought here is not something got clear beforehand and apart and then put into words; it is created in each poem, being something that couldn't be grasped and conveyed by words used in any paraphrasable way. Here in *Ash-Wednesday* we have, impressively manifested, that intense interest in the relation of words and linguistic usage to experience—which has its supreme creative expression in *Four Quartets*, a poem that (it's very much to be emphasized in an age exposed as ours is to the menaces of linguistic science) is an incomparably profound inquiry into the nature of language. The only further comment I will make before reading the poem is a reminder about the shifts of tone and the essential part they play in the meaning. Note, for instance, that line 4, the slightly altered Shakespearian line, has its own pointed felicity of tone (placing—you speak it in inverted commas) and that the parenthesis about the 'aged eagle' is an irony against self-dramatizing pride (for there may be a pride of humility), and note the factual flatness of the third paragraph ('Because I know that time is always time'):

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

Because I do not hope to know again
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice

Taking that poem by itself, you might perhaps be inclined to say that the emphasis my account of Eliot's poetry laid on non-affirmativeness was misleading. You might suggest that what I called the Christian nisus, the undisguised impelling spontaneity, amounted to implicit affirmation. But consider the second poem of *Ash-Wednesday* (which is more than a sequence—for the six constituent poems form a complex whole). This which I am going to read now is strikingly different from the first—the thing to note about it is the intensity with which, while appealing so positively to a Christian tradition, it evokes death as extinction:

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety

On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been
contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? shall these
Bones live? And that which had been contained
In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:
Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness.

The only further comment I will make on that is on the obvious presence in it of Dante, a presence announced plainly enough in the opening. The nature of the presence and the nature of Eliot's dependence on the great Tuscan poet are not easy to define, but we can see there *is* a dependence of some kind, and that it is an important theme for anyone concerned to vindicate critically Eliot's major status. The importance is avowed in the title attached to the next poem as I read it first (it had a French translation *en regard*) in *Commerce*. The title was 'Som de l'escalina', which as you know, comes from the Provencal passage spoken by Arnaut Daniel in canto 26 of the *Purgatorio*.

I will read the poem, the third of *Ash-Wednesday*, but I will first say something about—there is point, you will see in my doing that—'La Figlia che Piange', a short poem that appeared in 1919. The poem, with its theme of young love and its lyrical note, is unique in Eliot's work, but the memory represents something very important for Eliot, some vital mode of experience—something felt as a possibility of transcending disgust, rejection and protest. We know this not just from the power of the poem itself, but from the part played by related evocations in his later poetry. You will note the evocation in 'Som de l'escalina', the poem I shall now read—the last:

At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air

Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.

At the second turning of the second stair
I left them twisting, turning below;
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Damp, jagged, like an old man's mouth drivelling, beyond repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.
At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antiqe flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind over
the third stair,
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair
Climbing the third stair.

I musn't discuss the suggestion that even—or obviously—in that transmuted memory of love and childhood we have the influence of Dante. I must, in fact, bring my discourse to a close. To do so on the theme of Eliot's relation to Dante has a certain felicity. Of course, I have done no more than point to that theme as demanding attention—more intelligent attention than it has had. But, in attempting to give an unmisleading account of so great, complex and diverse a poet as Eliot in an hour's lecture, I *could* only be selective and suggestive. Both his major quality and his limitations were involved in his relation to Dante. A study of it would go deep into our civilization of today, and would throw light on our essential problems. The world he lived in was very different from Dante's and he was a very different kind of man and a very different kind of mind; and, though I have talked of illegitimate dependence, I haven't meant to suggest that his intense interest in Dante derives merely from his disabilities.

I hope that, in any case, I have made plain the kind of grounds that justify one's seeing in Eliot a major *modern* poet —a momentously significant poet of *our* world.

Roger Sharrock

FOUR QUARTETS AS A POST-CHRISTIAN POEM

I begin with one of the personal reminiscences of Eliot with which Stephen Spender enlivens his book on him in the Fontana Modern Masters series. On one occasion he was having tea with Leonard and Virginia Woolf when Eliot was also a fellow-guest. 'At their most "Bloomsbury-agnostic" they started needling him about his religious beliefs. "Tom, do you really go to church?" "Yes," "Oh, really! What are your feelings when you pray?" They waited rather tensely for his answer to this question. Eliot leaned forward, boxing his head in that attitude which was itself one of prayer, and described the attempt to concentrate, to forget self, to attain union with God. The striving.'

This anecdote provides a fitting introduction to the subject of the consciousness of God and Christianity in Eliot's poetry. It bears particularly on *Four Quartets*, the work I want especially to consider. It is fitting on two grounds. First, in revealing the gap in belief between the poet and his Bloomsbury friends. It reminds us of the shock of his acceptance of Anglican Christianity which was felt not only by Bloomsbury but by a great part of the inter-war intelligentsia. And we can take it as representative of the gap separating Eliot from not only his friends Bertrand Russell and Virginia Woolf, or from the neo-Marxist poets of the Thirties whom he published in the *Criterion*, but from the great mass of the secularized public during his lifetime. There is this astonishment of Leonard and Virginia Woolf, guided by a tacit acceptance of the values of scientific materialism, that any

highly intelligent man can profess and practise Christianity. Eliot has given an example of such ignorance in his poem *Triumphal March:*

> (On Easter Day, we didn't get to the country,
> So we took young Cyril to church. And they rang a bell
> And he said right out loud, crumpets.)

Unfortunately the muffiin-man has become completely extinct since Eliot wrote the poem and in the future the passage will require a note on that rather than on the bell rung at the Elevation of the Host during Mass. It is not really a very good joke; it is the sort of in-joke against the hosts of Midian in the shape of mean sensual economic man which could be met frequently in Anglo-Catholic vicarages between the wars and perhaps later. One meets it again in the superior disapproval of ordinary life expressed in some of the choruses of *The Rock* even though that work was an evangelizing pageant aimed at a wide public:

> In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
> The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit...
> Men! polish your teeth on rising and retiring;
> Women! polish your fingernails:
> You polish the tooth of the dog and the talon of the cat...

The image of Eliot as a Savonarola of the suburbs is not an appealing one. But taken together with the image Spender gives us of his acute separation from some of his own kind in the matter of religion, it serves to put the problem for us. Unlike earlier religious poets, Eliot is in a position of peculiar isolation, committed as he is to beliefs which his audience cannot share. One solution for the Christian poet in the post-Christian age has been to write for the informed and sympathetic minority of his fellow-communicants; this is I suppose what Charles Williams did and why he ventured to impose a highly personal theological language concerning the Church and the Empire on his Arhurian themes. The danger of this approach, and it is a danger which Williams did not wholly avoid, is the surrender to either personal eccentricity or group

cosiness (the shibboleth). The major poet cannot write for a clique; he must appeal to the best minds of his time. He may be as difficult as Gongora or Marino, and there may be cultural reasons why his audience is few though fitting, but it must not be a social and cultural segment. Eliot had made himself the poet of the best minds of his generation in England, and when the subject of his poetry became the experience of religion, his problem became how to continue to speak with major authority to those minds.

When Eliot reacted to the rather smart and brittle question of the Woolfs we are told by Spender that his attitude provided a model of the concentration of prayer and the effort to attain union with God. So alongside the first problem, of the nature of successful communication with his contemporaries, there lies another problem or question which we might put like this: when we call *Four Quartets* a religious poem, do we mean that it functions in the same way or a comparable way to religious acts? does its linguistic character resemble the language of prayer or liturgy? or do its patterns of imagery work like the images of religious meditation?

The same question can be put in a different way by asking if the poems are addressed to God rather than to a human audience? Certainly many of the poems of George Herbert are addressed directly to God; so is Hopkins's *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and his sonnet 'Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend'; in the former the event of the drowning of the five nuns is referred to as a focus for meditation on providence in stanzas passionately addressed to God in Christ; the sonnet is a poem of complaint and frustration at dryness in the spiritual life. Like so many of the poems in Herbert's *The Temple:*

> Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

Interestingly enough, *The Windhover* is not a poem of prayer like these, though it is dedicated 'To Christ our Lord', since it recreates the experience of the poet but does not speak in his role as postulant; we never forget that it is Christ's image

in the falcon that is contemplated: we do not discard that image to dwell on the divine presence, and the apostrophes 'O my chevalier! ah my dear', spring involuntarily from the poet as he views the movement of the bird. Sometimes indeed in his poems Herbert conveys the notion of dialogue, the two way process of prayer, by having God respond to the suppliant. Thus in *The Collar:*

> Methought I heard one calling, Child,
> And I replied, My Lord.

It seems to me that there is nothing of this sort in Eliot. We do not encounter any such simple address to a divine person. Those passages which might seem to contradict this are to be found in *Ash Wednesday*, not in the *Quartets*. Not surprisingly in these passages the mode of address is found together with the presence of conventional religious language or liturgical reference. The first part concludes:

> Teach us to care and not to care
> Teach us to sit still.
> Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
> Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

Eliot also uses the Hail Mary in *Animula* (1929), published a year before *Ash Wednesday*, working it into the texture of observation on man's growth towards his own death which forms the substance of the poem:

> Pray for Guiterriez, avid of speed and power,
> For Boudin, blown to pieces,
> For this one who made a great fortune,
> And that one who went his own way.
> Pray for Floret, by the boarhound slain between the yew trees,
> Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth.

In the second part of *Ash Wednesday* the central lyric passage about the garden where all love ends is addressed to the Blessed Virgin in language which closely parallels the successive epithets of the traditional Litany of the Blessed Virgin:

> Lady of silences
> Calm and distressed

Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving

As the conclusion of the third part we have an echo from the Canon of the Mass ('Lord, I am not worthy Lord, I am not worthy but speak the word only'); the fourth part, with its broken clauses and suspended syntax, throws up motifs that are to be more fully developed in the *Quartets* (for instance, the bird song in the garden and 'the word unheard, unspoken') but it does not contain any speech directed to a divine person; the fifth part refers to a veiled sister who may be the Blessed Virgin, but indirectly ('Will the veiled sister pray for Those who walk in darkness'), and in the same line manages to allude to the Benedictus. It will be seen that in the context of the poem as a whole these apostrophes and allusions to Scripture are slight: yet they may be said to provide a kind of liturgical ground-bass for personal meditations and reflections on certain moments and stages of an individual conversion. But of course their traditional and specific character is bound to make them act on the non-Christian reader as signals, all the more powerful when not 'understood', and resisted, that something of a religious nature is going on.

In *Four Quartets* there is hardly any overt, recognizable religious reference of a traditional kind, nor do we find that the constituent poems can be viewed as if they were prayers addresed to a divine person. There is of course a complex web of literary allusion which works upon the reader at whatever level of consciousness or recognition, and this web includes among its elements references to Christian mystical writers like Julian of Norwich and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing;* but then for that matter there is in *The Dry Salvages* a much more explicit reference to the Hindu Krishna and what he said in the *BhagavadGita;* and the dove descending 'with flame of incandescent terror' in the fourth section of *Little Gidding* certainly offers us the traditional

symbol of the Holy Spirit, but this is not obtrusive, since it is also 'the dark dove with the flickering tongue' of the second section, the German bomber in the air raid which has called out the air raid warden's patrol; and the second stanza of the lyric in *Little Gidding* is not an expostulation to the Holy Spirit of any kind, traditional or original, but a comment on the nature of the human condition made from the human side:[1]

> Who then devised the torment? Love.
> Love is the unfamiliar Name
> Behind the hands that wove
> The intolerable shirt of flame
> Which human power cannot remove.
> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire.

If it be objected that these lines refer to the love of Christ as Redeemer, working through the fire of purification which is voluntarily embraced by those who follow him, I would have to agree, but would maintain that such a statement tends to distort what is really happening in the lines. It does so by anticipating ends while the poem, like other poems, describes the means, the journey not the destination.

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

Eliot's method is rediscovery, not discovery, to work through the fuller understanding of what has already been experienced ('We had the experience but missed the meaning').[2] The tone is not so much devotional as philosophical (which is not to say that experience of the effort of devotion does not lie behind the singular concentration of the poetry). The effort is towards finding explanations which can be shared with others. Thus the positive declaration in the *Little Gidding* lyric—'Love is the unfamiliar Name Behind the hands that wove The intolerable shirt of flame'—has behind it the extreme instances of human

sin and violence in war and the 'gifts reserved for age' described to the poet by the compound ghost:

> the shame
> Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
> Of things ill done and done to others' harm

and it has behind it in the immediately preceding third section the driving in upon the poet of the facts of the reconciliation of wrongs and deep divisions such as those differences between the two religious and political parties of the seventeenth century in England which he feels as dividing his own inheritance both personal and national; in the light of this he is driven to meditate on the possibility that sin or human error may be subordinate, purposive and instrumental rather than final and self-sufficient; so that the ecstatic assurance of the lyric is something that is both prepared for and sustained by the poetic epistemology that has gone before. It is not for nothing that there are many parts of the *Quartets* which exhibit the verbal precision and caution of philosophical discourse; such are the opening lines of *Burnt Norton* on time present and time past.

It might also be objected to what I have been saying that out of the four short lyrics which make up the fourth sections in each quartet, one at least is addressed in orthodox Christian terms to a person to whom near-divine honour is paid, and with some concession to the traditional mode of supplication. The fourth section of *The Dry Salvages* is a hymn to Our Lady:

> Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,
> Pray for all those who are in ships, those
> Whose business has to do with fish, and
> Those concerned with every lawful traffic
> And those who conduct them . . .
> Figlia del tuo figlio,
> Queen of Heaven.

But the fact that here is here direct address to the Virgin seems rather to support my argument than to weaken it. Within the grammar of invocation is contained a statement of the

human fear of wastage and death arising naturally from the meditation on the destructive power of the sea in the first and second sections. Our lady is addressed as the special patroness of sailors and the traditional intercessor for man with Christ; this is not a prayer to God, but a plea for intercession, and in the restraint and severity of its phrasing it may seem the bare bones of such a plea, breathing stark endurance and formal repetition, rather than any ardour of devotion.

Further, the commentators on the poem have suggested that, just as this fourth section is addressed to the Blessed Virgin, so those of *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, and *Little Gidding* are connected respectively with God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I have already discussed the treatment of the Holy Spirit in *Little Gidding*, why that lyric is so different in its experiential searching, its special combination of logical argument and vision ('The only hope, or else . . .' 'Who then?' Question and answer; 'either . . . or . . .') from, say, any version of the *Veni, Creator Spiritus*. The field of reference, of the lyric in *Burnt Norton*, no doubt does take in God the Father as creator and preserver, hinted at in the sun and the sunflower, and the transitory revelation of the light on the kingfisher's wing, but it starts off from the perception of man's mortality in the 'Chill Fingers of yew' that are 'curled Down on us'. The lyric in the fourth section of *East Coker* is perhaps the most celebrated passage in the whole of the *Quartets*. It describes Christ in paradoxical imagery drawn from a modern hospital. He is the wounded surgeon, the dying nurse, and the ruined millionaire who has endowed the hospital. The poem is not a direct address to Christ, and it is not a hymn, though its technique of shock owes something to the way it operates against the grain of the customary Good Friday hymn:

> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food:
> In spite of which we like to think

That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood—
Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

Eliot had previously employed this technique of the deliberate reversal of the conventionally approved response to Christian doctrine in *The Journey of the Magi:*

I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

The trouble with the wounded surgeon image is that Eliot, like, perhaps, Cowley but not like Donne, has achieved a metaphysical conceit to render the sacrifice of the Cross which is intellectually accurate and brilliant at the total expense of emotional conviction; the black cloud and the flowers of *Burnt Norton* establish a small complex world of imagery within which we can move. It is the same with the 'frigid purgatorial fires' of *Little Gidding* which correspond to the tension between sin and sacrifice, dove and bomber. To use Eliot's own crititical vocabulary, it is a matter of the presence or absence of an objective correlative. In the wounded surgeon lyric there is no correlative to turn the urgent personal impulse or the Christian context into the viable public property that is a poem.

Our only health is the disease
If we obey the dying nurse
Whose constant care is not to please

We take the message, comprehend it, but then have to crumple it up and throw it away, unless we wish to be left with a bizarre surrealist fable. As with some metaphysical conceits there is an unconcealed desire to shock, and the sheer nastiness of the last stanza seems, while failing to provide an imaginative correlative, to deliver one of those acts of terrorism against the secularized public which Eliot sometimes practises. I have already given a minor example from the choruses of *The Rock;* another striking example is the painfully neutral account of Celia's martyrdom on an ant-hill in *The Cocktail Party.*

It can now be seen that *Four Quartets* is a major attempt to solve the problem of writing a Chrisitian poem for a post-Christian age, a poem which should not be narrowly devotional, a religious poem in the restrictive sense, but which would bridge the yawning gulf between the poet's own sensibility and those politely alien questions in the Woolfs' drawing-room. *Ash Wednesday*, in spite of its often teasing and deeply buried personal content, had been an unsatisfactory compromise between the methods of post-symbolism and inherited liturgical language. Eliot brought to the problem the fine critical intelligence he brought to all his poetry. In the essay 'Religion and Literature', written about the time he was composing *Burnt Norton* (1943) he says:

> For the great majority of people who love poetry, 'religious poetry' is a variety of minor poetry; the religious poet is not a poet who is treating the whole subject-matter of poetry in a religious spirit, but a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject-matter: who is leaving out what men consider their major passions, and therefore confessing his ignorance of them. I think this is the attitude of most poetry-lovers towards such poets as Vaughan, or Southwell, or Crashaw, or George Herbert, or Gerard Hopkins. [Fifteen years later in an essay entitled 'What is minor poetry?' he was to change his valuation of Herbert but not apparently of Hopkins]
>
> . . . I am ready to admit that up to a point these critics are right. For there is a kind of poetry, such as most of the work of the authors I have mentioned, which is the product of a special religious awareness, which may exist without the general awareness which we expect of the major poet. In some poets, or in some of their work, this general awareness may have existed; but the preliminary steps which represent it may have been suppressed, and only the end-product presented.

The aim which is I think fulfilled in *Burnt Norton* and its successors, is to create a poem written in a religious spirit which is not divorced from the major passions of men; none of what Eliot calls the preliminary steps are suppressed: in fact the whole stuff of the *Quartets* is a painfully honest ascent through those steps of the living fallen consciousness. Even when the end-product has been reached in the short intense lyrical passages I have been looking at, the poet does

not allow his art to be made over to a denominational theology, or even to a denominational sensibility, but still speaks from an individual living consciousness which remains open to the contemporary world. One more objection. If we ask the simple question, why then any reference at all to the Crucifixion, to the Holy Spirit, and to the Blessed Virgin, the answer may be difficult but is also simple. The divine presence enters the poem, not as the direct intervention of grace, as in prayer, or the sacraments, but as part of the consistent world of the poet's consciousness, proved at this late stage of a Christian civilization upon our psychological and historical pulses. The rough work is handed in and no one any more can shout 'Crumpets'.[3]

This openness of the *Quartets* to general experience is expressed by the relation of each poem to the poet's visit to a particular place which is named in the title. In *Burnt Norton* (1935) it is the garden of a house in Gloucestershire which Eliot had visited. It is the deserted formal garden of a house now empty; there is a rose-garden, box hedges, and the dry empty basin of a pool: from the concrete bottom of the pool the autumn sunlight is reflected. In *East Coker* (1940) the poet is visiting the village in Somerset where his ancestors had lived and from where they had left in the early seventeenth century with the original wave of pilgrims to settle in the American colonies. *The Dry Salvages* (1941), as the poet's note tells us, are a group of three rocks—presumably *les trois sauvages*—off the coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts; as a landmark they are associated with Eliot's holiday visits to the area, coming as a boy with his parents from St. Louis. *Little Gidding* (1942) is the village in Huntingdonshire where before Civil War Nicholas Ferrar founded a contemplative community; it is known that George Herbert visited the house; Charles I did so in 1633 and there is a legend that he came again for a night after his defeat at Naseby in 1645; the community was broken up by Cromwell's troops in 1647. Each of these visits provides the focal point of the poem in

which it occurs; it is an incident recalled from the past and blended with other memories: its present is never the present of the poem. Thus in *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker* we realize by the third sections that the setting is London and the Underground:

> Here is a place of disaffection
> Time before and time after
> In a dim light: neither daylight
> Investing form with lucid stillness
> Turning shadow into transient beauty
> With slow rotation suggesting permanence...
> . . . Only a flicker
> Over the strained time-ridden faces
> Distracted from distraction by distraction
> Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
> Tumid apathy with no concentration
> Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
> That blows before and after time,
> Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
> Time before and time after.
> Eructation of unhealthy souls
> Into the faded air, the torpid
> Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London,
> Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney
> Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate.

We are told that when Eliot first decided to add other similar poems to *Burnt Norton* he wanted to call the group *Kensington Quartets*, and that the gnomic saying of Heraclitus which is prefixed to the poem ('The way up is the way down') also has an application to the lift at Gloucester Road station where Eliot caught the tube to go to his office in Russell Square. There also seems to be a reference to movement in a lift a few lines later: 'This is the one way, and the other Is the same, not in movement But abstention from movement . . .' In *The Dry Salvages* we hear of the Mississippi, the river that is a strong brown god, and the river on whose shores Eliot was born, as well as of the New England coast. There is less London background in this poem, but in the fifth part

the references to fortune-telling, drugs, features of the press, and the Edgeware Road, bring us back to the world of Madame Sosostris and *The Waste Land*. *Little Gidding*, the last of the *Quartets*, has a firmly established background of the London blitz. In the second section we have moved from the ruined shrine of Nicholas Ferrar's community

> when you leave the rough road
> And turn behind the pig-sty to the dull facade
> And the tombstone.

to other ruins and other deaths in a London in flames:

> There are flood and drouth
> Over the eyes and in the mouth,
> Dead water and dead sand
> Contending for the upper hand.
> The parched eviscerate soil
> Gapes at the vanity of toil,
> Laughs without mirth.
> This is the death of earth.
>
> Water and fire succeed
> The town, the pasture and the weed.
> Water and fire deride
> The sacrifice that we denied.
> Water and fire shall rot
> The marred foundations we forgot,
> Of sanctuary and choir.
> This is the death of water and fire.

Are we in Huntingdonshire and then in London? or are we in London and then an image of an earlier visit to Ferrar's shrine and the snow-covered hedge-rows is imposed on our London consciousness? and if the latter where are we in the comprehensive final section of the poem where all the threads of the four poems are gathered together—'the sea's throat', 'The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree', 'the secluded chapel', as well as the fiery rose and the tongues of flame of the last episode? The first question may easily be answered in the negative. These are not poems of incident in which one episode succeeds another. The lyrics in the second and fourth sections and the meditations

on time and human life in the others draw on a complex of moments and allusions that accumulates throughout the poem. It is not possible to tie them down to any particular historical moment, to the moment in the rose-garden of *Burnt Norton*, or the moment in the ruined chapel in *East Coker*, or the air raid warden's patrol in *Little Gidding*, since all these associations are blended. It is however the case that the cross-currents of association become increasingly rich and complex in the course of the four poems. For this same reason, that the poem does not have a simple line of chronological development, we are over-simplifying if we say, for instance, that a visit at some time during winter to Ferrar's shrine at Little Gidding is recollected in London during an air raid. It is moments recollected from the past that furnish the imaginative focal points for each poem; there is no present action, and the most immediate concrete touches in the poem, the faces in the tube or on the escalator, the boxes and drowned men floating down the river, or the sounding of the air raid siren, are found on closer inspection to be images in the mind—in the case of the scene on the tube something recorded by an observer so detached in his own contemplation as to seem like a visitor from another world, looking on at a phantasmagoria like Eliot's favourite poet Dante guided by Virgil through hell and purgatory. The all-clear has become transformed into the myth of the return at dawn of a visitor from the world of the dead:

> He left me with a kind of valediction,
> And faded with the blowing of the horn.

So the method is distinct from that of the modern narrative or film which uses the flashback technique. For then the focal point is always the present moment of the action. A character is in London and remembers his childhood in another place, and a segment of that earlier experience is imposed upon the present. Now I do think that the popularity and availability of the flashback technique is a factor

which makes the merging of points of time in the *Quartets* easily grasped and appreciated by us. One of Eliot's strongest perceptions of the modern element in art and literature was its intense self-consciousness. He remaks on this, quoting Jacques Maritain, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), and offers Picasso as an instance of this self-consciousness, presumably on account of the chameleon-like metamorphoses of his technique. The idea of an almost painful burden of knowledge and self-knowledge is also prominent in Eliot's poetry; the critical statement is echoed by a line in *Gerontion:*

> After such knowledge what forgiveness?

Undoubtedly at that level of sensibility which Eliot shares with his contemporaries and with us he may appear as a typical early twentieth century writer, isolated from action in the surrender to the internal consciousness. It is noteworthy how many attempts in modern fiction to render decisive, sometimes violent action, present us with persons who at the crucial moment act as if in a dream of past velleities and mechanical external pressures; characters in the fiction of Iris Murdoch make love or strike each other as if ordinary life was something they were only partly and ludicrously engaged in; in the climax of *Les Chemins de la Liberte* when Sartre's hero Mathieu fires on the Germans from the church-tower, it is not so much a free independent action as an internal resolution of his problems, as his invocation of names from the past reveals ('This for Sonia, this for Daniel'). In fact, to risk a generalization, from the great Romantic autobiographies onwards, works like Wordsworth's *The Prelude,* or from the novel of the growth of an individual which followed on such works, novels like *Copperfield,* and *The Mill on the Floss,* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* literature has been as much or more interested in the integrity of the inner personality as in the projection of that personality in action.

In a highly general way one can say that Eliot shares in

this contemporary interest in introspection and what Matthew Arnold called 'the dialogue of the mind with itself'.[4] But for him, self-consciousness is a strategy and not an indulgence, and his wish is not to exalt and integrate personality, but to escape from it. The drive towards liberation from the time-bound self in the *Quartets* is exactly parallel to the programme for the poet as laid down in his earlier criticism. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) he had written: 'The progress of an artist is a continual sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality'. And the conclusion of the essay touches at the literary level on that communication of the living and the dead which is a prime theme of the *Quartets*, perhaps the leading theme since to realize this communication is both to escape from the bondage of one's own time and from the despair of solipsism:

> . . . very few know when there is an expression of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

The life of prayer is on a different plane to the life of art, but it exhibits certain analogies, the chief of them being an effectiveness of communication not achieved in the present life of the saint or the artist for whom success is impersonal and timeless:

> And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
> They can tell you, being dead: the communication
> Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
> Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

The mention of 'the timeless moment' recalls a guiding preoccupation of the literature of our epoch: among countless possible examples we might recall the 'epiphanies' of Joyce,

like the sight of the girl on the shore in the climactic episode of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* Charles Williams whom Eliot knew and admired speaks in the first chapter of *The Figure of Beatrice* of the different classes of the romantic *stupor* or shock—passionate love, the vision of the just city, and so on. Louis Macneice has a love poem beginning 'Time was away and somewhere else'. But whereas these epiphanies do not go beyond the revelation of the self to the self, in Eliot's epiphanies the language of the dead affords glimpses of an impersonal order.

The lyrical moments of intuition also represent deliverance from the bondage of time. In them is encountered

> The point of intersection of the timeless
> With time...
>
> *(The Dry Salvages)*

The original and supreme moment of this kind that is both in time and out of time is the moment in the rose-garden at the beginning of *Burnt Norton.* It is a moment that is completely given, an experience of pure and disinterested joy, associated with the sunlight rising lotus-like from the dry pool, with the song of the bird, and the laughing, playing children who are yet only felt to be there, 'hidden in the bushes. What really happens, and what does not happen, is left a mystery, for the poem says that the door into the rose-garden is actually never opened. There are mysterious presences who are spoken of only in the third person plural:

> There they were, dignified, invisible,
> Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
> In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,

The mention of 'our first world' which is entered 'Through the first gate' leads one to link these presences in their quiet dignity with Adam and Eve in Eden, the first garden. The second section of *Burnt Norton,* as is the manner of Eliot's second sections, stands back after the lyrical introduction to comment on the experience:

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time.
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered.

In this passage there is a distinction between the moments of intuition in themselves and the understanding of them in the course of a lifetime, that remembrance which will involve them in a significant pattern with past and future. Here Eliot is radically different from the romantic view of religious experience as it is exhibited in Shelly or the early Wordsworth where the ecstatic moment is everything and afterwards there can only be nostalgia and regret. The intuitive moments of joy in the garden, in the arbour and the draughty church, are hints of a larger understanding which is more fully realized in *Little Gidding*.

These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled.
(*The Dry Salvages*)

The hints of ecstasy fall into place within the terms of the life of prayer and self-discipline, and the disciplined life is seen first, not in terms of denominational choice, but as a psychological necessity in the effort to emerge from the vanity and deception of the time-bound world. So in the discursive, expository sections the specifically Christian references are rare: we even have an important statement on the necessity of living as if there were no tomorrow assigned to Krishna, not to the lilies of the field (*The Dry Salvages*, 124-168: cf. especially ll. 156-60; cf. 'And all is always now'

Burnt Norton, 150). Christian references, often at a fairly distant symbolic remove are reserved for the lyrics in the fourth sections which represent, to use Eliot's own word, the end-product of his disciplined quest—the burial of the dead in *Burnt Norton*, the sacrament of the altar in *East Coker*, personal prayer and the Angelus in *The Dry Salvages*, the granting of absolution and the ordaining of priests in *Little Gidding*.[5]

The statements which make up *Four Quartets*—the personal ones, that is, not the lyrics, which like the best Romantic or symbolist lyrics seem to come from anywhere or nowhere, —reflect aspects of what the students of mysticism have called the Affirmative Way and the Negative Way. The labelling is convenient for what I am trying here to describe. According to the way of affirmation the poet organizes the timeless moments of revelation into a significant pattern, often likened to musical harmony. By the negative way the poet confronts the unredeemed experience of quotidian life as in the Underground scenes and the subsequent comments on them:

> and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion.

From these long loose lines that approach colloquial speech, but have a monumental polish which raises them above mere rumination, one moves through the whole gamut to the incantation of the intensely wrought impersonal lyrics. It is as if one begins at an outer edge of banality, with the common language which the writer has to raise from banality and refurbish, to end at that still centre to which all the ways, personal revelation, ascetic discipline, and the sheer effort of

thinking through the problem of human time, have pointed: 'At the still point of the turning world' (*Burnt Norton*, 136). Into the secularized world of the ordinary language of argument the sacred makes no spectacular baroque descent *ab extra* but appears as a rediscovery of what had been lost—'We had the experience but missed the meaning'—at the point of intersection.

Eliot learned his kind of poetry from the French symbolists and post-symbolists; from having Laforgue as a major influence in his early poems he came increasingly to study Mallarmé and Valéry, who demanded that the poem should possess a singular artistic purity, communicating only itself, a unique complex of emotions. 'A poem should not mean but be', is a phrase now becoming well-worn. Poetry is seen as aspiring towards the condition of music. It is a curious fact that in the *Quartets* we have what is probably the most perfect symbolist poem. Eliot is able to solve the difficulty never really by-passed by Mallarmé and others, the obstinately referential character of the language they wished to distil into an aesthetic essence. He does this by using language to point to a reality beyond language: clusters and correspondences of images, rose and lotus, smoke and fire, the wild thyme unseen and the winter sunlight, reach out into silence,

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

The result is a work which has the aesthetic purity and impersonality of symbolism, while at the same time expressing meanings in relation to human life (not, I think, purposes: for the stance achieved is a suspension of the selfish will; the lesson petitioned for in *Ash Wednesday*, 'Teach us to sit still', has now been learned): a work which both is and is about. I think that difficulties of interpretation in the immensely suggestive and concentrated lyrical sections, as they are

explored by the commentators, may be removed, if we see them as symbolist poems with an anchor of referential meaning; whereas, for instance, Rimbaud's 'o saisons, o chateaux' reconstructs ordinary vocabulary, turning words into pure counters of emotion, and forming an incantation which invites us to be spell-bound if we are willing to abrogate our allegiance to ordinary verbal meanings and signals, the words in the *Quartets* which reach into silence are also linked with the personal and common experiences on which the poem is built. We have incantatory power, but not the spell at the expense of meaning; and meaning is also sustained by the recognition of the onward movement of history, personal, cultural and cosmic, that historical development which is real however much man's proper place may be elsewhere: 'Not fare well, But fare forward, voyagers'.

Eliot's later poetry is consistent with his earlier, just as it is a crude view of religious conversion which sees it as a fresh start *de novo*. What is expressed in *Preludes* as a hardly connected fragment, a fancy curled round these images, 'The notion of some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing', is restated in a different key in the final Christian vision of love and suffering interwoven in *Little Gidding*, when 'the fire and the rose are one'. What is new is the accomplishment and suppleness of the language and the four-stress verse; this language and verse is able to respond, simply and almost transparently, to the writer's reaction to what he called in an essay 'the boredom, and the horror, and the glory' of human life[6]. The constant interchange of singular and plural first persons' of 'I' and 'we' in the stream of reflection, associate us with the poet in a common humanity. The artistic dedication of the symbolist poet is parallel to and not really separable from the humility of the man: the effort that we have seen exhibited in trying to explain the act of prayer—'The striving—is now at last realized in a reconciliation of the self with time that is both moral and musical. 'Humility is endless', and the reward is

The complete consort dancing together
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph.

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NOTES

[1] Cf. 'Iam glad you like *The Cloud of Unknowing* . . . There is no question in it of "favors" and rapturous feelings—It leaves out the side which is God's side—what God may give to the soul—and simply takes the other, practical side—that the soul tries to give all it is and has. And that is all that we need worry about'. *The Spiritual Letters of Dom John Chapman*, O. S. B., second edition (1954) pp. 149–50.

[2] In this he is a late example of the Romantic circular movement from innocence to experience, and back to an 'organiz'd innocence': 'In my end is my beginning'. Cf. 'In its instinctive and natural stage, spiritual life wears the garb of innocence and simplicity . . . the spiritual sunders itself to self-realization. But this position of severed life has in its turn to be suppressed . . . and the spirit has by its own act to win its way to concord again' (Hegel, *Logic*, quoted in M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) p. 221).

[3] Some critics however seem to find it too easy, from contemplating the poem's religious discoveries or disclosures transposed, as it were, to a point outside the poem, to systematize Eliot's Christion vision. Thus even the informative and sensitive Harry Blamires speaks of 'bringing together the dogmatic and the mystical... affirming life powerfully and positively from the Chistian position' (Harry Blamires, *Word Unheard: A Guide through Eliot's Four Quartets* (1969) p. 150).

[4] On recognition as the main mode of Eliot's poetry, rather than immediacy of description or the action of the will, see Denis Donaghue, *Thieves of Fire* (1973) pp. 134-9. Mr. Donaghue sees the rose-garden in *Burnt Norton* as 'an area of feeling and relationship'.

[5] On ritual acts and sacramental references in the fourth sections of the poems, see Graham Hough, 'Vision and Doctrine in *Four Quartets*', *Critical Quarterly* (1973).

[6] On Eliot's belief that religious poetry might draw on 'the unexplored resources of the unpoetical', see his 'Talk on Dante' (*Adelphi*, First Quarter, 1951.) and cf. the discussion of this in John Press, *The Fire and the Fountain: an Essay on Poetry* (1955), p. 224, where he refers the origin of this belief to Baudelaire and relates it to the importance for poetic creation of the combination of widely divergent materials.

G. Singh

EZRA POUND AS A LETTER WRITER

> Is not my soul laid open in these veracious pages? do not you see me reduced to my first principles? This is the pleasure of corresponding with a friend, where doubt and distrust have no place, and everything is said as it is thought.
>
> Dr Johnson to Mrs Thrale (27 October 1777)

I

Pound wrote a large number of letters to some of the most important writers and artists of his time—William Carlos Williams, Joyce, Yeats, Wyndham Lewis, A. R. Orage, E. E. Cummings and T. S. Eliot—letters which run to 463 pages in D. D. Paige's edition of *The Letters of Ezra Pound* (1907-1941) published in 1951. Another 90 letters written by Pound to Joyce have been published in *Pound/Joyce*, edited by Forrest Read (1967), and there are numerous others (especially those addressed to Pound's life-long companion, Olga Rudge) that have yet to see the light of day.

In 1928 Eliot referred to the masterly nature of Pound's epistolary style[1] and what he said then is no less true today. Pound's letters possess two essential pre-requisites without which no epistolary style can achieve that masterliness of which Eliot talks: verbal economy and pithiness on the one hand, and the interesting as well as significant nature of what is expressed on the other. Pound's own view of what constituted the efficacy of his prose style is relevant:

> Poetical prose??? Hell. The great writing in either p or p consists in getting the SUBJECT matter onto paper with the fewest possible folderols and anti-macassars. When the matter isn't real, no amount of ornament will save it.[2]

While dealing with an extremely rich variety of themes, Pound throughout maintains a conspicuous individuality of style. In his introduction Mr Paige observes how Pound's idiosyncrasies of style and diction (such as 'the abbreviations, the deliberate mis-spellings, the capitalizations and the use of slanted lines for most of his punctuation') caused scarcely any bother when the letters were written, since 'one was too interested in what he was saying'. This holds good even today. In fact, far from creating any bother or hindrance, these idiosyncrasies add to our enjoyment of the wit, irony and sarcasm underlying Pound's letters—qualities in virtue of which he manages, paradoxically enough, to establish a kind of rapport with the reader which no amount of geniality or affability of tone could have achieved. His earnest honesty and selflessness of purpose is such that he does not put off the reader even when his attitude to the object of his irony, sarcasm or criticism is a bullying one. And when Pound dogmatises or is irreverently iconoclastic he does not sound flippant or self-complacent. For underlying it all is a life-long concern for the health, progress and vitality of the arts in general and for the art of poetry in particular—a concern which inspires the critically perceptive and pregnant comments he has to offer in his letters no less than in his other prose writings. On hearing that Harriet Monroe had planned to retire and visit her sister in Cheefoo, Pound writes to her remonstratingly:

> Having done your bit to provide a scrap of rudimentary ganglia amid the wholly bestial suet and pig fat, you can stop; but I as a responsible intellect do not propose (and have no right) to allow that bit of nerve tissue (or battery wire) to be wrecked merely because you have a sister in Cheefoo or because there are a few of your friends whom it would be pleasanter to feed or spare than to shoot (27 December 1931).

The style and substance of what he says invariably conveys Pound's sense of personal authority as a practitioner or theoretician of verse as well as a reformer and a pedagogue, a critic and a judge. And this authority itself derives from

sureness of perception and his conviction of being a genius who deserved audience.

As early as 21 October 1908, he was, for instance, arguing with William Carlos Williams to the effect that

> No art ever yet grew by looking into the eyes of the public, ruthless or otherwise. You can obliterate yourself and mirror God, Nature, or Humanity but if you try to mirror yourself in the eyes of the public, woe be unto your art. At least that's the phase of truth that presents itself to me.

But if Pound's frankness and independence of judgment were 'entirely undiluted with reverence', he was no less ruthless with himself than with others. On 21 May 1909, in another letter to Carlos Williams, he accuses himself of having

> sinned in nearly every possible way, even the ways I most condemn. I have printed too much. I have been praised by the greatest living poet (Yeats). I am, after eight years' hammering against impenetrable adamant, become suddenly somewhat of a success.

But if Pound's epistolary jeremiads represented the very opposite of 'the usual editorial suavity', they were nevertheless singularly free from personal pique or malice. There was something nobly disinterested and impersonal about them, motivated as they were by a sense of idealism. 'Until some one is honest', he tells Harriet Monroe,

> we get nothing clear. The good work is obscured, hidden in the bad. I go about this London hunting for the real. I find paper after paper, person after person, mildly affirming the opinion of someone who hasn't cared enough about the art to tell what he actually believes. It's only when a few men who know, get together and *disagree* that any sort of criticism is born (22 October 1912).[3]

Thus, for all his dogmatic self-assurance, Pound not only respected difference of opinion, but actually encouraged it. 'Of course we don't agree', he wrote to Carlos Williams, 'that would be *too* uninteresting' (21 October 1908). And he told Harriet Monroe that he has a right to be severe even though

> for one man I strike there are ten to strike back at me. I stand exposed. It hits me in my dinner invitations, in my weekends, in

reviews of my own work. Nevertheless it's a good fight (22 October 1912).

Of course, Pound was aware that the singular bluntness of his expression offended—and still offends—some people. He meets this charge four-square: 'My prose is bad, but on ne peut pas pontifier and have style simultaneously' (March 1913). The seriousness of what was at issue outweighed with Pound any question of style and decorum in the ordinary sense of the term. Thus, while trying to persuade Harriet Monroe to publish Eliot, he writes:

> He is the only American I know of who has made what I can call adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained himself *and* modernized himself *on his own*. The rest of the *promising young* have done one or the other but never both (most of the swine have done neither). It is such a comfort to meet a man and not have to tell him to wash his face, wipe his feet, and remember the date (1914) on the calendar (30 September 1914).

But what Pound encouraged others to achieve was something he had already achieved himself. For the most part he practised first and preached afterwards. While refusing Amy Lowell permission to associate his name with the anthology of Imagist poetry she was proposing to compile, Pound observed:

> The present machinery (of the Imagist school) was largely or wholly my making. I ordered 'the public' (i.e. a few hundred people and a few reviewers) to take note of certain poems.
>
> You offer to find a publisher, that is, a better publisher, if I abrogate my privileges, if I give way to, or saddle myself with, a dam'd contentious, probably incompetent committee. If I tacitly, tacitly to say the least of it, accept a certain number of people as my critical and creative equals, and publish the acceptance.
>
> I don't see the use. Moreover, I should like the name 'Imagisme' to retain some sort of a meaning. It stands, or I should like it to stand for hard light, clear edges. I cannot trust any democratized committee to maintain that standard. Some will be splay-footed and some sentimental.
>
> Neither will I waste time to argue with a committee (1 August 1914).

It is this independence of taste, judgment and perception that lies behind Pound's admiration for Wyndham Lewis ('Blake, that W. B. Y. is always going on about!!! Lewis has got Blake scotched to a finish') and Gaudier-Brzeska ('the best of the young sculptors and the most promising') and behind his energetic efforts to promote their work. The epistolary medium was one of Pound's most effective means of propaganda, persuasion and crusade on their behalf. And he was invariably bolstered in his crusade for the causes of others by his determination not to say that 'a thing is *good* until he is ready to stake his whole position on the decision'. As an exponent of 'minority culture'—and for Pound such a culture was not so much a matter of intolerance or snobbery, as the outcome of critical discrimination and responsibility—Pound would say: 'My pantheon is considerable, and I do not admire until I have thought; that is to say I do not admire until I (have) tested. One has passing enthusiasms: one finds in time lasting enthusiasms' (March 1915). And when, in the same year, he described T. S. Eliot as 'quite *intelligent*', he added that 'intelligent' was an adjective that was seldom in his mouth.

But it is, above all, in his role as an instigator of modern poetry—the sort of poetry that he wanted to write himself and that he wanted others to write—that Pound makes his mark in his letters. In his very first letter to William Carlos Williams (21 October 1908) Pound outlines his poetics as follows:

> To me the short so-called dramatic lyric—at any rate the sort of thing I do—is the poetic part of a drama the rest of which (to me the prose part) is left to the reader's imagination or implied or set in a short note. I catch the character I happen to be interested in at the moment he interests me, usually a moment of song, self-analysis, or sudden understanding or revelation. And the rest of the play would bore me and presumably the reader. I paint my man as I *conceive* him. Et voila tout!

As to the language of poetry, Pound conceived it as

'language charged with meaning'. But at the same time he also believed that 'Poetry must be *as well written as prose.* Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e. simplicity)'. Opposing 'Tennysonianness of speech' as well as every 'literaryism', he points out that language is made 'out of concrete things', whereas expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness; 'they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act *by* the writer' (January 1915).

It is this poetics that is behind Pound's critical advice and evaluations. For instance, while advising Dr W. H. D. Rouse on his translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* Pound refers to Homer's 'raw cut of concrete reality combined with the tremendous energy, the contact with the natural force'. He contrasts Homer with Milton and Henry James, in so far as what he calls the Homeric reality 'becomes mere pompous rhetoric in Milton', and 'the miracle of Homer is that great poesy is everywhere latent and that the literary finish is up to Henry James' (April 1935). The absence of literary finish in Homer, or of unity of surface, reminds Pound of Dante. 'I suspect', he writes to Rouse, 'neither Dante nor Homer *had* the kind of boring "unity" of surface that we take to be characteristic of Pope, Racine, Corneille', thereby indirectly alluding to, and to some extent justifying, the lack of such a 'unity' in his own *Cantos.* Also while defending the didacticism of his own poetry, Pound invokes the example of Homer as well as of other poets:

> I am perhaps didactic; so in a sense, or in different senses are Homer, Dante, Villon, and Omar, and Fitzgerald's trans. of Omar is the only good poem of Vict. era that has got beyond a fame de cenacle. It's all rubbish to pretend that art isn't didactic. A revelation is always didactic. Only the aesthetes since 1880 have pretended the contrary, and they aren't a very sturdy lot (9 July 1922).

So much for the reductive charge often laid against Pound that he was essentially an 'aesthete'!

Among the Latin writers, as Pound wrote to Iris Barry, 'Catullus, Propertius, Horace and Ovid are the people who matter. Catullus most. Martial somewhat. Propertius for beautiful cadence, though he uses only one metre. Horace you will not want for a long time. I doubt if he is of any use save to the Latin scholar . . . Virgil is a second-rater, a Tennysonianized version of Homer. Catullus has the intensity, and Ovid might teach one many things' (?20 July 1916). And recommending Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* he writes to Sarah Perkins Cope (22 April1934): 'being an institution of learning yr. Eng. prof. will never have heard of it though it was good enough for Wm. Shakespear. *And* any dept. of English is a farce without it'. Pound told Harriet Monroe that he considered the writings of Confucius, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 'the only safe guides in religion', but added: 'This doesn't repudiate "The G(oodly) F(ere)". Christ can very well stand as an heroic figure. The hero need not be of wisdom all compounded. Also he is not wholly to blame for the religion that's been foisted on to him. As well blame me for. . . all the bunk in vers libre'. And while refusing to accept 'ANY monotheistic taboos whatsoever', he described the *Metamorphoses* as 'a sacred book, and the Hebrew scriptures the record of a barbarian tribe, full of evil' (16 July 1922).

The two troubadour poets who impressed Pound most were Arnaut Daniel and Sordello. In the latter he found the fusion of word, sound and movement to be so simple that 'one only understands his superiority to other troubadours after having studied Provencal and half-forgotten it, and come back to twenty years later' (11 March 1937). Among Italian poets it is Dante, Cavalcanti and Leopardi who mattered to him most—'Leopardi splndid', he wrote to Iris Barry, 'and the only author since Dante who need trouble you, but not essential as a tool' (27 July 1917). He groups Dante with Shakespeare 'and various other excellent writers who have understood why a poet cannot neglect ethics, and

why an ethic which is afraid of analyzing the motives of action is very poor sham' (24 May 1936). According to Pound, Dante's poetry embodied that sense which 'the Protestant world has *lost*'—'the sense of mental and spiritual rottenness' (April 1937) which forms the corner-stone of Pound's own poetry, especially the *Cantos*.

As lyric poets endowed with that quality which captures the imagination of the modern mind, and which in fact constitutes the essence of modernity—Pound grouped Catullus, Villon and Leopardi together. While dismissing Tagore's philosophy, he pointed out that it didn't offer much for a man 'who has "felt the pangs" or been pestered with Western Civilization. I don't mean quite that but he (Tagore) isn't either Villon or Leopardi, and the modern demands just a dash of their insight' (22 April 1913).

Among older English poets it is Chaucer and Shakespeare whom Pound commends most, and Milton and Wordsworth whom he most berates. 'And English poetry????' he asks Iris Barry, 'Ugh. Perhaps one shouldn't read it at all. Chaucer has in him all that has ever got into English. And if you read Chaucer you will probably (as I did though there is no reason why you should be the same kind of imbecile) start writing archaic English, which you shouldn't' (27 July 1916). In Shakespeare, on the other hand, Pound admired his mastery over a variety of intonations, varying speeds of utterance and of sentence movement. He quoted a line from *Pericles:* 'Faith, she would serve, (pause)/after a long voyage at sea' and comments: 'The cadence is so well-taken that even the archaism in the first word doesn't dim the naturalness of the *sentence*' (4 November 1937). However, Pound's way of reading and admiring Shakespeare was all his own, for it went hand in hand with his loathing of what he calls 'all stage stuff'. 'I think the reason I loathe all stage stuff', he wrote to Ronald Duncan, 'is that it is split. I can stand bad theatre *in* the theatre, but when I read Shxpr I don't think of stage, I think of people. Anything that asks the reader

to think of effect or how it wd. be on stage distracts from reality of fact presented' (17 March 1938).

In his criticism of Milton and Wordsworth—but especially of Milton—Pound, instead of judging Milton's poetry on its own merits, tends to judge it in the light of its relevance to modern poetry. In a letter to Felix E. Schelling (8 July 1916) he points out how 'Milton ruined his work by not understanding that the genius of English is not the genius of Latin, and that one can NOT write an uninflected language in the same way, using the same word-order that serves in an inflected language'. As to Wordsworth Pound's judgment is even more drastic and, so it appears, quite unjustly so. He not only calls him 'a dull sheep', but he regards his achievement as inferior to French prose. 'He will do you no good', he tells Iris Barry, 'though he was better than some, and if there were no French prose and nothing worth reading one might learn a little about descriptions of nature from his endless maunderings' (27 July 1916).

Among the Victorian poets, it was Rossetti, Morris, Fitzgerald, Swinburne and Browning who interested Pound most and who constituted a significant influence on his own development as a poet and a craftsman. 'If you'll read Yeats and Browning and Francis Thompson and Swinburne and Rossetti', Pound wrote to William Carlos Williams (21 May 1909), 'you'll learn something about the progress of Eng. poetry in the last century. And if you'll read Margaret Sackville, Rosamund Watson, Ernest Rhys, Jim G. Fairfax, you'll learn what the people of second rank can do, and what damn good work it is. You are out of touch. That's all'.

II

But it is Pound's letters to the poets, writers and artists of his own century that acquire a peculiar degree of incisiveness and relevance which attest to his vital involvement in the

shaping of modern literature and in resuscitating, as he calls it, 'the dead art of poetry'. Although Pound never met Hardy personally, he corresponded with him and, at a time when Hardy's poetry was not in vogue, wrote admiringly about it. In one of his replies to Pounds letters when Hardy suggested changing the title of *Homage to Propertius*, Pound found the suggestion both 'impractical and infinitely invaluable' and commented: 'don't know that T.H. realized how much he was revealing of the gap between himself and the '90s. But he woke one to the extent of his own absorption in *subject* as contrasted with aesthetes' preoccupation with "treatment"' (8 July 1922). A few years after Hardy's death Pound wrote to W.H.D. Rouse, saying: 'Nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died. More's the pity' (30 December 1934). And when in 1936 Eugene O'Neill received the Nobel Prize for literature, Pound, who considered O'Neill as 'a post-Shavian derivative', noted: 'Shaw himself a mere louse in comparison with Hardy, Joyce or H. James. And Lewis and O'Neill less than G.B.S. Have always thought poor old Upward shot himself in discouragement on reading of award to Shaw. Feeling of utter hopelessness in struggle for values' (December 1936). If Hardy figured so high in Pound's esteem it is because of certain qualities that no other contemporary writer possessed in the same degree. In his note on Hardy's *Collected Poems* Pound observes: 'Now *there* is clarity. There *is* the harvest of having written 20 novels first' (April 1937). For Pound, Hardy's poetry presented qualities which poets like Eliot were not capable of appreciating. 'Mr Eliot don't like it', Pound says *apropos* of Dunning's poetry, and adds: 'but then he don't see either Yeats or Hardy' (February 1925).

Pound was also one of the earliest critics to recognize D.H. Lawrence's genius as a prose writer, even though he didn't like him as a person. 'Detestable person', he tells Harriet Monroe (March 1913), 'but needs watching. I think he learned the proper treatment of modern subjects

before I did. That was in some poems in *The Eng. Rev'*. And in another letter to Harriet Monroe: 'Lawrence, as you know, gives me no pleasure. Nevertheless we are lucky to get him... I *recognize* certain qualities of his work. If I were an editor I should probably accept his work without reading it. As a prose writer I grant him first place among the younger men' (23 September 1913). To have recognized Lawrence as a prose writer as early as 1913—and then only on the basis of the early novels *The White Peacock*, *The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*—was no mean achievement. In fact it was as important as recognizing, and making others recognize, the merit of Eliot or Joyce.

Together with Joyce and Eliot—and even before meeting them—the writer Pound came to know best was Yeats. Either from Venice or soon after his arrival in London in 1908 he must have sent Yeats a copy of *A Lume Spento* and got an encouraging reply from him, because in May 1909 Pound writes to Carlos Williams to say that he has been praised by the greatest living poet. And four years later, in a letter to Harriet Monroe, he tells her that Ford Madox Ford and Yeats 'are the two men in London. And Yeats is already a sort of great dim figure with its associations set in the past' (13 August 1913). Nevertheless Pound's esteem of Yeats as a poet led him to value Yeats's opinion as a critic. While admitting in a letter to H. L. Mencken (17 March 1915) that there might be reasons for an editor's reluctance to publish his poem 'The Temperaments', Pound adds: 'Still, Yeats likes "The Temperaments". He says I have achieved the true Greek (he should say Roman) epigram'. Similarly, when Amy Lowell —whose 'talents and temperament' Pound regarded as being always political rather than literary or artistic—suggested that he should contribute to a 'democratized anthology', Pound made his agreement to do so conditional on her instituting 'a yearly prize for poetry to be adjudged by Yeats, Hueffer and myself' (30 August 1917). In 1913 he also agreed to be Yeats's secretary and went to live with him at Stone Cottage in

Sussex. 'My stay in Stone Cottage', he wrote to his mother in November 1913,

> will not be in the least profitable. Idetestt hec ountry. Yeats will amuse me part of the time and bore me to death with psychical research the rest. I regard the visit as a duty to posterity.

At that time Pound was so impressed by Yeats's work that he could write to Amy Lowell(23 March 1914):'I think Lawrence and Joyce are the two strongest prose writers among les jeunes, and all the rest are about played out. And we could have anything Yeats happened to do'. But by 1916, as he wrote to Iris Barry, he had already started being somewhat impatient with what he calls 'sham Celticism . . . imitations of imitations of Yeats, and of the symbolistes *ad infinitum*. Soft mushy edges'. Yeats kept producing more and more, but for Pound his later output showed a noticeable decline. 'I don't think Yeats's *Silentia Lunae* hangs together', Pound wrote to John Quinn (4 June 1918),

> At least, I don't think it in the same street with his Memoirs as writing. And I find *Noh* unsatisfactory... And I admit there are beautiful bits in it. But it's all too damn soft. Like Pater, Fiona Macleod and James Matthew Barrie, not good enough.

And when Yeats's *Collected Poems* appeared, Pound asked T.E. Lawrence (August 1920): 'Is Yeats any worse than the last volume of Conrad's? As for idyllic and romantic—thought they wereW.B.Y's particular line. Howsomever!' Nevertheless, a couple of years later, while writing to Felix E. Schelling (8July 1922), Pound indicated his literary debts and influences, including Yeats among them: 'Considerable encouragement to tell people to go to hell, and to maintain absolute intransigeance, recd. from Mr. W. B. Yeats'.

It is highly probable that in his open criticism of Pound's *Cantos*—a criticism which Pound thought misled people more than anything else written about them—Yeats was to some extent prejudiced by Pound's criticism of him. 'God damn Yeats' bloody paragraph', Pound writes, commenting on Yeats's assessment of the *Cantos* in *A Packet for Ezra Pound*, 'Done more to prevent people reading *Cantos* for what is *on*

the page than any other one smoke screen' (February 1939).

In the case of Joyce, too, Pound's early enthusiasm for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* subsequently gave way to reservations concerning Joyce's later work—reservations that brought about a certain coolness in their relationship. On 18 February 1915, Pound wrote to H. L. Mencken: 'The prose writer I am really interested in is James Joyce . . . *The Egoist* is using a long novel of his *(A Portrait)* as a serial. It's damn well written'. Pound's admiration, of course, was always tied up with his disinterested zeal in promoting not only the cause of the particular writer, but of literature in general. Hence in 1916 he wrote 'a very strong letter re Joyce' to an American publisher 'advising him to print the Joyce in preference to my book—*(This Generation*, never published)—if his capital is limited. I can't go further than that'. In fact, as his letters to Joyce and to others on behalf of Joyce show—of which more later—Pound *did* go even further. So that while indicating the sort of periodical he wanted to have a right to appear in, a sort of' "official organ" (vile phrase)', he observed: 'a place where I and T. S. Eliot can appear once a month (or once an 'issue') and where Joyce can appear when he likes, and where Wyndham Lewis can appear if he comes back from the war' (January 1917).

The ninety letters that Pound wrote to Joyce between 1913 and 1937 *(Pound/Joyce*, edited by Forrest Read) contain the same degree of frankness, critical acumen and insight as the letters in Paige's edition. But somehow they are lacking in that biting irony and sarcasm, verbal and stylistic, which characterize the former. And this largely because in his letters to Joyce, Pound was more interested in advising him on various problems and in paving the way for his recognition, than in displaying his own wit, and critical authority. In other words, he was, as Horace Gregory said, acting as 'the minister without portfolio of the arts', rather than exercising his creative powers as a letter writer.

Having experienced difficulties in getting his own work

printed, Pound knew how to advise and caution Joyce. 'I have', he wrote to Joyce (17 July 1918), 'as much Trouble as you do in getting printed—tho' I am much milder & far less indecent=au moins=je suis peut etre un peu plus phallique, mais mi interessent moins les excremens et les feces humains et des bestiaux'. In another letter (10 June 1919), while calling Joyce 'gloire et decor de la langue Irso-Anglais', he still points out certain defects and limitations in *Ulysses*, affirming among other things that 'Mass effect of any work depends on conviction of author's sanity . . . Abnormal keeness of insight O.K. But *obsessions* arseore-ial, cloacal, deist, aesthetic as opposed to arsethetic, any obsession or tic shd. be very carefully considered before being turned loose'.

However, since Pound was not interested in Joyce's later work, Joyce seemed to forget all the praise and perceptive criticism Pound had expressed in respect of *Portrait* and *Ulysses* and started feeling a certain resentment against the latter. Far from effecting, as was claimed for it, a revolution of the word,[4] Joyce's later work appeared to Pound—and both H. G. Wells and, later on, F. R. Leavis were to concur with him—'as essentially a mosaic of nonsense syllabication', 'an aimless search for exaggeration'. In the last of the Rome Radio talks on Joyce, Pound sums up what he thought of Joyce's strength and originality as displayed in *Ulysses* and contrasts it with the 'aimless search for exaggeration' that characterises *Finnegans Wake:*

> Joyce hit his high in Ulysses/There was still exuberance/In Finnegan he is hunting /he is experimenting with a technique/bourgeois diversion/I havnt patience to wade through it/thank god I am not employed to estimate the amount of real metal in low grade ores/(no pun intended).[5]

III

Together with Joyce, the writer Pound helped most was Eliot to whom some of his most stimulating letters are

addressed. When, despite his recommendation of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'—'the most interesting contribution I've had from an American', as he wrote (October 1914) —Harriet Monroe rejected it, Pound wrote back indignantly: 'No, most emphatically I will not ask Eliot to write down to any audience whatsoever . . . Neither will I send you Eliot's address in order that he may be insulted' (9 November 1914). In another letter (31 January 1915) he met her objection more specifically:

> 'Mr Prufrock' does not 'go off at the end'. It is a portrait of failure or of a character which fails, and it would be false art to make it end on a note of triumph. I dislike the paragraph about Hamlet, but it is an early and cherished bit and T. E. won't give it up, and as it is the only portion of the poem that most readers will like at first reading, I don't see that it will do much harm.
>
> For the rest: a portrait satire on futility can't end by turning that quintessence of futility, Mr. P. into a reformed character breathing out fire and ozone.

Apart from backing Eliot, such comments also created the taste according to which his poetry could be appreciated, offering, as they did, what might well be regarded as a critical appraisal in a nutshell of Eliot's early poetry. In another letter (1 December 1915) Pound tells Harriet Monroe that he finds 'Prufrock' 'more individual and unusual than the 'Portrait of a Lady'! I chose it of the two as I wanted his first poem to be published to be a poem that would at once differentiate him from everyone else, in the public mind'. And in a letter to Margaret C. Anderson (August 1917) he admits that 'Eliot has thought of things I had not thought of, and I'm damned if many of the others have done so. Inventive, creative, or what not'. In fact, together with his honesty and generosity in praising Eliot, went Pound's almost paternal concern for his career. When, for instance, Eliot wrote a pamphlet *Ezra Pound, His Metric and Poetry* in 1918, Pound wrote to H. L. Mencken (12 March 1918):

> No, I did not write it, Eliot wrote it, but it would be extremely unwise for him, at this stage of his career, with the hope of sometime

getting paid by elder reviews, and published by the godly, and in general of not utterly botching his chances in various quarters of him to have signed it.

And in his very first letter to Eliot, as it stands in Paige's edition (24 December 1921), while out to discuss excisions and modifications to be made in the original draft of *The Waste Land*, Pound includes a doggerel 'Sage Homme' which wittily epitomises the genesis of Eliot's poem :

Sage Homme

These are the poems of Eliot
By the Uranian Muse begot;
A Man their Mother was,
A Muse their Sire.

How did the printed Infancies result
From Nuptials thus doubly difficult?

If you must needs enquire
Know diligent Reader
That on each Occasion
Ezra performed the caesarean Operation.

It was characteristic of Pound that he should have asserted his part in the shaping of the final version of *The Waste Land* only in a personal letter to Eliot, while praising openly what struck him as original in it, and doing his utmost to propagate its merit—even 'dragging my own corpse by the heels to arouse the blasted spectators', as he wrote to Harriet Monroe (January 1931). And when *The Waste Land* appeared in the revised form, Pound hailed it as a masterpiece—one of the most important 19 pages in English',—in a pamphlet he sent to friends and fellow writers asking for subscriptions 'in order that T. S. Eliot may leave his work in Lloyd's Bank and devote his whole time to literature' (March 1922).

But there were certain aspects of Eliot's later career which didn't interest Pound. 'Possum's rep. for decorum and subtlety', he wrote to E. E. Cummings (10 November 1926), was already something of a barrier between him and Eliot. Another, and an even greater barrier was that constituted by Eliot's criticism, as he wrote to John Drummond (18 February 1932):

I dunno how you feel about Eliot's evil influence. Not that his crit. is *bad* but that he hasn't seen *where* it leads. What it leads TO. Attention on lesser rather than greater. At a time when there is imperative need of a BASIS, i.e., what ole Unc. Wm. Yeats called 'new sacred book of the arts'. Something, or some place where men of good will can meet without worrying about creed and colour etc.

Pound was even less enthusiastic about Eliot's plays. 'Waal' he wrote to James Laughlin (January 1936),

I heerd the *Murder in the Cafedrawl* on the radio lass' night. Oh them cawkney woices, My Krissz, them cawkney woices. Mzzr Shakzpeer *still* retains his posishun. I stuck it fer a while, wot wiff the weepin and wailin. And Mr. Joyce the greatest forcemeat since Gertie. And wot iz bekum of Wyndham!

My Krrize tham cawkney voyces !

Apart from literary differences, there emerged, as time went on, even differences of personality and judgment between Pound and Eliot. Once settled in life as part of the establishment, Eliot drifted increasingly away from what Pound stood for. In a letter to Henry Swabey (March 1936) Pound refers to 'the respectable Anglicans, Rogers, Andrewes (whom Eliot dare not disagree with)'. And while expounding his plan to F. V. Morley (February 1937) for the proposed book *The New Learning* (which Faber and Faber were to bring out) he asks:

How much does Ez git fer eggsposin hiz iggurunce? In the brass-covered manner? And when do you want the mannerskrip to git to deh printers?? An how you gwine ter keep deh Possum in his feedbox when I brings in deh Chinas and blackmen?? He won't laaak fer to see no Chinas and blackmen in a bukk about Kulchur. Dat being jess his low-down Unitarian iggurunce.

In another letter to F. V. Morely (9 May 1937) Pound makes a bantering comment about Eliot: 'I got some reflex-shuns on deh Possum, co's of co'se he's kulchurd az hell. O long about his ducksun to Sam Johnson's *Vanity*. Waal, naow I axs you is Sam Vanitied??' But if Pound was critical of Eliot in his letters to others, he was no less so in his letters to Eliot himself. In a letter to him (14 December 1937) he invites Eliot to write a piece 'saying just and *plain* wot

he fink a styge (notta stooge) playe orter be', and adds: 'It needn't be *long*, as I know you're lazy. But also it needn't be in that keerful Criterese which so successfully protekks you in the stinking and foggy clmik agin the bareboreians ... However, you can say wot you like (not in epistolary, cause they cdn't translate *that* wiffaht losink somfink, but in Queen Eliz's and the Pos's English)'. Pound even advised Ronald Duncan (August 1939) how to 'eschew Mr.Eliot's affected and artyficial language'. And yet he was always keenly interested in Eliot the man and profoundly appreciative of what his art represented at its best.

Pound's critical esteem of Wyndham Lewis too went, for some time at least, hand in hand with his friendship for and collaboration with him. He considered him a great artist—in a letter to John Quinn (March 1916) he even went so far as to affirm that Lewis has got 'so much more *in him* than Gaudier'—and at the same time an important prose writer, and regarded *Tarr* as comparable to *Ulysses* in modernity and originality. And when in a letter to Ronald Duncan (17 March 1938) he recalled the achievement in art and literature of the early years of this century, he mentioned Lewis, along with Gaudier and himself:

> I come back to things *effected*. There were Gaudier and Lewis, or vice versa, plus me. There was before that my then recent headlines in 1909-1910 *plus* a clear program of three points *plus* a small nucleus of actual poems (H.D., Aldington, one of Bill Williams which were distinct from the stuff lolling about in 1911).

Pound's admiration for Lewis, and for that matter Lewis's admiration for Pound, did not cancel the difference of opinion between them, as one can see from their writings and letters. 'No one could be "wholly in sympathy" with *The Little Review*', Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe (1 February 1919), 'any more than I could be wholly in sympathy with Lewis: my only contention is that genius ought to exist, and that ALL publications should not exclude it'. And in a letter to John Quinn (19 June 1920) he indicated the class to which Lewis belonged: 'After Gaudier, Lewis, Joyce, one wants

something a bit meaty to excite one'. Points of disagreement in fact enabled Pound, Lewis and others to attain to the kind of freedom and individuality in their writings which Pound valued so much. *'If* you are looking for people who agree with you! !!!', he wrote to James Vogel (23 January 1929), 'How the hell many points of agreement do you suppose there were between Joyce, W. Lewis, Eliot and yrs. truly in 1917; or between Gaudier and Lewis in 1913; or between me and Yeats, etc.?' Pound's own relationship with Lewis and others brings out his complete dedication to the principle of a genuine and intelligent difference of opinion between those whom he more or less regarded as his peers. For instance, while warning Lincoln Kirstein (May 1931) of the danger of confusing lyric impulse and editorial function, he observes that

> As lyricist you can WANT (and shd. want) whatever you damn please. Editorial function something very different. In that function one has to (at least) observe, admit the capacities of people who like what one does NOT like.
>
> Life wd. have been (in my case) much less interesting if I had waited till Joyce, Lewis, Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, etc. complied with what my taste was in 1908.
>
> O HELL, how shall I put it. My son, elucidate thine own bloody damn point of view by its contrast to others, not by trying to make the others conform.

William Carlos Williams too came—and quite early in his career as a poet—under Pound's influence. Between 1908 and 1930 Pound wrote 17 letters to Williams—letters which indicate the extent of Pound's formative influence on him. In his first letter (21 October 1908) Pound outlines the fundamental tenets of his own poetics, while commenting at the same time on Williams' criticism of him:

> Good Lord! of course you don't have to like the stuff I write. I hope the time will never come when I get so fanatical as to let a man's like or dislike for what I happen to 'poetare' interfere with an old friendship or a new one . . .
>
> I am damn glad to get some sincere criticism anyhow . . .

But in another letter (21 May 1909) it is Pound who is criticising Williams' poetry 'as if (it) were my own work':

> Individual, original it is not, Great art it is not. Poetic it is, but there are innumerable poetic volumes poured out here in Gomorrah. There is no town like London to make one feel the vanity of all art except the highest...

He added in a postscript: 'And remember a man's real work is what *he is going to do*, not what is behind him. Avanti e coraggio!' And when in December 1913 Williams sent his poem 'La Flor', Pound found it 'good' and 'gracious' and added:

> Your vocabulary in it is right. Your syntax still strays occasionally from the simple order of speech . . . I think 'gracious' is the word I should apply to it also as a critic. It is dignified. It has the air of Urbino. I don't know about your coming over. I still think as always that in the end your work will hold.

Along with his encouragement went Pound's critically frank exposure of what constituted the weakness in Williams' poetry. 'The thing that saves your work,' Pound wrote to him (November 1917), 'is *opacity*, and don't you forget it. Opacity is NOT an American quality. Fizz, swish, gabble of verbiage, these are echt Amerikanisch'.

IV

Pound extended the help, encouragement and criticism that he offered to poets and writers, also to translators. W.H.D Rouse, the translator of Homer, and Laurence Binyon, the translator of *Divina Commedia* benefitted considerably from Pound's criticism as expressed in his letters to them. Between 1934 and 1937 he wrote a dozen letters to Rouse, and between 1934 and 1938, 9 letters to Binyon. In advising Rouse (30 December 1934) on his translation of *The Odyssey* as to how to avoid doing what, according to T. S. Eliot, Gilbert Murray had done—i.e., erect 'between Euripides and the reader a barrier more impassable than the Greek language'—as well as how to achieve a translation that would

satisfy those who are 'too sensitive to read the tushery provided by "adorned" translations', Pound asked him, above all, to 'keep the drive of the narration' and at the same time to produce the 'raw cut of concrete reality' (April 1935). And if Pound himself did not undertake the translation of *The Odyssey*, it was, as he pointed out, for three simple reasons: firstly, 'Am on a job (or perhaps two or three) that needs all the brains I've got'; secondly, 'Too god damn iggurunt of *Greek*'; and thirdly, 'When I do sink into the Greek, what I dig up is too concentrative—I don't see how to get unity of the *whole*'. And yet he kept 'nagging' Rouse because a translation of *The Odyssey* seemed to him 'so enormous an undertaking, and the requirements include *all* the possible masteries of English' (23 May 1935).

Pound's criticism doesn't seem to have gone down very well with Rouse who complained that he was cursing him for not making his kings talk like gangsters. 'No,' Pound replied in what is his last letter to Rouse included in the Paige edition (November 1937),

> I am not cursing you fer not makin your kings talk like gangsters. — — Where the translation can be improved is in dimension of inflection of the voice. Possibly *no* change of vocabulary required, but the greater variety of intonation and of sentence movement. The indication of tone of voice and varying speeds of utterance. In that, Homer is never excelled by Flaubert or James or any of 'em. *But* it needs the technique of one or more life times.

An indefatigable helper and campaigner for causes other than his own, Pound had now and then also to think of himself. 'I do have to stop and earn my board now and again. Malheureusement,' he writes to Margaret C. Anderson (January 1918). And in another letter to her (February 1918) he observes: 'I do not want to sink wholly into criticism to the utter stoppage of creation'. Although Pound had already achieved *Mauberley*, *Homage to Propertius*, the first four cantos and a number of shorter lyrics, he wrote to Eliot (24 December 1921): 'Complimenti, you bitch. I am wracked by

the seven jealousies, and cogitating an excuse for always exuding my deformative secretions in my own stuff, and never getting an outline'.

However, Pound's concern with his own creative work never affected the help and advice he was always willing to give to others. Nor was there anything pompous or pedantic about such advice. 'Your stuff holds my eye', he wrote to Marianne Moore (16 December 1918), 'Most verse I merely slide off of (God I do ye thank for this automatic self-protection), BUT my held eye goes forward very slowly, and I know how simple many things appear to me which people of supposed intelligence come to me to have explained'. And if he praised something, his praise was pointed and discriminatory, and not based on amiable banalities. 'Definiteness of your delineations', he tells Marianne Moore in another letter (1 February 1919), 'is delicious, in all the austerity of that much abused term. Must go on with it, you must. Thank God you don't tend to burble or to produce "FOUR epics" in one vol. as per last ad. of Amy'.

But in spite of the mantle of the teacher that Pound habitually donned in his letters, he was far from being oblivious of his own lacunas and limitations. 'The bounds of even my knowledge are not without their limit', he tells Iris Barry (27 July 1916). However, this didn't prevent him from trying to teach and stimulate others—'trying to provide', as Yeats remarked, 'a portable substitute for the British Museum' (22 April 1934). When, in November 1924, R. P. Blackmur proposed that Pound should undertake some explicatory or interpretative work—the exact nature of this project isn't clear from Pound's reply and in the absence of Blackmur's own letter there is no other way of ascertaining it—Pound replied:

> Adagio! Give me a little time, perhaps I may even manage a little cosmogony. The first impression of life is somewhat chaotic. Mind you, I can't at this stage guarantee to indicate the curvatures of Euc–or non-Euclidean space with a precision that will satisfy the Ecole Polytechnique. And we agree, je crois, that one can no longer put Mt. Purgatory forty miles high in the midst of Australian sheep land.

Along with his awareness of his own limitations went Pound's sense of creative integrity. 'I have had to scrap a full year's work more than once', he wrote to William Bird (17 April 1924), 'that is what art is and why it is so damn rare'.

As a teacher and critic, it was natural that university education, especially in the United States, of which Pound had had first-hand experience, should have come under his critical scrutiny. In a letter to Simon Guggenheim (24 February 1925), while congratulating him on the terms of the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, he voiced his concern that educational endowments should in general tend 'to produce mediocre students and to stop the good man just as soon as he starts'. In support of his argument Pound quotes what his old professor, Schelling, whom he tried to persuade to admit some men of literary ability, once wrote to him: 'the University is not here for the unusual man'. One of the factors that contributed to the situation of American universities—'flagrant cases of men of unusual ability hampered, by financial stress, while hundreds of mediocrities swallowed up America's heavy endowments'—was the neglect of literature and the arts—'the best means of inter-communication; the most condensed, the least likely to be vain argument.' This neglect itself could, at least partly, be attributed to the American parody of German philology which is 'often, most often, *not* a system of enlightenment but a conspiracy to prevent the student from learning more than his teacher'. Concluding his letter to Guggenheim, Pound wrote; 'If this note is harsh, set it down to my desire for clarity; if disjointed, to a desire for brevity'. Some years later, in a letter to Lincoln Kirstein (May 1931), he returned to the subject of educational endowments and of what is wrong with academic life:

> The endowments are sabotaged. Even when some vague and good natured millionaire 'founds' something with allegedly cultural or creative intent, the endowment is handed over to academic eminences who are

as incapable of picking a first class painter or writer as I shd. be of making a sound report on a copper mine. The one thing they are sure to hate is the germ of original capacity.

And when in a letter to Pound, Schelling accused him of being embittered, Pound answered back with a touch of humour and irony (April 1934):

As for my being embittered, it won't wash; everybody who comes near me marvels at my good nature. . .

I have never objected to any man's mediocrity, it is the idiotic fear that a certain type of mediocrity has in the presence of any form of the *real*. And the terror of newspaper owners, profs, editors, etc. in the presence of *idea*. I have documents stacked high, from men in most walks of life. Proved over and over again. No intellectul life in the univs. No truth in the press. Refusal to look at *fact*.

He concluded his letter by throwing down both a challenge and a practical suggestion to Schelling:

You ain't so old but what you cd. wake up. And you are too respected and respectable for it to be any real risk. They can't fire you *now*. Why the hell don't you have a bit of real fun before you get tucked under?

Damn it all, I never did dislike you.

One of the objectives Pound campaigned for in the early decades of this century was what he called the unGermanization of American Universities. 'I now see,' he wrote to Harriet Monroe (29 November 1917),

that some professors have proclaimed it. NOT, of course, because they know what or why, but on 'pathriotic' grounds.

However, that also should be encouraged. And the nature of philology, as a system of dehumanization, gone into.

And in April 1929, while acknowledging the receipt of a circular, Pound wrote to the Alumni Secretary of the University of Pennsylvania: 'The matter of keeping up one more otiose institution in a retrograde country seems to me to be the affair of those still bamboozled by mendicancy, rhetoric, and circular letters. . . . All the U. of P. or your god damn college or any other god damn American college does or will do for a man of letters is to ask him to go away without breaking the silence'.

The literary and critical substance of Pound's epistolary reappraisals, rebuttals and recommendations both reflects and epitomizes the essence of modernism in poetry, engaging our attention in such a way as to make us participate in the currents and cross-currents of twentieth-century literary and cultural history. In an early essay of his, 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris',[6] Pound observes that as an artist he dislikes writing prose. 'Writing prose is an art, but it is not my art'. But this was not so much the result of any inherent incapacity or temperamental ineptitude on Pound's part, as the corollary of his belief, as he wrote to Binyon (30 August 1934), that 'criticism should consume itself and disappear (as I think it mostly does in my *ABC of Reading*)'. And yet Pound's prose, especially in his letters, creates, as Leavis said *apropos* of Hardy's poetry, a style out of stylelessness,[7] because for all his conscious as well as unconscious Americanness, Pound was, from the very outset, fully aware of the difference between American English and British English, and he leaves us in no doubt as to where his preference lay. 'They, the American brood,' he wrote to Harriet Monroe (March 1913), 'have ears like elephants and no sense of the English language'. As an admirer of Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and Ford Madox Ford, Pound not only had that sense in abundance, but he also impressively displayed it in his own prose writings in general and in his letters in particular. It is not merely control of prose style and technique as such, but something else that accounts for Pound's epistolary mastery. What he said about Picasso's art applies as much to his own prose and poetry. 'It is not merely knowledge of technique, or skill, it is intelligence and knowledge of life, of the whole of it, beauty, hell, sarcasm, every kind of whirlwind of force and emotion'.

To conclude, Pound's letters are an incomparably vital and significant contribution to an already rich epistolary tradition in English that embraces Swift, Pope, Lady Wortley Motague, the Earl of Chesterfield, Gray, Cowper, Byron, Shelley, Keats,

Dickens, down to Matthew Arnold and Clough. But both by virtue of their frankness and vivacity of tone as well as by virtue of the colloquial language sometimes used—'I have made my quiet classical remarks elsewhere', Pound tells Mencken *apropos* of his letter to him (April 1915), 'but here I want 'em to know that they are being spoken to'—they are closer to Byron's letters than to those of any other writer. And by virtue of the various aspects of the *Zeitgeist* analysed and assessed as well as of the literary topics discussed, they come closer to the letters exchanged between Matthew Arnold and Clough. However, what is strikingly unique about Pound's letters is the utmost honesty and succinctness with which he deals with what he is talking about, expressing his point of view and approving or rebutting that of others without mincing words. They show, to quote a phrase from Edmond de Goncourt, or rather Pound's translation of it, 'the history of contemporary ethics-in-action' (l'histoire morale contemporaine').[8] But apart from the literary and critical value of these letters, they have also an autobiographical significance insofar as they present, in however helter-skelter and impromptu a way, 'short histories of one's life' (9 March 1916). In them Pound reveals, as nowhere else, a sense of supreme self-assurance and a firm belief in his own authority or in what he calls 'high and final Ezthority' (10 March 1937). In some of the letters one may detect—and Pound himself was the first to admit this—a 'lack of precision and of glittering phrase' (27 September 1916)—but on the whole they are singularly free from what he calls 'aimable inanities' (January 1919). Pound may complain, as he did in a letter to E. E. Cummings (January 1935)—and not so much out of modesty, as from a fastidious regard for the *mot juste*—that 'my popular style is rhetorical, just broad. Not very pointed'. And yet in most contexts and for most puposes his style could not have been more pointed, so that one can say of Pound what Dr Johnson said of Milton, that he seemed 'to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know

what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others'.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] In 'Isolated Superiority' (a review of *Personae: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound*), *Dial*, LXXXIV,I (January 1928).

[2] Quoted by D.D. Paige in the Introduction to his edition of *The Letters of Ezra Pound (1907–1941)* (London, 1951). Unless otherwise indicated, all the quotations come from this edition of Pound's letters.

[3] And some ten years later, he was to tell her again (27 March 1931): 'But anybody being a friend of anybody has nothing to do with literary criticism'.

[4] Cf, F.R. Leavis's views on this subject in his essay 'Joyce and "the Revolution of the Word" ', *Scrutiny*, II, 3 (1933). Later included in *For Continuity* (Cambridge, 1933).

[5] 'French Accent', *If This Be Treason...*, edited by Olga Rudge (Siena, 1948).

[6] Published in *The New Age*, 7 December 1911-15 February 1912. Now in *Selected Prose of Ezra Pound*, edited by William Cookson (London, 1973).

[7] 'Hardy the Poet', *Southern Review* (June 1940).

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Edward H. Strauch

MYSTICAL SYMBOLISM IN *THE NAUSEA*: AN EXPLICATION

Anyone familiar with Jean Paul Sartre's atheistic position will be confounded by the title of this explication. However, if a mystic can be regarded as one who seeks hidden, secret or esoteric meanings in human experience, the record of Sartre's hero in the novel *The Nausea* may be considered the 'confession' of a mystic. Furthermore, if mysticism is the spiritual or real way by which men have historically sought to transcend the demands of reason, then Roquentin's story depicts a mystical transcendence of rationalism. Since Sartre's hero must gradually reject Cartesian and scientific ratiocination in order to attain a viable and durable truth, Roquentin's existential preoccupation with symbols serves as the key to the mystical symbolism of his experience.

The present explication will, therefore, proceed in the following manner. First, Sartre's literary affinities with French symbolists will be examined. Second, beyond this sensuous and synesthetic stage of symbolism, *The Nausea* will be shown to manifest eight distinct patterns of existential symbols which resolve themselves into four spheres of significance. The third part of the explication will not only describe Sartre's affinities with Pascal and with Dante, but it will also show how Eric Auerbach's concept of *figura* admirably illuminates Sartre's mystical view of both peripheral and central personages. Fourth and last, the explication will show how the characters and situations prophesy symbolic destinies.

Literary Affinities with French Symbolism

The Nausea is a symbolic novel both by internal and

external evidence. In the beginning of the novel, we learn that Roquentin, the narrator, has experienced an inexplicable anxiety due to some mysterious change in the nature of things. He senses a mutation in himself and in the world around him. He reacts to coincidences, to things decaying and people dying, to his own physical fragility, to human suffering, to the Absurd, to the pseudo-purposes of bourgeois life, to the contingency governing Existence, and finally, to the meaning of a simple melody. By recording the incidents and phenomena, the perceptions and transformations, he will seek to understand the images of his metaphysical anguish —his nausea. Through the matrix of symbols and metamorphoses emerging out of Roquentin's search, the reader will discover where the senseless ends and the meaningful begins.

This 'symbolism which seeks' is associated with the self-expressive poets sometimes called symbolists. Even if Sartre had not been directly inspired by such poets as Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, he shows eclectic affinities with them. Much like Baudelaire, Antoine Roquentin wanders through a 'forest of symbols', looking for correspondences; the spleen in 'Quand le Ciel Bas et Lourd . . .' is like Roquentin's nausea. When Baudelaire asks, 'what is a poet—if not a translator, a decoder . . . of the universal analogy?'[1], we recollect that Antoine perceives an underlying unity beneath the images, metaphors, and symbols of experience which express his *Weltschmerz* and intimate the sense of the world. A compendium of correspondences, the novel divulges its dominant meaning through the nausea.

The novel calls to mind the *Art Poetique* in which Verlaine would have the poet seek inspiration in music rather than in sculpture or painting. It may be a singular coincidence, but Roquentin disdains both sculpture and painting to extol music. In fact, the jazz melody in the café becomes the symbol of Roquentin's new, authentic way of life because, even though its sounds decompose, the melody remains the same, young and firm, a witness without pity.[2] The music

has nothing in excess (*de trop*). It *is* (p. 246). It inspires him to create a work of art as durable and as absolute. Moreover, Verlaine's idea is 'Only the nuance..., the hazy and floating, are the means of art because the object of poetry is not the clear idea, the precise sentiment, but the swell of the heart, the chiaroscuro of sensations, the indecisiveness of the states of the soul'.[3] In the same way, *The Nausea* gives expression to the modulations of heart, mind, and soul which are translated by the inflection of the imagery.

Roquentin as 'narrator' in *The Nausea* bears marked resemblances to Rimbaud in his *Season in Hell*, 1873. Van Tieghem tells us that the poet's inventions 'would have the monstrous power to change life, that is, to create not only a new aspect of things, but a new world.'[4] This, indeed, is what Sartre seeks to achieve in his work. Van Tieghem adds: 'the reform of poetry implied a reform of the sensibility, of vision. The Poet must become the Clairvoyant "by a long, immense and irrational disordering of all the senses"'. What better definition of Roquentin's own obsession with the nausea? The approach of a crisis of nerves, the hallucinatory visions of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* are Roquentin's own.

Finally, Sartre's intellectual purpose seems to have significant parallels to the poetic of Mallarmé in his *Divigations* of 1896. Van Tieghem explains Mallermé's poetics as follows: 'Poetry must therefore be neither descriptive nor narrative, but suggestive.' For Mallarmé 'the object is only designated by an allusive image; the subject-matter of the poem is an Idea, that is, an abstract, intellectual or emotive notion.'[5] Clearly, Sartre's novel primarily expresses an abstract idea in the narrator's anxiety before man's existential situation. Furthermore, *The Nausea* is like a poem in being unified by a dominant mood.

These affinities of the novel to French symbolism provide external evidence that it is symbolic. However, there is also internal corroboration.

Norman Friedman reminds us in the *Encyclopedia of Poetry*

and Poetics that one may determine in three ways when an image is truly symbolic: 1) the connection between the image and thing symbolized may be made explicit; 2) it may be made into something by virtue of the speaker's reaction to it; and 3) the pressure of implicit association may be so great as to demand a symbolic interpretation.[6] It is clear from Roquentin's explicit statements and from his powerful reactions to images that they have a symbolic significance for him. Moreover, the pressure of the relentless anxiety upon his whole being demands a symbolic interpretation of the signs and symptoms of that anguish.

Patterns of Existential Symbols

An examination of the images and metaphors in *The Nausea* discovers that Roquentin's metaphysical anguish translates things, places, persons, situations and events into symbols which measure the four dimensions of existence. As clusters of schemata of meaning, they ultimately reveal existence to have four spheres of significance:
1) Nothingness (*le neant*) versus Plenitude (*de trop*); 2) The Fixed and Immutable versus Change and Metamorphosis; 3) Appearance versus Reality; and 4) Existence versus Essence. (To assist the reader to visualize these groupings, he is invited to refer to the schemata of symbols given below.)

Eight Patterns of Existential Symbols
Schemata of Symbols

A. *Nothingness* (Isolation and Loneliness) 1. the stone 2. street names 3. the street lamp 4. the torn billboard signs 5. the wall without doors or windows	B. *Plenitude (de trop)* 1. the king of hearts 2. the library 3. the museum and all its paintings 4. the chestnut tree and the root

6. the solitary sound of the siren on the wind
7. the scream of Lucie In the night
8. the Negress's voice and the song itself
9. Bouville iself next to the sea and in the middle of nature

C. *Fixed or Immutable*

1. the song and the record
2. the king of hearts
3. Boulevard Noir
4. *Musee de Bouville*
5. *Dictee*

D. *Change and Metamorphosis* (Decay, Decomposition, Death versus Creativity)

1. the paper in street becomes a beast
2. his face and flesh become vegetable, sub-ape, a polyp
3. rust in workshop and rotten boards
4. bench like a dead donkey
5. people dying
6. ruins everywhere
7. Roquentin stabbing his hand
8. the song causes his nausea to disappear
9. hand and arm move as a majestic theme of music
10. the melody teaches him to suffer in measure

E. *Appearance*

1. the sea—its mirror surface

F. *Reality*

1. its black reality full of beasts

2. cities and places seem different
3. days, months, and years seem orderly
4. explanation of history, the world of 'facts'
5. making love
6. scientific explanations
7. colours, flavours, odours, and definitions seem true
8. a world of natural order (cause and effect)

2. they all resemble each other
3. they are all the same
4. the new cannot be explained by the old, the effect by the cause
5. the juices, mucous, the smell—the biological reality
6. related to root—function does not explain anything
7. we cannot define with genre + *differentiae* (colours, etc. are never true)
8. the world is one of contingency

G. *Existence*

1. at museum Roquentin sees self as stone, plant, microbe
2. world of things and people, chestnut tree and root exist beyond explanations
3. Roquentin senses self by organic sensations
4. existence is the realities: the organic, the dying
5. the swarming *de trop* of nature
6. absurdity of existence and a man in existence
7. contingency is absolute

H. *Essence*

1. jazz introduction = an inflexible order
2. the fragile *duree* of the music
3. something has happened
4. like the melody one must suffer in measure
5. the Negress and Jew are saved
6. to have moments of life as a life one recalls
7. existence is the privileged moment; something has need of him to be born
8. he is his thought
9. self-transcendence = to make life essence

Schema A. The signs and symbols which depict *Nothingness* gravitate around objects or sounds that express the isolation of loneliness of all things in existence. Hence the stone Roquentin picked up and threw away because its dirty side filled him with a mild revulsion. The street names 'Black' and 'Fear' also evoke repulsion. The street lamp, the torn billboard signs, the wall without doors or windows also call forth a sense of solitude or of no escape. The solitary sound of the siren brought with the wind, the agonized scream of Lucie in the night, the Negress's voice and the song itself 'Some of these days, You'll miss me, honey!' all bespeak a sense of loss or of bereavement. And the city of Bouville itself, next to the dark sea and in the middle of nature, even if more abstractly, portrays loneliness. Lost in existence, man recognizes his finite fragility. As symbols of death, these things recall to man his nothingness.

Schema B. The signs and symbols that display *Plenitude* are fewer than those which describe man's existential isolation. The king of hearts represents so many gestures now disappeared. The library with its many books displays the mass of man's 'knowledge'. The museum of paintings reflects the bourgeoisie and their host of projects and ambitions. The chestnut tree and its mighty root sunk into the earth seems to Roquentin like the mindless, superabundant self-reproduction of nature.

Schema C. Images and symbols also exhibit the *Fixed and Immutable*. The song reveals its inflexible order which gives birth to the notes and destroys them, preventing them from existing for themselves. In the card playing, the king of hearts follows a rigorous chain of events which is as irreversible as the song itself. The Boulevard Noir is as inhuman as a mineral or a triangle. In the library there are the books describing the constant forms of the animal species and the conservation of energy in the universe. In the museum the paintings are like a claim to immortality by the same bourgeois who sought the guarantee of heaven through their religion,

but Roquentin knows ironically there is only absolute death. When Roquentin cannot pick up the piece of notebook paper entitled *'Dictee'*, he realizes he is not free, and the nausea attacks him. In all these symbols, then, are revealed the unalterable or irrevocable, and they chain Roquentin to his rock as if he were Prometheus.

Schema D. In contrast to the fixed and immutable is the imagery of *Change and Metamorphosis.* There is the piece of paper in the street which seemed to become a living beast to him. When he looks at his homely face in the mirror, Roquentin sees in his features something sub-human, sub-ape, something vegetable, something like a polyp. Then again he notices the sunlight, like a judgment without indulgence, brightening the rust in a workshop and its rotten boards. Another time Roquentin notices a bench which seems a dead and swollen beast, a donkey, its legs in the air. And Roquentin detects people who are dying: the cashier at the café who is rotting inside, Lucie's husband who has tuberculosis, and Doctor Rogé with his own fatal disease. Then all that Roquentin remembers from his extensive travels over the world is that the places he visited now seem ruins just as his memories have become dead leaves, become words. Thus there are many signs and symbols of decay, decomposition, destruction, and death.

Yet there are keys to creativity also, to metamorphosis in the direction of life, beauty, and meaning. The song the Negress sings causes Roquentin's nausea to disappear. He feels his body stiffen and resist. The melody shows him the way to measure his anguish just as, at last, it will lead him to make of his dissolving life a melody—young, firm, and abiding.

Schemata E and F. Other signs betoken Roquentin's apperception of *Appearance versus Reality.* The sea which appears as a mirror surface is in dark reality filled with beasts. All the places and cities seem so different at first, but finally, they all resemble one another. Days, months,

and years seem an orderly procession, but they are all the same—today as yesterday. 'Making love' is a euphemism, for Roquentin visualizes the juices, the mucous, the smell, the biological reality beneath it all. History, pretending to be a world of fact, is not true, for the new cannot be explained by the old, the effect by the cause. Anything can happen anytime. And the root of the tree in the public garden makes him realize that function does not explain anything; hence the explanations of science are useless. Colours, flavours, odours, and definitions seem true, but we cannot really define genres by them, for colours, odours, flavours are never true. Finally, the world of natural order which seems governed by cause and effect is an illusion, for there is only existence.

Schema G. Other clues point to Roquentin's insight into *Existence.* At the museum he sees himself as having existed as a stone, a plant, a microbe—hence a part of the All. He senses himself by a muted, organic sensation. Existence is all those realities he detected beneath the appearance of things. It is the organic—deteriorating, dying. As the reality of the root is beyond any accounting, existence itself is beyond all knowledge, beyond all explanations. Everything in nature is an excess, and he himself is *de trop* in the universe. Existence is absurd, absolute, and contingent. And what is man in such a universe? Roquentin knows he is like the stone, the plant, the microbe in the cosmos—and nothing more.

Schema H. Other indexes and clues bring Roquentin to discover the *Essence* in Existence. The notes of the jazz introduction to the 'rag' time melody are given birth by an inflexible order which in turn destroys them without permitting them to exist for themselves. Roquentin must accept the moments of his life just as he does the death of the musical notes. The melody makes him realize there is another kind of happiness in the *duree* of the music. Although everything can break the fragile music, nothing can

interrupt it, for the melody is a necessity.

The music makes Roquentin realize that something has taken place, 'I knew it! . . . something has happened', and his nausea dissipates and disappears: he is *in* the music, his gestures become part of a majestic theme. The melody leads him to understand all at once that the Negress who sings the song and the Jew who composed it are saved. They have washed themselves clean of the sin of existence. Roquentin then wants to see the moments of his life organize themselves as the past one recalls. He wants to live in the direction of his destiny. Existence has become the privileged situation which can be transformed, not into Anny's perfect moments, but into a meaningful life. Roquentin then comprehends that something needs him to be born. He knows he cannot stop thinking because he *is* his thought. He exists because he thinks, and he will justify his existence by thinking. He will create a work of art which will make men ashamed of existing mindlessly.

This brief review of existential symbols discloses the experience Roquentin has gone through. If the images of *nothingness* as an absolute call forth his awareness of death, the isolation and loneliness of things and places arouses his anxiety and compassion. If *plenitude* makes him aware of the fact of nature's superabundance, at the same time it fills him with nausea. Although the things and places symbolizing the *fixed and immutable* divulge an adamantine order to existence, they recall man's own perishable nature. In the symbols of *change and metamorphosis*, he feels horror of things decaying, dying, and decomposing, and yet change and metamorphosis open the way to creativity which, in its turn, promises an abiding order. In the items of *appearance versus reality* appearance *seems* sure and safe whereas reality reveals the chaos beneath the appearance of orderliness. In the emblems of existence, Roquentin finds the cosmos itself is absurd and contingent with man lost in that 'All'. Consequently, the symbols of existence evoke anxiety. Through

the insignia of essence, Roquentin becomes determined to measure his suffering and to transform his dissolving life into a permanent purpose. As the music has a fragile duration *(duree)*, life itself is a privileged moment, but a moment only. To endure is to think. To be worthy of life, one must seek out a thought-filled destiny.

Figural Representation or the Quest of a Mystic

Roquentin's search for the correspondences of an essential reality, revealed through the signs and symbols of existence, is comparable to the quest of the mystics. The connection of *The Nausea* to Pascal's *Thoughts* is that both depict the existential situation of man. What Roquentin describes is the frightening grief and senselessness of men's lives, of men s agonies—as absolute and continual as the infinite spaces of Pascal. What Roquentin feels is how lonely men are, each ignorant of the other, each surrounded by an eternal silence of terrifying meaninglessness. Both Pascal and Sartre depict man s position in an existence unaware of him and which man cannot ever really comprehend. Sartre's own artistic intent is to arouse the reader's nausea not only by brutally expressing the relentlessness of Existence but also by showing that human life is hell when lived mindlessly. (Indeed, Sartre seems to note modes of hell in *La Mort dans l'Ame, Les Mouches, Huis Clos, La Diable et le Bon Dieu,* and *L'Etre et le Neant.)*[7] The intention in *The Nausea* is similar to the *Thoughts* where Pascal represents an existence that can crush man because man is the weakest creature in nature, where man himself is a paradox, a chimera, a monster, a prodigy, a worm—the glory and the shame of the universe. For Pascal's purpose is to show that without God human life ends as a cruel and absurd hell.

While this archetypal theme unites Pascal and Sartre, the kinship between Sartre and Dante may not be so apparent. Yet the artistic intention of the medieval Italian and the

twentieth century atheistic existentialist is remarkably similar. If any pattern emerges from Dante's 'Inferno', it is the hopelessness of destinies devoid of purpose and meaning, for what otherwise do the repeated, senseless gestures of the sinners in hell show? They have missed the whole aim of earthly life revealed to medieval man by God: to love man, to practise the commiseration of Christ, and to offer the mercy of Mary. What unites the 'Inferno' and *The Nausea* is their main purpose: to evoke a specific emotion—whether the dread of death, the horror of hell, or the terror of final self-destruction. Their secondary intention is to come to terms with existence and to point a way for man.

Time provides the ultimate form and mystical meaning of Sartre's symbolic novel in the same way that time in religious literature unites past, present and future through the representation of *figurae* as described by Erich Auerbach.[8] 'Figural interpretation . . . establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves and fulfils the first'.[9]

This description calls to mind Norman Friedman's point that a poem is 'symbolic' when it resembles larger ritualistic patterns as purgation, scapegoating, and the artist-archetype. In this pattern the artist is seen as the hero and his art as a sacrificial ritual. He dies to this life in order to be reborn in his art as redeemer.[10] It is obvious that Roquentin becomes such an archetype as his decision to lead the authentic, creative life reveals the other figures prognosticating or requiring his appearance if existence is not to remain senseless.

In his discussion of the *Song of Roland*, Auerbach remarks:

> This impressiveness of gestures and attitudes is obviously the purpose of the technique... when it divides the course of events into a mosaic of parcelled pictures. The scenic moment with its gesture is given such power that it assumes the stature of a moral model. The various phases of the story of the hero or the traitor or the saint are concretized to such an extent that the pictured scenes . . . closely approach the character of symbols or figures.[10]

The Nausea also is such a mosaic of gestures, symbols, and figures as I shall show in my examination of the figurae of the novel.

The Nausea and Dante's 'Inferno' are comparable in their dominant mood, the preoccupation with man's exisiential position, in their sense of eternal justice and their mode of presenting that justice. Dante's figures have the characteristics of concrete historical reality at the same time that they are symbolic or allegorical personifications. The individual souls of the dead find their proper punishment, penance or reward.[12] Hence the overwhelming realism of Dante's beyond is due to the fact that the figure and his fulfilment are one, that the figurae are historical events and phenomena at the same time. In Sartre's *The Nausea* the figures of Lucie, of Rollebon, the Autodidacte, the bourgeois, the cashier at the café, the doctor Rogé, the simpleton M. Achille, *le bonhomme a la pelerine*, the young couple, Anny, the Negress who sang the song, the Jew who composed it, and Roquentin himself are true figurae—people of everyday reality transfigured by the destinies they have fulfilled or are to fulfil.

Auerbach's description of the damned reinforces the parallel between Dante and Sartre: '... they are but exempla of the winning or losing of eternal bliss. But the passions, torments, and joys have survived; they find expression in the situations, gestures, and utterances of the dead.[13] When Auerbach describes the inferno as 'the portrayal of a collective punishment',[14] we visualize Roquentin's journey through the nausea into the realm of torture where merciless Existence damns men forever to a state of dying.

Dante's theosophic scheme of things is defined by Auerbach as follows: 'The connection between occurences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurences are parts and reflection'.[15] Herein lies the important difference between Dante's medieval existentialism and Sartre's atheistic vision, for in the universe of the nausea there

is no divine plan. Rather, the connection among things in *The Nausea* is a rime without reason, a cosmos without credo, an Existence without Exegesis.

Nevertheless, the novel's spiritual unity is achieved through the kind of figural representation to which I have been alluding. All the characters in *The Nausea* are figurae because they describe the conditions of existence and of mortal humanity. Some represent the senselessness of existence, others prophesy the coming of the saviour who will transform the contingency of existence and master the anguish of dying through the measured emotion, durable form and immortal meaning of a work of art.

The reason for having compared the figural world of medieval literature to *The Nausea* was to underline the preternatural powers in both. What medieval figurae divulge is a Presence within reality, an Essence sustaining and directing human existence. In the novel, time is the medium through which men may convert existence into essence, and Sartre's characters become figural representations of that possible conversion.

The figurae seem to group themselves into two types around the four main characters: Rollebon, the Autodidacte, Anny, and Roquentin. Early in the novel (p. 20) Roquentin recalls when he was eight years old there was an old auditor who terrified the children because they felt he was alone and because they thought he must have the ideas of a crab. This solitary type reminds one of Roquentin who has made the children snigger because he had not skipped the stone across the water but had seemed bewildered. Hence the old auditor seems a spectre image of Roquentin himself and what he might become in the eyes of others.

Another early figure is the cleanup woman Lucie. Working where Roquentin lives, Lucie is incapable of consoling herself when she thinks her husband is drinking himself to death (p. 23). (Roquentin is sure the man has tuberculosis.) She cannot free herself from her anguish—'she is tied in a

knot' (p. 24). Hence Roquentin sees her imprisoned in her situation. One night Roquentin happened to witness Lucie being abandoned by her lover. When Roquentin heard her scream in the dark, he refused to help her in her solitary tragedy (p. 45). He will decline to act again to stop the man in her garden from exposing himself or to prevent the Corsican from catching the Autodidacte making a homosexual pass at a boy in the library.

Another figure is a *'vieux toque'* who is on the verge of having a mental crisis (p. 99). Treated with disdain by doctor Rogé, 'the old loon' is a figural representation of Roquentin himself in his nausea and of the real psychological danger he runs with his metaphysical speculations.

There is also *'le bonhomme'* wearing the large cape (p. 114). In front of a little girl, the old fellow 'exposes' himself sexually. Roquentin might have prevented that if he had understood why the pervert was wearing a cape. Only the girl's running away breaks his fascination with their little drama. Roquentin shouts at the man ironically 'A great menace hangs over the city' to scare him. The *'bonhomme'* is an outcast reminding us of all the others.

There is a newspaper story about the little girl Lucienne, who has been raped and killed, her flesh murdered. (She is the reason Roquentin later stabs his own hand—in a ritualistic gesture of commiseration.) As a figura, she recalls our physical fragility and clearly personifies mankind as victim.

The café cashier, rotting from a disease in her abdomen, is a figura of decomposition, of existence, and ultimately of Roquentin's own death.

His notice of these people and their human condition reflects his heightened awareness of life through the nausea. That these eventually point to Roquentin is shown by the painting *The Death of the Bachelor*. The bachelor, like Roquentin, had lived for himself. No one had come to close his dead eyes. The man had died utterly alone. It appears

that Roquentin foresees that this will be his own fate.

These peripheral figurae, then, all point to Roquentin's sense of isolation, his loneliness (the lonely notice the lonely), his unspoken anxiety—his nausea before existence which he shares with all human beings aware of death.

In contrast to these solitary figures, there are those men who live their usual communal lives. Roquentin notices all those who pass their time explaining themselves, recognizing happily they are of the same opinion as others (p. 19). Unlike the sufferers who suffer alone, unlike the dying who alwalys die alone, unlike the artist who must create the melody alone, such men are what Roquentin must *not* become.

At the café Roquentin observes card players(cf. Cezanne's *Card Players)* who try to fill time, but it is too vast to fill. And he notices a playing card king 'come from so far, prepared by so many combinations, by so many disappeared gestures . . .' (p. 39). Here again is a figural representation, for not only will the figures of Bouville disappear from his life but the ceaseless disappearance of the players' gestures reveals to him 'the unbreakable chain of circumstances'. He realizes he cannot go back in his own life. The aimlessness of the card-playing, like a life without purpose, is a warning to him—that the past is dead, that only the present and future count. He will have to decide to live, to fulfil his destiny.

Roquentin is annoyed by the statue of Gustave Impetraz (pp. 45-46). The women admire the bronze figure, for he was of the '*beau monde*', a guardian who upheld the ideals of the bourgeoisie and who wrote on trivial academic subjects. Here too is a figure of what Roquentin will determine *not* to be.

Roquentin thinks of all the professionals of experience: the doctors, the priests, the magistrates, and the officers who know man as if they had made him (p. 99). They are the ones who have baptized their little obstinations with some proverbs, in the name of experience, but they have never

really understood anything, because all the world's past cannot serve to explain anything (p. 101). The irony with which Roquentin treats them in his journal shows that he will not use them as models, for such men believe they have figured out man, but man has in Roquentin's eyes an infinite capacity to change and to create a new destiny.

Moreover, doctor Rogé himself, who plays the role of the successful and experienced man, does so to masquerade the insupportable reality of his own approaching death (p. 102). Hence all such successful men, sure of their rights and of their duties, are figurae of what the artist and thinker must *not* become. For this reason, Roquentin's words, 'so long, bastards!' (p. 135).

In general, Roquentin speaks of the bourgeois sarcastically. His rendering of their religious habits, their *coups de chapeau* (their social customs), their pretensions (e.g. *The Illustrated History of Mudville*), their monotonous monologues in the restaurants, their smiles, the gourmandises of the women, their gossipy stories, their hopes, their habits, their Sundays, etc. (pp. 63-81) remind us of the lost gestures of the playing cards.

These same bourgeois, with their guarantee of heaven and eternity *(the extreme unction)*, believe in the world of order, in cause and effect, in their power to legislate, and in self-adulation (their portraits in the museum). But Roquentin rejects and ridicules their world. The bourgeoisie become figurae of those leading artificial lives, of those having superimposed an absurd order on existence, of squandering their lives in meaningless ritual. They are the figurae of the false purposes which the artist and thinker must avoid.

It is M. Fasquelle, manager of the café Mably, who represents the reason men group together. Roquentin notices how after the café empties M. Fasquelle, alone, slips into unconsciousness. In fact, the clientele need others and exist only when with one another (p. 16). By contrast, Roquentin slips into consciousness when apart, and he exists only when

alone. So is it with the artist and thinker. So must Roquentin's life be in the future.

Beyond these fringe figurae are the central characters Rollebon, the Autodacte, Anny, and Roquentin. Roquentin's long-standing interest in the historical figure of Rollebon bears particular attention for what it reveals about Roquentin. He first became interested in Rollebon because the man had been accused of treason, been thrown in prison where he died after five years of captivity 'without appeal' (p. 24). This shows Roquentin's characteristic interest in a loner like himself, in one unjustly judged like the social outcast and the artist. After 1801, Rollebon inexplicably changed. The documentation on him (letters, secret reports, police archives) lack firmness and consistency as if they were not talking about the same person. This situation parallels the change that takes place in Roquentin because outwardly the transformation cannot be explained. Rollebon prefigures, but Roquentin will become an artist whereas Rollebon become a charlatan.

A further parallel between the two is seen in their both being homely or ugly *(laid)*. However, Rollebon used his charm to make conquests of the women at court whereas Roquentin sees his own face as something at the edge of the vegetable kingdom. This insight into his relationship with other forms of existence is figural in that it situates Roquentin as an existent. It is interesting to note that while Rollebon is a man continually disguising his motives and acts, Roquentin seeks a motive to live by (pp. 135-36). However, when Roquentin finds he can no longer write about the historical figure, Rollebon dies for him. Roquentin stops living with a fiction (p. 138) when he realizes Rollebon had been his *raison d'etre.* Rollebon prefigures what will happen to Roquentin, but the latter will free himself from the prison of existence and of his old life by living for a true purpose—that of art.

The Autodidacte is a definite figura. He tells Roquentin that if he were ever to travel he would keep a journal of the

smallest traits of his character in order to retrace what he was and what he might become (p. 54). He prefigures Roquentin who does keep a record of his metaphysical metamorphosis.

The Autodidacte would also have adventures happen to him—a series of accidents—in the hope of having 'lived' and found meaning. Roquentin has had 'stories, events, incidents' really happen to him. He had imagined (like Anny) that at certain moments, as when he heard music in cafés, his life could take on a rare and precious quality (p. 58). And he realizes all at once 'what summits wouldn't I attain if my own life made the material for the melody' (p. 60). Hence the Autodidacte in his naive way awakens Roquentin to a life purpose.

Roquentin detects signs of the Autodidacte's pederasty. That the 'self-taught' man's figural representation foreshadows the fulfilment of his destiny is shown in the following indications. (The Autodictate's 'love' for man as a humanist, while ironically revealing his homosexuality, belies his overt hatred of individuals. In this he is unlike Roquentin who hates abstractions, but feels compassion for individuals).

Roquentin cannot prevent the Autodidacte from making a homosexual pass at the boy in the library just as he could do nothing for Lucie or for the pervert in the public garden. One may ask why. Probably Roquentin felt man cannot prevent anyone from fulfilling his destiny.[16] In a sense all the figures in the journal are fated because they do not come to terms with existence.

When Roquentin discovers that the Autodidacte is reading his way through the library according to the alphabet, it becomes obvious that order *per se* is absurd.[17] For Roquentin's own later determination to create a work of art would be ridiculous if—unlike the pseudo-orders of science and of the bourgeoisie—he did not confront the absolute absurdity of existence. Roquentin does not want to be like the Autodidacte who, having read all the books, asks 'And now?'

Roquentin will seek to create an order out of his existence. By uniting and varying his life, he will free himself from suffering and thereby free others from suffering.[18]

Anny provides an example of the figural in her seeking to realize 'perfect moments'. Such *'moments parfaits'* had always been preceded by 'auguries'. Anny explained that the 'privileged situation' could be made into a perfect moment, and the moment was perfect if you were already plunged into something exceptional and you felt the need to put it in order. Anny had sought a kind of revelation or revealed truth in such moments, but now she feels she exists (in Roquentin's sense of the word). In the past Anny had tried to find those instants with passionate people who were carried away by hatred or love. Now she lives surrounded by deceased passions (p. 204) much as Roquentin lives surrounded by the 'defunct' world order of cause and effect, history, scientific law, and bourgeois purposes. Anny has found there are no more perfect moments. She has learned to live without histrionics (p. 202). Hence she is like Roquentin who has learned there are no adventures. They seem to have changed in the same sense.

However, there is a basic difference. When Anny described the perfect moment as an exceptional situation, which you felt aroused to put in order, Roquentin adds 'like a work of art', and Anny replies, 'no, like a duty'.

Furthermore, Anny wants to see Roquentin and to know he exists unaltered so that she could measure her own changes, assuming in her vain way that he could not change. Yet it is she who has not altered really, for she is still without pity for failures (p. 147), she is still bourgeois in her philosophy of duty. And in giving up her search for perfect moments, she abdicates from seeking to *realize* her life. It remains for Roquentin to fulfil his existence by choosing freely his own destiny.

In the past Roquentin had modeled himself on two French thinkers. He says that when he was twenty 'I was a type

like Descartes' (p. 84). Late in the novel he asks 'where is your dignity as a "thinking reed"?' Here he clearly has the ideal of Pascal before him.

Roquentin's story is the discovery that the past is dead and that he is free to choose his own destiny. It began (under 'Monday, January 29th, 1932') when he notes in his journal, 'it is necessary to choose—either the change is in me or in the room, the city, in nature. This need to choose emphasizes that he will discover the change is *in* him and in all Existence. In short, nothing is immutable, all is undergoing change.

This insight is reinforced when Roquentin observes that he is aware that a whole series of small metamorphoses have taken place (p. 15). Later he reaffirms. 'Anything can take place, anything can happen' (p. 111). This is both a patriarchal warning to heed the lesson of existence and a prophecy of things to come. All is changing, and in contrast to men who try to stop time and in contrast to science which seems to fix existence in stable laws, Roquentin will be the first to work *with* time.

When Roquentin says, 'I don't think enough of historical research to waste my time with a dead man (Rollebon) . . .', he rejects the past of lived life in order to live more meaningfully now and in the future. This figural tendency is verified when Roquentin remarks, 'The sense of adventure would be quite simply, that of the irreversibility of time' (p. 84).

The song, 'Some of these days, You'll miss me, honey;' causes his nausea to disappear and his body to harden; his arm (symbol of his existence) dances to the music (p. 38). Not only is the Jew who wrote the song a figura of Roquentin, the artist-to-be, but the song itself is a figura in the sense of being the fulfilment of a situation: either the composer or singer has lost a beloved and the song warns the beloved that she will miss him, or in Sartre's ironic sense, we will all miss life one of these days when we have died.

For Roquentin, adventure has meaning only by its death.

He wishes ardently he could achieve the summit of the music with his own life (pp. 59-60). Here the *motif* is to become an artist and to create something durable out of his dying existence.

The keystone to the arch of logic comes in the extinction of Antoine Roquentin as a person (p. 239). Only the anonymous conscience in existence remains and his own cognizance of being a conscience which forgets itself (p.239). This is figural: the old self must nearly die if the new is to be born. Once a historian devoted to the past, Roquentin transforms himself into an artist dedicated to living the present and creating the future. Finally, Roquentin realizes the music does not exist, it *is*. He wants *to be* pure, hard—to compose precise and clean music. In his becoming an artist, the figural prediction is completed. He will become the melody—firm and young in his thought and through the beauty he creates—as his very life dissolves.

Symbolic Destinies

Sartre makes a particular point in the novel to identify the instability, the uncertainties, the doubts, the lawlessness and the contingency within the deceptive constancy and immutability of *IS*—within what Western man has thought Existence is. What Sartre demonstrates artistically and metaphysically is how a symbolic truth emanates like a melody out of human anguish. This is seen in the unfolding of the existential situations of various characters into symbolic destinies. Anny's faith that the privileged situation could be made into the perfect moment shows Roquentin the direction he himself must take, for the privileged situation is life itself, and it is up to the individual not merely to suffer, but to create some kind of perfect destiny out of it. This is what is meant by Sartre's dictum, 'Existence precedes Essence'. This symbolic novel is such a transformation of existence into essence.

To make this question of symbolic destinies even clearer,

let us see how Roquentin finds himself in a situation parallel with all the sufferers. All of them are doomed to die. On the other hand, all the other characters are in contrast to Roquentin in the sense that they lead false lives, that they drift through purposeless existences, and that they are inhumane to their fellow men. The truest *figurae* or parallels to Roquentin are peripheral ones—the Negress and the Jew—outcasts who create beauty out of their suffering. The artist must move counter to all who lead mindless, insensitive lives.

Roquentin's searching psyche alternates between fear and determination, hope and desolation. As a seeker, he explores the murky unknown of himself adrift in the world. Only when his life forces find their purpose, does his own existence become transformed to take a meaningful direction.

Time shows him its innate power, for it shows man how to attain completion and perfection by revealing to him the possibilities in freedom and in self-realization. Roquentin discerns that man alone can fashion his future, and by doing so, man distinguishes himself from existence. While man is fated as an existent to decay and die like all other living things, he is free to *realize* his own destiny. This is the ultimate meaning of the melody—it directs its own destiny, even though it dies so the song may be born.

Time also reveals man is guided toward an end or shaped by a purpose. Traditionally this plane of time reveals the plan of Providence. What Roquentin has found is that, in order to make any sense out of existence, it is not in working out pseudo-systems or in self-adulation. Rather, meaning comes from *measuring* one's own pain and in mitigating the anguish in the world through a work of art.

It is interesting to note how time does change Roquentin. As Antoine confronts everyday realities, the style in his journal is correspondingly realistic. When he considers the sciences and social man, his style is reminiscent of literary naturalism. In his description of men's agonies, Roquentin

is expressionistic, buf when he expresses his own metaphysical suffering, he creates his true modality.

In fact, the transformation of Antoine's vision of things is translated by his voice. The novel begins with the historian's tone, Roquentin sounding like a man dedicated to Cartesian rationalism. Gradually one hears a Pascalian accent or mystical intonation. The first voice articulates the logic of civilization and science until Roquentin is faced with man's suffering in a senseless existence, at which moment the utterance changes to express his compassion. The voice of reason becomes a voice full of emotion and mercy. Indeed, the impasssioned tone seems to echo voices out of the Bible.

Or is it Danie's influence on Sartre? It is hard to ignore the striking affinities between them, for both condemn and pardon, both damn and show mercy. If we look deeply enough, we cannot fail to see that *The Nausea* embodies a Dantesque hierarchy of values with seven levels of punishment corresponding to the seven forms or degrees of existential transgression. 1.) The sins of the flesh are personified by the exhibitionist, the Autodidacte, Lucie, Francoise, and Anny. 2.) The impurity or suffering of the flesh is typified by the café cashier, Lucie's tubercular husband, and doctor Rogé. 3.) The sin of violence is exemplified in doctor Rogé's contemptuous treatment, of the old loom *(toque)*, in the Corsican's smashing in the Autodidacte's nose, in the mutual massacre of the nazis and communists, and in the murder of little Lucienne. 4.) The sin of mindlessness is represented in the card players, in the simpleton, in M. Fasquelle without his clients; in the aimless gestures, courtesies and activities of the bourgeoisie; in the Autodidacte's asinine, alphabetical reading-his-way-through the library. 5.) The sign of pride is impersonated in men of experience like doctor Rogé; in the bourgeois self-adulation in their portraits and in their projects; in Anny who scorns failures. 6.) The sin of malice is in mis-using one's free will to harm others. Rollebon belonged to this class and this is one

reason he finally sickens Roquentin. 7) At the deepest level, to complete the suffering of the flesh, there is the suffering of the mind. Curiously the Autodidacte's humility before knowledge is akin to this kind of excruciation, but it is, of course, Roquentin in the deepest pit who grieves for mankind's purposeless suffering in the hell of existence and who actually sorrows for the loss of heaven and of God. As Dante entered the 'Inferno' to suffer *for* those in hell who had lost *the* way forever, so does Roquentin journey among the lost and lonely, the sure and the cynical, to find his meaning.

We now recognize that the impassioned tone of *The Nausea* is like the patriarchal and prophetic voices of the Bible. In the Old Testament the dominant voice is that of Moses. It was he who read the signs of nature (the oncoming pestilence, the sea turning bloodred, etc.); it was he who mounted Sinai to receive the ten commandments and consulted his visions to know the promised land. The patriarchal vice seeks to ascertain the truth of daily life, the abiding laws, the revelation of eternal verity, or of the Presence of God here and now. It is the patriarchal voice which predominates Pascal's *Thoughts* and provides the vision of implacable justice in Dante's 'Inferno' where the design of destiny is immutable. It is also Roquent's voice speaking out against the wilderness of Existence.

By contrast, it is a voice of prophecy which fills the New Testament. Although remembered for His parables and his everyday wisdom, Christ's foreseeing His own death and understanding the purpose of His life aroused men's awe. Thus did His daily gestures, words and actions become symbolic of a higher destiny and, in a true figural sense, they prognosticated the fulfilment of a promise for all who would follow His way. Roquentin's voice seems to echo that promise when it urges us to overcome suffering by creating a future of our own.

These alternate voices modulate the meaning of the symbols and figurae which establish man's communion with

the ultimate reality of things. If the patriarchal voice translates for us the brutal meaning of existence, the representation of a single *figura*, capable of overcoming the absurdity of death, prophesies for others a future released from present anguish. Sartre's vision of existence is a message of hope for the few who dare to realize the mystical meaning of their symbolic destinies.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] P. van Tieghem, *Les Grandes Doctrines Litteraires en France* (Paris, 1965), p. 249.

[2] Jean Paul Sartre, *La Nausee* (Paris, 1938), p. 247. All specific quotations and paraphrases are from this editition of the novel. References are indicated in the text.

[3] Van Tieghem, p. 251.

[4] Ibid., p. 252.

[5] Ibid., p. 257.

[6] Norman Friedman's article on 'symbol' in *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* edited by Alex Preminger (Princeton, 1965), p. 833.

[7] The English titles of these works by Sartre are: *Sick at Heart*, *The Flies*, *Closed Doors*, *The Devil and God*, and *Being and Nothingness*.

[8] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literatures* (Garden City, N. J,, 1953), pp. 64-66.

[9] Ibid., p. 64.

[10] Norman Friedman's article on 'imagery' in Preminger's *Encyclopedia*, p. 368.

[11] Auerbach, p. 101.

[12] Ibid., p. 171.

[13] Ibid., p. 172.

[14] Ibid., p. 175.

[15] Ibid., p. 490.

[16] This inability to prevent anyone from fulfilling his destin, is comparable to the helplessness of those around Oedipus to stop him from bringing about his own doom.

[17] Indeed, the Autodidacte's use of the phrase *'A nous deux, Science Humaine*, not only comically recalls Rastignac in Balzac's *Pere Goriot* and Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pecuchet* but is also an ironical figural comment. I have largely omitted the ironies in *The Nausea* aimed at all things social, orthodox, and religious. Their intent is to arouse the reader's scepticism at absurd human activities which repeat the senseless processes and self-reproduction of nature. Such ironies express and evoke a contrapuntal pattern to the dominant melody of symbols I have explicated.

[18] By this child-like self-teaching the Autodidacte reminds us of Pascal's concept of 'natural ignorance' whereas Roquentin recalls the man of 'learned ignorance'. Put another way, the Autodidacte is the naive man, Roquentin the nauseated man.

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AN ASPECT OF *THE AMBASSADORS*

Apart from innovations in the technique of the novel, Henry James is also praised as the most distinguished among modern novelists for his portrayal of human nature as it failed or flourished in highly organized society, distorted, refined or sublimated by forms of civilization. James's subjects, 'the voiceless little tragedies of the soul', the dilemmas of the super-refined, the intellectual enthusiasms of young men, the abortive love of spinsters, are more relevant to modern life than the situations to be found in conventional romances, realistic novels with exaggerated social bias or propaganda novels of the Naturalist school.

In the novels of the last phase, which Matthiessen calls tha major phase, the social material remains almost the same as in James's earlier tales of 'international situation'. But they also demonstrate a considerable maturing of attitude attained by reflections and cogitations. Of the three novels of the period under review, *The Ambassadors* enjoys the privilege of being the most popular among the literary *elite* as well as lovers of the social novel. On the surface, it is also a novel of the 'international situation' like the former novels of the same category but in reality it is a more complex and subtle study of trans-Atlantic socio-cultural life than *The American, Roderick Hudson* or even *The Portrait of a Lady.* In the earlier novels James is preoccupied with 'the innocents abroad'. The culture-hungry, but financially well-off Americans, fall an easy victim to the corruptions, machinations and evils of the Europeans. *The Ambasscdors,* like other novels of the last phase, presents studies of human

situations which are universal. For, inspite of Brooke's thesis of the fatal mistake of James's 'expatriation' and Parrington's charge of 'deracination', the novel holds the mirror to contemporary life in such a way that James's observations inevitably transcend the local and the trivial. In *The Ambassadors* the presence of a symbolic and poetic mode of vision is unmistakable. Matthiessen's remark that 'If we want to find a figure in his carpet, we must search for it primarily in the intricate and fascinating designs of his final and major phase'[2] is more applicable to *The Ambassadors* than to any other work of the last period.

The Ambassadors should be seen not only as the culmination of Henry James's idea of perfection in the art of novel-writing but also as a profound study of the impact of European culture on the 'uninitiated' Americans in a more sophisticated and subtle manner. As is well known, in the earlier novels of 'the international situation' James has given pictures of the Americans in Europe—in England, France or Italy and their exploitation by the wily, the treacherous and the rapacious. Now with his maturer mind James is studying the reactions and responses of persons steeped in American consciousness in the glamorous world of Paris. The protagonist in *The Ambassadors* is superficially Chad Newsome who, being enamoured of the enticements of Paris, had been neglecting his father's trade. But actually it is Lambert Strether, a typical product of Woollett, somewhat uninitiated but sensitive, who envisions Paris and forgets his embassy in the wake of enlightenment, who should be regarded as 'the central intelligence' and chief 'reflector' of the novel. Instead of persuading Chad Newsome to return to Woollett, he is asking him to stay on. His argument is simple. If Paris could do so much to a middle-aged man like him, it could almost transform a young, sensitive and impressionable youth like Chad.

It is difficult to dub *The Ambassadors* as a novel of manners unless one redefines the connotation of this *genre*

of writing. The subject of the novel, though complex and multi-layered, is quite clear. We may say that Strether's adventure taken as a whole constitutes the subject-matter of the novel. But central to Strether's adventure is also a quest. In Paris he passes through several stages of mystification and enlightenment, until finally he reaches the heart of a situation which it was his initial object to investigate. The situation is the relationship between Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet. Thus the novel turns out to be one of the especially typical themes of French fiction: that of a woman ravaged by love for a man younger than herself who is gradually freeing himself from her.[3] The French novelists have excelled in studies of the suffering of lovers and here James is trying to emulate them from a new angle. In a sense Strether's story turns out to be a cultural history of late nineteenth century New England township, Woollett, and the 'Babylon' of modern Europe, Paris.[4]

Let us, first of all, analyse the first two books of *The Ambassadors* to highlight the 'cultural' aspects of James's art. As is well-known, James laid out the novel organically in twelve books, each of which could serve for a month's instalment. His subject was well-fitted to such treatment since it consisted of Strether's gradual initiation into a world of new values, and a series of small climaxes could therefore best express Strether's successive discoveries.

The opening book at Chester, where Strether, arriving from Liverpool to meet his friend Waymarsh, encounters first Maria Gostrey, is really a prologue that suggests the theme of Europe. 'Without pomp or circumstance, certainly as her original address to him, equally with his own responses, had been, he would have sketched to himself, his impression of her as: "Well, she's more thoroughly civilised . . ."'[5] The second book begins in London. Strether is already started on his eager growth through fresh impressions. During his conversation with Maria he explains his mission. Strether must have his initial taste of Paris, that 'vast bright Babylon':

Miss Gostrey had dined with him at his hotel, face to face over a small table on which the lighted candles had rose-coloured shades... He had been to the theatre, even to the Opera in Boston, with Mrs Newsome, more than once acting as her only escort; but there had been no little confronted dinner, no pink little confronted dinner, no pink lights, no whiff of vague sweetness as a preliminary... There was much the same difference in his impression of the noticed state of his companion, whose dress was 'cut down', in respect to shoulders and bosom, in a manner quite other than Mrs Newsome's, and who wore round her throat a broad red velvet band with an antique jewel . . . Mrs Newsome's dress was never in any degree 'cut down', and she never wore round her throat a broad red velvet band (I, p.44).

The contrast in dress and manners goes further. It is a revelation of the uninitiated New Englander. He remembers his remark once to Mrs Newsome that she looked, with her ruff and other matters, like Queen Elizabeth. The present situation obliges him to compare his companion Miss Gostrey with Mary Stuart. His curiosity and bafflement know no bounds when he encounters more surprises in 'doing' London. By and by he tells Miss Gostrey about Mrs Newsome, her son in Paris, and his own mission.

James gives us beautiful impressions of Paris as it enamoured Strether. He had been waiting for letters from Mrs Newsome and discovering Paris in the meantime:

In the garden of Tuileries he had lingered, on two or three spots to look; it was as if the wonderful Paris spring had stayed him as he roamed. The prompt Paris morning struck its cheerful notes—in a soft breeze and a sprinkled smell, in the light flit, over the garden floor, of bare-headed girls . . .

In the Luxembourg Gardens he pulled up; here at last he found his nook, and here, on a penny chair from which terraces, alleys, vistas, fountains, little trees in green tubs, little women in white caps and shrill little girls at play all sunnily 'composed' together, he passed an hour in which the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow (I, pp. 69-70).

The background serves as a prologue to the human drama of which Strether was an observer and in which he was later a participant.

There were as many as four letters for him from Mrs Newsome and none of them short. He read the letters successively and slowly. And yet it was the difference of being just where he was and as he was that formed the escape. He felt the seeds of his earlier visit to Europe sprouting again. But his conscience had been forbidding him the purchase of a book. When he glanced at the lemon-coloured covers of French books he was inevitably reminded of green-cover books at home: 'The green covers at home comprised, by the law of their purpose, no tribute to letters; it was of a mere rich kernel of economics, politics, ethics, (I, p. 77). The ethical-cum-utilitarian bias of such books produced a kind of revolt in his heart. Was he to renounce all amusement for the sake of authority? Perhaps he had no alternative. Paris had bewitched him beyond redemption:

> It hung before him... the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It tinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next (I, p. 79).

Strether felt as if Paris mocked his Woollett consciousness by throwing its lovely baits—'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shalt be no more cakes and ale?' He thanked God that he was not engaged to Mrs Newsome by any promise. That would have tied his hands. He was free to move and educate himself in Paris.

From the artistic point of view even the first two books alone are sufficient to bring into focus the polar opposition between the cultural ethos of New England (Woollett) and French (Paris) life. However, a brief reference to the remaining books is necessary to complete the series of impressions which cause Strether's moral and aesthetic metamorphosis.

Though Chad has been mentioned casually before, it is only at the end of the third book that he appears with a dramatic entrance into the back of Maria's and Strether's box at the *Comedie.* In book four Strether feels his way into

friendship with Mrs Newsome's son and in the fifthhe is introduced to Madame de Vionnet. Among the sophisticated Parisians Strether finds himself a really 'majestic aboriginal' and the more he comes to know about Parisian way of life the more he deplores his lost opportunities. His advice to little Bilham 'to live' sums up his final enlightenment.

The next two books (books six and seven) concentrate on Strether's developing relationship with Madame de Vionnet, from the first call on her to his rejection of Woollet and taking her out to lunch. Before the end of this book his position and Chad's are reversed. Chad is willing to go home and it is Strether who now urges him to stay on.

Such conduct brings swift retribution with the arrival, in book eight, of the new ambassador, Mrs Newsome's formidable daughter, Sarah Pocock, who has been sent to take over the duties of the wavering Strether. The critical point in book nine is the announcement that Madame de Vionnet's daughter is to be married and this leaves Strether with the growing awareness that it must be Madame de Vionnet herself to whom Chad is somehow bound. The tenth book moves rapidly to Sarah being outraged at Strether's betrayal and to her ultimatum that her entourage is leaving Paris. The eleventh book rises to the most effective climax of all—Strether's glimpse of Chad and Madame de Vionnet together on the river and his long delayed perception of their real relationship. In the concluding book James gives us his impressions of the final interview between Strether and Madame de Vionnet.

The Ambassadors not only reveals facets of the typically American cultural life as contrasted with the European but it also highlights the dilemma and predicament of individuals in certain situations which add philosophical dimensions to the novel. Mathiessen points out that the challenge 'to live' had solely preoccupied James's mind at the age of fifty-five. His immense elaboration of the challenge tells how much it meant to him. It becomes in fact the quintessential expres-

sion of a dominant theme that runs throughout James's work from *Roderick Hudson* to *The Portrait of a Lady*. In *The Ambassadors* Strether introduces into his version of the theme a highly complex image, which serves to reveal his Puritan heritage. It is the image of life as a tin-mould into which 'the helpless jelly' of one's consciousness is poured by 'the great cook'. In this way Strether symbolises the illusion of free will. The form of the individual consciousness has been predetermined and limited, not by the Puritan's God, but by every force in the individual's background and environment. Yet Strether insists that we make the most of life by enjoying our illusion. Strether had missed his earlier opportunity and is perplexed with his new predicament in the light of his discoveries. Madame de Vionnet has lived her life and enjoyed her illusions. But at the end of the novel she appears to be a ghost of her former self:

> She was older for him tonight, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her then as vulgarly troubled, in very truth as a maid-servant crying for her young man (II, p. 256).

Thus *The Ambassadors*, apart from showing the moral dilemma and inner conflict of the central characters, also throws light on James's own conditioning. Some of his biographers and critcs, including Mathiessen and Leon Edel, seem to suggest that Strether was a projection of the novelist himself.[6] Like Strether, James too had his disappointment in youth but in the serenity of middle age he came to appreciate the value of 'seeing' and 'reflecting' which in turn made him the artist and seer *par excellence*.

As is obvious to any reader of *The Ambassadors*, what Strether sees is what James saw—the Europe of the tourist. But James, being more perceptive and endowed with a keener sensibility, conceived of seeing in a multiple sense, as an act of the inward even more than of 'the outward eye'. As he observed in the Preface to *The Ambassadors*, 'art deals with what we see, it must first contribute flul-handed

that ingredient; it plucks its materila ... in the garden of life—which material elsewhere grown is stale and uneatable'.[7] But what distinguished him from French naturalists and English aesthetes alike was that he never forgot the further kind of seeing, the transcendent passage to the world behind appearances and beyond the senses.

In order to present the history of highly refined and perceptive characters ('fine consciences' in Conrad's words) and simultaneously to unfold the history of various civilizations, James employs metaphorical devices in *The Ambassadors* in a very subtle and suggestive manner. The use of historical analogies—like those between Queen Elizabeth and Mrs Newsome, Mary Stuart and Maria Gostrey, Cleopatra and Madame de Vionnet—is very revealing. Strether envisions the French countess most fully as Cleopatra in the following manner:

> Her head, extremely fair and exquisitely festal, was like a happy fancy, a notion of the antique, on an old precious metal, some silver coin of the Renaissance. . . He could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge (I, p. 238-39).

If Madame de Vionnet is like Cleopatra, various and multifold, Mrs Newsome and her ambassador daughter are, like Queen Elizabeth, relatively simple and, above all, cold.

The employment of the boat image recurrently serves to delineate Strether's movement from action and America to observation and Europe. The balcony scenes have their own artistic justification in conveying to us certain aspects of European culture which remain so puzzling to the Americans. James also makes use of gardens and parks as setting for some very significant scenes. William M. Gibson observes that the four major garden scenes in *The Ambassadors*, (in Books I, II, V and XI) constitute crucial stages in Strether's eating of the fruit of the tree; and his enrichment in knowledge of the world, of good and evil'.[8]

It has been maintained earlier that *The Ambassadors* is a very complex work of art with all sorts of aesthetic, philoso-

phical, social and ethical implications. The social aspect of the novel with its superb realism and cultural overtones is really characteristic of James at his best. True, the social material in this as in other novels of 'the international situation' is severely limited. Here, as elsewhere, James is concerned about the moneyed classes of the expanding America of his day (the Newsomes are its representatives), the titled and propertied classes of Edwardian England (English life as depicted in the London scenes) and the aristocracies of France (Madame de Vionnet in Paris). The Americans as painted here (Mrs Newsome and her daughter) are generally shown as rich, uninitiated, rough and cold. Strether himself does not succeed in shedding his Woollett complexes altogether; Chad Newsome after his initiation into Paris life decides to go back to America to assume charge of his ancestral trade. The English life is depicted not so much in terms of persons as in terms of art and culture (theatres, parks, avenues and galleries etc.). The English national character remained an inexhaustible source of wonder, perplexity, amusement and delight to James. But in *The Ambassadors* he focuses his full attention on Paris and French culture, particularly of the upper classes. Strether's 'Babylon' could boast of its 'Cleopatra' and the beauty and glamour of its parks, gardens, theatres, art-galleries, museums, salon and all other paraphernalia of 'civilised life'. It is not for nothing that he feels like an aboriginal in this enrivonment and his country folk are merely rough, uncultured, money-minded and cold persons. In James's treatment of the cultural aspects of American and French life we admire the way in which he makes it serve the double purpose of a radical criticism of society at the turn of the century and of a more general 'criticism of life' in the Arnoldian sense.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] 'Mr. Henry James's Later Work' *North America*, CLXXVI (1903).

[2] F.O. Mathiessen, *Henry James : The Major Phase* (New York, 1963), Preface, p. XV.

[3] D.W. Jefferson, *Henry James* (London, 1960), pp. 80ff.

[4] F.O. Mathiessen applies the term 'cultural history' to all the three novels of the last phase. He observes: 'Aesthetic criticism... inevitably becomes socal criticism, since the act of perception extends through the work of art to its milieu. In scrutinizing James's major novels I have tried also to write an essay in cultural history' (*op. cit.*, Preface, p. XIV).

[5] *The Ambassadors* (London, 1923), Vol. I, pp. 8-9. All quotations are from this text.

[6] *op. cit.*, pp. 27 ff.

[7] Preface to *The Ambassadors*, reprinted in *The Art of the Novel*, edited by R.P. Blackmur (New York, 1962), p. 312.

[8] William Gibson, 'Metaphor in the Plot of *The Ambassadors*', reprinted in *Henry James*, Modern Judgment Series, edited by Tony Tanner (London, 1968), p. 313.

A. A. Ansari

MEASURE FOR MEASURE AND THE MASKS OF DEATH

Though doubtless cast in a comic form and ultimately following the trail of a reconciling and harmonizing process *Measure for Measure* is enwrapped in the shadow of death from beginning to end. Moments of suspense and intense agony, when the action hangs in a precarious balance, are far too numerous to be ignored, and these considerably neutralize the comic overtones of the play. The sustained and ingenious manipulation of the conventional stock-in-trade of comedy—the disguises, the substitutions, the impersonation, the bed-trick, the secret tryst of the lovers—is done with the specific purpose of trapping Angelo in his own toils of idealism. This kind of botching up of some sort of happy ending looks a little unconvincing, even clumsy, inspite of its manifest intention. The play has been aptly designated as a 'dark' comedy because in it the comic action is all along threatened by a subterranean force likely to explode any moment. The crime committed by Claudio and Julietta is what initiates the action, and Angelo—to whom the reins of government are entrusted by the Duke in order to see 'If power change purpose, what our seemers be'[1] (I, iii, 54)—is bent upon bringing the rusty and neglected law into speedy operation. This may also be regarded as a calculated experiment in testing Angelo in the art of governance and the dispensation of justice. We cannot help feeling that the death-penalty—unalterable and irrevocable as it is—is there as a malignant presence throughout, and the implicit, ominous foreshadowing of it is made by Claudio himself thus.

> Our natures do pursue,
> Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,
> A thirsty evil; and when we drink, we die. (I, ii, 120–22)

Here the analogy with the rats who are unsuspecting discoverers of their 'bane' (which is yet proper to them) evokes a sense of discomfort as also a feeling of nausea. The pursuit of license, leading to sharpening of sexual appetite whose gratification eventuates in death, is what is being suggested here, and this awareness dawns upon Claudio even at a very early stage. He is keenly alive to the sense of guiltiness as well as to the fatal consequences of surrender to sexual temptation. And Angelo, the demi-god, declares peremptorily and in no uncertain terms:

> See that Claudio
> Be executed by nine tomorrow morning;
> Bring him his confessor, let him be prepar'd,
> For that's the utmost of his pilgrimage. (II, i, 33-36)

In some of the early comedies of Shakespeare, as also in the great tragedies, the main action is paralleled with one in a lower key, and that accentuates and highlights the former. It is used both for purposes of clarification and reinforcement. The City in *Measure for Measure* has a symbolic status and in it the trafficking in sex is done with gusto, openly and blatantly, and Mistress Overdone and her bawd, Pompey, are chiefly engrossed in it. Hence the fact of her being under a cloud at the moment is not only understandable but is also meant to elicit some sort of vague sympathy from the reader: 'Thus, what with the war, what with the sweat, what with the gallows, and what with poverty, I am custom-shrunk' (I, ii, 75-77). The smutty jokes and sexual innuendos exchanged between Elbow and Froth, in fact the whole Pompey-Elbow-Froth complex of communication and the barbed, cynical comments made by Lucio upon this preoccupation with sex in the underworld, arrests one's attention all at once. The restraint-liberty dialectic in the play is neither simple nor patient of an easy resolution. It may be tentatively identified as an opposition between the satisfaction of the physical appetites and the imposition of the domineering law. It would be only fair to

conceive of these divergent claims of the flesh and the law not so much in terms of a conflict as a copresence of ineradicable elements in a necessary whole. After all, passion or sexual appetite is embedded in human nature and cannot be uprooted at will. To put too strong a curb on natural and inherent vitality is bound to lead to devitalization. At the same time law as the restraining force is needed both for safeguarding against excesses of blind self-indulgence and for maintaining the human organism and the body-politic in a state of equilibrium. But if the law is enforced with ruthless severity, that is, not for moderating but extirpating passion it might be deflected from its legitimate purpose. Hence the danger is that both an unqualified reverence for law and the practice of a hedonistic ethics is likely to lead to perversions and ultimately to psychological imbalances. Both originate from an attitude to life that is not sufficiently grounded in experience, but is based upon an arid abstractionism. And the only alternative one can propose and work out tentatively is to recognize, in the given situation, the legitimacy of the sexual impulses as well as the sobering and moderating function of reason. In other words this may be done in the interest of the totality of human experience that may, otherwise, be falsified. But this is to anticipate.

The Viennese society, as projected in *Measure for Measure*, is one in which corruption 'boils and bubbles' and it is rotten to its very core. Here law as an organ of discipline and an effective instrument for ensuring the stability and wholesomeness of the social order has been kept in abeyance. In reply to the first Gentleman's remark, 'Thou art always figuring diseases in me; but thou art full of error; I am sound', Lucio's retort: 'Nay, not, as one would say, healthy: but so sound as things that are hollow; thy bones are hollow; impiety has made a feast of thee' (I, ii, 49-53), demonstrate unmistakably that sin and corruption are preying upon the energies of the social structure. An unrestrained indulgence

in sexual appetites leads not only to physical decay but ultimately to the death of the spirit. The shadow of death seems to be hovering over the society in which Mistress Overdone carries on her brisk trade in flesh unashamedly, and for Pompey and Elbow bawdy talk is their familiar idiom. Froth is not only engaged in frivolities but appears to be utterly dehumanized and continues moving helplessly like a lurid figure in a bizarre world which stands on the brink of destruction. The images of venereal diseases that serve as current coin for Elbow, Pompey and Lucio are an index of their pattern of responses. It is a world that has been emptied of spiritual values—one which is hollow, degenerate and diseased and in which the living flame of life is about to be extinguished. It is a bestial world in which wallowing in flesh is the only engagement that keeps one going, and hence it looks as if the spirit of man has already suffered extinction. In a breathless, animated flow of words in which each, like a seasoned chess-player tries to out-manoeuvre the other, Isabella offers us an eschatological vision that is intended to dislodge Angelo from his position of obduracy:

> Alas, alas!
> Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once,
> And He that might the vantage best have took
> Found out the remedy. How would you be
> If He, which is the top of judgement, should
> But judge you as you are? O, think on that,
> And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
> Like man new made. (II, ii, 72-80)

Here though it is the complex Creation-Death-Resurrection metaphor that has been pressed into the service of rhetoric yet the accent falls on the inevitability of utter annihilation if the severity of Divine will had not been toned down and mitigated by compassion. Angelo's finer feelings are being touched by this implicit allusion to Grace in the larger context of the human situation. It is by evoking the image of eternal perdition and also that of the ecstasy of redemption that Isabella hopes to move Angelo to the gesture of forgiveness.

She makes the best of her rhetorical opulence in seeking the support of the central Christian myth for bringing about a change of heart in Angelo. And even when this fails to elicit any response from him she of necessity narrows down her frame of reference, changes her strategy and urges upon Angelo to make an honest self-scrutiny:

> Go to your bosom,
> Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
> That's like my brother's fault. If it confess
> A natural guiltiness, such as is his,
> Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
> Against my brother's life. (II, ii, 137-42)

The area of discourse has now been brought down from the universal to the particular and this entails a greater intensity of concentration. Isabella is really concerned with the shattering of Angelo's image of himself as 'a man of stricture and firm abstinence' (or of inhibited sexuality), as one who is a victim of self-delusion and takes a false pride in his self-repression. She proceeds on a certain hypothesis: in case Angelo discovers in himself a 'natural guiltiness' like that of Claudio—a propensity towards the flesh as obstinate and insistent as that of her brother and tending towards the same kind of sin—the death-sentence passed against him must be revoked forthwith. Isabella proposes very adroitly to place a mirror before Angelo but the latter—an embodiment of ice-cold pride and self-regarding Puritanical virtues—is not willing to subject himself to any kind of self-introspection.

Neither of the two techniques of making Angelo evoke the terrifying vision of death before the mind's eye registers any impact upon him and leads to any kind of softening on his part. Later, realizing that Isabella was either not following the drift of his argument or deliberately side-tracking the issue Angelo proposes to her the surrender of the 'treasures' of her body to him as a price for Claudio's redemption. This gives her a violent, emotional jolt, for she could hardly expect such infamy from a person who prided

himself on his moral integrity and his apparent triumph over the entanglements of the felsh. Her indignant refusal to consent to such an ignominy makes her visualize death thus:

> were I under the terms of death,
> Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
> And strip myself to death as to a bed
> That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
> My body up to shame. (II, iv, 100-104)

This is even more opulent in phrasing than Cleopatra's 'The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts, and is desired' and betrays a degree of erotic tension. This is what Leavis, in an unforgettable phrase, calls 'sensuality of martyrdom.'[2] Such a concretely sensuous image of death, coming from the lips of one who very often produces the impression of frosty coldness and who wished 'a more strict restraint, Upon the sisters stood, the votarists of Saint Clare', (I,iv,4-5) may appear a little incongruous. But it wells up from the fullness of a heart worked up to the highest pitch of intensity, the unappeasable indignation of protest.

Persisting in the same blaze of anger and while rebuffing Angelo's threat of subjecting Claudio to 'ling' ring sufferance,' Isabella assumes, uncritically, and depending blindly on her brother's response, that he would rather embrace a bloody death than reconcile himself to her sister stooping to any kind of ignominy:

> Though he hath fall'n by prompture of the blood,
> Yet hath he in him such a mind of honour,
> That had he twenty heads to tender down
> On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up
> Before his sister should her body stoop
> To such abhorr'd pollution.
> Then, Isabel live chaste, and brother, die:
> More than our brother is our chastity. (II, iv, 177–84)

This betrays a naive optimum of faith in Claudio's impulse for self-sacrifice as she had earlier made a commitment of self-restraint in regard to herself while offering 'to wear the impression of keen whips as rubies' if she 'were under the

terms of death.' Isabella formulates the issue in terms of an opposition between the ideal of honour on the one hand and the loss of chastity on the other. And the ideal of honour as upheld by Claudio would stimulate him to risk his own life in order to enable Isabella to preserve the 'treasures' of her body. Life on Angelo's terms is sure to be spurned and rejected by Claudio. The passage reflects a highly idealized picture of her own self and a correspondingly specious assumption on Isabella's part that Claudio would have no terrors of death and would therefore slacken his hold on the alluring pageant of life without any inner compunction. Her valuation of the dilemma in which both of them are involved is made in terms of her bloated sense of self-righteousness and her right to subdue everything else to it. Hence 'Isabella's attempt to place the individual spirit above all other demands, in relying solely upon her spiritual strength'.[3] With this is also linked up her gross and pitiable ignorance of the intricacies of human nature, the subtle and varrying motivations of behaviour and hence her misplaced coksureness about Claudio's order of preferences. It is no less obvious that Isabella looks upon death with contemptuous detachment because its immediate prospect does not cleave to her bones as intimately as is the case with Claudio.

The crisis in Isabella's soul, seemingly resolved up to this point, is followed by the Duke's speech addressed to Claudio with the express intention of cheering him up. Lying at the heart of the play as it does, it is worth a glance:

> Reason thus with life:
> If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
> That none but fools would keep . . .
> Merely, thou art Death's fool;
> For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,
> And yet run'st toward him still . . .
> Thou'rt by no means valiant;
> For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork
> Of a poor worm . . .

For, like an ass whose back with ingots bows,
Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
And Death unloads thee . . .
What's yet in this
That bears the name of life? Yet in this life
Lie hid moe thousand deaths; yet death we fear
That makes these odds all even.
(III, i, 6-41)

In this hortatory speech contempt for death is induced in Claudio through a loathing for life. Here the Classical and Christian motifs and overtones are fused together for creating a composite picture of death. The strategy aims at making Claudio feel so repelled by the prospect of living that he may persuade himself to accept the death-sentence as the less inadequate of the two alternatives. The elements composing this oration reverberate across the ages to the tradition of the Medieval drama and the entire passage has the feel of a gnomic utterance. Life, with all its pomp and glory, all its delusive joys and partial securities, all its shams, pretensions and allurements, eventuates in death. Death is visualized as a Morality play figure, the more man tries to shun it and keep it at arm's length the more dangerously he runs into it, and the fear of it is instinctive and hair-raising. It also unloads man of the burden of his worldly acquisitions and takes him to the last stage of his pilgrimage. All the hopes and ideals that sustain man turn out to be mere illusions, for all of them involve contrarieties. Life is not a seamless yarn but a complex pattern of events of reality involving and reflecting baffling inconsistencies. Man's life may best be summed up as an after-dinner's sleep that makes him look at the enigma of being through a distorted lens and induces in him forgetfulness of the world of Eternity. The best of man's sojourn in this world is sleep, and sleep in a way is a figurative form of death that man may own and succumb himself to. Death is also the great leveller and it is through death that we are apt to overlook not only the social distinctions but also the bitter memories and continuous frustrations of a

flawed existence, and yet we hesitate to accept its verdict. Wilson Knight very rightly points to the 'changing, wavering substance' of man as reflected in this speech and to the fact that life here is painted as 'a sequence of unrealities, strung together in a time-succession.'[4] The oration, coming from the Duke in the guise of the Friar and aimed at providing solace and comfort to Claudio, is bound to be formalized and sententious. It has the compactness and cogency, the suavity and level tones, though not unmixed with the sense of the pontifical, of an oration delivered from the pulpit. It is framed by careful phrases and neatly and deftly arranged aphoristic periods. It has all the virtues of a classical piece of composition—stability and poise, cold and statuesque formality, balanced but detachable units of meaning leading on to a grand finale or clamactic proposition. It truly reflects the tone of voice and civilized temper of the speaker.

Isabella, unlike Claudio, is capable of looking on death with detachment. But in the passage that concludes Act II Sc. iv, referred to earlier, owing to being high-strung, the timbre of her voice seems to crack. Her speech vibrates with emotion that is only slenderly rooted in experience, and she takes little cognizance of what it may land her into. Later, while intending to communicate to him the finality and irrevocability of his death-sentence she makes an arched, oblique allusion to it thus:

> Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,
> Intends you for his swift ambassador,
> Where you shall be an everlasting leiger. (III, i, 56-58)

The very economy of the statement betrays on undercurrent of irony and it is also a piece of artful dodging on the part of Isabella. At best she concedes that fear is the chief component in the experience of death; otherwise it seems to be devoid both of excruciating pain and the sense of ultimate extinction. That way man reacts in the same manner as the beetle he treads upon and, inferentially, should be no more

liable to feel pain than it:

> The sense of death is most in apprehension;
> And the poor beetle that we tread upon
> In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
> As when a giant dies. (III, i, 77-80)

Claudio, for the time being at any rate, strongly resents any attempt aimed at bracing him up and offers us an identical sensuous image of death as was done by Isabella earlier:

> Think you I can a resolution fetch
> From flowery tenderness? If I must die,
> I will encounter darkness as a bride
> And hug it in mine arms. (III, i, 81-84)

The iron of endurance seems to be tinkling in his nerves and the sensuous charm of death is at the same time as irresistible for him as it was for Antony:

> But I will be
> A bridegroom in my death, and run into't
> As to a lover's bed. (IV, xiv, 99-101)

But unlike Antony who, in a moment of utter despair, does prove his word, Claudio's is a clean contrary movement, and Shakespeare's alchemy of genius is brought home to us in the subtle portrayal of the resurgence of life in the face of the ghastly impendence of death.

For sometime after Isabella had acquainted him with the 'salt waves fresh in love' rushing from Angelo and the obnoxious proposal put forward by him in all audacity for his redemption, Claudio is of the same mind as Isabella. It looks as if her earlier triumphant declaration, 'Then Isabella live chaste, and brother die', had not only been forced out of the depths of her being but was also an expected, though naive anticipation, of Claudio's reaction to the matter. Even later, to Isalella's

> This night's the time
> That I should do what I abhor to name;
> Or else thou diest tomorrow (III, i, 100-102)

Claudio's prompt rejoinder is: 'Thou shalt not do it'. What

is more central to the issue is the fact that in his reassurances to Isabella, Claudio had really been talking of death more or less as a mere abstraction, an airy hypothesis, and as such it could be evaded and put by. Two crucial points in Isabella's address to Claudio, however, come to hold him in their firm grip. One is the possibly contingent nature of the sentence of death, and the other is the reiteration, with some degree of finality, of the hour of the approach of his execution and Angelo's peremptory command that Claudio should be prepared for it. The phrase 'your death tomorrow' that had been sounding with an ominous ring now acquires an added poignancy and seems to emanate from some obscure region beyond the frontiers of consciousness. He appears to be startled out of his stupor and wishes to continue clinging to the last straw of hope in the midst of the grey despair overshadowing his predicament:

Isabel. Be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow.
Cla. Yes.—Has he affections in him,
That thus can make him bite the law by th'nose
When he would force it?—Sure, it is no sin;
Or of the deadly seven it is the least. (iii, i, 106-110)

The primitive, animal horror of death assumes all at once a visible, tactile presence for him; it stands out before him beckoning him towards total annihilation, and Claudio is unnerved. In other words, death which, in spite of being ubiquitous, is something vague and unrecognizable, becomes for the moment part of his persona, intimate self and drains off all his energy. The sense of awe and of bewilderment, springing from his particular situation, makes him modulate his familiar idiom of speech which is conveyed to us thus:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bath in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribb'd ice;
To be imprisond in the viewless winds

And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that viewless and incertain thought
Imagine howling,—'tis too horrible.
The weariest and most loathed wordly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death. (III, i, 117-31)

The powerful, tidal sweep of this passage, causing a breach in what separates the mundane from the preternatural, is overwhelming. It is the fear of the unknown, the perilous leap in the dark as far as futurity is concerned, that is being underscored here. The opposition between the icy coldness of death, with the sure process of ultimate decay of which it represents a climax, and the warm, palpable motion of the living body, is at the heart of the passage. The indeterminate, contrary movements of the 'delighted spirit'—spirit set free from the bondage of the body—its traversing through dark, misty and frozen regions or abysms of space is something which it is terrifying to contemplate. The passage helps us recall vividly Hamlet's 'dread of something after death, The undiscover'd country from whose bourn No traveller returns', and the fearful dreams that vex and poison one's serenity and idealism. It is, however, significant to note that whereas the Duke's speculation about death is built up round generalities—generalities that are yet a part of the fabric of common experience—Claudio's speech offers us a crystallization of the deepest anguish (*Angst*) by which the human psyche is invaded. The latter is also more luminous and focalized and is forced out of immeasurable depths of feeling. The Duke seems to have a genius for offering the distillation of experience stretched over the ages. One is also justified in holding that whereas the Duke merely focuses on the condemnation of death, Claudio's unconscious mind spins round the feeling of insecurity, the sense of uncanniness that hovers over man's ultimate jounrey. It may be added that it is as much the fear

of death and extinction as the intensity of Claudio's plea for life, the re-assertion of the protoplasm out of the womb of darkness that arrest our attention in a moment of instant perception. The factity of the *Dasein*, however imperfect or inadequate, is to be preferred to something that is shrouded in mystery and lies beyond our range of comprehension.

Looked at from the stance of Barnardine, a convicted malefactor, death is robbed both of the elemant of fear and the touch of mystery about it. For him it is not only denuded of significance, it not only becomes a cipher but something that does not deserve to be attended to seriously. It is neither the whore to be whipped by the beadle nor the lover whose embrace is both seductive and fatal nor the inscrutable presence that can on no account be exorcized. Barnardine not only looks down upon it as the Duke would have Claudio do, he is just indifferent to it and is not to be cowed down by its gruesomeness. The Provost, a gentle and humane soul as well as an objective and clear-eyed observer, sums up his attitude towards it admirably and succinctly thus: 'A man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep; careless, reckless, and fearless of what's past, present, or to come: insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal.' (IV,ii,140-43) He is subject neither to human categories and sensations nor to time-succession but drags on his existence in his own empty universe. The Provost further enlightens the Duke in disguise in this way: 'He hath evermore had the liberty of the prison: give him leave to escape from hence, he would not. Drunk many times a day, if not many days entirely drunk. We have very oft awaked him, as if to carry him to execution, and showed him a seeming warrant for it; it hath not moved him at all.' (IV,ii,145-51) Whatever the psychological inhibitions that govern Barnardine's conduct Death itself becomes degraded when it is confronted with a man of his mould and temper. He is neither overwhelmed by its gruesomeness nor intrigued by its subtle and impenetrable mystery. He just wants to pass it by because its intrusion in

his own world is likely to dislocate the even tenour of life he had been pursuing so consistently for ages. It is neither worthy of being scrutinized closely nor does it tease us out of thought. It is something utterly futile and paltry and hence does not pose any threat to the impercipience to which Barnardine has been so shamelessly and irretrievably reduced. How would Death look when juxtaposed with an 'unregenerate life-force'[5] like Barnardine?

Angelo's evocation of death comes almost towards the end of the play and is no less revealing. The wily sophist of the earlier scenes, who had tried to bundle up Isabella in legalistic quibblings, not only meets discomfiture at her hands but is also completely foiled by the superior strategy of the Duke. Ultimately he not only achieves a degree of self-purgation but also comes to the realization that good and evil are so inextricably mixed up in the pattern of living that they can neither be treated in total isolation nor explained away in terms of a simplistic solution. He admits the fact of his being 'undiscernible'—deluded by his own false idealism—and brought to bay at long last, recognizes death as the only and proper meed he could expect for all his doings:

> Then, good prince,
> No longer session hold upon my shame,
> But let my trial be mine own confession.
> Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death
> Is all the grace I beg. (V, i. 368-72)

Further prompted by the impulse for self-surrender he speaks with genuine fulness of heart thus:

> I am sorry that such sorrow I procure,
> And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart
> That I crave death more willingly than mercy;
> 'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it. (V, i, 472-75)

Mercy it is that Angelo had most doggedly and perversely denied to Claudio, and insisted that the death-sentence could in no way be revoked. But now death is the coveted

prize he is most eager to obtain as a little earlier the infliction of 'sequent death' constituted for him the gift of grace that could be bestowed on him by the Duke. The process of traversing through the inferno of pain and misery may be said to have brought him not only an unerring perception but also a new wisdom and a new humility. We might as well hold that Angelo comes to develop an acute sense of absolute loneliness of being without communication, and this continues haunting him in the last scene of the play. Death is an ineluctable fact in *Measure for Measure*, and the dramatization of the various attitudes towards it goes to show that there is also a tragic focus to the play in the sense of our clinging to duration as such. The Duke speaks of death with disdain and also treats it as a phantom. Claudio's act of romanticizing, under Isabell's moral infection, soon transforms death into an object of fear and Angelo's inward agony, betrayed by an appeal for mercy, modulates itself into a death wish. As an objective fact of existence Death does not fit into Barnardine's pattern of animal living. But neither Claudio's nihilistic horror nor Angelo's death wish nor Barnardine's impercipience constitutes the whole of truth. All these masks of Death are, however, relatively inconsequential, for as Karl Jaspers puts it beautifully: 'What death destroys is phenomenal; it is not Being itself'.

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Maqbool Hasan Khan

SHAKESPEARE'S SELF-REVELATION:
A Critical Theme in the Nineteenth Century

How does one approach the Shakespeare criticism of the past? In a way the problem may be reduced to one of the proper adjustment of tone, of trying to achieve a rather precarious balance between sympathy that may sometimes have to be deliberately induced and the almost inevitable touch of ironic detachment, a critical shrugging of the shoulders to ward off possible involvement in problems that are no longer seen to be problems and approaches to the subject that are no longer regarded as valid or even relevant. Not that the difficulty arises while dealing only with the trivialities of minor criticism. True, no doubt, that the recent publication of extensive selections from the earlier criticism of Shakespeare[1] has highlighted the problem for the ordinary student of Shakespeare in a way that a concentration on Jonson's Folio poem or Dryden's *Essay* or Rowe's *Life* had never done. It is interesting to see that generally the more extended treatments of the subject, especially those that go beyond literary criticism to trace the course of the movement of the general appreciation of Shakespeare, have to struggle hard in order to strike the right note.[2] A preoccupation with the chief landmarks only, with critical insight at its historically most untrammelled, poses few problems. It is possible to read Jonson's poem without being especially aware of the Renaissance concern with the antinomies of art and nature or of the contemporary stance of awe and reverence towards 'haughty Rome and insolent Greece' and the consequences of such a stance in terms both of critical freedom and restraint. Dryden and, to a greater extent, Johnson approached important

facetsof the imaginative vision of Shakespeare by taking recourse tothe common experiential reality enshrined inthe plays. Dogma is no doubt occasionally transcended; more generally, however, it is persuaded into yielding its last iota of critical relevance and validity. In his notes more than in the Preface, Johnson speaks with the authority of general human experience behind him. The case of Coleridge however is exceptional; he was too profoundly engaged in thinking out problems for himself to have followed, or himself devised, a framework of generally accepted dogma. The semblance of a peculiarly nineteenth century ring in his voice can perhaps better be explained with reference to the fact of a certain vulgarisation of his insights as the century developed some of its most cherished Shakespearian themes. Coleridge seems closer to the present age, especially to the critical modes originating in the 'thirties, than do most of the other Romantic critics. The point, however, that is being sought to be made here relates not so much to the universal elements in the best Shakespearian criticism of the past as to the rather obtrusive frameworks and theoretical edifices that evoke little sympathetic response in the contemporary reader now.

Notable among such critical perspectives of the past is the one that insists on deriving the moral significance of Shakespeare's work from its supposed reflection of his creative self. In a wider context of ideas, as may briefly be seen later, such an approach is part of an intellectual movement that, starting at the end of the eighteenth century, has not yet exhausted itself. In its rather naive equation of life and art, however, as also in its over-simplified approach to the critical problems attending upon the study of Shakespeare, the nineteenth century search for ethical significance in terms of biography—in the critical writings of Dowden and others—presents difficulties to the modern reader that may not relate to the general drift of this criticism so much as to its overt, and often misconceived, aims and intentions. The approach to Shakespeare through his 'biography', the main plank of

Edward Dowden's *magnum opus, Shakespeare, His Mind and Art*,[3] continued to be favoured by important critics till the publication in 1907, in the once popular English Men of Letters series, of Walter Raleigh's[4] interesting monograph on Shakespeare. It is important to maintain the distinction between approaching Shakespeare's work through his 'life'—a contribution to criticism proper, whatever its ultimate value—and seeking to construct biographies by a selective marshalling of 'evidence' from the plays. It was the latter approach that ultimately degenerated into unbridled indulgence in pure fantasy and was responsible for the less fortunate among the romanticised biographies of Shakespeare. Frank Harris and romanticists like him, however, have little claim on the attention of someone that was mainly preoccupied with the aesthetic criticism of the plays; the concern with the personalist stance is, on the other hand, really justified on the ground that it had come to be adopted by serious criticism as means of approaching what it supposed to be the real creative centre of Shakespeare's art. Dowden and Raleigh cannot be dismissed as insignificant critics. Raleigh, the later of the two, wrote monographs on three major English poets and though, like Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch—his famous counterpart at Cambridge—his interest in literature smacked somewhat of the ideal of the accomplished gentleman, he always wrote with taste and enthusiasm. His book on Milton (in the same series as the one on Shakespeare) is something of a landmark in the history of Milton appreciation. Certainly he did not possess (nor did Dowden) the kind of penetratingly analytical or profoundly synthesising intellect that had given to Bradley's *Shakespearian Tragedy* its unerring grasp of an essentially speculative subject, but he did bring to bear on Shakespeare's plays an unmistakably assimilative mind, rooted firmly as it was in an experiential enjoyment of literature, and it is with some justification that a recent reference work on Shakespeare calls his book as 'still a good general introduction'. Edward Dowden, whose main critical

work on Shakespeare was published exactly in the middle of the second half of the nineteenth century and which was, its immense prestige in the past notwithstanding, a work more of youthful enthusiasm than mature judgment (the book was written at the age of thirty two), may legitimately be regarded as the most representative Victorian critic of Shakespeare. Bradley may, incidentally, have to be denied that distinction, and that too not merely for the technical reason that *Shakespearian Tragedy* missed the Victorian age by a narrow margin but also for the more important reason that in a peculiar, negative way, and through a remarkable continuity of debate, he belongs more with the twentieth than the nineteenth century critical ethos. Bradley does certainly share with Dowden some of his Victorian preoccupations; moral concerns and a mild or pronounced agnostic orientation of thought tend to assimilate Shakespeare to George Eliot as much in the *Shakespearian Tragedy* as they do in the *Mind and Art*. Bradley, however, stands in direct relationship more to Shakespeare's work and to critics like Johnson and Coleridge than to his own age. It is Dowden who no doubt needs a historical perspective, and that mainly because he chose (at least in his major work) to write on Shakespeare from the personalist standpoint, a critical stance that then appeared more or less valid. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to see where the main significance of the approach was supposed to lie, what the real drift of such criticism was, and how it may be assimilated into the main patterns of twentieth century Shakespearian criticism.

Writing of Shakespeare's self-revelation as a critical debate in the nineteenth century is, therefore, mainly to write about Edward Dowden and his firm conviction that the mystery of Shakespeare's work could be easily unravelled if we approached it as 'fragments of a great confession'. He was not indeed the first to have believed that literature was a form of self-revelation, experience filtered through a temperament. The idea—in the form in which it came to be radically dis-

tinguished from the rhetorical notion of the individuality of style ('le style est l'homme meme')—was about a hundred years old when Dowden came to apply it so thoroughly to the study of Shakespeare's work. The personalist approach had its origin mainly in the replacement, at the end of the eighteenth century, of externally determined canons of criticism by inner, psychological criteria. The disintegration of formalist classicism was accompanied by the growth of a certain introspective self-consciousness and linking of thought with experience and personality. This was a change of a radical nature and certainly one beyond the scope of literature or literary appreciation. It is possible, ironically enough, to trace the origin of this change, one that dealt the death blow to the neo-classical conception of literary culture as sharing in the common fund of given experience, to the circumstances surrounding the birth of neo-classicism itself. Humanism was the direct source of the literary creed that stressed so much the virtues of generalisation and impersonality; it also encouraged not only speculative thought but speculation about the nature of thought itself—the ultimate source, in a way, of the idea of personality and of experience.

It is in this context that Wordsworth's *Prelude* acquires such a tremendous significance in that it marks the artistic apotheosis of the experiential self of the writer. It indicates the great shift in the focus that took place as the century of polite culture drew to a close. It is the counterpart in England of Goethe's creative endeavours that had rightly appeared as 'fragments of a great confession'. Herder stressed the implications of the personal factor both for literary creation and criticism when he had suggested (in 1778) that as a work of art was the impression of a living human soul, the biography of an author was bound to be the best commentary on his work. Some of the most important aesthetic distinctions popularised by the German critics at the turn of the century, the distinctions between 'naive' and 'sentimental', 'real' and 'ideal', 'objective' and 'subjective', were mainly formulated

while working out the implications of the insight regarding literature as a record of experience. The idea of personality, of authenticity achieved through living and experiencing, haunted the creative genius of Europe throughout the nineteenth century and became, at the same time, the living principle of the interpretation of literature for critics who wished to move out of the generic criteria of a dead formalism.

The study of the biographical approach in its application to the work of Shakespeare would require one to look for peculiar emphases and ramifications within the general framework of the personalist stance. Though the discussion of the question of Shakespeare's self-revelation was already about a hundred years old, no one else before Dowden had given it so much salience as to make it the central issue:

> The attempt [says Dowden in his Preface] made in this volume to connect the study of Shakespeare's work with an enquiry after the personality of the writer, and to observe, in its several stages the growth of his intellect and character from youth to full maturity, distinguishes the work from the greater number of preceding criticisms of Shakespeare,

The claim was no doubt justified and for reasons that may not now be regarded as very complimentary to Dowden's own critical acumen in choosing to feel confident where others before him had remained tentative and hesitant. It is possible that some of his confidence he might have owed to elements in the contemporary critical ethos, to intellectual tendencies with a peculiarly Victorian character. Dowden remains the exemplar *per se* of the biographical approach to Shakespeare, an approach that dominated the critical scene as an accepted orthodoxy for many decades. Moreover, though he continued to write on Shakespeare till almost the end of his career and many of his later writings are not only of a high order but also mark the beginnings of fresh lines of inquiry,[5] he never thought it necesary to change his position[6] with regard to the main stance in his earliest book. It would, therefore, be proper to keep Dowden in the focus

while writing on Shakespeare's self-revelation.

The scantiness of biographical detail and the dramatic mode of Shakespeare's writings have generally tended to lead those who seek self-revelation in Shakespeare to fall back upon their own intuitive and subjective apprehension of his personality. The line between objective assessment and subjective impression, between fact and fantasy, tends to be almost imperceptibly blurred. And not for the seekers after self-revelation alone. Even in the eighteenth century when biography and criticism were distinct pursuits, in Rowe's *Life*, for example, the tendency to embroider, around the meagre facts, patterns out of the biographer's preconceptions, had already created the first of the innumerable 'images' of Shakespeare that went a long way to influence, albeit indirectly, the criticism of the plays. With the advent of Romanticism the attempt consciously to fuse subjective conceptions of Shakespeare's personality with an appreciation of his works became an important preoccupation with critics and commentators. Dowden's case is, however, different and rather paradoxical: for him the connection between Shakespeare's personality and his work was not in any sense an overt indication of a subjective approach; on the contrary, the search for the unity of the author's mind in his work was part of the objective, detached and systematic study of literature. The late Victorians had a passionate faith in the scientific method and Dowden, notwithstanding his liberal, humanistic upbringing, was enough of a positivisit not to approach literature as an object the study of which required the intellectual discipline of a scientist. Criticism was for Dowden, as for others in that age, the pursuit of truth, and a pursuit that had its analogue in the work of an anatomist or a botanist. Dowden no doubt occasionlly speaks of a literary work in terms of its organic unity—a Coleridgian concept—but the idea undergoes a subtle shift of connotation in that Dowden's use reminds us more of a botanist's approach to a plant than of

a vital organism of transcendent significance that a literary work is for Coleridge. It was, therefore, neither as a sentimentalist nor a subjective impressionist that he sought to connect the study of Shakespeare with an enquiry after his personality, it was, on the contrary, almost as a scientist, as someone working under the shadow of the evolutionary 'myth' about the *origin* of things that he looked for the origin of Shakespeare's work in his mind. The extraordinary success of the *Mind and Art* speaks volumes as to the contemporaneity and immediacy of its critical idiom.

Dowden's main 'hypotheses', to use his own favourite word, are focused on the question of self-revelation. He assumes that not only is there a link between an author's work and his mind, but also that criticism would acquire significance in proportion to its success in unravelling the man behind the work. His second assumption is that the complete works of an author would also be found to reveal the writer's mind in a peculiar way—not as a disconnected collocation of aspects, but as an organism manifesting a process of growth. Thus, interestingly, he sets out to study Shakespeare's work not only as 'fragments of a great confession'—however indirect—but also trace in them 'the growth of a poet's mind'. In all this Dowden was not, of course, being very original: the entire weight of critical tradition during the preceding hundred years, from Herder, through Schiller, Goethe, the Schlegels, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keble, Carlyle, and Newman, had been in favour of the view of art as self-revelation. Coleridge, indeed, among the English critics had formulated a view that was far more subtle and complex taking full account of the 'distancing' achieved in a work of art despite the unique and personal nature of its vision. Lacking sufficient force of contrast, however, his views, too, had merged into the more straightforward personalist theories of literary art.

There is little doubt that in his Victorian enthusiasm for the personality of Shakespeare, for rescuing Shakespeare

from being 'attenuated to an aspect' *(Mind and Art*, p. 2*)*, for imagining him as a real person—'practical, positive, and alive to material interests', *(Mind and Art*, p. 33*)* endowed with a sense of fact, but liable to succumb to excessive thought and passion—for believing that Shakespeare could, and did, in fact abide our question, Dowden did not underestimate critical difficulties, nor did he ignore the fact that some of the most influential opinion before him had insisted on approaching Shakespeare as an impersonal poet, opinion that otherwise regarded literature as self-expression. Dowden was undoubtedly aware of the hazard in attempting 'to pass through the creations of a great dramatic poet to the mind of the creator' (Preface, p. xiii). Richard Simpson, reviewing the *Mind and Art* in *The Academy*[7], recognized this when he pointed out:

> Professor Dowden's subject is one full of difficulties, and incapable of strict demonstration. Mr Halliwell exhorts us all to avoid the temptation of endeavouring to decipher Shakespeare's inner life and character through the media of his works. According to previous bias, so will the reader's assent to the conclusions of this book.

Knowing fully the dangers and pitfalls of the approach he had adopted Dowden still believed that 'a product of mind so large and manifold as the writings of Shakespeare cannot fail in some measure to reveal its origin and cause' *(Mind and Art*, p. xiii). The most influential critic of the century had, apparently, thought otherwise. Coleridge had throughout laid great stress on the protean quality of Shakespeare, his impersonality at the simple dramatic level. In this he had been close to Schiller who had categorised Shakespeare with Homer as 'naive'—lacking in the element of self-consciousness so characteristic of 'modern' literature. Schiller's conception of Shakespeare in terms of a depersonalised, immanent deity was echoed by Coleridge when he remarked: 'Shakespeare is the Spinozistic deity—an omnipresent creativeness, Milton is the deity of prescience. . . . Shakespeare's poetry is characterless; that is, it does not reflect the individual Shakespeare'.[8] Shakespeare, Coleridge insisted, possessed

the quality of total self-immersion, a quality which he shared with Chaucer, but in a totally different way:

> The sympathy of the poet with the subjects of his poetry is particularly remarkable in Shakespeare and Chaucer, but what the first effects by a strong act of imagination and mental metamorphosis, the last does without any effort, merely by the inborn kindly joyousness of his nature. How well we seem to know Chaucer! How absolutely nothing do we know of Shakespeare![9]

Apart from this general characterisation, Coleridge had specifically disavowed the possibility, at the psychological level, of identifying Shakespeare with any of the *dramatis personae*. 'Shakespeare darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion. . . . Shakespeare becomes all things, yet for ever remaining himself'.[10] In *Venus and Adonis*, Coleridge found the 'second sure promise of genius' which consisted in 'the choice of the subject remote from the private interests, circumstances, and feelings of the poet himself'.[11]

Notwithstanding all these, and many other, comments on Shakespeare's impersonality, it may perhaps not be exactly true to suggest, as M. H. Abrams does,[12] that Coleridge was, like some modern critics such as Stoll and Kittredge, exclusively concerned with Shakespeare the artist. The subjectivity which he attributed to Shakespeare was, no doubt, not the subjectivity of the poet, but 'a subjectivity of the *Persona*, or dramatic character'.[13] Nevertheless, as C. J. Sisson points out,[14] there are hints of a subjectivist approach in Coleridge. In the fourth of his 'Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton', he intended to consider Shakespeare's plays 'as they seem naturally to flow from the progress and the order of his mind'.[15] No doubt, 'the progress and order of his mind' is in terms of artistic growth and maturity, but the suggestions elsewhere do certainly acquire a vaguely biographical significance. In his arrangement of the plays according to 'epochs', the group comprising the tragedies is preceded by the comment: 'the period of beauty is now

passed by, and the period of . . . ['terribleness'] and grandeur [succeeds]'.[16] In the same group *Troilus and Cressida*, too, is preceded by a comment that has a faintly biographical undertone.

The foregoing is not intended to form part of a summarised history of the controversy regarding Shakespeare's self-revelation since any such attempt would have to take into account many other developments; the interest, for example, in the study of Shakespeare's characters and the growing feeling that some of these characters stand in a special relationship to their creator. The brief reference to Coleridge, however, was intended only to show that Dowden's attempt in the *Mind and Art* was not without a context of critical discussion, and that, apart from critics like A. W. Schlegel who had taken a subjectivist view of Shakespeare, even Coleridge's criticism could have provided Dowden, if he needed it, possible grounds for discovering self-revelation in Shakespeare.

Dowden's main concern was not biographical but critical though it is not always possible to distinguish between the two. This is perhaps as it should be. One may indeed be persuaded to discover in the fact not only the main significance of the approach but also its most important point of contact with some of the common tendencies in the Shakespeare criticism of the present century. The blurring of the distinction between biography and criticism—whether the critic's aim is to probe the depths of the creative self of Shakespeare for its own sake or to discover the mind in the works as constituting its ethical core—is indicative of the fact that the two are perceived to be originating in the unity of lived experience. What Dowden was out to discover in Shakespeare was the essential meaning that the latter's experiencing self had been able to forge out of life. That Dowden had considerable difficulty in locating that meaning can be seen from his letters. He was in search of a 'conception of the man Shakespeare', he tells us in one of his

letters,[17] and he found it in an essay by David Masson,[18] the well-known biographer of Milton. Masson helped Dowden in locating the core of Shakespeare's spiritual quest: a taut balancing of the empirical and the metaphysical, or rather the apprehension of the beyond through a full realization of the mundane. Masson thought that, believing all human existence to be an illusion, Shakespeare had achieved a profoundly metaphysical dimension through the very concreteness and reality of his presentation of the actual world. An important conclusion that can now be drawn is that when Dowden set out to connect Shakespeare's personality with his work, he did not probably mean to identify the dramatist with any of his characters on the simple, psychological level of fictional 'recognition'—Dickens himself in the character of David Copperfield, for example—not 'personality', perhaps, at the psychological level at all; what he hoped to discover in the unity of complete works, was the uniqueness, the 'personality' of a consistent vision. Masson did in fact provide him with what he had been looking for—a 'conception of the man Shakespeare'.

Dowden does no doubt try to arrive at a conception of Shakespeare's personality in the more normal sense of the word also. He contrasts two popular 'images' of Shakespeare—that of the cheerful, self-possessed, and prudent man, the 'burgher-from-Stratford', and the one that had been popularised by the French author, Taine, of Shakespeare as 'impetuous in his transports, disorderly in his conduct, heedless of conscience, but sensitive to every touch of pleasure, a man of inordinate, extravagant genius' (*Mind and Art*, p. 31). From these two extreme views of Shakespeare's personality, Dowden evolves a conception that, apart from its great psychological interest as postulating an inner conflict, also acquires strong ethical overtones—it becomes, so to say, a Victorian analogue of the Pilgrim's Progress, overcoming in this case the daemons of excessive thought and passion, and moving on to the heights of redemptivist

vision. The 'positivist' in Shakespeare is juxtaposed with that which is represented by the composition of *Othello* and *King Lear*. The 'positivism' is no doubt discovered in the fact of the few known business transactions at Stratford; the other aspect of his personality is only inferred from the composition of plays like *Othello* and *King Lear*. By a remarkable logical *legerdemain*, Dowden transforms the objective manifestations of 'the infinite of passion and the infinite of meditation' in characters like Hamlet and Othello into the deeper components of Shakespeare's spiritual personality. That the argument is circular, a virtual *cul de sac*, is never noticed by the believer in Shakespeare's self-revelation.

The chief among the critical consequences of the biographical method is the salience given to certain plays and characters, and, at the same time, the undervaluation of certain others. *Titus Andronicus*, for example, is not generally regarded as among the 'great' plays of Shakespeare, and the consensus of scholarly opinion at that time was sceptical about the authenticity of the play. One, however, suspects that Dowden may have been encouraged in his gross undervaluation of the play by his preconceptions about the biographical scheme, by his belief that the play was written at a time when Shakespeare had not as yet linked his soul to the 'graver realities' of life. The biographical predisposition also leads Dowden to accord a more radical position to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* than would generally be warranted. Dowden does this in terms of what would now be called thematic or moral concern, though there is also present a certain element of fictional identification. Dowden misses many of the dimensions of the history plays by limiting their scope to the 'world of the practicable'. His criticism of the last plays, too, has been vitiated by the element of sentimentality introduced by his conception of Shakespeare's supposed 'old' age.

Shakespeare, His Mind and Art was published in 1875, and immediately it became a great success. It was followed,

two years later, by the little book Dowden wrote in the Literature Primer series, and it was this that contained the biographical pattern of Shakespeare's growth in its most crystallised form. It no doubt led to much sentimentality and its popular acceptance was certainly the source of a good deal of critical confusion, but its implicit recognition of Shakespeare's artistic growth in experiential terms was an achievement of a high order. Dowden was perhaps the first to have embarked on a systematic critical study of Shakespeare's plays in a chronological order. He had been helped in this by the work of scholars from Malone to Furnivall and Fleay, but it was his own sense of the inner significance of the plays in terms of their growing moral vision that had really enabled him to discern in them their pattern of growth. Coleridge had wished to study the plays in a 'physiological and pathological', and not a chronological, order, but this may not be taken as a total disavowal of the chronological study. The real reason why he had turned away from making much of the chronological order of the plays was that contemporary scholarship had made available to him a sequence that would have led only to absurdities; it is difficult to believe that any one could have worked out a pattern of spiritual growth in Shakespeare on the basis of a chronological order that assigned *The Winter's Tale* to the middle, and *Twelfth Night* to the latest, years of Shakespeare's career.[19] Dowden's own chronological arrangement in *Shakespeare Primer* aims at a comprehensive view of Shakespeare's development, and, as pointed out by Sir Edmund Chambers,[20] takes account of general intellectual and literary factors. He goes beyond external evidence and 'scientific' tests, and finds justifications for his own chronological arrangements in a critical and intuitive sense of development: 'As we do not need a thermometer to inform us of decided changes in temperature in the atmosphere, so we need no scientific tests to make us aware that, in passing from *Love's Labour's Lost* to *Hamlet*, and from *Hamlet* to *The Tempest*, we pass

from youth to manhood, and again from a manhood of trial and sorrow to the riper manhood of attainment and of calm' (*Shakespeare Primer*, p. 37). It may be possible to see that in this, as in much else, the reference to growth in literal, biographical terms is only a way of approaching the inner significance of the plays. It may be regarded as the Victorian, critically less sophisticated version of the great Romantic insight about the experiential bearings of art. It is worth recalling that the best in the Shakespearian criticism in the present century does in no way suggust that the insight is of any but the supreme value.

It would be interesting, and not entirely uninstructive for the history of Shakespeare criticism, to make a survey of the articles on Shakespeare in the successive editions of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century. It may not contribute much to our knowledge of the genesis and growth of bardolatory, but it would not fail to illuminate the history of the rise and fall of orthodoxies in Shakespeare criticism and scholarship. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Shakespeare article in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia* (1885),[21] contributed by T. Spencer Baynes, Professor of Rhetoric at St. Andrews University, presents the account of Shakespeare's life and the development of his genius in terms that are remarkably close to Dowden's, whom it mentions by name. The 'pattern', thus, had already become part of the established view of Shakespeare's genius, and was to remain so for many years to come. Needless to say, the earlier editions have hardly a trace of the developmental design, and, subsequently, the article contributed by Sir Edmund Chambers to the famous eleventh edition, though largely sympathetic to the biographical approach, especially to the *Sonnets*, is, as would be expected from such an eminent authority, free from indebtedness to any single source.

George Brandes, the Danish writer, had deliberately set before himself the goal of refuting the idea of Shakespeare's impersonality. The result, however, was a book[22] that crossed

the limits of objective criticism and, along with the book by Frank Harris, may rather be approached as no more than an interesting sociological phenomenon. Sir Sidney Lee whose biography of Shakespeare was regarded as the most authoritative till superceded by the scholarly volumes of Sir Edmund Chambers, was staunchly opposed to the idea of self-revelation. His knowledge of Italian and French poetry of the sixteenth century led him to regard even the sonnets as mere poetical exercises with absolutely no relevance to Shakespeare's personal life.[23] In his lectures on *Shekespearean Tragedy*, Bradley decided to 'leave untouched, or merely glanced at, questions regarding Shakespeare's life and character and the development of his genius and art'[24] because he was concerned only with a specific aesthetic problem and, perhaps also because he might have thought the subject of questionable critical utility. It was only in a little introductory volume, part of a series that obliged the contributor to fuse biography into criticism, that another distinguished attempt was made to read Shakespeare out of his works and then to approach the works in the light of that preconception.

To say, however, that Raleigh worked under some kind of an obligation to adopt the biographical approach would not at all be correct since the enthusiasm with which he responds to the challenge right from the beginning suggests strong conviction rather than the attempt to make virtue out of necessity. We may recall that it was Raleigh who, with his excellent gift for memorable phrase ('monument to dead ideas' for *Paradise Lost*), made the remarkable suggestion—the subject was self-revelation—that 'no man can walk abroad save on his own shadow' *(Shakespeare,* p. 7). Raleigh was a convinced personalist. It is interesting to note, however, that he had adopted an ironic, detached stance towards the excesses of the Romantic critics of Shakespeare. 'Since the rise of Romantic criticism, the appreciation of Shakespeare has become a kind of auction, where the bidder, however extravagant, carries off the prize, *(Shakespeare,* p. 4).

This element of detachmenent, the ability to stand outside the Romantic tradition, is significant in that it is indicative of a slight, almost imperceptible shift in sensibility. It may be worthwhile to remind ourselves of Raleigh's contribution to Milton criticism. There, too, he makes efforts to disengage himself from the Romantic tradition in criticism though the effort was overshadowed by the fierce modernist assault on Milton that began in the 'twenties. In his book on Shakespeare, Raleigh makes an effort to go back to the older modes of critical apprehension in order to balance what he considered to be the excesses of Romantic criticism. About the problem of Shakespeare's self-revelation, however, he chose to follow in the footsteps of Dowden rather than adopt the more formal and impersonal approach of critics and scholars like Sir Sidney Lee.

The very excellence of Shakespeare's writing makes Raleigh convinced that Shakespeare could not but have revealed his mind in them. That which is revealed is not, of course, anything as trivial as personal idiosyncrasies. 'What we do know of him is so essential that it seems impersonal' (p. 6). In this brief summary of Raleigh's views on the subject of Shakespeare's self-revelation we may also note that most of the arguments are advanced in the spirit of controversy suggesting that the critical debate that had been initiated by Dowden three decades earlier could still provoke interest, and also that Raleigh seems to be summing up what appear to him as arguments still valid.

The main weakness of most of the arguments put forward is the inability to distinguish between the emotion of real life experienced by the poet and that of art inhering in a structure that has an independent life of its own. The entire debate about self-revelation in the nineteenth century was carried on, by protagonists and opponents alike, on the basis of fallacious arguments. No one can deny the experiential context of literature and the individuality of artistic vision, but to say that the living experience of art is the same as the

lived experience of life is to miss an important step in the argument. It is no less than ignoring the intermediacy of imagination. It is the recognition of this important truth in the general critical consciousness of the present century that leads one to find rhetoric such as the following so pointless. 'Plays like those of Shakespeare cannot be written in cold blood; they call forth the man's whole energies, and take toll of the last farthing of his wealth of sympathy and experience' (p .8). Raleigh makes an appeal to the reader's awareness of the complexities of poetry. Great poetry refuses to commit itself to rigid, easily comprehensible formulations of experience. Since Shakespeare cannot offer 'a four-square scheme of things' (p. 9), he may be thought not to have revealed himself in his works. We must, however, realize that 'he has spread out before us the scroll that contains his interpretation of the world;—how dare we complain that he has hidden himself from our knowledge?' (p. 8).

An interesting part of Raleigh's biographical method is his suggestion regarding the actual content of Shakespeare's self-revelation. All such attempts, however, are bound to degenerate into trivialities since the critic's own predispositions may incline him to foist them on Shakespeare's work. Dowden, we may recall, thought the core of Shakespeare's spiritual life to have consisted of the conflict between passion and meditation. For Raleigh, on the other hand, the chief significance of Shakespeare's spiritual quest lay in his passage through the Charybdis and Scylla of reason and the life of imagination. All this reminds us of the irony of history that problems, critical and other, are seldom resolved; they are simply relegated to the domain of irrelevance. There is, however, an important respect in which Raleigh has anticipated a tendency in the Shakespeare criticism of the 'thirties that was once regarded as novel and exciting. Raleigh approaches Shakespeare's imagery for evidence of his tastes and inclinations almost in the same spirit and with the same assumptions as Caroline Spurgeon was to do

later in the 'thirties.

The interpretation of Shakespeare in the past has had a twofold significance: interpretation in terms of contemporary preoccupations, and that with a transcending relevance. The two are not easily separable. The personalist stance, particularly from Dowden to Raleigh and at least in its overt formulations, has perhaps more of the former. The perception of continuities in Shakespeare criticism would, however, incline one not to be discouraged by ostensible, and now irrelvant, aims. The results of the application of the biographical method to the study of Shakespeare would be found to have much in common with some of the important trends in twentieth century Shakespeare criticism. There are not only continuities of basic assumption between the practitioners of the biographical method and critics like Caroline Spurgeon and Dover Wilson, but even the *Scrutiny* critics, with their avowed moral concerns, would also be found in the main drift of their criticism to be engaged in not dissimilar pursuits.

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22 George Brandes, *William Shakespeare* (London, 1898).

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24 'Introdction', *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1904), p. 1.

BOOK REVIEWS

Love-Hate Relations. By STEPHEN SPENDER (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited), first Indian reprint, 1977, 318 pp.

In 1965 Stephen Spender gave the Clark Lectures at Cambridge University. His subject was the Anglo-American relationship. Since he 'hates' printing his lectures, he decided to rewrite them. In the process only five pages of the original lectures have survived. If the informal manner or the smooth flow of Spender's thoughts, achieved at times at the expense of brevity, has made the book eminently readable, it has also considerably concealed the amount of scholarship that has gone into its writing. Another feature that lends a certain vividness to Spender's style is his use of similes some of which are quite outstanding like the one about the preserved American past as it must have appeared to the eye of Spender, the poet: '... does not it all have the glazed look of a paralyzed Sparrow under the hypnotic glare of a boa-constrictor—the great American future?' Apart from an introduction, the book consists of five sections, each containing a number of sub-sections. In the introduction, the author declares that he has chosen to study English and American sensibilities through the medium of English Literature, for 'within the common literature and language the two peoples share a past of memory and imagination'. Spender's frame of reference is quite inclusive. This gives an additional interest to the book besides that of its subject. It can, as well, be read as a work of literary criticism containing, as it does, a number of valuable critical insights into some of the most important British and American writers and their works. Indeed at places, Spender's approach is so close to that of literary

appreciation that a few of his observations (if picked out of the context) may be offered as specimens of practical criticism, for instance, his analysis of a brief passage from Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, in the first section of the book (pp. 18-19). These pieces of critical analysis are, no doubt, an integral part of the central argument of the book.

Spender opens his argument with the observation: 'A Hundred years ago, England had over America what Emerson called "the immense advantage". American thoughts, he wrote, were English thoughts. Today it would be as true to say that America has the advantage over Europe. European thoughts are American thoughts'. Though it is debatable whether European thoughts are American thoughts, perhaps what Spender wishes to suggest here is the over-all dominance of America which can hardly be doubted. That this dominance is largely a result of America's material progress, Spender does not deny. His aim is neither to extol, nor to underrate the position of supremacy that America has come to acquire today but to understand how the United States, culturally a colony of England, as Margaret Fuller described it in 1847, started disentangling itself from the intertwining European past, and by 1920 there was hardly anything in Europe that it considered worth emulating. The fact that even in the middle of the nineteenth century America's subservience to Europe was not complete and had a degree of ambivalence about it, is demonstrated by the conflicting American attitudes to the literary and cultural tradition of Europe (Emerson, Henry James, Walt Whitman). Despite this 'the shadow image of England and Europe,' as Spender calls it, continued 'to qualify the American writers' attitude to their own country or state of culture'. On the other hand, the English did not find much of interest in America till as late as the twenties. Spender points out that the 'love-hate' of the early twentieth century English writers was directed against England itself as they helplessly watched the doom of the English 'patria', and by the time England emerged

from World War II, it had been reduced to the status of 'provincial' in relation to the United States. This 'patria' or the idea of the true nation (different from any concept of political nation), contends Spender, was the moving spirit behind the American writers' search for identity in the second half of the last and the first quarter of the present century. For Spender, Whitman's poetry is founded on an imagined American 'patria', as was W. B. Yeats's on an Irish one. He regards Pound's expatriatism as 'essentially patriotic' and makes it clear that for Henry James and Ezra Pound the 'patria' was not England, though this cannot be said of T. S. Eliot.

The first two and part of the last sections are largely devoted to a study of some American traits viewed in an antithetical relationship to the corresponding European ones. Empathy and subjectivity are the two features of the American writers which, according to Spender, put them in sharp contrast to their English counterparts. He emphasizes the American writer's love of ultimate experiences and their tendency to 'test existence against dissolution' (Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald). Spender calls Whitman's *Song of Myself*, 'the archetypal poem of the subjective', and suggests that, within the American context, *The Waste Land* is its exact opposite. In his view 'the main characteristic of American Literature is ultimately self-realizing, that of English Literature self-cultivating'. Indeed, Spender's love of antithesis is rather strong, for he goes to quote Chateaubriand who considered America to be the realization of the idea of permanent society. These observations, though controversial and perhaps a bit too generalized, are, undoubtedly, fresh and provocative.

Equally perceptive, and probably more convincing, is Spender's account of American attitudes to the past. In his mind being Americanized corresponds to living only in the present. Americans, as they cannot bear the existence of any mysteries, endeavour to rationalize the past not only at

home but everywhere, for instance, in Asia. The idea of a self-contained, inexplicable past, superior in certain respects to the present, is alien to America. This, perhaps, is the reason why some American writers, like William Carlos Williams, are so critical of Eliot. Analysis and selective acceptance of the past (Pound, Eliot) is, says Spender, an attitude the English have imported from America.

Before considering contemporary American attitudes to art and culture, Spender makes two bold assertions: (a) What is known as 'Americanization' is European methods gone to America where they take root and flourish; (b) America is less materialistic than the old Europe which built Venice, Versailles, St. Peter's, etc. Spender finds old Europe devoid of any sense of social responsibility and remarks: 'The ideal building of the Renaissance was one in which no one lived at all'. Though in the same breath he adds that in Europe old art represents 'solidified invisible values' and therefore it cannot be considered in economic terms. On the other hand, the American concept of art is utilitarian, in a way even commercial, for it is believed in that country that all art can be bought. The fact how even a sensitive American critic, like Edmund Wilson, prefers an American bathroom to a European cathedral brings into sharp focus a representative American attitude to the old world and its culture. Spender's dissection of America's collective mind is at its best in the piece entitled, 'American Solutions'. Emphasizing the infectious nature of the process of Americanization, he concludes that, in all probability, Russia will become a second America. This reflects the nature of the realism and the keenness of Spender's analysis.

In the concluding part of the book, Spender has, to a great extent, drawn upon his own experiences in the United States, and said a few candid things about that country. For example, he points out that the ruled in America share part of the guilt of the rulers, for the two are not totally alienated from each other; or that American protest is

essentially 'a function or reflection' of the establishment against which it is directed. Spender has displayed a rare sensitivity and understanding in his treatment of, what he calls, the 'orgasmic' culture of America (movements like Beatnik, Hippie, etc,) exponents of which 'throw "life" into the scale against the society'. He finds a parallel to this attitude in certain English novelists like D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. Spender has all along emphasized the historical perspective against which America and its culture should be viewed. Moreover he has substantiated his observations on America quoting what some of the leading American poets and writers have to say on the subject. For instance, he refers to a speech by Randall Jarrel before concluding that, despite campus patronage, the American poet is an isolated *elite*, condemned to this fate by a philistine public.

'Henry James As Center of English-American Language' is the title of the chapter almost exclusively reserved for studying the novelist who, by leaving America and rejecting the American idiom, refused to be 'provincial', and who wanted the separate indentities of the American and English writers to dissolve into one. Spender regards James's criticism of certain American writers (Hawthorne was 'provincial') as mostly polemical; a justification of James's own preferences. But as compared to T. S. Eliot, he finds James more flexible in his critical attitudes. Again, bracketing Eliot with James, Spender treats the two as writers who, in their choice of language, go to the dictionaries instead of going to the people. To say this about Eliot is to state only a half-truth. Spender says that James was a snob who could not separate the idea of civilization from aristocracy, though he was aware of the latter's decadence and failures. As the external civilization collapsed, James had to shift the centre from the civilization to his own consciousness in the novels of the last phase. This, to Spender, explains the 'opacity' of these novels, as also the description of 'artificial' life in them. The word snob may sound a little

unpleasant to some of James's admirers, yetone cannot but see the force of Spender's argument.

Spender is generally more at home when dealing with literary history and criticism. Understandably he is on far surer ground in the chapter 'Ebb and Tide' in England Here he has made a judicious use of his first-hand experience of the English literary scene right from his boyhooddays. His criticism of the Georgians (poetic rather than poetry) is unsparing yet sympathetic. He allows Pound and Eliot due credit for revitalizing English poetry at a time when it was at its weakest, but he does not fail to point out that even the Georgians were in revolt against some of their contemporaries like Kipling and Alfred Noyes; and that the oft-criticized diffused verse of the Georgians contains some cherished English values. In two of the sub-sections of this chapter: 'The American Visitors', and 'The Persona of Bridges', Spender has vividly contrasted the English and American attitudes to poetry in the first two decades of the present century with reference to Pound, Eliot and Robert Bridges. He also shows how even Robert Frost, though quite acceptable to the Georgians, was different from them. Refuting Pound's view that the English poets were fighting (World War I) for a worthless civilization, Spender asserts that the fight was for 'gentleness' and 'innocence' and not for civilization. He, then, notices the continuation of this 'fight' in the works of such English novelists as Forster, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, and sets these 'poet-novelists' in opposition to Wells, Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett, the 'materialist' novelists or novelists of 'Saturation' as Henry James called them. Nothwithstanding their differences, the 'poet-novelists' (a term coined by Spender) described 'the situation of the consciousness in their time'. Living through a period of history that signified the decline of individuality these novelists decided to shift their point of view from external to internal reality. Spender understands that this shift was implied in Virginia Woolf's assertion

that life had changed in 1910. He hails the poet-novelists' stance as timely and relevant because at that hour the deepest crisis in England was one of being. He prefers to read the works of these novelists as studies of 'the English soul at a particular moment in its history'. Characterizing Forster's *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*, Lawrence's *England My England*, and Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* as 'elegies for England', Spender analyses these novels in considerable detail to show how they embody the English qualities which ended with World War I. Although Spender provides a fresh perspective on these novels, one wonders if his approach, however excellently it may serve his immediate purpose, is not, by definition, restrictive. Lastly, Spender wishes the English writers to retain their Englishness even if they opt for an international identity. Since this is only a hope, it would be premature to comment upon it.

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Reason and Love in Shakespeare: A Selective Study. By ALUR JANAKIRAM (Machilipatnam: Triveni Publishers), 1977, 228 pp.

The book is an attempt to examine Shakespeare's works in the light of some important Renaissance concepts, particularly those of *reason* and *love*. Associated as they are with the medieval view of an understandable, orderly, hierarchical world, these concepts lend themselves readily to the thematic motifs of Elizabethan literature. Elizabethan thinkers subscribe to the view that Reason and Love, harmonizing with each

other in their higher manifestations, must occupy a supreme positon in the microcosm, otherwise chaos would come. Thanks to the work of historical critics, the hierarchy-harmony theory can be turned into a theory of Elizabethan literature, particularly of tragedy and comedy. Mr Janakiram is aware of 'the danger of treating Shakespeare's tragic characters as case-histories based on faculty-psychology principles'. But he contends that 'there is still some basis for a consideration of Elizabethan psychology on the ground that its assumptions were more ethical than empirical and that its broad conclusions on the results of intemperate behaviour, rather than the details of its doctrine in its various aspects, have not altogether lost validity or conviction even today. Eclectic though it was, its chief aim was to account for human behaviour from a theological-ethical standpoint.' How far Elizabethan faculty-psychology, or any psychology with its fixed categories can get to the dynamic, living reality of human behaviour is beside the point, but can a critical approach based on psychological-ethical concepts—or any concepts for that matter—get to the imaginative reality of a work of art? Are we justified in talking about concepts when in a work of art concepts do not exist as such? Can concept-based criticism lead to any reliable value-judgment when both a mediocre and a great work may draw upon the same fund of conceptual material? Can such criticism really help us understand and appreciate a work of art? Such questions crop up as one goes through Mr. Janakiram's book.

The validity of his approach may be questioned; but it must be admitted that Mr. Janakiram has done his scholarly job well. One cannot help admiring his scholarly documentation, his lucid presentation and his judicious selection not only of the 'background material' but also of the Shakespeare texts he sets out to examine. His study has its own value—in spite of its limitations and risks, of which one must have some idea. To be informed so nicely about the Elizabethan intellectual climate is in itself valuable. In certain cases it can

be quite useful in as much as it can put us on our guard against nodding assent to certain critical opinions (especially when we are doing a critical rehash on the basis of what others have said). More positively: we can re-examine the poem if the incongruity of these critical opinions give us a jolt. For example: Do we think, as some critics have thought, that Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is an apotheosis of 'propelling' lust? Is the queen of love a gluttonous 'empty eagle'? Is she an incarnation of mere *voluptas?* Mr Janakiram says it must not be so; and he tries to vindicate Shakespeare's Venus--as if she needed any vindication—by documenting a lot of 'background' material associated with the neoplatonic-Elizabethan concept of love as a union of the physical and the spiritual, which 'background' material is conceptual in nature and is, of course, extraneous to the poem. This 'background' material regards the procreative aspect of love as divine in its spiritual aspect, and we must understand that Venus who has arisen from the neoplatonic foam of Elizabethan thinking is both *Venus Genetrix* and *Venus Urania.* Mr Janakiram goes a step further in his vindication. He discusses the imagery, as it ought to be discussed, 'in relation to the specific context and also the total framework' of the poem. Here Mr Janakiram does something more positive. His ability to understand and appreciate the poem in its 'total framework' does not seem to depend wholly on his concept-based approach. Ironically, but rightly too, the implication is that those who misunderstand the poem are those who have failed fo see the pattern and the spirit of the whole work, to enter its imaginative world and to get most deeply involved with its values. They are those who look at the poem from a point outside it, and are, therefore, swayed by extraneous considerations of their own. Mr Janakiram's concept-based criticism, which is itself based on extraneous considerations in so far as concepts *qua* concepts are extraneous to a work of art, can act as a corrective to those who are swayed by extraneous considerations of their own, less prestigious,

more personal, more idiosyncratic than the intellectual-climate concepts of an age remote in time but still as *ethical* as Mr Janakiram could wish. Basically, the greatest merit of his approach is a negative one, though Mr. Janakiram supplements it with something positive which is all his own.

Mr Janakiram examines *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *The Phoenix and Turtle* with an insight that simply cuts across all his scholarly documentation and cataloguing, which is not to deny their value in the enrichment of our understanding. I must hasten to submit that considerations of intellectual-conceptual 'background', influences, biography etc. can enrich our understanding of a work of art, but by themselves and in the absence of any insight into the text they cannot help in this understanding, cannot offer any key to it. These things are extraneous to literature and are related to it only in an indirect way. They cannot explain it; nor can they lead criticism to any reliable value-judgment (even if criticism goes all along *The Road to Xanadu*). Although Mr Janakiram does not press his argument 'to establish a direct *relation* between the artefact and the conceptual framework of Elizabethan Psychology and ethics' he does argue from an extraneous 'conceptual basis to artistic exemplification,' thus falling into the fallacy of a purely expressionistic theory of art: treating the work of art as simply the expression and exemplification of something already known and existing out there—ignoring that it is the creation-and-discovery of 'forms of things unknown' or, at least, not known so fully before.

The fallacy involves a great danger when a concept-based interpretation, with all its ethical implications, is imposed on a work of art, which has nothing to do with concepts as such and which may not at all evoke the ethical considerations and sentiments that attend upon particular concepts in the outside world. It need not be over-emphasized that a work of art is concerned, not with concepts—or objects for that matter—but with living and lived mythical

values which it creates and discovers in and through a pattern of sensuous forms of experience. Particular concepts may serve only as raw materials for art. They may form important thematic motifs for art, not because they are significant in themselves but because they have a potentiality of mythical value; which is realized when the concepts are transmuted into sensuous forms of experience: when the thematic motifs are transmuted into art-elements, to refer to Susan K. Langer's important distinction. It is dangerous to make motifs the basis of interpretation and value-judgment. For one thing, the same motifs may be there in the case of very inferior as well as of very great art—both may make use of Reason and Love, for example. What matters is not concepts or motifs but what a work of art makes of them. What matters is the dialectical pattern of the value-embodying sensuous forms of experience. It is this that involves us most deeply, evokes and manipulates our responses and even supplies us with critical criteria for its judgment. It is on this that critical criteria must be based, and not on extraneous conceptual material.

Concept-based criticism, with its extraneous standpoint —be it philosophical, ethical, psychological, sociological, ecclesiastical or whatever-ical—may give rise to some irritating, baffling questions like: 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' (This is not to under-estimate Bradley's own insights into the texts.) And I am afraid Mr. Janakiram's concept-based approach may give rise to such another irritating, baffling question: Why are we not priggishly happy about the ruin of Othello who loses his Reason? Or for that matter about the ruin of Macbeth, Lear or Hamlet when from a philosophical-ethical point of view we see something terribly wrong with him (something that calls for our moral condemnation)?

Such questions will arise if criticism goes after concepts and neglects the living and lived realities of art-elements, neglects the particular dialectical pattern of value-charged

experiential forms in a particular work of art because of which every work of art offers the criteria of its judgment. Every work of art involves the whole of our being in a particular way; its particular dialectical pattern of experiential forms manipulates and engages our sympathe, attitudes and responses in a particular way. If it is a tragedy, it may do all this in a way that cuts across moral condemnation. Mr Janakiram's plea for the ethical assumptions of faculty-psychology may become quite irrelevant to our experience of a particular tragedy. His concept-based interpretation of *Othello*, apart from the irritating, baffling question it may lead to, does not take us to the very heart, the very experiential core, of the play's imaginative reality, but passes by it tangentially. It does not help us to get the very 'feel' of it—the magic, the existential mystery of the horrible trap the poor human animal falls into, works his way into: and the pitiful, fearful inevitability of it, reason or no reason.

The fact is that Reason and Love do not operate as 'ethical constants' in Shakespeare, as Mr Janakiram maintains but as motifs become art-elements. And, in and through the experiential dialectics of these art-elements, instead of illustrating and just expressing philosophical-ethical concepts, Shakespeare is creating-discovering and exploring certain living and lived mythical values—including that of the awful existential mystery referred to above—certain deeper, elemental, fundamental and ultimate truths regarding existence. I would like to submit that for the sake of revealing these truths Shakespeare makes use of thematic motifs (like Reason and Love), plot, situation, character etc. as s affolding. But, at the same time, these things have a semblance of reality, an 'illusion of life', as it is often called, in as much as Shakespeare, like a great artist, builds up his dialectical unique pattern of unique experiential forms out of them to reveal the deeper truths. For this purpose he makes us live the particular character and situations and the particular attitudes to values that they involve—the par i-

cular attitudes to values associated with Reason and Love in a particular character-situation context, for example. The full-blooded uniqueness of the value-charged experiential forms, implying the character-situation 'illusion of life' in drama is a fact of experience not to be denied or minimised—as is so often done by post-Bradleyan criticism—and in spite of Bradley's conceptual fallacy of treating character as a stable psychological entity, his greatest contribution lies in tacitly acknowledging the full-blooded uniqueness of the living and lived experiential forms of Shakespeare's art.

The ideal of the fusion of Reason and Love is not there in Shakespeare as a conceptual 'constant', as Mr Janakiram makes it, but as an experiential form of value. It is certainly there in *The Phoenix and Turtle*. It can be shown, with a little stretch of the argument, that the very title of the poem suggests this fusion-ideal, this 'two-in-oneness' of Love (Phoenix) and Constancy (Turtle); for the two entities, the Phoenix and the Turtle fuse and yet remain distinct in the new entity' 'The Phoenix and Turtle'. And, therefore, the real title of the poem is *not* 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', as Mr Janakiram puts it, but *The Phoenix and Turtle*, with the definite article coming only at the beginning. Perhaps, the mistake is just an oversight grown into a habit; and I need not tell a scholar like Mr Janakiram that the title appears as *The Phoenix and Turtle* even in the First Quarto edition of the poem (1601), being the collective title of various poems on the same theme edited and published by Robert Chester.

We know that Shakespeare sometimes explores the ambivalent value-signification of certain conceptual motifs like 'honour' by creating a drama of contradictory value-attitudes. Mr Janakiram rightly takes note of the honour-honour axis in *Troilus and Cressida*. One is reminded of the (mouth-) honour and (real-) honour polarities in *Macbeth*. But, to reiterate my point, I may submit that in the plays such polarities operate, not as conceptual (ethical) 'constants' but

as oppositely charged experiential value-centres in which we are most deeply involved through the particular 'illusion of life' of a particular play.

Reason and Love are just conceptual abstractions extraneous to Shakespeare's, art. I wish Mr Janakiram had not so much striven, as he himself has observed with reference to the king of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost*, 'to enlist his rational powers in the service of abstractions'.

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