THE USE OF CERTAIN MYTHS

IN

THE WORK OF T.S. ELIOT

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P R E F A C E

T.S. Eliot's statement that myth is an ordering device in literature 'is constantly belied by his use of myth in his own poems'. This is the opinion of the American critic Richard Chase, [1] noted for his work on myths and mythological themes in English and American literature.

Whether or not Chase is right must emerge from the chapters which follow. Their purpose will be to examine the effects of the use of myths and mythological patterns on Eliot's work in general, rather than to annotate individual mythological allusions. Simply to recognise an allusion is to raise a question, not to answer one: for we have then to decide what the writer hoped to achieve by its use, and whether or not he has succeeded. Unless they lead on to such questions, lists of sources contribute little to our understanding of a work.

Far more important than incidental allusions are the mythological themes and patterns on the larger scale, which reveal themselves in recurrent allusions and in basic patterns of symbolism. Again, merely to recognise such a pattern is inadequate: in every case, a discovery of its function in both the poem's (or play's) structure and the poet's technique should be our main concern.

In this connection Chase himself has been attacked. Charles Moorman accuses him of neglecting the main problem in his study of Melville, where his

> insistence on finding mythological referents for everything in Melville too often leads him away from the investigation of broad mythological patterns, a valuable literary strategy, into overly specific point-by-point applications of particular myths to Melville's text... Ahab becomes a maimed and impotent Prometheus, Billy Budd a true and whole Prometheus. But Chase never raises any question of the particular function of these myths within the novels, of how they affect general structure or theme, or why they are used by Melville in the first place. [2]

While Moorman's specific charge may be a little unjust (if we assume

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1 Quoted by Charles Moorman: Arthurian Triptych (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1960) p. 162.

2 Ibid. p. 6.

that Melville's 'use of myth' was mainly an unconscious process), his general statement is highly relevant to Eliot's work. Eliot himself has made it clear that in his case the use of myths and mythological patterns has often been a fully conscious, even self-conscious, process. Therefore we may apply to his work the questions mentioned by Noorman: what functions the myths fulfil within individual works; how they affect general structure and theme; and why Eliot uses them in the first place.

This last question leads us back to a more fundamental one: why do many writers, especially modern ones, use myths 'in the first place'? The problem involves discussion of the relation between myths and literature, and of the nature of myths themselves: this forms the material of the first chapter. The other chapters will deal with some of Eliot's works, attempting to explain and analyse his use of myths in them, and to illustrate its importance in each case.

C O N T E N T S

C H A P T E R I

MYTHS AND LITERATURE

That 'myth' is a notoriously protean word is a commonplace of modern criticism. 'These days' says Richard Chase, 'the word "myth" is thrown about as cavalierly as is any word which the cultural climate envelops with glamor and charges with an emotional voltage. It is a powerful word, but not precise.' [1]

In his short essay on the subject Chase objects to the widespread assumptions that myth may be regarded as philosophy, a system of metaphysical or symbolic thought, a theology or body of dogma, or a world-view. He asserts that a myth is a story, an art-form, and that myths cease to exist when disinherited from their literary matrix. But he confuses the issue by using the adjective 'mythical' in a sense obviously divorced from any narrative connotations: he urges that modern poetry needs, through a certain control and direction given to the poetical emotions, to become more mythical. His essay as a whole illustrates the lack of precision he mentions.

Apart from the adjective, Chase uses synonymously two deceptively similar terms which are nevertheless often employed in different senses: on the one hand 'myth', and on the other hand '<u>a</u> myth' or 'myths'. Here it is that much confusion about the word arises: when used without article or plural, 'myth' tends to take on a host of powerful associations (often related to the mythopoeic <u>process</u> or to all mythologies together) but no clearly defined meaning. So for Chase to say that 'myth' is not philosophy but '<u>a</u> myth' is a story, is to discuss two different terms as if they were the same. It will be advisable in what follows to adhere as far a possible to the less general term 'a myth' (or the equally particularising plural form).

John Lehmann in an essay on the same subject equates 'a myth' with

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1 'Notes on the Study of Myth', <u>Partisan Review</u> XIII (1946) p. 338.

both 'a poem' and 'a creed', but also says that 'Rimbaud, like Byron before him, completed his myth by living it.' He remarks that Shelley invented his own myth in Prometheus Unbound, and suggests that 'the greatest poets have always striven to create a myth, a world that shall be a symbol for the world of actual existence in its moral and aesthetic aspects.' [1] These comments have a high suggestive value; at the same time their diversity is more likely to muddle than to aid any attempt to find out what a myth is.

Yeats said of the term: 'I do not mean a fiction, but one of those statements our nature is compelled to make and employ as a truth though there cannot be sufficient evidence.' [2] This brings us closer to the realm of religious belief, and at the same time detracts from any purely narrative notion of a myth. Certainly a connection with religion is etymologically valid, since the ancient Greek mythos was the verbal formula (usually a narrative) accompanying and explaining a ritual. (In this sense the recital of the facts of Jesus' passion and death in the Christian Eucharist could be called a myth.) But from its early Greek use the word has travelled far and wide. It is curious to note that while 'mythology' and 'mythical' have been long established in the English language, 'myth' entered its vocabulary only during the nineteenth century. [3] At first used simply to denote a fictitious story, usually from primitive or classical lore, it became within a few generations impossible to define in any generally accepted sense. Scholars in many fields found the term useful and adopted it for their own purposes, and in the last half-century the ever-increasing diversity of approach has made any synthesis progressively more unlikely. The position has been aggravated by the inability of scholars to agree about the origins and functions of myths.

Since the Greek mythos was not only a part of an ancient ritual

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1 'The Search for the Myth', The Penguin New Writing 30 (1947) pp. 149, 150, 146.
2 Quoted by Peter Ure: Towards a Mythology (1946) p. 60.
3 See The Shorter Oxford Dictionary under 'myth', where 1830 is given as the earliest known date of its use in English.

but often a kind of retrospective justification for it, classical scholars long regarded myths as aetiological in origin and function, accounting for ritual actions and often also for natural phenomena. But in the present century this assumption has been strongly challenged from three directions: anthropology, philosophy and psychology.

To Malinowski the 'aetiological myth' is

> an imaginary, non-existent class of narrative,... corresponding to a non-existent desire to explain, leading a futile existence as an 'intellectual effort', and remaining outside native culture and social organization with their pragmatic interests.[1]

If a myth does sometimes explain anything about nature or the history of tribal customs, that is a by-product of its primary function, which is to provide sanctions for the conduct of tribal life. It is really the statement of a greater

> and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions,[2] as well as with indications as to how to perform them.

It therefore functions as a strong cultural force and a means of social cohesion.

If myths are not aetiological, surely it is unlikely that they originate only in communities where man is in a 'pre-scientific' stage? Malinowski speaks of myth (here used more or less synonymously with the mythopoeic process) as 'an indispensable ingredient of all culture';[3] and Hocart dismisses the necessity for any theories of either a 'mythopoeic man' with a different mentality from ours, or an aetiological origin of myths.[4]

Cassirer, while he also rejects the aetiological view, does nevertheless posit a mythopoeic stage: this would be a pre-scientific and prelogical stage of development, for 'before man thinks in terms of logical concepts, he holds his experiences by means of clear, separate, mythical images.'[5] He usually uses the general term

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1 Myth in Primitive Psychology (1926) p. 44.
2 Ibid. p. 39. In this passage Malinowski is of course referring to 'mankind' in the context of tribal society: no broader application is here intended.
3 Ibid. p. 125.
4 The Life-giving Myth (1952) pp. 39-45: 'The Common Sense of Myth'.
5 Language and Myth (New York 1946) p. 37. For his rejection of the aetiological view, see An Essay on Man (Yale 1944) p. 76.

'myth', not the form with the article: this seems to be due to his broad conception of 'myth' as a general category on the same level as language and art. He regards language and myth as simultaneous products of a primitive stage when man is a kind of 'imagist', not yet a 'conceptualist'. They

> are two diverse shoots from the same parent stem, the same impulse of symbolic formulation, springing from the same basic mental activity, a concentration and heightening of simple sensory experience.[1]

A sense of the numinous, the mana of the Melanesians, gives rise to this heightening of sensory experience, and so to that process of symbolic formulation which is the root of all language, myth and art.

With both Malinowski and Cassirer we can see the study of myths resulting in a greater degree of autonomy for the mythopoeic process. Cassirer's placing it on the same level as the mental process underlying language and art would mean that myth was neither an accidental consequence nor a forerunner of language,[2] nor an art-form.[3]

These trends in the study of origins and functions constitute a serious challenge to the old aetiological theory.[4] The argument, based on firm anthropological grounds, that such a theory wrongly argues from our conscious logical mentality in discussing what are really non-logical processes, is a cogent one.

In the last sentence 'non-logical' is the operative word. It was said above that Cassirer thought in terms of a non-logical mentality which operated with images instead of concepts, but he called it 'pre-logical'. This prefix lends credence to the idea of a mythopoeic 'stage' in primitive man's development: a notion expressly rejected by several anthropologists including Hocart. Thus, if we desire even a partial and tentative synthesis of views, the problem presents itself: how can we accept the mythopoeic process as non-logical, and yet deny any relevant difference between the myth-making savage's mentality and

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1 Language and Myth p. 88.
2 The theories of Max Müller and of Herder respectively: see Language and Myth pp. 4-6, 85.
3 Chase's view: see p. 1.
4 But we should note that it is still held by some notable scholars, e.g. Sir Maurice Bowra: The Greek Experience (1957) p. 103.

our own?

It is at this point that the work of Jung assumes cardinal importance, for it supplies the link which makes such a reconciliation possible. Myths arise out of non-logical processes, but these processes are preterlogical and unconscious rather than prelogical and conscious; so they apply equally to primitive and to civilized man.

Coupling his analysis of dreams and fantasies with the study of myths, Jung discovered certain common features:

> investigation of the products of the unconscious yields recognizable traces of archetypal structures which coincide with the myth-motifs, among them certain types which deserve the name of dominants.[1]

These are the archetypes of the 'collective unconscious'. The existence of this collective unconscious is itself suggested by these common features.

> Besides the obvious personal sources, creative fantasy also draws upon the forgotten and long buried primitive mind with its host of images, which are to be found in the mythologies of all ages and all peoples.[2]

So the mythological stories of various traditions can be interpreted as narrative developments and elaborations of these archetypal symbols and themes.

Many of these symbols, says Jung, can under certain circumstances have a beneficial effect upon the dreamer, especially when grasped and held by the conscious mind. They play a fundamental role in that movement towards psychological integration which he calls the individuation process. He is therefore persuaded not only of the inevitability of myth-making, but of the constant value of it.

While Freud would see the Oedipus myth, for instance, as a kind of narrative excrescence produced by the universal repressions which social and family life cause in the unconscious, Jung would take a more positive view. As the traditional herbalist might say that for every disease there exists somewhere a plant which can cure it, so Jung, it seems, would hold that the collective unconscious is a kind

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1 Symbols of Transformation (1956) p. 390.
2 Ibid. p. xxix.

of storehouse of potentially therapeutic 'transforming symbols', capable of righting imbalances in the psyche.

The importance of Jung's work lies in its placing the mythopoeic process as much in contemporary society as in primitive communities. This supports and reconciles the two protests we have seen above: against the aetiological theory of origins, and against the notion of the mythopoeic mentality as an evolutionary phase. In emphasising the constant necessity and importance of mythopoeia, it also brings the study of myths closer to examining its connections with the study of modern literature.

There is among students of literature a widespread and often justified suspicion of the excursions of Jungians and Freudians into the critical field. But perhaps this suspicion is justified not so much because the psycho-analysts are being bad critics as because they are so often not being critics at all: they are continuing as psycho-analysts, using texts to do their work on instead of confessions from the couch. At such times they are interested in the poem only as a source of information about the psyche of the poet; the reverse is true of the critic, since the function of criticism is not the 'exposure' of the poet but the exposition of the poem. Jung himself has insisted (though he has not always been heeded) that while psychology can throw some light on the process of artistic activity, it cannot 'explain' any work of art itself. That is the function of literary criticism. [1]

We conclude that the study of a poet's use of myths in order to 'explain the poet' is a task for the psycho-analyst. The purpose of these chapters lies elsewhere. They will note some of the poet's critical comments and remarks about himself in order to throw light on his use of myths; and they will examine that use of myths in relation to the poems and plays themselves.

While no real synthesis of theories can be even remotely expected, what general conclusions have so far been possible about the origins,

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1 See his essay 'On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art' in Contributions to Analytical Psychology (1928).

nature and functions of myths? The following are the most important.

Myths are the product of a non-logical process which is common to both primitive and civilized man since it takes place on the unconscious level. They are not 'invented' in order to explain anything, nor are they simply traditional stories.[1] Their archetypal nature invests them with a great yet indefinable significance, and in primitive and other universally religious societies they are sacred formulas which play an important part in ritual and in the cultural life of the community. They are usually in narrative form and accepted as true by such societies, but this truth is not regarded as a matter merely of historical validity. Its importance lies in the myths' pragmatic value, for in appealing to the primordial past they provide sanctions for social conduct in the present and future. From all this we can see that they exert a powerful influence on individual and community, imposing an ordered pattern on both their thinking and their living, for in such communities thinking and living (and even feeling) are not divorced. They provide for the individual a clear indication of his position in relation to society and to the whole body of his experience.

Why is it, then, if the mythopoeic process is common to all men in all ages, that civilized contemporary society obviously cannot boast this unified sensibility? Today we have the symbolic 'myths' of art and the ideological 'myths' of politics. How has the word come to take on these connotations? And what possible connection can there be between them?

The answer to all these questions lies most likely in Cartesian philosophy's division of reality into Extension and Thought, its conviction that mathematical properties are the only 'real' properties of objects, and its two separate orders of certainty, objective and subjective. This bifurcation was of great value to empirical science; but another of its results was, in the words of Philip Wheelwright, 'to alienate nature from man by denuding it of human significance, and

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1 Simple traditional stories are not myths proper, but legends (pseudo-history) or fairy-tales (pure fantasy). The threefold distinction is favoured by Malinowski (Myth in Primitive Psychology, 1926, pp. 35-36), who shows that it is preserved in the vocabulary of the Trobriand Islanders.

thereby deprive man of his natural sense of continuity with the environing world...' [1] Accordingly a 'dissociation of sensibility' (mentioned by Eliot [2]) set in during the seventeenth century. It has been further commented on by Basil Willey: 'The cleavage then began to appear, which has become so troublesomely familiar to us since, between "values" and "facts"'. [3] One was no longer able to think and feel simultaneously, as one unified experience; nor could any meaningful relation be maintained between subjective feelings and objective phenomena.

Such a split in sensibility would lead to a split also in the functions of the mythopoeic process. In the primitive tribal community or in European society of the Middle Ages, permeated by a religious world-view, the shared consciousness of a common body of myths (a consciousness partly expressed, partly reinforced, and partly produced in ritual acts) was the natural concomitant of a unified sensibility under which all thought, feeling, action and experience were subsumed. The primordial facts related in the myths were absolutely relevant to the immediate social order at any and every moment. The forms of social order depended on the vision of a cosmic order expressed in the relevant body of myths, the accepted mythology. (The termination '-logy' implies here, just as elsewhere, some kind of comprehensive order or system.) Now the Cartesian bifurcation, in making objective 'reality' necessarily subject to the world-view of empirical science, achieved a great deal; but it also broke this connection between the vision of a cosmic order and sanctions for the maintenance of social or political order. The social power of the ancient myths passed to the modern political and ideological 'myths'. Although they are not myths in the classical sense, the instinct which accords them the name is a true one, for their power may derive from a similar process, [4]

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1 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', The Language of Poetry, ed. Allen Tate (Princeton 1942) p. 6.
2 'The Metaphysical Poets', Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 288.
3 The Seventeenth Century Background (1934) pp. 87-88.
4 Note the theories of invasion or projection by which Jungians account for the power of ideological myths, suggesting that the mythopoeic faculty may sometimes be directed into dangerously ambivalent channels. (See P.W. Martin: Experiment in Depth, 1955, pp. 99, 170-2, 194-7, 225, 238.)

and they do perform (albeit inadequately) a part of the function of the old myths. The other half of that function, communicating the vision of a cosmic order, becomes the quest of the artist. The physicist's or astronomer's cosmic order cannot fulfil the same function as the artist's, since whatever its degree of validity it is denuded of that immediately human significance which the myth or poem possesses. Its facts, as Willey would say, have no relation to values.

The two modern types of myth, the artistic and the ideological, are neither of them equal in force to the traditional myth with its powerful influence in the very rhythms of life of the primitive or non-secularized society. But the use of the word in these two ways is none the less legitimate, if we remember that the ancient function of myths is divided between them. Except among modern savages and groups of exceptionally powerful religious sensibility, the inherited myth is today a very pale shadow of its former self.

It follows from the above discussion that, even excluding ideologies, two distinct kinds of myth may be found in literature today: traditional myths incorporated for various purposes, and the writer's own 'mythic' products, the myths of the modern artist. These modern 'personal myths' do not display the immediate social relevance of the ideological ones; on the other hand, they often possess a transcendental reference which the ideological myths lack. Both being maimed descendants of the traditional myths, neither can boast the combination of these qualities (transcendental reference and social or ritual force) which distinguishes their forebears.

If it could be clearly demonstrated that any artist's personal myths had profoundly affected social organization in the modern era, their claim to the name would be even stronger, and we should be able to agree with Shelley that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. But this strong social influence is apparently limited to the ideological myths of men like Marx. Whatever influence the artist's work may exercise, it does not have the same grip on a whole community or social group. (The cinema and television are no exceptions: for it is as media of mass communication and not as art forms that they wield

their social power. They are more the instruments of ideological myths than the creators of artistic ones.)

We have constantly to bear in mind, therefore, that in following the widespread critical habit of referring to the 'myths' of individual modern writers, we are using the term in a limited sense. When we say that Coleridge in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Melville in Moby Dick have produced works of a mythic nature, we do so not because they have any visible effect on our social order or any immediate relevance to ritual, but because, largely through the archetypal nature of the events and characters, they achieve a kind of emotional autonomy akin to that of dreams or ancient myths; also because their vision of the cosmic order of things is autonomous rather than derivative, and their spiritual universe is in each case unique: it exists only for the work in question. This in turn further increases the stature of every person and event in the work. All events give the impression of being sketched out on a vast canvas, in an ordered manner which lends to them a kind of ritualistic significance, even though they have in fact no connection with ritual. [1]

Despite all this the personality of the individual writer inevitably enters the work and its presentation of its own cosmic order, so that its impersonal mythic force can never operate fully on the reader. Whether or not its symbols spring from unconscious processes, the same thing applies. The myth produced by the modern poet, the personal myth, therefore lacks the naked power of traditional myths which have lived long and intensely in the consciousness of a whole people: and it lacks this power precisely because it is a personal myth.

Many critics use the term in the modern personal sense. Attempted justifications for it are few: generally the usage is taken for granted as legitimate. John Lehmann, as we have seen (page 2), spoke of Prometheus Unbound as Shelley's own myth. In the same essay [2] he calls

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1 The hermit's shriving the Ancient Mariner is of course a ritual act, but it takes place within the poem, which as a whole has nothing to do with any ritual external to but affected by it, as was the case with the ancient myths in ritualistic societies.

2 Lehmann, op.cit. p. 154.

Eliot's Four Quartets and Edith Sitwell's A Song of the Cold the greatest examples of myth-making in modern English poetry. David Daiches says that to the modern critic 'myth' is 'a kind of symbolic situation produced by the proper use of "archetypal" imagery'. [1] Kathleen Nott talks of the poet as a myth-maker whose 'job is the organisation of his own multiple meanings - this is where mythopoeia and poetry coincide'. [2]

Of course the organization of multiple meanings is not exclusively a matter of using archetypal images. It involves the search for a principle of order in the flux of experience. Yeats's search for such a principle resulted first in his use of traditional Irish myths, and later in the construction of his own complex system of gyres and incarnations, circuits of the sun and moon, phases of human personality, and types of transformation of the soul after death. This system he set forth in A Vision, the prose statement of his comprehensive 'mythology'. The termination '-logy', as we noted above, suggests order, system and pattern; and 'mythology' has been widely used to refer not merely to a body of myths but also to the system of symbols they contain and the pattern of ideas or world-view which they reflect (e.g. 'Babylonian mythology' may, when used in certain contexts, be virtually equivalent to 'Babylonian metaphysics' or 'the Babylonian world-view'). It has even been used to mean a world-view or a system of thought quite independently of a body of myths. [3] But in the usage of modern criticism the word has become inextricably entangled with 'myth': their frequently synonymous use makes it impossible to maintain any sharp distinction. Perhaps the most that can be said is that a mythology involves a rather more complex pattern of symbols than a single myth, and a pattern formulated on a larger scale - developing perhaps throughout a writer's work, and achieving completion at a comparatively late stage. [4]

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1 Critical Approaches to Literature (1956) p. 168.
2 The Emperor's Clothes (1953) p. 249.
3 See for instance the quotation from R.L. Brett on page 35. 'Mythology' here approaches several of the meanings denied to 'myth' in its narrower sense by Chase (page 1), whose remarks illustrate the common identification of the two words with each other.
4 Yeats's final, personal and complex mythology was exceptional in this respect. Instead of emerging gradually in his poetry, it was formulated independently in A Vision, after which it provided him with symbolic material for his poetry.

Peter Ure has examined the development of Yeats's own mythology, a development foreshadowed by his use of Irish myths. After a chapter on Yeats's use of these inherited myths he says:

> So far we have treated of the mythological subject in the accepted sense, of Yeats' handling of themes drawn from the race symbols common to the "indomitable Irishry" and expressed in their ancient classical literature. This definition of mythology must now be extended to cover material which provides a like poetic stimulus, but in which the myth derives not from the experience of the race but from that of the individual poet. How far is it legitimate to apply the term mythology to this kind of material? Critics of Yeats... have not hesitated to do so...[1]

The rest of Ure's study is both an examination of Yeats's progress towards a 'personalized mythology' and a justification of the use of the term in this way. The progress involved not merely the use of archetypal themes or patterns: according to Ure, even the figures of real persons like Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson attained mythic stature through the way in which Yeats treated them in his poems.

But this was only a stage of the search. Out of 'communications' made to him and his wife from the spirit-world, Yeats finally developed his own mythology which he described in A Vision. It resembles many things: an astrological system, a philosophy of history, a religious eschatology, a system of psychological types. With its wealth of symbolic material it is frequently reflected in his poetry. The gyres and incarnations are closely related to 'Leda and the Swan', 'The Mother of God' and 'The Second Coming'; of the twenty-eight phases of personality, the twenty-seventh and twenty-sixth are found in 'The Saint and the Hunchback'.

Yeats fully believed in the mysterious communications out of which his system had developed;[2] but what of the system itself? In the Introduction to the later (1937) edition of A Vision he wrote:

> Some will ask whether I believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon... To such a question I can but answer that if sometimes, overwhelmed by miracle as all men

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1 Towards a Mythology (1946) p. 28.

2 Although his account of the communications definitely involves a supernatural element, his general notion of a 'Great Memory' is strikingly similar to Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. See Yeats's Essays (1924) pp. 510-511.

> must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice.[1]

Theirs was, then, a kind of potentially pragmatic truth: they functioned as 'stylistic arrangements of experience', providing him with the vision of a cosmic order as a framework for his poetry; and the symbolic pattern which related human personality to cosmic events helped him to effect that connection between 'reality and justice', between 'facts' and 'values', which has become so difficult for the artist in the modern age. The literal truth or untruth of his mythology was, for artistic purposes, irrelevant: its value lay in providing the artist with a patterned world-order that combined 'all the coherence of a metaphysic and all the personalism of a religion'; it gave him 'what he desired - a sense of power, a sense of order, the revelation of a secret knowledge and metaphors for his poetry'.[2]

When these remarks are compared with what follows in this chapter, it will be seen that the factors which lead a writer to seek a personal mythology have much in common with, but are only a part of, the reasons why countless writers make use of the ancient traditional myths.

Returning to these traditional myths, we ask now what the reasons are. Why have they been used, adapted and retold so often, especially in modern literature?

Part of the reason may lie in their symbolic nature. One of the main peculiarities of myths is their inability to reach any absolutely final form. This is because their symbols are not mere similes or even extended metaphors (though they may provide the poet with material for these things): they remain full of unrealized potential; they possess a

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1 A Vision (1937) pp. 24-25.

2 Ure, op.cit. pp. 116, 61. Compare Eliot's remarks: 'I doubt whether belief proper enters into the activity of a great poet, qua poet. That is, Dante, qua poet, did not believe or disbelieve the Thomist cosmology or theory of the soul: he merely made use of it, or a fusion took place between his initial emotional impulses and a theory, for the purpose of making poetry.' 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 138.

wealth of implication which cannot be contained in any one rendering, and so they cry out constantly for further exploration - whether by simple retelling of the myth in modern terms, or by use of it for other purposes. The symbol of the Odyssean journey has been handled in different ways by Homer, Dante, Tennyson, James Joyce and others: but the mere fact that it has been handled so often witnesses to its richness. The same applies to the symbol of Faust: Marlowe, Goethe and Thomas Mann have all found in it a significance which led them to retell, elaborate or employ it in one way or another. This inexhaustibility is regarded by many as an essential feature of all true symbols. Cassirer, defining man as <u>animal symbolicum</u>, said that other animals can use signs but not symbols. 'A sign or signal is related to the thing to which it refers in a fixed and unique way' whereas 'A symbol is not only universal but extremely variable'. [1] A student of Yeats writes: 'All that the meaning we assign to a symbol can ever be is either part of its meaning or one of its possible meanings. No symbol has a meaning'. [2] Symbols to Jung are 'ambiguous, full of intimations, and, in the last analysis, inexhaustible'. [3]

Nevertheless the argument from the nature of symbols provides no sufficient answer, since artists may use richly suggestive symbols which have no connection with any myth. The further question therefore becomes necessary: What are the particular advantages of myths which make them so often preferable to other sources as a fund of allusions, narrative themes, symbol patterns and technical devices?

The answer is, briefly, that a myth can be of use to the poet in so many ways at the same time if necessary: as a means of universalising personal emotions or experiences and particular characters or events; as a device making possible a high degree of compression by combining statement and comment in one; as a repository of powerful and widely-known symbols, and thus a way of overcoming barriers to communication; as a means of imposing order on chaotic experience; and as a link with

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1 <u>An Essay on Man</u> (Yale 1944) p. 36.
2 John Unterecker: <u>A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats</u> (1959) p. 34.
3 Quoted by Genevieve W. Foster: 'The Archetypal Imagery of T.S. Eliot', <u>P.M.L.A.</u> 60 (1945) p. 578.

a vigorous tradition, the need for which is felt more strongly by artists in an age when common traditions are few and feeble. Finally, it is also of course likely that myths in any case exercise a strong hold over the imagination if, as Jung holds, they originate in unconscious or non-logical processes.

While the importance of each of these features of a myth varies from one poet to another, they are often closely connected: especially by the need for a link with tradition, and for a set of common symbols; also by the need for an ordered body of experience.

The need for a principle of order in chaotic experience has already been mentioned in the case of Yeats. If the poet stands, as Dante did, within a strong cultural tradition with its own generally accepted mythology or world-view, he has no need to cast about for a framework which will impose order on experience for the purposes of his poetry: such a framework is provided for him in the traditions of his day. But if he lives in the nineteenth or twentieth century, the case is different: he finds himself adrift in an apparent meaningless welter of experience, devoid of order and direction. This was the position of the Romantics. D.G. James summarises their dilemma as follows:

> they were traditionless and standing alone and isolated. They did not work, and could not work, within a framework of established convention, literary, religious, and social. They were necessarily innovators. They had not a certain homogeneity of culture, the sense of working in a tradition, of writing for their fellow men on a basis of a community of experience, whether social or religious.[1]

James discusses the various ways in which they reacted to their problem. Wordsworth found his solution independently of mythologies, but of the other leading Romantics he concludes that

> Blake tried to create a private mythology, and that with a philosophy both contradictory in itself and a distortion of Christianity; Shelley and Keats used ancient mythology for expressing modes of sensibility which were largely Christian, whatever their formal beliefs; Coleridge was brought face to face with Christianity under circumstances which made him more willing to learn, and to adopt modes of expression not his own.[2]

It is significant that while each sought in a mythology the answer to

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1 The Romantic Comedy (1948) p. 123.
2 Ibid. p. 162.

his problem, they found their answers in different places. Coleridge confronted the Christian 'mythology', Shelley and Keats turned to ancient (Greek) mythology, and Blake attempted to create his own (but using other mythologies, and especially the figures of Prometheus, Satan and Christ). This suggests that the solution to their artistic dilemma lay not in any one system, but in mythology itself. The particular mythology adopted or employed by each poet provided him to some extent with what he had been needing: a link with vital tradition, an ordered world-view, and a set of symbols in which he could objectify his thought, feeling and experience. It was only in the mythological symbols or situations that each one could find for certain of his emotions the adequate 'objective correlative'. [1]

The need was thus emphatically an artistic and not simply a religious one. James himself discusses what he calls the Romantics' 'need to employ mythology' in terms of a quest partly for a system of belief, but mainly for an adequate literary form. [2]

Myths are also used widely because they not only contain well-known traditional symbols common to both writer and reader, but symbols often remote enough from their daily experience to avoid such reactions as might hinder communication. Avowed Christians writing for mainly non-Christian readers often find them useful. C.S. Lewis, for example, turns to Arthurian mythology in That Hideous Strength. The novel is an almost allegorical account of the battle between Good and Evil; but by representing it in the guise of the conflict between Logres and Britain (with Merlin as a kind of deus ex machina) he reduces the danger of irrelevant reactions arising from anti-religious presuppositions on the reader's part. In other words, Lewis realises that between his Christian convictions and the non-Christian views of many of his readers there is a great gulf fixed, with no common language of symbols by which they can effectively communicate. He therefore casts about for some common ground from which to begin, and having found it,

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1 'Hamlet', Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 145. It is here that Eliot coined the phrase.
2 James, op.cit. p. 29.

proceeds by indirections. His common ground is sometimes Arthurian mythology, sometimes an invented mythology of his own in which the characters and situations belong ostensibly to science-fiction. His Christian intent is merely hinted at in the name of his hero, Ransom (who incidentally appears in That Hideous Strength with the added name - significantly - of Mr Fisher-King). Both Lewis and Eliot are frequently concerned with presenting a basically Christian view of things, and in some of his plays especially, as we shall see, Eliot proceeds, with the help of myths, by a similar method of indirection. Direct contact between writer and reader, then, are made the more difficult in the present age by their lack of any common frame of reference such as existed in classical Greece or mediaeval Europe. Myths, in the words of Philip Wheelwright, are invaluable to the poet because they furnish 'a background of familiar reference by which the sensibilities of the poet and his readers are oriented and so brought into profounder communication than would otherwise have been possible'. [1]

Joyce's Ulysses illustrates the value of a mythological framework in several ways: as a simple scaffolding for narrative, as a means of universalising characters and events, and as a means of compression. Without the Homeric parallel of the Odyssean journey, the novel would be simply a jumbled and meaningless succession of petty events in the life of one Leopold Bloom in Dublin on one ordinary day: the sixteenth of June, 1904. The journeying of Ulysses gives it a shape, and an external necessity is laid on the order of events. Bloom, Molly and Stephen are redeemed from insignificance and raised to the stature of archetypes as we learn to think of them as Ulysses, Penelope and Telemachus; the novel becomes a quest which is resolved at the end when Bloom-Ulysses regains his wife and home (very recently cleared of suitors in the person of Blazes Boylan), and discovers a new Telemachus in place of the dead child whose loss has so long troubled him. In the course of the story come various Odyssean episodes in different literary styles; these styles too, drawn from many periods and sources, subtly

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1 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', The Language of Poetry, ed. Allen Tate (Princeton 1942) p. 22.

reinforce the universalising function of the parallel technique. This parallelism lifts the whole account of the one day on to a new plane. Its purpose is not the limited one of ironic juxtaposition, though it could be used for that; in this case the resemblance between the inner situations of Bloom and Ulysses is more profound than any glib contrast which we may make between their external status. At the same time the Ulysses myth functions as a means of compression. Because all of Bloom's actions and thoughts are seen against the mythic background, that background itself provides implicit comment at every stage: comment which would otherwise be either impossible or excessively lengthy and probably unconvincing. Thus the parallel

> enables Joyce to show us in the actions and the relations of his characters meanings which he perhaps could not easily have indicated in any other way - since the characters themselves must be largely unaware of these meanings and since Joyce has adopted the strict objective method, in which the author must not comment on the action.[1]

This use of a myth to achieve a concentration of statement and comment in one, and a combination in figures or events of both individual particularity and universal significance, is a common feature of Eliot's work. This does not mean, however, that his 'mythical method' in, say, The Waste Land, corresponds in all respects with Joyce's in Ulysses. We shall have reason to see that there are important differences.

In most of the short poems of the Prufrock and 1920 collections, Eliot's use of mythological parallels, images and allusions has not yet assumed anything like the importance that it has later. Nevertheless a few of them need discussion in order to show the beginnings from which his mythical method developed, before finding its first full expression in The Waste Land.

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1 Edmund Wilson: Axel's Castle (New York 1931) p. 213.

C H A P T E R I I

BEGINNINGS

The Waste Land is not only a poem based on mythological themes. It is also a kaleidoscope of allusions both familiar and obscure. The second characteristic is more typical of the earlier poems than the first. They contain a few mythological references, but in most of them the use of myths goes no further than that. In fact it corresponds largely to the use made of allusions of any other kind. But there are some important exceptions which will be noted.

Probably the commonest use of allusions at this stage is for the purposes of ironic contrast. Eliot takes a literary, historical or mythological reference which is already charged with a special significance by its original context, and places it in a new context where simply by its presence it will make implicit comment on the material surrounding it - usually comment of a derisive nature. Allusion to a scene of ancient grandeur, for instance, will throw into relief the shoddiness of what passes for grandeur in the (usually modern) world of the Eliot poem. Thus reference to Princess Volupine's barge which 'Burned on the water' ridicules her by comparison with Cleopatra, whom we could never imagine arriving 'at a small hotel' to conduct her amours. And we do not imagine Cleopatra with 'meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic' hands. Mention of the barge derives its irony from its context in the 'Burbank' poem, and in so doing contributes an increased irony to the whole. We come to see the Princess, not as a gorgeous femme fatale, but as a member of a decadent cosmopolitan aristocracy descending from time to time upon the inane world of 'fashionable' Venetian society. Submarine music heralds the 'fall' of Burbank just as subterranean music heralded Antony's impending disaster.[1] Again the allusion is ironic in purpose:

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1 See Antony and Cleopatra IV iii.

their respective falls are not comparable. And Eliot increases the irony by relating Burbank's seduction to his supposed desertion by his tutelary deity in the form of Hercules. The reminders of Antony and Cleopatra show us by implication how unlike Antony and Cleopatra these two are. [1]

These allusions are historical, or more properly literary - since they derive their force from their original contexts in Shakespeare's play. Now in these early poems we find mythological allusions used in the same way. In 'Sweeney Erect', for instance, Sweeney is invidiously compared with Theseus. The epigraph from The Maid's Tragedy provides the reference to the myth which is developed in the opening lines of the poem. The forsaken Aspatia imagines herself as the model for Ariadne in a tapestry depicting the flight of the perjured Theseus, with Ariadne on the shore watching his departing sails. In the rest of the poem we have instead the brothel scene in which the woman left on the bed has an epileptic fit while Sweeney tests his razor on his leg and wipes the suds around his face. And instead of Bacchus descending to comfort the forsaken princess Doris enters, fresh from her bath, with sal volatile and a neat brandy to calm her down. The purpose of the mythic parallel is purely ironical. The girl's plight is no great and noble sorrow like Ariadne's, and certainly does not disturb Sweeney, whose bovine equanimity hardly deserves the name of cynicism. His desertion of her bed is not an act to make the world catch its breath, as is Theseus's desertion of Ariadne. Nor is it the sequel to an act of heroic proportions like the slaying of the Minotaur. To say that we have a non-heroic picture of Sweeney and the girl would be an understatement. They are entirely lacking in dignity. Not only are they seen in bestial terms ('Gesture of orang-outang / Rises from the sheets in steam'), but the girl is described in detached terms as if she were the grotesque creation of

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1 The irony here does not return upon itself as in The Waste Land. There, in Part II, we have the portrait of a woman whose comparison with Cleopatra serves not only to contrast the pair ironically, but at the same time to call to mind the sterility of Cleopatra's own sexual relations. There the comparison's ambivalence is made possible by the central theme of (an often literal) sterility, and by a totality of vision in which present-past distinctions are not of primary importance. These features of the highly-developed mythical method do not apply to 'Burbank' - its aims are much simpler.

some clumsy primitive artist carving a statuette out of an old vegetable:

> This withered root of knots of hair
> Slitted below and gashed with eyes,
> This oval O cropped out with teeth...

Some critics have seen in this poem the kind of complexity which we find in The Waste Land, and disagree that the intention of the myth-references is purely ironical. They argue that the treachery of Theseus was hardly admirable, and that he as well as Sweeney is implicitly condemned by the poem, since it shows us that at all times 'love has been betrayed' [1] (it is incidentally very doubtful whether what Sweeney has betrayed is the girl's love!). Granted that love is always being betrayed in any age - which is obvious and neither here nor there - and that Theseus treated Ariadne very shabbily: the question is whether these are the topics in which Eliot is really interested here. It is unlikely that they are. He is simply concerned to contrast his disenchanted picture of a desertion in the real world with the idealised picture of a desertion in the world of mythology. (It has occasionally been remarked that for all the disenchantment and squalor of his early poems they betray the temperament of an inverted romantic idealist.) There is no reason to quarrel with those who insist that he is not here contrasting a sordid present with an idealised past. Nevertheless he *is* contrasting a sordid *reality* with the idealised situation of a *myth*, and the contrast is an ironic one. The allusions are thus used here for the same purpose of irony as in 'Burbank'; except that the 'real world-myth world' contrast represents a slightly higher degree of complexity than the 'past-present' contrast. If anything should convince us of the poem's ironic purpose it is the aside on Sweeney preparing to shave:

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

- implying of course that if Emerson *had* seen Sweeney he might have changed his mind. The mythological stature of a figure like Theseus, even in the act of deserting Ariadne, would not have disturbed Emerson's

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1 D.E.S. Maxwell: The Poetry of T.S. Eliot (1952) p. 81.

proposition at all.

In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' the allusions of various kinds again serve a purpose which is mainly ironic; but although 'Prufrock' is earlier than the poems which we have just examined, its irony is of a more complex kind owing to its monologue form. In other words the controlling consciousness of the poem, Prufrock himself, is conscious of the ironies - they are not imposed upon a scene from without. The allusions to John the Baptist and to Lazarus, which we may call mythological in the sense that these are figures in the Christian mythology, do not differ in their use from the allusion to Hamlet. Prufrock's sensitive and tormented consciousness of himself does not prevent him from seeing himself in an ironic light (it probably encourages him to do so). He cannot see himself as any of these great figures:

> Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in
> upon a platter,
> I am no prophet - and here's no great matter...
>
> Would it have been worth while...
> To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
> Come back to tell you all...
>
> No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be...

But the irony becomes tempered with pathos when Prufrock turns from reference to myth-figures to his daydream visions of an idealised myth-world from which he is excluded:

> I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
>
> I do not think that they will sing to me.
>
> I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
> Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
> When the wind blows the water white and black.
>
> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
> Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

So he is not only excluded from that idealised world but also called back rudely by 'human voices' from his daydreams of it.

The use of myth-allusions in 'Mr. Apollinax' is again comparatively complex by the standards of the early poems (yet simple when contrasted with The Waste Land's method). Again the purpose is ironic, and again the irony is achieved by juxtaposition of the myth-images with the 'literal' scene that is set before us. As in 'Prufrock', various

mythological rôles are suggested for Mr Apollinax - but this time through a spectator and not through himself. This time the added complexity comes about through the ambivalent attitude of the speaker: he is detached yet not entirely detached. And from his attitude we derive a more complex impression of Mr Apollinax than we should otherwise have done. He is mocking Mr Apollinax, but it is not contemptuous mockery: the contempt is reserved for Mrs Phlaccus and Professor Channing-Cheetah. So he ends up by being to some extent on Mr Apollinax's side - and so do we. We find ourselves wondering (and this is surely Eliot's intention) how seriously we should visualise this strange man in the rôle of a mythical creature. He certainly has passionate vitality and it is probably more than his laughter that is profound; and he has an element of the demonic about him which his name helps to suggest, but which arouses no more reaction in his uncomprehending admirers than an observation on his pointed ears. If he arrived as Apollyon himself, or galloped into the drawing room in the form of a centaur, they could not be further from understanding him than they are now. If he appears rather ridiculous, it is the circumstances in which he finds himself that make him so: yet genteel pseudo-intellectual gatherings probably <u>are</u> his normal circumstances, so he cannot help looking ridiculous even while his profundity makes his hearers come off worse. The man who is lionised can never quite dissociate himself from the silliness of those who lionise him. He 'appears the more foolish the more he is mythologized', but the 'oeriness of his character... [which owes much <u>to</u> his mythologization]... tends to dominate the portrait', [1] so that we laugh at him and then laugh at his hearers even more, for not seeing him as we do. Thus the irony is double-edged, since the myth-allusions both make him look foolish <u>and</u> surround him with an aura of profundity which throws into greater relief the inanity of the Channing-Cheetah set. He cuts an absurd figure as 'the old man of the sea', yet he <u>is</u> master of his element by comparison with the others whose teased brains and floundering confusion make them as helpless as the 'worried bodies of drowned men'. We see the complexity

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1 Grover Smith: <u>T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays</u> (3rd imp., Chicago 1960) p. 32.

of his character in the combination of sensitivity and vulgarity represented by juxtaposition of the shy Fragilion and the gaping Priapus. The reference to Priapus may also suggest that Mr Apollinax is a potential bringer of fertility, but it is not clear that it is intended to do so. When coupled with his comparison to a foetus, it may be taken to suggest that he is an irrepressible vital force, but there is no reason to bring in overtones of the whole world of fertility myths. This is what some critics tend to do: both with reference to Priapus and to the old man of the sea. Yet Eliot's allusion is simply to the figure of Priapus in a painting by Fragonard; and it is not necessary to raise the cry of 'Fertility overtones' whenever Eliot mentions water. Indeed there is reason for suspecting that much interpretation of Eliot's early work has been unnecessarily complicated by the assumption that he is proceeding along the same thematic lines as in The Waste Land. We should rather wait to see whether a poem itself suggests a sterility theme before interpreting it in terms of a mythological sterility-fertility opposition.

Such a theme is to some extent suggested by another of the early poems, 'Gerontion'. The sterility-fertility opposition is presented by the contrast between Gerontion's own situation (in a 'dry month', with a 'dry brain', in a 'dry season', 'waiting for rain', surrounded by 'Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds') and the situations with which he has not been identified or has refused to identify himself: fighting in the 'warm rain', and the coming of Christ ('In the juvescence of the year.../ In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas'). The mythological allusions are here Christian, and the Christian dispensation seems to be seen by Gerontion as the possible source of a fertility which he has repudiated. He is confirmed in his sterility since his every possible action 'is choked by the potentiality of monstrous consequences'.[1] In this respect he is like Prufrock: in each case there is the inactivity born of impotence - moral, emotional, physical and even intellectual impotence, since for all his acute consciousness of his position he

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1 Hugh Kenner: The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot (1960) p. 110.

remains static: his understanding issues only in the tortured futility of his monologue. They are 'These matters that with myself I too much discuss / Too much explain' but they do not lead on to a renewal of spirit as in Ash-Wednesday. The despair of his old age and his inertia prevents him from consummating a union (sexual or spiritual or both) which he realises he was once in a position to achieve:

> I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
> To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
> I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
> Since what is kept must be adulterated?
> I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
> How should I use them for your closer contact?

The images associated with Christ have an ambivalence designed to suggest a sexual as well as a spiritual vitality which he (Gerontion) lacks; and this ambiguity implicitly sets Christ on a plane with other bringers of fertility, the seed-and-vegetation gods of comparative mythology. He comes 'In the juvescence of the year', an image of beauty and terror ('the tiger'). And 'Us he devours': to Gerontion this is not the purgative devouring of Ash-Wednesday II, but a judgement, a visitation of wrath upon the sterility which he represents. Christ himself came to be eaten, to give new life: but this promise of life has been dissipated by the recipients into the sterile esotericism of ritual, with its hint of the conspiratorial ('Among whispers' is typically ambiguous) and its perversion into the occult superstitions represented by people like Madame de Tornquist. Gerontion is free of these - 'I have no ghosts' - but he has nothing else either. The monologue represents a stage between the method of 'Prufrock' and that of The Waste Land. 'Prufrock' is a more personal monologue, and the imagery does not operate on a mythological plane - what myth-allusions there are are incidental. In the vision of The Waste Land we have complete impersonality: Tiresias sees it all, but he is only an eye - his personality does not affect the presentation of the vision. Also, owing to the comparative myths underlying it, the whole poem proceeds on what we may call a mythological level. Gerontion's reverie falls halfway between the two: the effect of the mythological images is more pervasive than in 'Prufrock', less so than in The Waste Land. And the poem is both personal and impersonal: personal in that we

can detect one or two aspects of his personality - he is, for instance, seeing himself in a dramatic light; and impersonal in that he is, as his name suggests, a representative consciousness - as Kenner has it, 'simply a zone where more or less energetic notions are incorporated, to agitate themselves tirelessly'. [1]

'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', though superficially less complex than 'Gerontion', provides the best introduction to the method of The Waste Land. Myth-references are few, consisting mainly of the allusions to Agamemnon in the epigraph and the last stanza: but they radically affect our reading of the poem, which in turn is constructed throughout to give full play to their ambivalence. Far from being incidental, they are the backbone of the poem. A fairly detailed analysis will illustrate this.

The epigraph from Aeschylus links Sweeney's fate with that of Agamemnon, crying as he is struck down: 'Alas, I am smitten with a mortal blow!' This prepares us to see in what follows some relation to the Agamemnon myth, whether of similarity or of contrast (remembering always that each to some extent implies the other).

The first two verses stand alone. Each is a complete sentence, and they are juxtaposed as a pair. (After the second verse there are no full stops until the end of the poem: the action - clumsy though the conspirators' gestures are - sweeps on without pause to its climax in 'When Agamemnon cried aloud'.) Of these two verses the first presents a thoroughly animal Sweeney, in the second his situation is related to the movements of the heavenly bodies. At once Eliot begins to create the atmosphere of foreboding: [2] 'Death and the Raven drift above'. Immediately after this the ape-like man who is in danger is subjected to a little irony and at the same time gains a little in stature: for 'Sweeney guards the horned gate' - the gate to the kingdom of Pluto himself. Normally a

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1 Op. cit. p. 110.

2 F.O. Matthiessen tells us that 'Eliot once remarked that all he consciously set out to create in "Sweeney among the Nightingales" was a sense of foreboding.' But we would agree with Matthiessen that the method he used 'inevitably causes his delineation to take on wider implications.' The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (3rd edn. 1958) p. 129.

figure like Sweeney depicted in bestial terms would not gain in stature or dignity from such a line: it would simply convey irony. But the threat of death which builds up throughout the poem reduces the initial ironic implications and emphasises their reverse. The cosmic background does not merely make Sweeney a petty figure: it tends to universalise his situation, and so prepares us slightly for the identification which is to come at the climax. After the first verse Sweeney plays no active part in the scene, and this omission subtly increases his dignity in comparison with those who are plotting around him. The only thing he does in the poem is laugh in the first verse (his guarding the 'horned gate' is a statement of situation in symbolic terms rather than an action). In contrast to him, his companions go through a series of aimless, clumsy, futile actions described by means of bestial images and verbs expressing lack of discipline or co-ordination: 'Slips', 'Sprawls', 'gapes', 'Tears at the grapes with murderous paws'. Their description in these terms makes them appear degraded and rather sinister; Sweeney's merely makes him harmlessly and amiably foolish, and not enough so to detract from his comparative dignity.

The description of the scene, with its air of fumbling yet malicious intrigue, prepares us for the climax in which the mythological allusions determine our response to Sweeney's fate. The atmosphere has been sufficiently built up for us to have few illusions about the scene at the door: The host with someone indistinct
Converses at the door apart...

But as we arrive at this crucial point, our attention is suddenly switched without warning to the nightingales near the convent:

The nightingales are singing near
The Convent of the Sacred Heart...

Our surprise is increased by the discovery that the 'nightingales' of the title is not simply an ironic reference to Sweeney's female companions (though it is that too). Another change of scene follows at once:

And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud...

The first impression produced by the changes (from Sweeney's dive to the convent, from the convent to the bloody wood) is one of pure confusion. But on reflection we realise that, as in Greek tragedy, the violent climax

of the action has taken place 'offstage' - at the moment that 'Agamemnon cried aloud', for this line is the climax of the poem's movement. The link immediately effected between the fates of Sweeney and Agamemnon at first suggests pure ironic comment on the contrast between the two men and their circumstances: this is as it should be, so that the real implication (contained in the last two lines) can make its full impact. The nightingales are singing during the slaughter of Agamemnon, King of Kings,

> And let their liquid siftings fall
> To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

This twist at the end is all the more effective as we realise in retrospect that it has been prepared for throughout the poem. The subtle ways in which an unconscious dignity has been assigned to 'Apeneck Sweeney' now achieve their (mostly delayed) effect. The mention of Agamemnon has momentarily shown Sweeney as a ridiculous figure, but the last two lines slow round our entire ready-made apparatus of glib contrast. Agamemnon's death is made ridiculous and sordid. The nightingales are as indifferent to it as Sweeney's companions are to his death. By the same token Sweeney's death is lifted on to a plane where it has just as universal a significance as that of the King of Kings. There is no ultimate difference between the two, just as there is no ultimate difference between the situations of Bloom and Ulysses. The plot surrounding Agamemnon's death was just as base and furtive as any brothel intrigue. Miss Gardner aptly suggests that it is 'an illusion that we should think the death of Agamemnon important and the death of Sweeney sordid. The nightingales make no such distinction.' [1] Their singing and their droppings are the only external 'comments' available on the death of either man; and both comments are relevant. Both deaths are important, and both deaths are sordid. An instance of the compression of Eliot's imagery is the phrase 'liquid siftings' - a brilliant ambiguity for either the faeces or the song of the nightingales. The stain on the shroud is figurative as well as literal, for it is a 'dishonoured shroud': not only because one of the murderers was an unfaithful wife, but because the victim himself was killed partly in revenge for the death of his own daughter. It would be inadvisable to

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1 The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949) p. 83.

press the mythical overtones any further than this, but we are reminded at least that Agamemnon died in dishonour.

The poem thus ends with the deaths of Agamemnon and Sweeney implying comment on each other. Yet no open comment is necessary on the poet's part except for the one reminder, 'dishonoured'. The rest is done by the coupling of the contemporary and mythical situations.

Three other allusions may affect the reader's final response: the Philomela myth, in which lust and intrigue also led to violent assault - but an assault which produced, through the end of the victim's human life, the 'inviolable voice' of the nightingale; the Christ myth, in which conspiracy and death give rise to the ordered rhythms of life at the convent; and the allusion to the 'bloody wood'. Agamemnon did not die in a wood, but the priest-kings of Nemi did, and their murder was a life-giving event which benefited their people. These interpretations are probable but not certain.[1] If accepted, they anticipate The Waste Land in their common suggestion of a renewal of life as a potential result of death, and lend added significance to the sordid death of Sweeney.

The final result, as in so much of Eliot's work, is an awareness of the fusion of apparent opposites: squalor and splendour, lout and king, meaningless murder and life-giving sacrifice. And in this fusion of different places, periods, and persons (both 'real' and mythical) into one inclusive vision, Eliot anticipates two of the major concerns of his later work: the focusing of an all-inclusive human consciousness (carried out in The Waste Land), and the reconciling of opposites (the central theme, it might almost be said, of Four Quartets). At the same time 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' maintains by its visual images a particularity of detail which paradoxically enhances its universality. No sententious statement on the poet's part is either necessary or desirable

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1 Intentional reference to the Philomela myth is suggested by another epigraph given to the poem when it appeared in Ara Vos Prec: 'Why should I speak of the nightingale? The nightingale sings of adulterous wrong.' There is, however, no certainty that the convent is intended to remind us of Christ's death. As for the 'bloody wood', the intention is again uncertain, but Eliot's interest in The Golden Bough (see below, pp. 32-33, 36) may have prompted him to take an image from its very point of departure. In the last resort it is their common hint of a renewal of life that favours these three interpretations.

in order to assert the universality of the scene: like Joyce, he does so instead by importing the mythological situation and allowing the two to react and comment on each other. With the resulting relationship at work, he can succeed in being suggestive and evocative by concentrating on being vivid and precise in his imagery. This 'reconciliation of opposites', a feature of his technique as well as of his thought, is mentioned by Anne Ridler who refers it to two of the major influences on his style:

> For the Symbolists, poetry was an art that 'should not inform but suggest and evoke, not name things but create their atmosphere',... while for T.E. Hulme's 'hard, dry, classical verse', the 'great aim is accurate, precise and definite description'. Both these strains meet in Eliot's verse...[1]

His use of myths with their combination of universality and particularity, of precision and evocativeness, is one of the ways in which this reconciliation has been possible. For (to quote again from Peter Ure)

> In a myth unexplained overtones and undertones of meaning and tantalising obscurity are united with clear-cut images, acts and situations whose mysteriousness lies in their very exactitude, their formal and ritualistic significance. They absolve the poet from the shoddy vagueness of half-conceived images, while at the same time they close the door upon no genuine mystery. And over all of them lies this unknown power, the profound hold which the myth exercises on certain kinds of imagination.[2]

Ure's last remark recalls what we have seen in the first chapter: that, as well as being technically useful to poets, traditional myths are distinguished by their powerful influence over human thoughts and attitudes. Some of this ancient influence still operates unconsciously. Denis de Rougemont, who in Passion and Society sets himself the task of demonstrating the modern influence of an old myth, declares (the emphasis is his own) that 'the most profound characteristic of a myth is the power which it wins over us, usually without our knowing.' He also remarks that 'A myth makes it possible to become aware at a glance of certain types of constant relations and to disengage these from the welter of everyday appearances.'[3] These factors - the unconscious influence of myths, and the constant relations recognisable in the recurring themes which we find in many different myths - account for part of The Waste Land's success.

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1 'A Question of Speech', T.S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, ed. B. Rajan (1947) p. 114.
2 Towards a Mythology (1946) p. 11.
3 Passion and Society (revised edn. 1956) pp. 19, 18.

C H A P T E R I I I

THE WASTE LAND

The importance which Eliot attaches to myths is directly connected with his concern about the modern poet's lack of any adequate inherited tradition. Indeed his concern with tradition is one of the major concerns of his critical writings. In some remarks in After Strange Gods (which include a wagging of the head at Yeats) he speaks of the search for tradition and the search for myths:

> Mr. Yeats was in search of a tradition, a little too consciously perhaps - like all of us. He sought for it in the conception of Ireland as an autonomous political and social unity, purged from the Anglo-Saxon pollution. He wished also to find access to the religious sources of poetry, as, a little later, did another restless seeker for myths, D.H. Lawrence. The result, for a long period, is a somewhat artificially induced poeticality. Just as much of Swinburne's verse has the effect of repeated doses of gin and water, so much of Mr. Yeats's verse is stimulated by folklore, occultism, mythology and symbolism, crystal-gazing and hermetic writings.[1]

This is not a repudiation of mythology, but an illustration of the state of affairs which led Yeats and other myth-seekers into their various attempted solutions. For Eliot concludes:

> What I have wished to illustrate, by reference to the authors whom I have mentioned in this lecture, has been the crippling effect upon men of letters, of not having been born and brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition.[2]

This is the problem which, as we have seen, has been common to many modern poets: their lack of tradition has left them with a mass of chaotic experience and no principle of order to give to it (and so to their art) the necessary significant form. They have resorted to many devices either to fulfil or to compensate for this lack, according to whether they desired a permanent solution valid for all their work, or a temporary one for a particular work. Yeats's personal mythology was his attempt at a permanent solution. The Ulysses myth, as found in Homer, functioned as a 'temporary' ordering device (on the technical

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1 After Strange Gods (1934) pp. 44-45.
2 Ibid. p. 49.

rather than the philosophical level) for Joyce as long as he was concerned with that particular novel.

Eliot was greatly impressed by Joyce's use of the Ulysses myth, and by the way in which the parallels with Homer's narrative fused the ancient and modern worlds so as to shed a new light on every event in the novel. But his review of Ulysses contains several apparent contradictions which are best explained by his own preoccupations at the time. The Waste Land and Ulysses had been published in the same year (1922), and the consciousness of the startling new method followed in his own poem may have influenced several of his remarks. Eliot has himself observed that

> the critical writings of poets... owe a great deal of their interest to the fact that the poet, at the back of his mind, if not as his ostensible purpose, is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write.[1]

This is especially true of his remarks on Ulysses. He protests against the tendency of critics to see the Homeric parallel as simply an amusing dodge, and goes on:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. It is a method for which the horoscope is auspicious. Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious) ethnology, and The Golden Bough have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward... order and form...[2]

Several features suggest that in his account of the 'mythical method' Eliot is thinking as much of The Waste Land as of Ulysses. The remark that 'Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method' is irrelevant to Ulysses, where the mythical method is a main feature of the narrative method and not a substitute. If the mythical method

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1 'The Music of Poetry', On Poetry and Poets (1957) p. 26.
2 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', The Dial LXXV (1923) p. 483.

consists in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity (which is precisely what Joyce is doing), there is no reason to think that it was 'impossible even a few years ago'. Joyce's method does give 'a shape and a significance' to the chaos of history, but why this could not have been done without psychology, ethnology and The Golden Bough, Eliot does not explain. On the other hand, these things which are irrelevant to Ulysses can be applied to Eliot's own mythical method employed in The Waste Land. He uses it as a substitute for the narrative method, and it would not have been possible without the work of the psychologists and anthropologists.

The modern explorations of myths in these respective fields had completely changed men's conceptions of their origins, nature and functions. Jung had spread the idea of myths as products of racial memory, of a collective unconscious, in which certain universal symbols were operative. Sir James Frazer, in The Golden Bough, had demonstrated the similarity underlying many rituals (and therefore also myths) in different parts of the world: a similarity due to certain basic patterns very like Jung's basic patterns of symbols. Certain constant themes recurred universally in these myths and rituals, like the pattern of death and rebirth: whether represented in mysterious symbols from the unconscious, or in rites of sympathetic magic connected with the annual crops of the tribe.

This scholarly attention concentrated on the subject, and producing sometimes sensational results, made for an increased self-consciousness about myths; and in this self-consciousness Eliot shared. The Waste Land is a product of his highly conscious use of the new ideas about myths, not simply of the myths themselves. The same cannot be said of Ulysses: for while it is also a highly self-conscious method which can produce such a novel, its psychological element has nothing in particular to do with psychological theories about myths - let alone their connection with anthropological theories about myths.

But in The Waste Land the relevance of psychology and anthropology to each other is celebrated. The connection which they have effected through the study of mythic and ritual symbols has given to the idea

of (and the prestige of) 'tradition' a new lease of life. The value of certain age-old symbols has been suggested by (more or less) scientific methods. To the poet this vindication of tradition is of overwhelming importance. It promises new possibilities of communication through symbols which may be used consciously by the poet and to which the reader can be expected (either consciously or unconsciously) to respond. Tradition, then,

> has become revitalized for us because we now realize that there is a collective mind at work within it; because we may believe on the authority of the psychologist that the poet speaks not only for himself but for a whole cultural pattern.[1]

The men who saw the ancient ritual and symbolic patterns as ageless phenomena, introduced myths anew to the modern world as a potentially powerful force, and brought the past much closer to the present than would have been possible in, say, the eighteenth century. And this showed not only the importance of the past to the present, but the importance of the community mind to the individual mind. In doing so it confirmed Eliot's convictions about the significance of the community mind, and of that consciousness of the past which is necessary in the present if we are to be contemporary in the fullest sense:

> The poet... must be aware that the mind of Europe - the mind of his own country - a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind - is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not supersemunate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen... The difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.[2]

> Tradition... cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense,... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.[3]

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1 R.L. Brett: Reason and Imagination (1960) p. 111.
2 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 16.
3 Ibid. p. 14.

Tradition, then, is not passively received but actively won, since it is above all a matter of consciousness - a consciousness of the past in the present, and of the community mind in the individual mind (whether it be a geographical or a literary community).

The above passages are perhaps the best commentary on the technique of The Waste Land: a technique which 'Psychology... ethnology and The Golden Bough' have together made possible. Although its theme is one of sterility and futility, The Waste Land is technically an exuberant poem, rejoicing at once in the sense of roots and the sense of freedom, as well as in the new possibilities of communication via universal symbols, which the new sciences have made possible.

What is the nature of Eliot's mythical method in The Waste Land, and what is the myth or mythology which he uses?

To say that he based the poem on a single myth would be both to deny the value which he found in psychology and anthropology, and to misread Eliot's own comments on the subject. The Waste Land is not based upon the Grail legend: it is constructed around the central situation of an entire field of comparative mythology. Although it has long been customary to regard the Grail story as 'the myth' which he uses, not all commentators have concurred in this. One critic goes so far as to say that 'The real mythology of The Waste Land is (without any pejorative use of the term) the mythology of modern psychology.' [1] But this is not so: both psychology and anthropology have thrown light on the phenomenon of almost identical myths and rituals occurring in scattered areas, and it is this approach to myths which has enabled Eliot to base his work on a group of similar myth-situations and myth-figures, of whom the Fisher King is merely one. Stephen Spender comes much nearer the truth than the critic quoted above:

> Instead of a basis of accepted belief, the whole structure of Eliot's poem is based on certain primitive rituals and myths, which, he seems to feel, must be psychological certainties, being a part of what psychologists call our 'race memory'. [2]

He goes on to regard this as an appeal to 'scientific legend': which,

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1 R.L. Brett: Reason and Imagination (1960) p. 115.
2 The Destructive Element (1936) p. 145.

while perhaps dubious phrasing, does at least allow that the underlying myths are myths in the classical sense, and not modern ones.

The one book which appears to have had the most direct influence on the creation of The Waste Land is Jessie L. Weston's From Ritual to Romance. Miss Weston related the origins of the Grail legend to several early myths of dying and rising gods; her conclusions were made possible largely by Frazer's work, especially his volumes Adonis, Attis, Osiris. (It is to these volumes, too, that Eliot expresses indebtedness.) Miss Weston's book also incidentally corroborated certain views of the psychologists (e.g. in the sexual symbolism of the Tarot suits). But while psychology and anthropology had prepared the ground very thoroughly, it was her book in particular which gave immediate impetus to Eliot in the construction of The Waste Land.

The assumption that Eliot based the poem on the Grail legend is one of the unfortunate consequences of his 'Notes'. Yet even in these Notes he does not say so himself. The point is an important one. His words are: 'Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend...' [1] It was not the story of the Grail itself, but Miss Weston's interpretation of its origins, which he found so suggestive, since it enabled him to draw symbols from several myth-sources without impairing the unity of the whole. He makes no mention of any of the Grail romances: for the Chapel Perilous he refers us specifically to Miss Weston's book, and the only Parsifal from which he quotes is, ironically, Verlaine's. The Grail itself plays no part at all in the poem. The Fisher King appears twice, as one of the 'protagonists' who are all united in Tiresias. But it is the whole family of fertility myths to which the Grail myth (according to Miss Weston) belongs, on which the poem is based: not simply the Grail myth itself.

In lamenting the results of his 'Notes to The Waste Land' Eliot has (perhaps unconsciously) confirmed that his debt is to Miss Weston and

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1 Collected Poems 1909-1935 (1936) p. 78.

not to the Grail romances. He says that his Notes

> stimulated the wrong kind of interest among the seekers of sources. It was just, no doubt, that I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston; but I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail.[1]

What he found so useful was, then, the pattern common to those myths which Miss Weston discussed. The central situation of each is, indeed, a 'Waste Land'. It is a land waiting for the life-giving rain, or for the rising of the rivers, or the freeing of the waters, as the case may be, depending on the geographical circumstances in which the various myths took their individual forms. In each case the sterility of the land is reflected also in the animals and the people, and the whole situation is bound up with the death or injury of a god or hero (in the case of the Grail legend, the wound of the Fisher King). The way in which fertility is restored to the vegetable and animal worlds is similarly always bound up with the resurrection or healing of the god or hero, whether it be Adonis, or Osiris, or the Fisher King.

From this it is clear that The Waste Land is not so much based even upon these myths as upon the situation central to each of them; but it does also employ symbols connected with them, in order to achieve its structural unity without recourse to the narrative method. The poem consists of a series of phantasmagoric images, with the specific situations taken from many times and places, most notably modern London.

There are three ways in which Eliot used these myths. The first, the adoption of the central situation of sterility, we may call the thematic use. The second is fundamental to his technique, and connected not with the theme but with the structure of the poem. As the combined work of anthropology and psychology had shown many of the dying and rising gods to be basically the same, so Eliot fuses the personages of the poem into one: all the characters are linked through the Tarot pack, and again all the men and women become fused in the figure of Tiresias.

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1 'The Frontiers of Criticism', On Poetry and Poets (1957) p. 110.

The structural link between the characters is thus seen most clearly in the device of the Tarot pack. Again we notice how his debt to Miss Weston's book, with its relation of the Tarot pack to the myths in question as a means of foretelling such things as the rising of the waters, looms much larger than his debt to any particular one of the myths themselves. Further, he found that the relationship between the parallel myths provided him with a wealth of different symbols with which he could develop his presentation of the sterility theme. So the symbolic use of the myths enabled him to approach his subject from various angles and at the same time maintain not only artistic unity, but a constant play of overtones by which the incidental images could reinforce the central image of the waste land itself.

These three ways of using the myths (which are also of course three related reasons for using them) correspond roughly with the three ways in which he says he found Miss Weston's book useful: it suggested to him the title, the plan and much of the incidental symbolism. In examining the poem we shall therefore pay special attention to these interacting aspects of Eliot's mythical method: the way in which myths are used to express the central theme stated in the title; to give an apparently chaotic structure some semblance of an ordered plan; and to provide incidental symbolism in order to develop or reinforce the central theme. It will also be necessary to refute one or two popular misconceptions about The Waste Land; and to examine some special symbols (and methods of employing them) which, though not exclusively derived from traditional myths, point towards the gradual development of that 'personal mythology' which is completed in Four Quartets.

The first myth-figure that we meet is unrelated to the fertility myths of Miss Weston and Frazer: she is the Cumaean Sibyl of the epigraph. But her situation and her person each perform an ironic function which adds interest to the poem's sterility theme. Her situation is one of barren withered age: she is suspended in a glass bottle and shrivelling up because she had asked for long life. Apollo had granted her wish - a year of life for every grain of dust she held in her hand - and her only wish now is to die. She has found

that 'the giving famishes the craving'. The implication of her plight (an implication only, since there is no explicit solution to the sterility which is the poem's theme) is that she has asked for the wrong gift: extension of life does not mean vigour and fruitfulness - indeed, as many of the fertility myths imply, it is paradoxically through death that a renewal of fruitful life is obtained. In her withered state the Sibyl provides a fitting foretaste of the barren misery which is to follow in the phantasmagoric picture of the Waste Land. In its close relation to the central theme this epigraph from Petronius is far more fitting than the original one with which Ezra Pound was so profoundly dissatisfied: the words of the dying Kurtz in Heart of Darkness.

The ironic function performed by the person of the Sibyl is, when we remember that this epigraph was a later choice, perhaps a pure coincidence. But it happens that as a type of prophetess she anticipates the two 'seers' of the poem, both of whom are essential to its plan and structural unity: Madame Sosostris, whose fortune-telling by the Tarot cards provides a list of dramatis personae, and Tiresias, whose vision is the poem and in whom all the characters meet. Tiresias, 'old man with wrinkled dugs', always foresaw the truth but was plagued by the disbelief of those who heard him. His is the vision of the impotent seer - he is incapable of doing anything to avoid what he foresees and so his gift is simply an intolerable burden to him. Madame Sosostris, on the other hand, shows a breezy confidence in her clairvoyant powers, yet there are some things which she is 'forbidden to see'. Nor does she find the Hanged Man, and she warns her client to 'Fear death by water': two features of her message which, as the poem progresses, reveal her incompetence. For it becomes implicit (never explicit) that in the Hanged God and in water (even perhaps death by water) lies the Waste Land's only hope of fecundity. Her ignorance of the true secret of life corresponds to the Sibyl's ignorance in making her foolish request to Apollo; the wrinkled, world-weary misery of Tiresias who sees all things too clearly corresponds to the misery of the withered Sibyl in her bottle who, understanding the truth now, can only wish for death.

At the very beginning it becomes clear that the Waste Land's inhabitants are afflicted not only with sterility but also with the fear of fertility. Growth and fruitfulness are painful and disturbing, 'April is the cruellest month'. It is easier to 'shut the door and sit by the fire' like the women of Canterbury who 'do not wish anything to happen'. All life-bringing events are agonising, like the birth which was to the Magi 'Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death'. In the ancient rituals connected with Miss Weston's parallel myths, it was often only through the death of the god that renewal of vegetation could take place; or, in the Grail legend, through the active questing, ordeals and agonies of the knight who was to heal the Fisher King. In the Waste Land, barren forgetfulness is found preferable to the active pains of growth and renewal. 'Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow...' The few memories of release or ecstatic vision are followed by barren trivialities or desolation:

> In the mountains, there you feel free.
> I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

and:

> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
> Oed' und leer das Meer.

The barren chaos of the Waste Land is presented in the second section of 'The Burial of the Dead'. It is a waterless wilderness of 'stony rubbish' and 'broken images'. The speaker addresses the 'Son of man', suggesting simultaneously divine words to a prophet, and a general term for all humanity. For it is the consciousness of all humanity which is the vehicle of the poem's vision - a consciousness reflected in the similar myths and rituals which underlie the whole structure. The 'handful of dust' for strewing on a coffin evokes the fear of death; from the epigraph too, more by coincidence than by design, it gains in suggestive power: we remember the handful of dust which brought the Sibyl such long life together with the desire for death.

Subsidiary myths reinforce the theme of sterility. In the little episode of the hyacinth girl, the lover remembers with sorrow a vision of beauty which troubles him, which cannot be separated from his

awareness of desolation and unfulfilment. All the symbols of the little scene imply promise of fulfilment and fruitfulness: full arms, wet hair, and the symbol of the dead Hyacinthus who 'rises' every year in the flower that bears his name. But the ecstatic vision is followed by the cry of desolation from Tristan und Isolde, itself a myth of passionate but unfruitful love. The vigour and promise of 'Frisch weht der Wind / Der Heimat zu', which introduces the episode, have been lost: the sea is desolate and empty.

Madame Sosostris now appears, and her fortune-telling provides an important unifying device by presenting several of the characters who are to appear in the rest of the poem: the drowned Phoenician Sailor (Phlebas), the man with three staves (arbitrarily associated by Eliot with the Fisher King), the one-eyed merchant (Mr Eugenides); and the Hanged Man whom she mentions but does not see, and who can only be glimpsed out of the corner of an eye in Part V. Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, the type of the Siren or femme fatale, is a comprehensive title for the women of the poem: the Cleopatra figure and Lil, Mrs Porter, the typist, Elizabeth, the Thames-maidens. Eliot emphasises the cosmopolitan character of the Waste Land by his brilliant choice of names (Sosostris, Equitone, Eugenides, Phlebas): a device seen to better advantage still in 'Gerontion', with its Mr Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist, Fraülein von Kulp, Do Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs Cammel. This cosmopolitanism is, as we shall see, one of the poem's essential features. Perhaps it is emphasised too (though we cannot be sure) by the constant undercurrent of comparative myths. Certainly the mixture of languages, quotations and allusions functions in such a way as to emphasise it, but like so many of Eliot's technical devices (as well as images) this mixture has two different simultaneous effects: it creates both a feeling of decadent cosmopolitanism and a sense of a universal consciousness. This dual function of images or technical devices is what makes possible Eliot's extraordinary compression. It is quietly at work again in the last image seen by Madame Sosostris: 'crowds of people, walking round in a ring'. She cannot interpret the vision, and the neutral statement may equally suggest either blinkered futility

or patterned order.

It is the blinkered futility which we see in the 'Unreal City'. The city is not simply modern London: it is at the least an amalgam of London, Limbo and the scene of any vegetation ceremonies in the ancient Levant. The particularity of detail in the scene only serves the more effectively to universalise it. Fused together are Dante's vision of Limbo ('I had not thought death had undone so many'), the striking of the clock on Saint Mary Woolnoth, and the burial of the god in the ancient fertility rituals. Leavis remarks that 'just as all experiences "meet in Tiresias," so a multitude of experiences meet in each passage of the poem.' [1] This is especially clear in the 'Unreal City' passage. The quotations and allusions which bring together Dante, modern London, ancient wars between Rome and Carthage (Mylae), primitive - probably Egyptian - vegetation ceremonies, Webster and Baudelaire, are used by Eliot to bring about that sense of universal consciousness and that compression mentioned about: 'a compression, otherwise unattainable, that is essential to his aim; a compression approaching simultaneity - the co-presence in the mind of a number of different orientations, fundamental attitudes, orders of experience.' [2]

In this wilderness of strangers where 'each man fixed his eyes before his feet', the speaker sees an acquaintance whose name and naval career show him to be a compound, timeless figure. Bizarre gardening gossip follows.

> 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
> 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
> 'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
> 'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
> 'You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!'

On the surface the passage reads like the taunting nightmare of a murderer's conscience, and the visual image of a dog proudly scratching up what were best left covered needs to sink into our mind's eye before we start casting about for references and allusions. Indeed it is

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1 New Bearings in English Poetry (New edn. 1950) p. 100.
2 Ibid. p. 107.

dangerously easy in reading Eliot's work to overlook its strong visual and sensuous qualities in the eagerness of the search after recondite allusion and hidden meaning. Some knowledge of allusions is useful for an understanding of his technique; but understanding of the technique is worth little without experience of the poetry.

Much has been written on the allusions of this passage. The buried corpse almost certainly refers to vegetation ceremonies in Frazer's work, whose presence in The Waste Land is attested by Eliot himself in his Notes. It seems most likely to refer to the rituals connected with the burial of Osiris as the corn god, whose effigies made of earth and corn were buried in the earth. Frazer tells us that

> When these effigies were taken up again at the end of a year or of a shorter interval, the corn would be found to have sprouted from the body of Osiris, and this sprouting of the grain would be hailed as an omen, or rather as the cause, of the growth of the crops. The corn-god produced the corn from himself: he gave his own body to feed the people; he died that they might live.[1]

Of many ancient rites (related also by similar myths) of Adonis, Attis, Osiris, Dionysus and Demeter, Frazer says that

> ...the view that the essence of all these rites was the mimic death and revival of vegetation, explains them separately and collectively in an easy and natural way, and harmonises with the general testimony borne by the ancients to their substantial similarity.[2]

Eliot deliberately omits specific mention of Osiris, however, as this would obviously limit the implications of the passage and so defeat his purpose. As it stands, the passage effects that close connection between the fertility of vegetable and animal worlds which is a common feature of his parallel myths, and also of the way in which he presents his theme (juxtaposing scenes depicting barrenness in nature and unfruitfulness in sexual relationships).

The general intent of the reference to vegetation ceremonies, even if they are those of Osiris, makes it extremely unlikely that (as some commentators have supposed) the 'Dog' is an intended allusion to Anubis, the jackal-headed god who assisted at the resurrection of Osiris. While

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1 The Golden Bough (Abridged edn., St. Martin's Library 1957) Vol. II p. 496.
2 Ibid. p. 507.

Eliot is certainly guilty at times of elephantine pedantry (as in 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service') this is not such a case. The reference is simply an adaptation of two of Webster's best known lines, taken from Cornelia's dirge in The White Devil. The lines of the dirge continue the first Part's theme of 'The Burial of the Dead', and the alteration from the wolf as foe to the Dog as friend continues the grotesque gardening small-talk ('Will it bloom this year?') with the image of the dog scratching in the garden. The emphasis on mythological allusion which reads Anubis into the lines is unwarranted.

Admittedly the capital in 'Dog' presents a problem. Unfortunately it has led to abstract interpretations which have very little in common with Eliot's methods of employing his symbols. Cleanth Brooks, for instance, neglects the possibility that the wolf of Webster has become a dog because wolves do not scratch around in back gardens. His anxiety to place an abstract interpretation on the symbol betrays insufficient attention to the vivid visual images on the 'surface'. He is inclined, he says, to 'take the Dog... as Humanitarianism and the related philosophies which, in their concern for man, extirpate the supernatural - dig up the corpse of the buried god and thus prevent the rebirth of life.' [1] Miss Helen Gardner, whose study of Eliot is probably more helpful, imaginative and free of pedantry than any other, justly replies: 'I feel the strongest disinclination to 'take the Dog', with or without capital, in any such way. Such abstractions belong to another way of thinking and are out of place here.' [2] Her comments on this passage illustrate the value of coupling imagination with the search for sources. They reveal also an appreciation of the visual images and nightmarish quality of The Waste Land which are so often overlooked in the search for the 'meaning'. For these reasons they deserve quotation in full:

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1 'The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth', reprinted in T.S. Eliot: A Selected Critique, ed. L. Unger (New York 1948) p. 327. The essay appeared first in Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939).

2 The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949) p. 93.

> This is the climax of the movement, when the crowds flowing over the bridge are brought to a standstill. It is as if the people walking round in a ring whom Madame Sosostris saw had been interrupted; perhaps by the one-eyed merchant showing what he carries on his back, or by the Hanged Man whom she did not find; or as if the lady who reads much of the night had laid down her book and looked out into the darkness. There is horror in the thought of the corpse buried in the garden, which, while we try to forget it, is taking new shapes beneath the earth; and in the thought of the Dog, which is not mitigated by the copy-book phrase that he is 'friend to men'. The Psalmist's cry 'Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the Dog' blends with a familiar image of a dog in a back-garden digging up, and bringing with friendly eagerness, to lay at his master's feet, something he had hoped he had disposed of. The feeling is very complex; we recoil in horror from the thought of the Dog, and in disgust from what the dog in the garden scratches up and brings us; but he is 'friend to men' perhaps even in his manifestation as the Dog, as much as when he lays at our feet some disgusting half-decayed object, wagging his tail with pleasure at his own cleverness.[1]

The mythological element in the passage (the allusion to the vegetation ceremonies) becomes a mere mechanical device unless we sense at the same time the nightmare of horror and guilt in these lines. It is the feeling of guilt which gives point to the speaker's suddenly swinging round upon the reader with finger outstretched: 'You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!'

Part II, 'A Game of Chess', presents us with two inhabitants of the Waste Land drawn from different strata of society, both types of Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks: the wealthy neurotic depicted as a Cleopatra-figure, and Albert's wife Lil as seen through the eyes of a smugly solicitous friend. The central sterility theme is brought out in the barren lives of these two women, one with bad nerves, the other with bad teeth, one insulated from the odours of nature by the chemist's perfumes, the other (with five children, however) now disconnected from the processes of nature by the chemist's pills. Only one mythological allusion appears in this part; it is not directly related to Miss Weston's set of parallel myths, but is used here and in Part III to make oblique comment on the sterile lives and sexual liaisons of the Waste Land's inhabitants. This is the reference to Philomela. As we find in so many of Eliot's images, it is capable of operating simultaneously in opposite ways. On one hand the 'sylvan scene' is simply

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1 Ibid. p. 92.

one of the 'withered stumps of time' which are told upon the walls. Its subject is the metamorphosis of one who has been raped as a result of sterile lust, one who now cries in the wilderness. The subject of her song is adulterous wrong, to which she constantly calls attention. But the attention which the Waste Land gives to such sorrows is no more than a passing interest in scandal and cheap sensation:

> And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
> 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.

In 'The Fire Sermon' another allusion to Philomela follows the announcement of Sweeney's approach to Mrs Porter in the spring. The triviality of their relations is suggested in the 'Twit twit twit' of the nightingale's song, and we feel sure that 'So rudely forc'd' would not apply to Mrs Porter in any except the most ironical manner. Yet the isolated 'Tereu' which follows contains within this triviality a hint of pathos: the nightingale calls in its song upon the name of its ravisher. This indicates in small compass the complexity of the Philomela symbol as used by Eliot. For (returning to Part II) while the picture above the mantel deals with the result of suffering after lustful and sterile abuse, it shows a change which enables the wronged Philomel to fill all the desert 'with inviolable voice' - a voice miraculously produced by violation of her person. So the 'rebirth-through-death' pattern common to the parallel myths is quietly reinforced by the 'beauty-through-suffering' pattern of this other myth. That Philomel is not to be seen purely as another symbol of sterility is indicated also by the sense of release which this passage brings to the reader: after the long, richly sensuous description of the dressing-room, with its stifling and oppressive atmosphere of artificial lights and odours, the illusion of the window giving upon the 'sylvan scene' in which the nightingale 'Filled all the desert with inviolable voice' brings a momentary feeling of escape, refreshment and even cleansing, akin to (but not as effective as) those other mysteriously cathartic passages in Eliot's work: Part IV of The Waste Land ('Death by Water'), Part II of Ash-Wednesday, and 'Marina'. The refreshment here is short-lived: the '"Jug Jug" to dirty ears' brings us back to the dressing-room

and the scene is casually passed off with 'other withered stumps of time'. As the woman's querulous chatter falls in the silence of the room and in the emptiness of her hearer's mind, yet another (and this time an ironic) meaning invests the passage we have just read:

> there the nightingale
> Filled all the desert with inviolable voice...

So the Philomel myth, like so many of Eliot's favourite symbols, performs several simultaneous functions and so enables his verse to achieve at the same time that compression and that wealth of overtone which would otherwise be impossible. [1]

In 'The Fire Sermon' the scene is London and the Thames, but it is a timeless London. The river is as much Spenser's Thames as today's, the haunt not only of Elizabeth and Leicester but of the 'nymphs' and their companions. Not only are they timeless, but this city and this river are representative of all cities, islands, rivers, lakes: the 'Unreal City' is all cities. The waters are the waters of Leman (perhaps a conscious pun) or of Babylon: 'By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept...' The city is inhabited by the modern Sweeney and the ancient Fisher King, the Levantine trader and the prince of Naples, all united in the vision of the Greek prophet.

The Fisher King appears 'fishing in the dull canal' in squalid surroundings. As at the end of Part V, the only thing which identifies him is the fact that he <u>is</u> fishing, since at later stages of the Grail legend's development this was the activity which was thought to have gained him his title. Here in 'The Fire Sermon' he is identified also

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1 In dealing with the poem's mention of the rape, Cleanth Brooks again shows the wrong kind of interest in abstract interpretations and mythological 'sources' (in his essay in <u>T.S. Eliot: A Selected Critique</u>, ed. L. Unger (New York 1948) p. 328). He mentions how in one of the Grail manuscripts 'the court of the rich Fisher King was withdrawn from the knowledge of men when certain of the maidens who frequented the shrine were raped... The curse on the land follows from this act... Whether or not Mr. Eliot noticed this passage or intends a reference, the violation of a woman makes a very good symbol of the process of secularization... Our contemporary waste land is in large part the result of our scientific attitude - of our complete secularization.' There is no justification whatever for interpreting the rape as a symbol of 'secularization', and the idea of a 'contemporary' waste land as Eliot's subject begs a host of questions: see pp. 62-66 below.

with Ferdinand prince of Naples through the line which echoes Ferdinand's 'Weeping again the King my father's wrack'. This passage of The Tempest is one of the major symbols of The Waste Land: 'Those are pearls that were his eyes' recurs in Parts I and II, 'This music crept by me upon the waters' comes in Part III. The Phoenician Sailor, of whom Madame Sosostris says 'Those are pearls that were his eyes', is drowned in Part IV.[1] These lines of Shakespeare appear to have constituted for Eliot so richly suggestive a symbol that it has become a part of his own group of peculiarly personal symbols like Philomela and Sweeney: that is to say, a part of his early 'personal mythology' in which so many symbols are capable of ambivalent use. Whether or not the title of 'mythology' is fully justified in this sense yet is debatable, since there are no signs of any pattern connecting these personal symbols other than that ambivalence which many of them have in common. But something like a pattern connecting another set of symbols is found in Four Quartets: and it is the progress towards such a pattern that we see already developing in the symbolism of The Waste Land. This process will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

The Tempest passage (Ariel's two songs and Ferdinand's speech between them) seems to correspond for Eliot to a mysterious sense of illumination and of comfort in the midst of desolation; a feeling induced by the idea of complete transformation which the imagery conveys. The particular relevance of the lines' symbolic value in The Waste Land is probably best shown in Ariel's second song:

> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.

The pattern which we saw in the parallel myths ('rebirth-through-death') and in the Philomel myth ('beauty-through-suffering') is seen again here in a slightly different form, but one similar enough for the transformation of bones into coral and eyes into pearls to become another

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1 With Act I Scene ii of The Tempest in mind, the tolling bells and crowing of the cock in Part V are reminiscent of Ariel's refrains, but there is no reason to think that this was part of Eliot's intention.

expression of that theme which runs like an undertone, never stated, right through the poem: namely, that renewal of life and beauty are brought about through death, but not through that barren death-in-life which is the predicament of the Waste Land's inhabitants. The eyes which become pearls are dead eyes; but they are also like the corpse which sprouts corn: they deny complete decay and dissolution by the implication always of a change 'Into something rich and strange'; Eliot sees the life within the corpse as well as its reverse, 'the skull beneath the skin'. These are 'whispers of immortality' in which new life or new beauty proceeding from death is more than an ironical paradox, as in the poem of that name:

> Daffodil bulbs instead of balls
> Stared from the sockets of the eyes!

But life out of death, though constantly hinted at in this way, is never stated in the poem as an explicit fact: The Waste Land represents a stage of Eliot's thought and feeling which, while pointing the way to it, lies some distance from Ash-Wednesday Part II.

The connection of the Fisher King with this Tempest symbol of transformation reinforces his mythological connection with the potential transformation of the Waste Land. Miss Weston speaks of him as 'a being semi-divine, semi-human, standing between his people and land, and the unseen forces which control their destiny'; and on the subject of his title (attributed in later versions to his supposed activity of fishing) she quotes another scholar who asserts that 'the Fish was sacred to those deities who were supposed to lead men back from the shadows of death to life'.[1] In the present passage of 'The Fire Sermon', the 'shadows of death' are evident in the images of rats, bones, and 'White bodies naked on the low damp ground'; but there is no explicit sign of new life. The Fisher King hears instead the rattling of bones and the sounds announcing Sweeney's approach to Mrs Porter.

The horns which bring Sweeney are a veiled reference to those which

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1 From Ritual to Romance (Doubleday Anchor Books, New York 1957) pp. 136, 127.

bring Actaeon to Diana, as Eliot points out in his Notes. Here we have another incidental mythological allusion. It is isolated in its occurrence and has not the importance of the Philomela references, but it is worth noting that here too the intention may be only partly ironical: for while Mrs Porter is no goddess and hardly chaste, her relationship with Sweeney is certainly no more sterile than that between Diana and Actaeon. The virgin goddess is in the literal sense just as barren as the Waste Land, and Actaeon's view of her naked body is no more fruitful than any of Sweeney's liaisons. From this we can take warning that The Waste Land's juxtaposition of present and past, and of 'real' world and 'myth' world, is not merely for the purpose of ironic contrast: the similarities are often more basic than the contrasts, especially where the central sterility theme is concerned. The Waste Land itself is a mythological symbol, and there is therefore no reason to suppose that all references to myth-figures are intended as symbols of fertility in contrast to the sterility of the Waste Land.

The one-eyed merchant of Madame Sosostris is Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant. The figure of the Levantine trader suggests no myth, but does remind us of Miss Weston's theory that the mystery cults connected with the death-and-rebirth myths were disseminated by soldiers and merchants from the Levant. Nothing of the sort is being disseminated by Mr Eugenides. What he carries on his back (that which Madame Sosostris was forbidden to see) ought probably to have been the secret of initiation into new life through the cult, but turns out to be no more than a pocket full of currants. Nor does his invitation bear the marks of any process leading to fruitful renewal. On this passage the comment of Cleanth Brooks is useful:

> Mr. Eugenides, in terms of his former function, ought to be inviting the protagonist to an initiation into the esoteric cult which holds the secret of life, but on the realistic surface of the poem, in his invitation to "a weekend at the Metropole" he is really inviting him to a homosexual debauch. The homosexuality is "secret" and now a "cult" but a very different cult from that which Mr. Eugenides ought to represent. The end of the new cult is not life but, ironically, sterility. [1]

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1 T.S. Eliot: A Selected Critique, ed. L. Unger (New York 1948) p. 333.

This is one of the few episodes in which the implied contrast is purely ironic without additional overtones of similarity in meaning between the surface event and the allusion. That is to say, it is the simple 'Sweeney Erect' type of contrast, not the more complex 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' type which is much more characteristic of The Waste Land. The irony is reinforced here by the merchant's trivial connections with vegetation, growth and fruitfulness: his dried fruit, his unshavenness, and his name - 'Eugenides'.

At the centre of the poem, presiding over the scene which focuses all the Waste Land's barrenness in the meaningless, passionless and futile coupling of a man and a woman, is Tiresias. Together with the Tarot pack he lends some unity to the isolated episodes. The Tarot pack has made possible the diversity of scene and character while at the same time connecting the plan of the poem to the mythic theme. Leavis has summed up two aspects of its usefulness: '...suggesting, as it does, destiny, chance and the eternal mysteries, it at once intimates the scope of the poem, the mode of its contemplation of life'. Also, being connected by Miss Weston with attempts to predict the rise and fall of the waters which brought fruitfulness to the land, it 'has affiliations with fertility ritual, and so lends itself peculiarly to Mr Eliot's purpose'.[1] In a similar way Tiresias is useful; he too is connected with destiny and the eternal mysteries, he can foretell the future, and his sexual experience combines the experience of both man and woman. He is therefore the ideal means of uniting all the characters of the poem into one unified vision, including both sexes. His vision is a kind of archetype of the experience and consciousness of all mankind; it is in him that the all-inclusive human consciousness of the poem is focused. Grover Smith aptly sums up his function by analogy with Lewis Carroll: 'Tiresias' he says, 'is the dreaming "Red King" of the poem'.[2] As he watches the typist and clerk, we are reminded of the story about the coupling of the two serpents, and this provides additional implicit

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1 New Bearings in English Poetry (New edn. 1950) pp. 96, 97.
2 T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays (3rd imp., Chicago 1960) p. 68.

comment on the scene. The world-weariness of Tiresias, who sees all, is his most important characteristic. Like the speaker in the book of Ecclesiastes, he sees 'no new thing under the sun'. He is an old man, blind, 'with wrinkled dugs', who sees that all is always the same, and can give utterance to no prophetic hope. The barrenness of the Waste Land is part of his own physical and spiritual experience: it is not limited to the age of the typist and clerk.

> (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
> Enacted on this same divan or bed;
> I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
> And walked among the lowest of the dead.)

In Part IV appears the drowned Phoenician Sailor seen by Madame Sosostris. She told her client to 'Fear death by water', but at the same time the potentially transforming quality of such a death was hinted at: 'Those are pearls that were his eyes.' Thus the drowning of Phlebas is providing us with yet another of Eliot's typically ambivalent images. On the surface level it is an image of destruction and dissolution, and death by water is indeed, as Madame Sosostris observes, something to be feared: the end of Part IV urges us to 'Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.' On the other hand the passage has a mysteriously cathartic effect. There is a feeling of resolution, stillness and reconciliation akin to that in the short lyric of Burnt Norton Part IV, or in the lines describing the Leader in 'Triumphal March': a sense of entering into repose. The image of cleansing (the bones being stripped bare of flesh) also has something in common with those images which give Ash-Wednesday Part II its serene, purged feeling. Phlebas is stripped of all his flesh and the years of his life, and seems to be entering a renewed state of innocence at 'the still point of the turning world':

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

This 'Entering the whirlpool' does not convey the same sense of futility and destruction that we find in the wind (a whirlwind?) of 'Gerontion':

> De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
> Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
> In fractured atoms.

It suggests instead an approach to the still point at the centre where all movement and stillness are reconciled, where death by water may be seen as simply the prelude to undergoing a sea-change into 'something rich and strange'. In this sense the sailor from the Levant is undergoing a kind of baptismal initiation into the secret of life. The whole passage, which cannot be interpreted simply on the level of any one meaning explicitly given, implies again the possibility of rebirth through death, and the 'stripping' hints at that ideal of ascesis which remained unfocused in anything resembling a religious context until Part II of Ash-Wednesday.

The close analogy with musical structure which we find in the Quartets is already foreshadowed here in The Waste Land: for natural rhythms seem to indicate that the point at which a lyrical or semi-lyrical resolution should come is the section immediately preceding the last. Why this should be so is difficult to discover. It is a matter intimately related to what may be called the instinct for form; the reasons are as unconscious as the reasons why a cadenza and coda should be so satisfying at the conclusion of a movement in sonata form. In such a passage as 'Death by Water', the rhythms are as much a part of the meaning as the words themselves: for attempts to extract a 'meaning' from the words alone miss the sensation of stillness and resolution. Grover Smith, for instance, thinks of Phlebas as merely another character who 'disintegrates in "fractured atoms"'. [1] This is inadequate. Nowhere more than here is the underlying mythological pattern more closely related to the rhythmic movement of the verse. Miss Gardner, noticing this rhythm, speaks of the passage's 'suggestion of an ineffable peace, a passage backward through a dream, to a dreamless sleep in which the stain of living is washed away...' [2] At the end of 'The Fire Sermon' St. Augustine and the Buddha were used to illustrate the ambivalent nature of fire: its power of destruction (which includes the burning of sterile lust) and its power of purgation; in 'Death by Water' the

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1 T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays (3rd imp., Chicago 1960) p. 92.
2 The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949) p. 95.

similarly ambivalent nature of water is suggested: as an agent of destruction and decay, and as a means of cleansing and purgation. Its further significance as a bringer of fruitfulness is emphasised in Part V, where the thirst of the desert reminds us of the 'stony rubbish' section of Part I.

This final Part, 'What the Thunder said', begins with a series of skilfully chosen images which combine vivid particularity ('torchlight red on sweaty faces') with evocative generality ('Prison and palace and reverberation / Of thunder') to suggest the passion of Christ without naming him. The reason for this is the same as the reason for not naming Osiris at the end of 'The Burial of the Dead': Eliot can thus, by using precise images with indefinitely expanding ripples of association, suggest both one particular event and also a general, archetypal pattern of events. The one myth [1] is employed in such a way as to indicate a general mythological pattern. Leavis says of the passage:

> The reference is unmistakable. Yet it is not only Christ; it is also the Hanged God and all the sacrificed gods: with the 'thunder of spring' 'Adonis, Attis, Osiris' and all the others of The Golden Bough come in. And the 'agony in stony places' is not merely the Agony in the Garden; it is also the agony of the Waste Land, introduced in the first section...

In a word, the event is many events. The agony of the Waste Land is taken up again in the desert scene which follows: 'Here is no water but only rock...' And the journey through the desert landscape merges into other journeys: the walk to Emmaus, an Antarctic expedition, the approach of a knight to the Chapel Perilous. Eliot remarks in his Notes that he associates the Hanged Man of the Tarot pack with the hooded figure who is glimpsed in the Emmaus passage: 'Who is the third who always walks beside you?...' But again the absence of a name means that the possibility of parallels with other situations and events is not excluded. (One parallel is with a polar expedition mentioned by Eliot.) The fact

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1 The gospel story of the passion and resurrection is here clearly used as a myth, since the whole point of the passage lies in the features which it shares with various myths of death and rebirth. Its use as a myth in a literary context does not mean that any questions of historicity are begged in either direction; nor is any connection with Bultmann's demythologizing of the Gospels implied.

2 New Bearings in English Poetry (New edn. 1950) p. 98.

that the speaker can only see the hooded figure out of the corner of an eye, and that 'When I count, there are only you and I together', gains in significance when we remember that Madame Sosostris did not find the Hanged Man. There seems to be the hint that full recognition of the Hanged Man might be a means of attaining fertility for the Waste Land and its inhabitants, and thus that the death-and-rebirth pattern may be the solution for which Tiresias (and therefore all the persons of the poem) is waiting. The disciples who hear the reverberation 'Of thunder of spring over distant mountains' do not recognize in spring thunder the possibility of new life. They resign themselves instead to inertia and death:

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

Parts IV and V especially seem to imply that it is not so much in the complete absence of a solution as in the failure to recognise one, that the perpetuation of the Waste Land's nightmare lies.

It must be emphasised that all these are no more than hints. Eliot does not attempt to offer any explicit solution, and at the very end the nightmare is still unresolved except for the half-ironic benediction. The symbols which might have had a transforming effect are simply merged in the mass of other phantasmagoria like images in a dream, instead of being, as the Jungian would say, grasped and held by the conscious mind. It is not until Ash-Wednesday that explicit solutions enter Eliot's poetry, in the form of a Christian asceticism. Here in The Waste Land, even in the Emmaus passage, there is no real statement of any solution, let alone a specifically Christian one, to the central predicament. Christ on the road to Emmaus merely points to another pattern of renewal on the same level as the sprouting of the corn-god or even the cleansing of the drowned sailor's body: and it is notable that these passages are written in such a way that warning or fear, instead of vision and recognition, are the main features of the speaker's attitude in each case. (The irony of Part IV lies in the fact that the peaceful rhythms indicate that deeper, richer meaning which is absent from the 'surface' of the warning, almost sinister, words.)

The description of the Chapel Perilous shows that no solution has been reached: for whereas it ought to be a scene of testing where a knight may, by asking the right questions or undergoing a trial by terror, bring about the healing of the Fisher King and the restoration of fertility to the Waste Land, it is deserted. It is situated in a 'decayed hole' among the mountains (perhaps that 'Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit') and is inhabited only by the wind. The life-giving ordeal by mysterious apparitions (mentioned by Miss Weston in Chapter XIII of her book) is absent here. Only dry bones are present, and 'Dry bones can harm no one' - a negative attitude which contrasts strongly with the song of the bones in Ash-Wednesday II. The crowing of the cock suggests both mockery and malignant triumph at the failure of a disciple, whether it be a questing knight or a Galilean fisherman.

The whole of Part V reads far more like nightmare than the rest of The Waste Land, except perhaps for the 'Unreal City' passage at the end of Part I. The world of 'What the Thunder said' is a world of mirage and hallucination, or in which mirage and hallucination cannot be distinguished from reality. The air is full of apparitions as well as sounds: red faces, hooded figures, hordes swarming and stumbling in desert places, falling towers, a woman's hair, bats with baby faces, blackened walls, a crowing cock in a flash of lightning, sounds of crying and lamentation, whispers, whistling, voices singing out of hollow places, the wind singing through the grass, and, recurring throughout, distant thunder. The images convey an impression of complete disintegration and chaos (when he wrote Eliot derived images from the theme of Eastern Europe's disintegration). An obscene horror is communicated in the most surrealistic passage:

> A woman drew her long black hair out tight
> And fiddled whisper music on those strings
> And bats with baby faces in the violet light
> Whistled, and beat their wings
> And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
> And upside down in air were towers
> Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
> And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

No conscious meaning can be extracted from this passage, and attempts to do so (like that of Cleanth Brooks in his essay) are misguided. The images simply stand as they are, as a means of conveying a sense of

horror, disgust and chaos; their effect upon us takes place more on the subconscious level at which nightmares are experienced, than in the conscious mind which seeks out meanings. They are not myth-images, but like myth-images they achieve their impact on the imagination and not on the reason.[1] The short passage just before this one, in which Eliot is conscious among other things of the decay of Eastern Europe, combines a more archetypal quality with its dreamlike features to suggest the disintegration of civilization: the use of question form instead of statement, the words 'hooded', 'endless', 'horizon', combine to produce this quality, together with the 'maternal lamentation' which reminds us of Rachel (Jeremiah 31:15) or Hecuba or Niobe or all of these together.

At the end of the poem no healing or fertility has been obtained: the land is still arid and the protagonist (appearing once more as a fisherman, perhaps the Fisher King) speaks of preparing for death: 'Shall I at least set my lands in order?' While the words of the thunder contain a hint of refreshment and order ('Give' - 'Sympathise' - and 'Control'), the black clouds bringing life-giving rain are still 'far distant'. Significant fragments of a polyglot culture are all that remains to give feeble support in a state of spiritual aridity: 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins'. But the ominous atmosphere of the whole of Part V makes it necessary that on the last 'shantih' we feel there is more to come which we are not permitted to see. The threefold blessing combines a sigh of resignation with a faint whisper of reassurance. The hint at a promise of rain, fertility, rebirth, is never explicit but is nevertheless present.

Cassirer said that 'In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death'.[2] It is true that there is no such thing as a 'sterility myth'.

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1 Of interest here is Eliot's remark, in the Preface to his translation of Anabasis by St.-John Perse (Revised edn. 1959, p. 10), that 'There is a logic of the imagination as well as a logic of concepts.' In the same place he says of Perse's poem: 'The reader has to allow the images to fall into his memory successively without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment; so that, at the end, a total effect is produced.' The same may be said of this Waste Land passage.

2 An Essay on Man (Yale 1944) p. 84.

Sterility appears only as an element in fertility myths. So even in its depiction of sterility, The Waste Land cannot help implying through its mythological 'sounding-board' the possibility of renewal and fertility. This explains how Maud Bodkin was able to discover in The Waste Land what she called, in Jungian terms, the 'pattern of rebirth'. [1]

But while the sterility-fertility opposition and the hint of rebirth are the more readily appreciable features of Eliot's 'mythical method' in The Waste Land, there is also an element in his use of imagery which foreshadows the mythical method, and indeed the 'personal mythology' of the Four Quartets. What precisely this personal mythology consists of is the concern of a later chapter; but one of its most striking characteristics is the sense of unity in diversity brought about by the ambivalence of single images and the reconciliation of opposing images: of images, that is, which appear to be in opposition to each other until their more basic similarity is demonstrated. This ambivalence of single images and reconciliation of opposing images are both apparent in The Waste Land, long before they play their major rôle in Four Quartets. Eliot's handling in The Waste Land of the traditional four 'elements', and his attitude to time, provide examples of this emerging method.

It is not only in the Quartets that the elements of air, earth, fire and water play a major symbolic rôle. They do so in The Waste Land, but here their significance is obscured by the poem's not having a fourfold structure. Earth, fire, water and air are leading symbols respectively in Parts I, III, IV and V. Their titles bear this out: 'The Burial of the Dead', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water', 'What the Thunder said'. Part II is in a very real sense, as we shall see, the exception which proves the rule. But in the other four parts it is not the mere presence of the elements as images which is important: it is their ambivalent use. In 'The Burial of the Dead' earth appears as the element which both receives the dead and brings forth all manner of growth and life. On the one hand it is associated with 'dry stone' and 'a handful of dust'; on the other hand it is the source of life, whether of hyacinths or of the corn

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1 Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (1934) pp. 308 ff.

sprouting from the buried god. It is the symbol both of destruction and of renewal. The same is true of each of the other elements. In Part III the 'Burning burning burning burning' may be construed as either the burning of sterile lust, or the fire of purgation which removes that lust: but our appreciation of the image's function is incomplete unless we construe it as both of these things at once. Like Dante, Eliot makes a simple, fundamental image do a great deal of work; we remember that on the seventh cornice of Mount Purgatory Dante's fire has the same dual significance, standing for the lust which is being punished as well as for the agent of purgation. We must also bear in mind that even this double connotation does not necessarily exhaust the significance of the image; the fact is merely that we can recognize here at least two modes in which it operates. In Part IV the water is, as we have seen, both destructive (drowning) and restorative (cleansing). On the positive side, water may of course be life-giving as well as cleansing. This is clearer in the images of Part V, where the desire for rain is a leading theme; but the sea itself is capable of operating as a life-giving symbol. As Miss Bradbrook remarks: 'Eliot has a few strong and central symbols, as he has a few strong and central themes, and the sea as the primal source of life and energy is one of the most important.' [1] Finally in Part V, 'What the Thunder said', the dominant element is air, used again in an ambivalent way. It is the element in which are experienced all kinds of mirages and hallucinations, deceptive sights and sounds. On it are carried lamenting voices, and aimless winds blow about the empty chapel. Borne on the air is the sound of thunder: sometimes dry and sterile, as in most of Part V, and sometimes (towards the end) with at least the hint of a promise of life-giving rain. In most of The Waste Land, as at the beginning of Ash-Wednesday, it is 'Smaller and dryer than the will'. But by the end of 'What the Thunder said' it is clear that we are to regard the air as potentially a bringer of life as well as of 'aethereal rumours'.

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1 M.C. Bradbrook: T.S. Eliot (Revised edn. 1958) p. 11. See also the end of 'Prufrock', Marina, the end of East Coker, and The Dry Salvages for important (and sometimes ambivalent) sea-symbolism.

The importance of this ambivalent use of the elements in Eliot's personal mythology will be further commented on in the chapter on the Four quartets, where its most notable occurrence is probably the passage on fire in Little Gidding Part IV. In The Waste Land water (or the lack of it) is clearly the most important of these elemental images, playing as it does a major rôle in the imagery outside Part IV as well as in it.

It remains to examine Part II, which was called the exception that proves the rule. Here none of the elements emerges as a leading image - and it is curiously enough the absence of the elements that gives point to the whole section, and makes its two episodes the gloomiest presentations of sterility in the poem - with the possible exception of the typist-clerk scene in Part III. In 'A Game of Chess' (a suitably 'abstract' title in comparison with the other four) the characters presented to us are cut off from the elements, are living in an insulated and artificial world. It is surely no accident that of the five parts of the poem, this is the only one in which the entire action takes place indoors. The artificiality of the rich woman's surroundings is emphasised by means of irony. Her chair does not burn on the water: it 'Glowed on the marble'. The fruited vines are artificial. The light from the candle-flames is not Fire in any elemental sense: it merely shows the glitter of her jewels. Similarly the air which freshens from the window only serves to stir the odours of her 'strange synthetic perfumes'. In this artificial world there is no water to drown or swim in, but only the odours from perfume bottles, and the 'sad' firelight ('In which sad light a carvèd dolphin swam.') These ironically described concessions to 'contact' with the elements only emphasise her isolation from them. 'The wind under the door' causes fear in the 'room enclosed'. The whole scene suggests this insulation against the elements and against natural processes, even to the 'closed car at four' if it rains. Similarly in the section about Lil, the emphasis is on artificiality (the dentures) and the denial of natural processes ('them pills I took, to bring it off'). In the face of this picture of sterility, added importance attaches to the casual remark: 'What you get married for if you don't want children?' Part II is the picture of a Waste Land in which fruitfulness is not only

lost or absent, but stremuously denied and avoided.

While The Waste Land's ambivalent use of single images (such as each of the elements) illustrates one main feature of Eliot's developing personal mythology, the other main feature (the reconciliation of apparently opposing images) may be seen in the poem's attitude to time. Since neglect of this 'reconciliation technique' has given rise to many misconceptions about what the poem is actually saying, we shall, before discussing it, look at some of Eliot's own comments on interpretation.

> ...when I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the "disillusionment of a generation," which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.[1]

Elsewhere he says 'I am used to having cosmic significances, which I never suspected, extracted from my work... by enthusiastic persons at a distance'.[2] Yet on other occasions he appears to give carte blanche to enthusiastic interpreters: '...what a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author...'[3] and again:

> A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant... The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid - it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of. The different interpretations may all be partial formulations of one thing; the ambiguities may be due to the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate.[4]

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1 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 368 (from Thoughts After Lambeth).
2 Ibid. p. 127 (from Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca).
3 The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933) p. 130.
4 On Poetry and Poets (1957) pp. 30-31 (from The Music of Poetry). Eliot's readiness to allow alternative and even contradictory interpretations, provided they be satisfactorily comprehensive ones, gives rise to an amusing anecdote by Professor Coghill. After a production of Sweeney Agonistes based on a completely unexpected interpretation of the piece, Eliot professed astonishment at the interpretation and yet said that he accepted the production. Coghill records the following conversation between himself and Eliot on the subject:

Myself: But... but... can the play mean something you didn't intend it to mean, you didn't know it meant?
Mr Eliot: Obviously it does.
Myself: But can it then also mean what you did intend?
Mr Eliot: I hope so... yes, I think so.
Myself: But if the two meanings are contradictory, is not one right and the other wrong? Must not the author be right?
Mr Eliot: Not necessarily, do you think? Why is either wrong?
This was to me so staggering a point of view /adds Coghill/ that I could only put it down to modesty.

(From T.S. Eliot: a symposium, compiled by Richard March and Tambimuttu, 1948, p. 66.)

How the above pairs of remarks are to be reconciled is not clear - it would be foolish to suppose that Eliot is never guilty of inconsistency, or at least that he never changes his mind. But perhaps we may reasonably assume that when he said 'There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of', he could have added: 'But not less.' It is at any rate clear that Eliot's real objection is against critics who impoverish rather than enrich the interpretation of a poem: who narrow what we may call (in a much-worked phrase) its 'frame of reference'. This was his charge against those 'more approving critics' of The Waste Land. Had they appreciated what he was trying to say and striven to find yet more in the poem of which he was not conscious, the exercise might have been at best informative and at worst harmless. Their harmful effect lay in appreciating only a fraction of what the poem was intended to do. Their neglect of what we have called the 'reconciliation technique' was the cause of this.

The specific fault in interpretation of The Waste Land has been that critical approach which fixes the poem and its significance firmly in the twentieth century, and regards its technique of oblique comment as operating almost exclusively by means of irony; so that juxtaposed or simultaneous references to different periods of time have been regarded as means of pointing up contrasts, instead of being recognised as means of suggesting similarities or of doing both of these things at the same time. Hence the widespread critical opinion has been that The Waste Land is a poem which uses a mythical method in order to depict the Europe of the nineteen-twenties as a spiritual waste land. The fact is that the whole poem is an attempt, not to distinguish spiritual aridity in one age from spiritual fertility in another, but to achieve a unity of vision in which spiritual aridity and the quest for (or fear of) fertility are seen to be fundamentally the same in all ages. That 'sense' of his own age which Eliot attributed severally to Baudelaire, Blake and Villon, consists, in Matthiessen's words, of

> a condensed, bare honesty that can strike beneath the appearances of life to reality, that can grasp so strongly the intrinsic elements of life in the poet's own day that it likewise penetrates

> beneath the apparent variations of man from one epoch to another to his essential sameness.[1]

It is this penetrating 'beneath the apparent variations of man from one epoch to another to his essential sameness' which we also find in the mythical method of The Waste Land. Matthiessen is among the few critics (they include Miss Gardner and I.A. Richards) who realise this. In dismissing the most common fallacy about the poem he says:

> ...some readers object that Eliot's view of life is peculiarly narrow; they object to his describing contemporary existence as a waste land. Most of the force of that objection is lost, I believe, when it is understood that he is not thus characterising the present as distinct from the past, but is probing the implications of certain tragic elements inherent in the very nature of life.[2]

The basic contrast in the poem is not between past and present or even between the myth-world and the real world, but simply between fertility and sterility, whether in the past or present, and whether in the myth-world or the real world. But the notion that allusions to the past, or to literature, or even to the underlying myths themselves, are a means of achieving ironic contrast at the expense of the present, is a notion that dies hard. For instance, Charles Moorman regards the mythic materials as being used to 'contrast the fertile religious order of the past with the sterile secular chaos of the present...'[3] This interpretation is entirely without foundation: order and chaos are connected both with past and with present, just as in 'Sweeney among the Nightingales' disorder and sordidness surrounded the death of Agamemnon no less than the death of Sweeney. Another quotation from Moorman demonstrates a corollary of this fallacious view:

> Sexual intercourse, which in past time has driven men to war, murder, and poetry and for which men once lost the world and thought the world well lost, has become, in the contemporary waste land, a matter of routine, as mechanical as combing one's hair or placing a record on the phonograph.[4]

Owing to his unwarranted assumption of a 'contemporary waste land' as the poem's subject, Moorman misconstrues its attitude to sexual intercourse. Eliot is not concerned to contrast intercourse in the twentieth century

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1 F.O. Matthiessen: The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (3rd edn. 1958) p. 19.
2 Ibid. p. 106.
3 Arthurian Triptych (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1960) pp. 147-8.
4 Ibid. p. 132.

with romantic presuppositions about love in centuries gone by; indeed such romantic presuppositions would be unlikely to enlist his sympathy. He is concerned with sex primarily as an image of fruitfulness, and contrasts the sterility of sexual relations with the fertility which (by implication) should be theirs. Romantic love in the ancient sense (particularly the convention of courtly love) is basically just as sterile as the love-with-contraceptives of the twentieth century, or the intercourse which results in Lil's taking 'them pills' to 'bring it off'. The contrast is emphatically not one between a supposed modern sterility and a supposed ancient fertility: Tiresias has in more senses than one 'foresuffered all' that is enacted in the typist's bedroom; he too has known triviality, sordidness and meaninglessness in sexual relations. The parody of Goldsmith's lines has, it is true, an element of ironic contrast: but the contrast is simply between two different reactions to futile sex, not between futile sex and meaningful sex. Goldsmith's little verses with their quiet self-mockery can hardly be thought to stand as a symbol of fertile love in past ages; and that fact that we cannot take them seriously makes the irony of Eliot's parody go deeper than at first appears.

It is in this double-edged irony that we see the reconciliation technique at work. What is first seen as a contrast becomes on closer examination the opposite of one at the same time. A look at a few of the other allusions will bear this out. There is no fertility at all, in the sound literal sense, in the love of Tristan and Isolde. The apparent opposition between the images of modern petty affairs and ancient grand passions takes on a deeper irony when we realise that the ancient grand passions were just as sterile. This applies to the relations between, for example, Antony and Celopatra; Elizabeth and Leicester; even Diana and Actaeon - their brief and unsatisfactory acquaintance is no more fruitful than that of Sweeney and Mrs Porter. Diana rejects Actaeon and remains a virgin, it is true, while Mrs Porter does not; and the 'sound of horns and motors' is certainly an ironic allusion. But the irony operates in both directions, and ironic contrast becomes reconciled with ironic similarity: for the sterility and futility

of the Sweeney-Mrs Porter relationship reminds us in turn of the equal sterility of the Diana-Actaeon relationship. In other words, if it is true that every apparent similarity implies a contrast, it is also true that every apparent contrast implies a similarity. Even the first Thames-maidens song: 'Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me.' takes us to the passage in the Purgatorio where Dante meets Pia dei Tolomei ('Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma') who was murdered by her husband - hardly a fruitful sexual relationship. It must surely be of some significance that the very people who figure in Eliot's allusions, whether or not they are used for purposes of ironic contrast, are also, almost without exception, people whose sexual relations, however passionate, were not fruitful. Consideration of this at first surprising fact ought to give pause to those who base their interpretation of the poem on a supposedly pure and simple ironic contrast between present and past. Such a simple contrast was indeed a feature of Eliot's earlier technique, but in the middle and later work (including The Waste Land and even 'Sweeney among the Nightingales') the ideas are more complex.

The rise of the fallacy has, however, not been surprising in view of the ambitious nature of Eliot's real purpose: namely, the focussing of an inclusive human consciousness (the consciousness of all humanity at all times) of the problem of sterility in the realms of animal and vegetable, moral and spiritual, life. One might hazard the remark that even here he is not only using myths but in a sense trying to construct one, since through the images and the 'collapsing' of place and time he attempts to represent a preterlogical mode of awareness on the part of mankind as a whole. Edmund Wilson does not do Eliot justice when he says that in the poem he 'is living half the time in the real world of contemporary London and half the time in the haunted wilderness of the mediaeval legend.' [1] Neither the real world of contemporary London nor the haunted wilderness of mediaeval legend are of primary interest to Eliot as milieux for the action of the poem, since the only true milieu for that action is the consciousness of the human race (focused in

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1 Axel's Castle (New York 1931) p. 106.

Tiresias) - it has nothing to do with place or time. That is precisely why place and time are treated in what superficially appears to be such a cavalier fashion. In the vision Tiresias is seeing all experience at all time. Only some of the times and places suggested in the vision are: Germany in the prewar period (preceding the First World War, that is), modern London, Elizabethan London, Dante's Limbo, the Mediterranean in the era of Phoenician trade, Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, a desert, a chapel in the era of questing knights, the Ganges, and ancient Egypt. The host of languages employed further contributes to the deliberately-contrived kaleidoscopic effect, just as the various styles in Ulysses contribute to the illusion of unity and comprehensiveness which is part of Joyce's aim.

It now becomes clearer what is meant by the 'reconciliation of apparently opposing images' as a feature of Eliot's developing mythical method (and of that personal mythology into which the method has developed by the time we meet it in Four Quartets). What appears initially to be the juxtaposition of two ideas for the purposes of ironic contrast (such as Cleopatra in the barge and the wealthy neurotic woman in her Chair) is revealed on closer examination to be at the same time a juxtaposition for the even more important purpose of calling attention to a basic similarity of situation. Spenser's beaux and nymphs on the banks of the Thames are fundamentally no different from the modern idle young men-about-town and their girl-friends. To emphasise this similarity, different places and different periods are fused into one. The reason why this reconciliation of images is referred to as a feature of a mythical method will become clear later. It is bound up with the nature of the personal mythology expressed in Four Quartets: a personal mythology whose keyword is reconciliation of opposites (hence the suggestiveness of the Heraclitean Fragments as epigraphs to Burnt Norton). There we find a reconciliation not only of differences in time, but of time with timelessness, darkness with light, death with birth, movement with stillness. It is the early stages of development towards this personal mythology that we find in The Waste Land.

Perhaps the best brief statement on this reconciliation of opposing images comes from I.A. Richards. Its relevance to interpretation of The Waste Land is particularly clear.

> ...the central process in all Mr. Eliot's best poems is the same; the conjunction of feelings which, though superficially opposed, - as squalor, for example, is opposed to grandeur, - yet tend as they develop to change places and even to unite. If they do not develop far enough the intention of the poet is missed. Mr. Eliot is neither sighing after vanished glories nor holding contemporary experience up to scorn.[1]

In retrospect it becomes clear that Eliot's mythical method in The Waste Land involves a great deal more than 'manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity'. His mythological background has rather been used to effect a fusion in which neither contemporaneity nor antiquity is of primary importance, but only the central mythical situation itself: the experience of sterility. The myths themselves have provided symbolic material with which to unify and to elaborate this theme; and the theories of Jung on the psychological and Frazer on the anthropological level enabled Eliot to develop a technique which made narrative unnecessary: a technique which operated through symbols and aimed at suggesting a kind of vision or dream of the whole human race, personified in Tiresias. In these ways the myths made possible a kind of order which appears as a rich disorder, since the mythical method, like the mythical mode of awareness, is by nature comprehensive and inclusive, and in every sense the reverse of analytic.

The concentration made possible by the use of mythological images reinforcing the mythological theme, is further aided by the two features so characteristic of the later personal mythology: the ambivalence of images, and the reconciliation of images. Just as in the Paradiso all the redeemed are gathered into one in the multifoliate rose, and as in Little Gidding all opposites and differences are gathered into unity until 'the fire and the rose are one', so even in the Inferno-like world of The Waste Land differences of person, place and time are comparatively irrelevant, and what matters most is their sameness, even though it be

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1 Principles of Literary Criticism (1926) pp. 294-5.

a sameness of affliction and not of beatitude. As it is the office of the empirical scientist by analytical methods to discover the differences between things, so it seems to be the office of the mystic to see beyond the differences to the unity of all things. It is the mystic vision to which Eliot always aspires. Miss Gardner, commenting on the last part of The Waste Land, communicates in an exciting way the sense of unity which he achieves. As a concise indication of the nature, method and scope of the poem, her words are probably unrivalled. Just as all the characters are one, so, she says,

> In the same way the time is all time and no time. Though we are plainly at times in modern London, it is an 'unreal city' and in the last section the city has vanished. It is all humanity that seems to be waiting then; the disciples have buried their Lord and the women are lamenting the death of Syrian Adonis or Phrygian Attis. Travellers are making their way through deserts, or to the Southern Pole, or to the village of Emmaus, or to the Chapel Perilous in the mountains, through a landscape peopled with shapes of horror, which fades into the vast Indian plains. Great crowds swarm from ruined cities, the refugees from every empire that has ever fallen. Although The Waste Land may begin with the 'dilemma of the modern mind', it discovers that the modern dilemma is the historic dilemma; and to limit the poem's meaning to being primarily the expression of modern lack of faith is to mistake its form and scope. Its true subject is ageless; it discovers a radical defect in human life and makes clear the 'insufficiency of human enjoyments'. Its contrasts in style and its historic references are used to demonstrate that beneath both beauty and ugliness there lurk in all classes and in all ages boredom and terror; all wars are the same war, all love-makings the same love-making, all homecomings the same homecoming:
>
> And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
> Enacted on this same divan or bed. [1]

1 The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949) pp. 88-89.

C H A P T E R I V

DANTE'S WORLD

The importance which Eliot attaches to Dante is clear from his own critical writings: he says that 'more can be learned about how to write poetry from Dante than from any English poet' and that 'there is no poet in any tongue - not even in Latin or Greek - who stands so firmly as a model for all poets.' [1]

Dante's influence is fairly easily discernible in Eliot's work. But are we justified in including a discussion of 'Dante's World' under the heading of Eliot's use of myths? Can Dante's work (especially the Commedia) be called a myth? Can his 'world' be called a mythic world? Did Dante use myths or create them? Can the term 'myth' be reconciled in the Dantean context with the term 'allegory'? Questions like these need some preliminary attention before we can turn to the Dantean element in Eliot's poems.

It is necessary first to discover roughly what relationship existed between Dante and the popular myths of his day. By far the most widespread and influential mythological structure in Dante's time was the world-view of mediaeval Catholicism. It fulfilled both the functions of traditional myths mentioned above: it combined a means of social order with the vision of a cosmic order; the dissociation of sensibility had not yet set in. [2] In many respects the task of the creative artist is rendered much easier by such a set of circumstances: he has, as it were, a rich fund of raw material at his disposal, and is therefore absolved from the necessity of creating his own cosmic pattern in the manner of Yeats. He is able to proceed at once to developing themes implicit in that ready-made mythological structure, and a less tortuous attitude to the myths is therefore possible. Wheelwright indicates the simplicity

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1 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) pp. 252, 268 (from Dante).
2 See above, p. 8.

of attitude possible to the poet who is 'born, like Aeschylus or Dante, in a period when a substantial body of myths enjoys wide acceptance as literally true: his greatest poems in such case will be poetic intensifications and elaborations of some of those myths.' [1]

Eliot agrees: this is clear from his earlier essay on Dante, which appeared in The Sacred Wood. There he speaks of the two men whom he regards as the greatest philosophical poets: Dante and Lucretius. Of the 'system' which Lucretius held, Eliot writes: '...he is really endeavouring to find the concrete poetic equivalent for this system - to find its complete equivalent in vision'; and his 'true tendency is to express an ordered vision of the life of man'. [2] These poets were, then, attempting to create poetic equivalents to a system, to an ordered vision of the universe - just as much later Yeats tried to do, but with very much less success because he had to 'conjure up' the vision as well as create its poetic equivalent.

Dante was in a more fortunate position than either Yeats or Lucretius. 'Dante' says Eliot, 'had the benefit of a mythology and a theology which had undergone a more complete absorption into life than those of Lucretius.' [3] Accordingly he was able to present a vision of unrivalled order and comprehensiveness: 'Dante's is the most comprehensive, and the most ordered presentation of emotions that has ever been made.' [4]

Eliot thought of Dante as presenting an ordered scale of human emotions, for which vast project he found an allegorical scaffolding to be most useful. Indeed, to him 'the allegory is the scaffold'. [5] And this remark may throw some light on the distinction which it is essential to make between mythology and allegory. The comprehensive mythology of which Dante 'had the benefit' was a philosophic structure based, it is true, partly on Scripture, but nevertheless a structure quite independent of any specific literary formulation of it. Allegory, on the other hand,

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1 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', The Language of Poetry, ed. Allen Tate (Princeton 1942) p. 22.
2 The Sacred Wood (1920) p. 161.
3 Ibid. p. 163.
4 Ibid. p. 168.
5 Ibid. p. 163.

has no existence independently of literary works; it is at the most a technical device often found useful. A mythology is nothing like a technical device.

The allegory of the Commedia is thus a means of expressing the vision; its mythology is that system of experience and belief and thought which underlies the vision. Traditional allegorical method is, too, only a small part of Dante's method: he does not limit himself to the normal 'A=B' type of allegorical correspondence that we find in the Pilgrim's Progress. In her Introduction to her translation of the Inferno, Dorothy Sayers draws attention to the limits of Dante's debt to traditional allegory: 'by using for his images real people, rather than personified abstractions, Dante gains an enormous artistic advantage over the simple allegorist'. [1] In the Vita Nuova he had handled this normal method of personifying virtues and vices, but in the Commedia

> he did not try: he looked at the great bristling difficulty of allegory, over which so many writers, before and since, have come a cropper, and, with his infallible poetic tact, quietly by-passed it. Instead of endeavouring to interest us in personages labelled "Counsel" or "Divine Grace" or "Simony" or "Theology" he gave us portraits of Virgil, Beatrice, Pope Nicholas III, and Thomas Aquinas, in whom, since they are human, we are predisposed to be interested. In this way he saved himself pages of elaborate description and made room in his poem for the discussion of a great many subjects of the utmost importance, thus widening its range and increasing its variety.[2]

However, the way in which Dante modified the allegorical method for his own purposes is less important to us at present than the fundamental distinction between his mythology and his allegory, and the fact, as we can see above, that whereas his mythology was the very life-blood of his work, his allegory was entirely of secondary importance, as a matter of technique. He may have used a modified allegorical method, and Joyce may have used a 'mythical method', as Eliot calls it, in Ulysses: the fact remains that whereas allegory itself *is* simply a method, mythology is much more.

Dante was not independently imposing an order on his experience and his vision of the world (as Yeats tried to do). The Church had already

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1 Hell (Penguin Books, 1949) p. 16.
2 Ibid.

done that (especially through the systematizing work of Aquinas), thereby making available to him all his mythological raw material. What he did was to use this Christian mythology in his work, together with images drawn from his own experience and acquaintance, to transform a theological system into a poetic vision.

Dante's modification of the allegorical method means that in the Commedia the ostensible story and the 'spiritual reality' which it represents do not remain strictly separable, as they would do in typical allegorical works. Instead, story and spiritual meaning are fused together through the use of the non-abstract images. Moral and spiritual 'meanings' cannot be lifted neatly clear of the narrative (as they can in Pilgrim's Progress). Whether implicit or explicit, they have their full effect only within the story with its real persons.

By 'real persons' we do not mean historical as against fictitious persons, but three-dimensional figures with individual qualities as against two-dimensional abstractions like 'Mercy' or 'Justice'. In this sense Ulysses, for instance, is as much a real person in the poem as any of the saints or Dante's own acquaintances. He is therefore more than an allegorical figure. The same applies even to the Siren in Dante's dream (Canto XIX of the Purgatorio), as Francis Fergusson points out: '...because of the sturdy realism which underlies the whole conception of the Divine Comedy the Siren, for all her moral meaning, is not reduced to the status of a moral allegory only. She retains some sort of being in her own right...' [1] In the context of the poem she is both a mythological figure and a real person. This is Dante's great advantage over traditional allegory, which in not dealing with real persons was so much the poorer.

In what precisely does Dante's mythology consist? What myths does he use or create? His debt was not only to that mediaeval Christian mythology which, as Eliot remarked, had undergone such a thorough absorption into the life of his day. He was indebted also to classical mythology which, while not demanding his intellectual belief, remained

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1 '"Myth" and the Literary Scruple', The Human Image in Dramatic Literature (Doubleday Anchor Books, New York 1957) p. 173.

a rich fund of symbols. We can therefore distinguish between the 'believed mythology' within whose intellectual framework his entire work had its being (the mediaeval world-view) and the simply 'useful mythology' of the classics. The second is of course completely subsidiary to the first: a place is found for the mythical guardians and rivers of the underworld (the Styx, Cerberus and so on), but they appear in a thoroughly Christian Hell (much more so than Milton's); similarly the eternal fate of the heroes of the Trojan War is determined by the results of the Harrowing of Hell, in which not only Christ but also Adam, Abraham and David played an important part according to the Mystery plays.

The classical, biblical and almost contemporary figures all rubbing shoulders give to Dante's world a comprehensiveness which it would certainly have lacked had he limited it to historical figures of the Christian dispensation only. And this comprehensiveness almost gives to the world of his vision the status of a separate mythology. But it would be unwise to call Dante's a 'personal mythology', for his world remains essentially the world of mediaeval Catholicism with a slightly modified geography and population to suit the purposes of his poem.

Dante's world consists naturally of the traditional three-storeyed universe (with Purgatory providing a kind of mezzanine floor between earth and heaven). The geography of each of the three non-terrestrial realms is set out in realistic detail (as far as Paradise can be said to have a geography), and maintains its illusion of reality throughout, quite independently of its symbolizing in each case a spiritual state: damnation, penitence or grace. The progress from horror through purgation to the beatific vision is accompanied by suitable images and suitable styles: the restless, flickering phantasmagoria of the Inferno give way to the gentler rhythms of the Purgatorio, filled nevertheless with much personal questioning and striving; then, the personal conflicts ended, the serene pages of the Paradiso are given over to the 'sweet austerity' of philosophical and theological instruction, until finally even these fade away in the light of the beatific vision.

Now this general movement from horror through striving to austere serenity is closely paralleled in Eliot's work. It would be absurd to

suppose that his earlier, middle and later work was deliberately modelled in each case on the corresponding Cantica of the Commedia. But allowing for the shape of the apparent 'spiritual' development that appears in his poems, and bearing in mind his admiration for Dante, it is not surprising that we are tempted to see a parallel pattern, even if an unplanned parallel.

Eliot's own spiritual development is not in fact relevant to the present study; all that is of interest is the reflection of a spiritual development in the poems. If we were to discover that he had in fact been objectively dramatising someone else's spiritual development, the fact would be of no consequence: meanwhile it is convenient to refer to this development as his own. Whatever the truth about any personal experience underlying the poems, the change in style is undeniable: we have only to compare 'Prufrock' with Ash-Wednesday, and Ash-Wednesday with the Quartets. There is a general movement which may be represented in roughly three phases: we pass from a world of flickering shapes, figures and impressions, objectively set out, to a phase of intensely personal self-questioning and striving after spiritual vision, and finally to the serene and precise movement of passages of philosophical speculation.

Matthiessen says 'It would be glib to say that in The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men" Eliot wrote his Inferno, and that since then his poems represent various stages of passing through a Purgatorio; still such a remark may possibly illuminate both his aims and achievement.' [1] It is difficult to see how a remark which illuminates his achievement can be dismissed as glib; but Matthiessen no doubt felt some apology was needed for a comment so apparently open to the charge of glibness, yet one which he felt it necessary to make. No such apology is necessary. The observation is perfectly legitimate except that it is more likely to illuminate Eliot's achievement than his conscious aims - no poet would be so foolhardy as to attempt another Commedia in any form, but many would allow themselves to be strongly influenced by it. In looking

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1 The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (3rd edn. 1958) p. 11.

at Eliot's work against the background of Dante's poem, therefore, we shall not be treating it as a modern Commedia, but as a body of work into which images from that mythology which constitutes Dante's world find their way. When Eliot said that so much could be learned from Dante about how to write poetry, he might more specifically have said that so much could be learned about how to handle images. It is in the treatment of imagery (and in the use of specifically Dantean imagery) rather than in style that Eliot is most deeply indebted to Dante, though he has also made one or two conscious attempts at a Dantean style and rhythm.

It is worth noting that Dante's presence asserts itself at the very beginning of Eliot's collected work. The monologue of the tormented Prufrock is preceded by the words of the damned Guido da Montefeltro:

> If I thought that I were making
> Answer to one that might return to view
> The world, this flame should evermore cease shaking.
>
> But since from this abyss, if I hear true,
> None ever came alive, I have no fear
> Of infamy, but give thee answer due. [1]

The irony of Guido's words is paralleled by the irony of Eliot's title. Guido only answers because he is quite convinced that his words will never reach the ears of anyone on earth. Prufrock's 'Love Song' is never uttered outside the Inferno of his private thoughts and conflicts. Dante's Counsellors of Fraud, of whom Guido is one, are punished not merely by the tongues of fire in which they are enveloped, but also by the loss of recognizable identity in which this results. The suggestion is that furtiveness and pretence make it impossible for people properly to know and sympathise with each other: so each inhabitant of the eighth Bowge is appropriately isolated inside an impenetrable wall of flame. Similarly Prufrock can never communicate any love song (and if he could it would hardly be this one), isolated as he is within the walls of his own tortured consciousness. We are reminded of the second word of the thunder in The Waste Land Part V: 'Dayadhvam' - 'sympathise'. The passage runs as follows:

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1 Inferno XXVII 61-66, in Miss Sayers' translation.

> Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
> Only at nightfall, aetherial rumours
> Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

Eliot compares this in his Notes with the story of Ugolino (Inferno XXXIII), who tells Dante how he heard the men nailing up the gate of the tower in which he and his sons were imprisoned. The idea of imprisonment without hope of escape (Guido is equally imprisoned) becomes to Eliot a way of suggesting the curse of individual consciousness with its inevitable isolation. His purpose is almost explicitly shown by his juxtaposition of the Ugolino quotation with another from F.H. Bradley on precisely this isolation: '...my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside...' This sense of isolated consciousness makes Prufrock incapable of decisive speech or action: he is too much aware of the impossibility of communication.

> It is impossible to say just what I mean!
> But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
> Would it have been worth while
> If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
> And turning toward the window, should say:
> 'That is not it at all,
> That is not what I meant, at all.'

The whole of the poem underlines the irony implicit in the 'you and I' of the first line. Guido's words normally have little chance of being heard outside Hell; Prufrock's words have even less chance of being heard outside the 'you' and the 'I' which are both Prufrock. The feelings of impotence and isolation which dominate the poem are greatly increased in the reader by a recognition of the parallel between the situations of Guido in Hell and Prufrock in himself.

Of all Eliot's earlier work, 'Prufrock' and The Waste Land are the pieces most indebted to Dante. The flickering phantasmagoric world of The Waste Land probably owes a good deal more to Dante than a quotation or two. For example, not only is Eliot's 'Unreal City' fused with Dante's Limbo by a quotation, but the rest of the scene - the sighing multitude with downcast eyes, the sudden recognition and hailing of an old acquaintance in the person of Stetson - is all in the spirit of the Inferno.

But if we refer to, say, The Waste Land as Eliot's Inferno, it must be with strong reservations. The fleeting figures of Tiresias's vision are never really inhabitants of Dante's world, because they are not seen against the background of the Catholic mythology, and their fate lacks that tremendous finality which strikes us so strongly in, for instance, Dante's picture of Paolo and Francesca.

Dante plays a more important part in the later work, since there both the mythological background and the images used are often close to his own. While Eliot has never written a real Inferno and would wisely never attempt a Paradiso, he has come very close to producing an ordered Purgatorio. It is no coincidence that in the pages of the Purgatorio we see his debt to Dante most clearly.

Eliot's Purgatorio is of course Ash-Wednesday. It would be true to say that all his work since then has also been a kind of Purgatorio, but Ash-Wednesday stands out far more prominently in this respect. It is rich in Dantean imagery, and these images blend with the images of Eliot's own emerging 'personal mythology' as well as with allusions to Catholic liturgical practice. Placing the poem clearly in the context of a Christian scheme of things, Eliot draws closer to both the spirit and the method of Dante. He begins, too, to state a little more explicitly through the Dantean mythology what he had only hinted at through the comparative mythology of The Waste Land: namely, that renewal and life are often if not always achieved through a process involving renunciation or death. The renunciation and death of Ash-Wednesday Parts I and II are unquestionable. Although it is not made clear, the 'blessèd face' renounced at the beginning may be the same face which is found at the end: a face which in Dante's world would certainly be the face of Beatrice. But this is speculation, not certainty; and it is as well to remember that the order in which the Ash-Wednesday series now appears is not the order in which the pieces were originally published. On the other hand, the alteration of the original order is itself significant, and makes for a more shapely structure: renunciation in the first part leads to that acceptance of annihilation which is the beginning of purgation,

in the second; the purgatorial ascent takes place in the third, to be followed by the vision of the garden and the lady so strongly reminiscent of the Earthly Paradise.

Whoever is renounced in the first part (which we cannot establish) is less important than the fact of renunciation itself. With renunciation, vain strivings cease and a prayer for a positive kind of resignation follows: 'Teach us to care and not to care / Teach us to sit still.' This is the state which has been achieved in Part II, where the song of the bones appears. As soon as Part I has ended with its 'Pray for us now and at the hour of our death', we are confronted with the remains of a corpse: the bones only. Three white leopards have fed on the rest. And presiding over the strange scene is a white-gowned lady who honours the Virgin in meditation.

The nature of the leopards has been much discussed. There is no reason to suppose that they have any connection whatever with the three beasts which confront Dante at the beginning of the Inferno. Whatever else Dante's beasts may be intended to represent (whether it be lust, pride and avarice or the sins of youth, manhood and age), they are clearly evil and cause Dante great fear. Eliot's leopards, on the other hand, are obviously beneficent, since the bones are 'glad to be scattered'. The reader gains the impression that the leopards' devouring of the flesh has been almost of the order of a ritual action. We do not think of them as ravening beasts, but as participants in some mysterious process, in which having performed their allotted task they may retire to lick their paws contentedly in the shade of a juniper-tree.

Just as no one interpretation can be accepted as exhausting the significance of Dante's beasts, so there is no simple equivalent for Eliot's very different leopards. Indeed, before seeking any equivalents at all, it is as well to accept the images themselves and allow their visual quality full play. In this way a total impression of the scene begins to form in the mind: an impression of quiet serenity which applies equally to the leopards, the bones and (despite the paradoxes in the song of the bones) the Lady. The leopards are at peace because they

have fed to satiety; the Lady is in the peace of contemplation; the bones are at peace because they are glad to be scattered ('we did little good to each other') and they shine with brightness. The most important visual quality which the leopards, bones and Lady have in common is whiteness. This image of purity is reinforced by the bones' clearness: they are glad to have been stripped of flesh.

It is not in using Dante's three beasts that Eliot is here following Dante: indeed, he is certainly not using the three beasts. But he follows Dante in the method of using his images: that 'allegorical' method which in the Commedia differs so widely from normal allegorical method by using concrete, particularized figures instead of personified abstractions. Eliot's comments on Dante's beasts are helpful here, since they give us some idea of how to approach his own images in Ash-Wednesday:

> I do not recommend, in first reading the first canto of the Inferno, worrying about the identity of the Leopard, the Lion, or the She-Wolf. It is really better, at the start, not to know or care what they do mean. What we should consider is not so much the meaning of the images, but the reverse process, that which led a man having an idea to express it in images. We have to consider the type of mind which by nature and practice tended to express itself in allegory: and, for a competent poet, allegory means clear visual images. And clear visual images are given much more intensity by having a meaning - we do not need to know what that meaning is, but in our awareness of the image we must be aware that the meaning is there too.[1]

Matthiessen, unlike so many of Eliot's commentators, appears to have heeded this warning in examining Eliot's own work: '...we are simply presented the picture of his three beasts "having fed to satiety"; and for their emotional significance here that picture seems adequate; it is unnecessary to translate them into abstractions...'[2]

Elizabeth Drew takes a Jungian view: 'They are in the tradition of all the devouring myths in which the hero is swallowed and emerges regenerated, just as the scattering of the bones tells of the same psychic reality as the dismemberment of Dionysus or of Osiris.'[3] This is a useful comment in that it avoids the pitfall of attempting to attribute a specific abstract meaning to the leopards, while at the same

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1 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) pp. 242-3 (from Dante).
2 The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (3rd edn. 1958) p. 116.
3 T.S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry (1950) p. 136.

time it offers some explanation of the cathartic quality of the passage (like that of 'Death by Water' in The Waste Land), and it leads us back to the very next paragraph in Eliot's essay on Dante. Here he refers to something which sounds remarkably like the Jungian practice of 'active imagination':

> Dante's is a visual imagination. It is a visual imagination in a different sense from that of a modern painter of still life: it is visual in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten [not completely, the Jungian would say], but as good as any of our own. We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions - a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated - was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming.[1]

What Eliot in fact attempts in this passage of Ash-Wednesday is to present images as it were in a vision, not primarily that we should discover an abstract meaning for them, but rather that they should operate upon us, consciously or unconsciously, to communicate a feeling of cleansing and release. And this is undoubtedly what they do. It is achieved largely through the constant emphasis on whiteness:

> The Lady is withdrawn
> In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.
> Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness.

The white leopards strip the flesh down to the white bone, and the whole scene appears to be presided over by the Lady in the white gown. It is because of her that the bones shine with brightness: she it is who has made this purgation possible. (We remember at this point that it was Beatrice herself who descended into Limbo to ask Virgil to accompany Dante on his pilgrimage towards purgation.)

The complete acceptance of annihilation is shown to be the point at which regeneration becomes possible. This is no proposition stated discursively in bald terms, but is certainly the notion which the images convey:

> And I who am here dissembled
> Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
> To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.
> It is this which recovers
> My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions
> Which the leopards reject.

The scene is the desert, the immemorial place of renewal and regeneration;

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1 Op. cit. p. 243.

and the bones are not only the bones of the corpse eaten by leopards: we are reminded too of Ezekiel's desert vision of the valley of dry bones, which were restored to life.

What of the identity of the Lady? It does not really concern us: the main point is that she fulfils her function as an image. She is not the Virgin, since 'She honours the Virgin in meditation'. She is simply a Lady who, with the leopards, the juniper-tree and the desert, presides over the work of purgation, the cleansing of the bones. Whether or not she is also the Lady or veiled sister of the later parts does not matter either.

In the song of the bones appear references to the Rose and the Garden (apparently signifying either the Lady or the Virgin). These images become more and more frequent in Eliot's later work, where the movement towards traditional images is strongly marked (the fire and the rose at the end of Little Gidding are a far cry from the startling 'etherised-evening' imagery of 'Prufrock'). But these traditional images which Eliot adopts are, as we shall see, employed by him in an individual way which reinforces rather than exhausts their suggestive possibilities.

Another feature of the song of the bones which is characteristic of the later Eliot is the constant play of paradox, and what he calls (with reference to Lancelot Andrewes) 'squeezing the word'.[1] We have, for instance, 'End of the endless / Journey to no end'; the Garden 'where all loves end' and the Garden 'where all love ends'. The ambiguities of the word 'end' (cessation, purpose, consummation) are exploited to the full, as are 'Word' and 'world' in Part V.

Part III suggests the ascent of the Purgatorial Mount. No literal Mount Purgatory need, of course, be read into the passage. The general notion of climbing and struggle is sufficient to achieve the poet's purpose, whether or not one has Dante in mind. All that is necessary is that one should be aware of a severe moral struggle in the course of (and partly symbolised by) an ascent. The stairs cannot, as is sometimes

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1 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 347 (from 'Lancelot Andrewes').

suggested, correspond to the three steps at the gate of Purgatory (Canto IX), for the simple reason that Eliot's are clearly stairs with several turnings, not three steps. The passage corresponds, if anything, not to Dante's entrance into Purgatory, but to his actual ascent of the mount.

It might be objected that the souls who are purged in Dante's vision have already passed beyond all moral struggles, and accept their purgation willingly, whereas there is still severe moral struggle in Eliot's passage. But if we concede that Dante himself is never merely an objective spectator in Purgatory, the objection loses force. He remains a prey to personal conflicts, doubts and fears: on awaking from his dream of the Siren, for instance, and even in the Earthly Paradise when confronted by Beatrice (indeed, perhaps more so than ever at that stage). Dante's own purgation is symbolically accomplished by the receiving of the seven P's for the seven sins (Peccata), and their ceremonial removal as he emerges from his tour of each successive cornice. On this view of Dante's moral and emotional involvement, the rough parallel of Eliot's ascent with the climbing of Mount Purgatory stands as legitimate. It is further endorsed by the original title of Part III, 'Al Som de l'Escalina', a quotation from Eliot's well-loved Arnaut Daniel passage in Canto XXVI.

Matthiessen has suggested a more detailed interpretation of Eliot's stairs: that the three divisions correspond to the three divisions of the sins purged on the Mount - Love Perverted, Love Defective and Love Excessive of Secondary Good (or, roughly, self-centredness, sloth, and sensuality). This is a much more likely and pleasing theory than the other, though neither is necessary. He adds an interesting remark which indicates one aspect of the usefulness of mythological images: 'Such a reminder that the stages of the soul which Eliot is depicting correspond also to a completely developed pattern of philosophic and religious thought, would remove the experience from anything purely personal, and would thus enable it to possess a more universal significance.' [1]

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1 The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (3rd edn. 1958) p. 67.

Part IV brings us to what is clearly, whether planned or not, Eliot's version of the Earthly Paradise (and one suspects that here at least part of the resemblance is deliberate). Several differences are obvious: it is clearly a garden in contrast to Dante's forest, Beatrice has much more to say than Eliot's 'silent sister', one figure is in white and blue and the other in green, and so on. But the general atmosphere of the scene is very like Dante's, and other details support the parallel. The trees and flowers, the spring and the stream, are there; and references to the years restored, suggesting a meeting after long separation. The 'jewelled unicorns' also vaguely suggest some procession like one of the Beatrician pageants.

But it is the figure (or possibly figures) associated with the power of intercession and the recovery of lost innocence, which is most significant. Dante's world and Eliot's here meet: the meeting-place, a paradise-scene presided over by a lady with mysterious powers. Dorothy Sayers' description of Dante's Earthly Paradise applies equally well to Eliot's garden:

> Green and cool and fragrant with flowers, murmurous with bird-song and babbling brook and tree-tops rustling in the wind that moves with the turning worlds, holding fast its secret of repatriation and renewal, this is the place that all mankind remembers. This is the forgotten innocence, thrust back by the trauma of Adam's guilt into the unconsciousness of all his seed, the image of which troubles the imagination of some children and all poets with intimations of immortality.[1]

In each case this paradise is reached after a strenuous ascent, and in it a meeting takes place with the lady who presides over it. In Eliot's poem there are signs of two ladies, although from the nature of the poem we cannot be sure. One appears to be the silent sister, but she is not necessarily identical with

> One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing
> White light folded, sheathed about her, folded.

This is the figure restored to the poet's vision, perhaps the 'blessèd face' renounced in Part I. If this is a separate figure from the 'veiled sister', they nevertheless both have features in common with Dante's

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1 Purgatory (Penguin Books, 1955) pp. 18-19.

Beatrice.[1] The silent sister is clearly associated with powers of intercession; the figure sheathed in white light is more likely to represent an experience of the recovery of innocence. This recovery or restoration is an experience treated also in Marina. The fact that it should be expressed through the image of a female figure provides plenty of opportunity for Jungian speculation on the rôle of the anima in the individuation process suggested by the shape and imagery of both Eliot's and Dante's work; but whether or not we employ the technical terms of Jungian analysis, the images of Ash-Wednesday IV clearly proceed, like those of Dante's Beatrician pageants, from what Eliot calls the world of the 'high dream'.[2] Miss Gardner has, significantly, another name for it: she speaks of 'the flute-player in blue and green, and the "silent sister veiled in white and blue", from the world of private myth-making.'[3] Where Eliot's 'high dream' and Dante's have so many notable features in common, the question whether individual myth-making has been subordinated to conscious myth-using, or vice versa, is indeterminate. Common features do not necessarily imply borrowing; on the other hand, the poetry of vision need not be devoid of borrowing. In either case, Eliot in Ash-Wednesday inhabits Dante's world, whether he has knowingly stepped into it, or strayed into it unawares. Considering the relevance of his Dante essay of 1929, however, the latter does seem unlikely. This does not preclude private myth-making as well: but that is a process which, in Eliot, asserts itself fully only at a later stage.

Unlike Dante's, Eliot's Earthly Paradise does not become the setting for translation to a Paradiso. The experience to which it gives expression takes place on a much more modest scale, and is succeeded by renewed conflict and questioning in Part V. The process of Part IV is, in Leavis's words,

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1 Features may be found in common with Dante's other helpers too, such as St. Lucy who intercedes for him, and the lady Matilda whom he meets walking among the flowers in the Earthly Paradise ('Who walked between the violet and the violet' begins Eliot's Part IV). But these are minor figures in Dante's world, and their significance is included and exceeded in the figure of Beatrice herself.

2 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 262 (from Dante).

3 The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949) p. 100.

> A process analogous to Dante's; but the modern poet can make no pretence to Dante's certitude - to his firm possession of his vision. The ambiguity that constructs a precarious base for rejoicing in the fourth poem brings doubt and fear of inner treachery in the fifth.[1]

This fifth section reverts to the rather tortuous manner of the first in which a word or phrase is turned over and over, 'rubbed and questioned'; but here yielding more fruitful results through that 'squeezing' of the word in the manner of Andrewes (by means also of a quotation from Andrewes) which is applied to the terms 'Word' and 'world'. Dante's world now recedes, and what follows is a series of observations and petitions addressed to the veiled sister rather in the style of some of the choruses from The Rock. The lines tend toward the sententious, and lack the visionary intensity of the rest of Ash-Wednesday. But at the end of the section, the phrase 'spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed' reminds us that under Beatrice's reproaches that is precisely what Dante is doing: shedding the last trace of original sin. In the Purgatorio this is associated with his drinking of the waters of Lethe; but in Eliot's renewed concern in Parts V and VI with renunciation, we are reminded of the renewed conflict in Dante as he faces Beatrice, before the final symbolic act of purification. As they meet this last conflict begins, and, says Eliot,

> in the dialogue that follows we see the passionate conflict of the old feelings with the new; the effort and triumph of a new renunciation, greater than the renunciation of the grave, because a renunciation of feelings that persist beyond the grave.[2]

The renunciation of Ash-Wednesday is not on such a high level of intensity, but the order of experience has close enough parallels to Dante's to confirm the suggestion that the poets are moving in the same world of vision and of spiritual experience. Their 'dreams cross' in another sense than the one intended by Eliot in his use of the phrase.

Part VI opens with a meditation on 'turning', suggested like that of Part I by the Ash-Wednesday lesson from Joel. But whereas in Part I we read 'Because I do not hope to turn again', in Part VI we find instead

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1 New Bearings in English Poetry (New edn. 1950) p. 127.
2 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 263 (from Dante).

'Although'. The two phrases introduce respectively the beginning and end points of the spiritual process undergone in the course of the poem. In Part I we find the speaker at a state of disillusionment in which he despairs of ever turning again successfully for joy and solace to 'The infirm glory of the positive hour'. This despair of his own powers and of all that the transitory world can give leads him to a state in which he can only renounce these things and cry and wait for illumination from a source which is not transient. In other words he is undergoing what the evangelist would call the conviction of inadequacy and of sin. The poem bears this out quite clearly:

> And pray to God to have mercy upon us
> And I pray that I may forget
> These matters that with myself I too much discuss
> Too much explain
> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Let these words answer
> For what is done, not to be done again
> May the judgement not be too heavy upon us

He has reached the point of complete stillness and emptiness, can only wait and can only rejoice in the waiting ('Teach us to sit still'). This is a form of that 'dark night of the soul' spoken of by St. John of the Cross and dealt with again in East Coker:

> 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.

This point is the point of ripeness for spiritual regeneration, a stripping and cleansing or a death and rebirth of the soul. This process is what we see in the following poems of Ash-Wednesday. In Part VI, with the 'conversion' complete, there return again the temptations to transient joys, and 'Although I do not hope to turn again' and 'though I do not wish to wish these things', the beauty and vitality of transient things challenge the speaker's appointed way of asceticism. The failure of worldly solace in Part I corresponds roughly, in the allegory of spiritual experience, with Dante's losing his way in the wood at the beginning of the Inferno. But there is no parallel in Dante for the renewed conflicts of Parts V and VI, for the same reason that there is in Eliot no parallel to the beatific vision. The recovery of innocence in Eliot's Earthly

Paradise has not been a lasting experience.

In Part VI the 'sister' is still addressed, as in Part V, but her milieu is no longer Dantean. The world of Eliot's private myth-making comes a little more strongly to the fore. Images recurrent throughout his work appear here, and take on added significance from their use elsewhere. Acceptance of the continuing possibility of spiritual desolation seems to be emphasised when from Part V of The Waste Land ('Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think') we come to the end of Ash-Wednesday:

> Teach us to sit still
> Even among these rocks,
> Our peace in his will
> And even among these rocks
> Sister, mother
> And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
> Suffer me not to be separated
>
> And let my cry come unto thee.

The juxtaposition of the line 'Our peace in his will' with the image of the sea echoes the oft-quoted lines of Piccarda in the Paradiso, where the will of God is itself the sea to which, like rivers, all things flow:

> ...and His will is our peace;
> This is the sea whereunto all things fare
> That it creates or nature furnishes.[1]

But the range of suggestiveness of the sea-image is determined by Eliot's own pattern of recurrent images. The passage in the middle of Part VI expresses not merely an experience of temptation, but also an experience of release. The insidious power of sensuous delights is suggested in the third part, in the scene viewed from the 'slotted window'; but here, the imagery of the sea and granite shores and whirling birds conveys a sense of ecstatic release absent from the other passage:

> ...though I do not wish to wish these things
> From the wide window towards the granite shore
> The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
> Unbroken wings
>
> And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
> In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
> And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
> For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
> Quickens to recover
> The cry of quail and the whirling plover...

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1 Paradiso III 85-87, in Miss Sayers' translation.

This temptation to rebel against the demands of renunciation appears less disturbing than the insidious temptation of Part III; the images which, in the interests of an apparently ascetic 'Way', here need to be rejected (to use the terms of Charles Williams) can elsewhere be affirmed: in Marina, for instance. There we find no suggestion of the Way of Rejection: on the contrary, the moment of illumination and spiritual renewal is captured through the affirmation of these images of ecstatic release:

> 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.

Outside of Ash-Wednesday Dante's work continues to impinge upon Eliot's, but less constantly. It becomes apparent from time to time in scattered allusions: the first line of Animula, quietly yoking the poem to Marco Lombardo's discourse on the progress of the soul and the problems of free will, [1] seems to have a gently ironic intent. For the 'little soul' of Eliot's poem has a poor chance of developing fully and in freedom: 'The pain of living and the drug of dreams / Curl up the small soul'. The irony becomes stronger as we arrive at a direct contrast with the beginning:

> Issues from the hand of time [no longer God] the simple soul
> Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame...

The passing cry 'O Mantuan' in 'Difficulties of a Statesman' echoes Sordello's greeting to Virgil, [2] which is followed by a lament on the state of Italy faintly parallel to the weary lament of Eliot's poem. The first Thames-maiden's song in The Waste Land is of course related to those words of La Pia which also interested Ezra Pound. [3] Their double-edged irony has been commented on elsewhere.

But the most notable passage is one not so much of quotation or allusion as of imitation: the description of the poet's meeting with the 'familiar compound ghost' in Part II of Little Gidding. Yet it is neither any lines suggestive of Dante nor the attempted imitation of his

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1 Purgatorio XVI 85ff.
2 Ibid. VI 73ff.
3 Ibid. V 134.

style and rhythm which is most important. It is the whole situation evoked: a situation which takes again into the world of Dante, in which there occur sudden meetings with barely recognizable acquaintances, followed by passages of reminiscence or instruction. The Danteam terza rima cements the entirely conscious connection on the level of prosody.

The scene is London, just after an air raid during the Second World War. But in the visionary meeting during his patrol, the air-raid warden is again in the land where 'dreams cross'. Hell, earth and Purgatory appear to be indistinguishably fused together, just as the 'familiar compound ghost' is himself neither Dante nor Virgil nor Brunetto Latini nor Arnaut Daniel nor even Mallarmé, though hints of all these are present. He is simply a 'compound' ghost, carrying all the suggestions of a dead master in the art of poetry. Like Paolo and Francesca he is blown towards the speaker, but his 'brown baked features' remind us of Brunetto Latini (whose meeting with Dante in Hell seems to be one of the high points of the Inferno for Eliot). [1] The sudden recognition in the course of a weary patrol reminds us of that cry 'Stetson!' at another Inferno-like meeting in The Waste Land. But whereas at that meeting the conversation, ostensibly a series of taunts, hinted at a renewal of fertility through death, here it describes the death-in-life of an old age unilluminated by grace (even if it be the old age of a visionary poet): the only remedy is the grace achieved through purgation.

> From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
> Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
> Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

These lines are the essential connection between Parts II and IV of Little Gidding. They prepare us to recognize the ambivalence of the lyric's 'dove descending'. The dove with the tongues of terrifying flame is the Holy Ghost: but the terror of this divine visitation is emphasised by our mental connection of it with the bomber, 'the dark dove with the flickering tongue'. The warlike intensity of the dove's

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1 Inferno XV 26-27, and Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 247.

visitation is reinforced by our realisation that this is normally a symbol of peace. But the really vital connection between the doves of Parts II and IV is their association with fire. That 'refining fire' is indeed the image of the purgation which the Holy Ghost makes possible. It is in strong contrast to the purely destructive fire of 'the dark dove with the flickering tongue'. So the ambivalence of the dove-image merely contributes to the ambivalence of the fire-image. In Part IV fire assumes at least two more rôles: it is the fire of redemptive divine love, and the wasting fire of vain desires. When we consider the multiple significance of this imagery and look back at Dante's Arnaut Daniel passage, we see that in this way of handling images, as in so many other respects, Dante is Eliot's master.

This passage (Canto XXVI of the Purgatorio) is that part of Dante's work to which, more than any other, Eliot is indebted. Richards has recognized this, but misinterpreted the nature of his debt by attributing it to his concern with sex, 'the problem of our generation, as religion was the problem of the last.' [1] Eliot's reply is predictably tart: 'One might think that sex and religion were "problems" like Free Trade and Imperial Preference; it seems odd that the human race should have gone on for so many thousands of years before it suddenly realised that religion and sex, one right after the other, presented problems.' [2]

Eliot's real concern with Canto XXVI lies in its depiction of the willing acceptance of the refining fire, and in the way in which the ambivalence of that fire-image is exploited. His comment on the quality of Purgatorial suffering is extremely important:

> The souls in purgatory suffer because they wish to suffer, for purgation. And observe that they suffer more actively and keenly, being souls preparing for blessedness, than Virgil suffers in eternal limbo. In their suffering is hope, in the anaesthesia of Virgil is hopelessness; that is the difference. [3]

It is because the suffering in Purgatory has this positive end that it is accepted willingly, and that the sufferers can sing joyous songs of

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1 Principles of Literary Criticism (1926) p. 292.
2 The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933) pp. 126-7.
3 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 256 (from Dante).

expectation even while they weep for pain. Eliot's own translation of the Arnaut passage makes this clear:

> 'I am Arnold, who weeps and goes singing. I see in thought all the past folly. And I see with joy the day for which I hope, before me. And so I pray you, by that Virtue which leads you to the topmost of the stair - be mindful in due time of my pain.' Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.[1]

The eagerness not to lose a moment's opportunity of purgation explains the unwillingness of the souls on the seventh cornice to overstep the flames in which they suffer.

At the same time, the fire which purges them symbolises also the sin from which they are being purged. While this principle applies to many of the punishments and means of purgation in the Inferno and the Purgatorio, the aptness here is particularly striking. 'Poetic justice' would be far too poor a term to describe the perfect symbolism of the sufferings Dante metes out. It is the treatment of images according to his own particular allegorical method which determines the nature of these afflictions. The proud, who looked down on others, are compelled by the weight of heavy stones to continue looking down; the envious, who could not endure to look on joy, have their eyes sealed up; as wrath blinds the judgement and suffocates the natural feelings, the wrathful are enveloped in a pall of smoke which blinds and suffocates them; the covetous, who minded only earthly things, are fettered prostrate on the earth. These are the penances in which souls are purged by enduring in symbolic terms the logical consequences of their sin. Two other penances (running for the slothful and starvation for the gluttonous) effect purgation through the opposite of the sin. The penance of the seventh cornice has elements in common with both groups, but belongs properly with the first. Although the penitents are denied any sexual congress, they continue to endure the symbolic burning of their lust in the form of the fire which torments them. The fire stands both for their lust itself, and for the fire of

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1 Ibid. Eliot has used many parts of this passage: Ara vos prec ('And so I pray you') was the original title of Poems 1920 and Al som de l'escalina ('to the topmost of the stair') of Ash-Wednesday III; Sovegna vos ('be mindful') is quoted in Ash-Wednesday IV; and the last sentence, Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina, in The Waste Land V as one of the 'fragments I have shored against my ruins'.

the divine love which burns away that lust with its purity. Fire is clearly the most traditional, the most strongly ambivalent, and the most effective in raising immediate response, of these images of purgation. Both its traditional and its ambivalent nature would appeal to Eliot; and at the same time its power of eliciting response in the mind of the non-religious reader facilitates communication with a society which is for the most part devoid of any pre-organized pattern of mythological images.

The most important line of the Canto is for Eliot the last: 'Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.' For it is not, as Richards supposed, the sin, but the penance and its relation to the sin, which is of special interest to him. There is another aspect of the penance of the seventh cornice whose ambivalence is notable: running around the mountain in opposite directions are the penitents of homosexual and heterosexual lust respectively, and as they pass each other they exchange swift embraces and kisses. These demonstrations of love symbolise the sin from which they are being purged; at the same time the swiftness of the embraces and kisses makes them entirely chaste, free from any element of sensual dalliance. Charles Williams refers to this as the two great Ways (of Affirmation and of Rejection) becoming one, and 'those who mourn for unholy kisses meet with true kisses'. [1] The rejection of the old, disorderly love consists in the most vivid affirmation of true and orderly love: the two spiritual Ways, Rejection of the love of created things and Affirmation of the love of created things, have been reconciled. But it is in the Way of Affirmation that Dante is really master. 'Love' is the answer to the fundamental question about every sin purged on the Mount: all sin is simply Love gone awry, whether it has become Perverted, Defective, or Excessive Love of Secondary Good. The beginning of all sin, as well as the beginning of all purity, is Love. And Love is also that which purges away the sin to reveal that Love which lay always at its core. Therefore in Part IV of Little Gidding 'Love' is

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1 The Figure of Beatrice (1943) p. 172.

the answer to the question 'Who then devised the torment?' (of purgative suffering). There is torment either way: the torment of 'sin and error' or the torment of the Love-devised suffering which will purge us from them:

> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire.

Has Eliot really attempted to reconcile the Ways of Affirmation and of Rejection, as Williams held that Dante had done? The question is perhaps an unfair one, since the achievement of such a reconciliation is more likely to emerge from a poet's work than to be imposed upon it by a conscious effort. There are signs in Four Quartets that the two Ways are closely juxtaposed: images associated with those 'moments of illumination' characteristic of Eliot's later work are followed or accompanied in both East Coker Part III and Little Gidding Part V by references to the ascetic Way of Rejection. The passage beginning 'Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning' which affirms the images of ecstatic vision, is followed immediately by a statement of mystical asceticism which is almost a direct translation from St. John of the Cross, the gist of which appears in the line: 'You must go by the way of dispossession.' And at the end of Little Gidding the lines recapitulate several of Eliot's recurrent images of ecstatic vision, but the condition to which these lead is also stated, in a telling parenthesis, to be

> A condition of complete simplicity
> (Costing not less than everything)

But whether these juxtapositions are a complete fusion of the two Ways is doubtful. The moments of illumination captured in Four Quartets are merely glimpses of a vision, momentary and fleeting ('Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after.'), which can only be given permanent meaning through severe ascetic discipline. The two Ways appear to be united by a kind of rhythm of spiritual experience in which they alternate and so give meaning each to the other. There does not seem to be any passage in which, as on Dante's seventh cornice, the Rejection of the love of created things and the Affirmation of the love of created things are united and reconciled by being expressed in the same action.

In the most affirmative of all Eliot's poems, Marina, the Way of Rejection is entirely absent. In much of his other work it heavily outweighs the Way of Affirmation (and one of the epigraphs to Sweeney Agonistes is taken directly from St. John of the Cross: 'Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.'). The nearest that we come to a reconciliation of the two is the Quartets (in which so many other things are reconciled); but even there it is incomplete.

It was almost certainly Dante's central image, the figure of Beatrice, that enabled him to reconcile the two Ways until finally, in the beatific vision, we have pure Affirmation. It is in this beatific vision that his love for the image of Beatrice is spiritually consummated. T.S. Eliot lacks a Beatrice: his 'My daughter' of Marina is the nearest approximation, but no comparison can justly be made; and for all the Affirmation at the end of The Elder Statesman, Monica who makes it possible pales into complete insignificance beside Beatrice. The lack of an image comparable with Beatrice is one measure of the vast inferiority of Eliot to Dante as a visionary poet. Although biographical detail is in the strict sense irrelevant to this study, we are safe in assuming that there was no figure in Eliot's personal experience who could assume the mythological status of Dante's Beatrice.

Dante had, as Eliot remarked, the added benefit of a mythology which had undergone a thorough absorption into the life of his time. Eliot's contemporary world lacks one unified, ordered vision of the universe in which all things, natural law and spiritual experience included, are intimately bound up together. Many parties, sects and communities have their 'myths' (often that form of myth manqué which we call an ideology), but there is no comprehensive mythology to provide that 'primeval, greater and more relevant reality' [1] which could combine sanctions for the preservation of social order, for moral behaviour and for the direction of spiritual experience, with the vision of a transcendent

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1 Malinowski's phrase: see page 3.

cosmic order. Dante's Europe, on the other hand, was united in acceptance of the mediaeval Catholic world-view. In Dante's time, says Eliot, 'Europe, with all its dissensions and dirtiness, was mentally more united than we can now conceive.' [1] And a widely accepted comprehensive mythology was, irrespective of its literal truth, of infinite artistic value to the poet.

Within the framework of that Catholic mythology, Dante was able to construct the world of his Commedia. The detailed geography of the three realms is his own, but the three realms themselves belong to the mythology on which he was dependent. Theological notions about the nature and working of Divine Grace were the property of the Church; but through them Dante was able to raise the image of Beatrice to the status of a mythological figure.

In embracing the Catholic Christian tradition, [2] not merely as a matter of personal faith (which is not of direct interest to the critic) but as a source of poetic imagery, Eliot placed himself in a position where he could profit much more directly from the example of Dante than he had done up to that point. So it is not surprising that Ash-Wednesday, the first of his major poems to be published after his entry into the Church, shows the clearest traces of the Dantean mythology. In entering the Dantean world he appropriated both a rich fund of mythological imagery and a renewed and deepened awareness of the double-edged quality of traditional symbols. These things cannot, in the twentieth century, exert the same communicative power that they did in Dante's time. That they still exert as much power as they do, and are capable of gaining widespread 'poetic assent' independently of 'philosophical belief', [3] is remarkable enough.

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1 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 240 (from Dante).
2 The fact that the particular tradition which Eliot embraced was Anglo-Catholic does not call in question the phrase 'Catholic Christian tradition'.
3 An important distinction made by Eliot in his Dante essay: see Selected Essays p. 257.

C H A P T E R V

MYTHS FROM GREEK DRAMA

One of the characters, named 'E.', in Eliot's 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' (1928), remarks that 'it is as much the lack of moral and social conventions as the lack of artistic conventions that stands in the way of poetic drama to-day.' [1] It is difficult not to hear in this the voice of Eliot himself. His work in poetic drama is a series of attempts to overcome this problem of a lack of moral and social conventions, or rather the problem of communication which follows as a logical consequence upon it.

It is no accident that both periods in the history of western culture in which drama arose were periods singularly well endowed with accepted moral and social conventions. Ancient Athens, admittedly a small and in many respects a unique community, possessed strong conventions governing thought and behaviour at the time when Aeschylean tragedy was in its infancy. Mediaeval Catholicism with its own conventions was the most powerful single force in Europe when the miracle and mystery plays came into being. In each case a rich mythology, which had as yet become neither an antiquarian curiosity nor the subject of demythologising programmes, held sway over the minds and lives of the whole community. Even those who may have tried to repudiate it intellectually could not escape its pervasive influence at other levels: the living mythology was as much a part of the community's life as the air it breathed.

In each case, too, the accepted mythology was enshrined in ritual forms which formed in turn the context out of which the drama arose. The vexed question whether any myth arose out of, or itself gave rise to, its related ritual is of no consequence here; the close relations between

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1 Selected Essays (3rd edn. 1951) p. 54.

myths and ritual, and between ritual and drama, are well enough established for us to accept them.[1] The question 'Which came first: the myth or the ritual?' does not matter to us since we are able in any event to assert that the drama arose from the ritual and used the myth. Perhaps in doing so it tended to divorce the myth from the ritual by giving it an independent existence; on the other hand, the ritual element in primitive drama was no doubt too strong for such a divorce to be immediately possible. It has become almost a commonplace to say that those who watched the plays of Aeschylus being performed were not detached spectators, but participants assisting at a religious function, like worshippers at Mass; but the remark does illuminate to some extent the aims of Eliot in his poetic drama, especially in Murder in the Cathedral.

Of the revival of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin with plays closely related to Irish mythology, Ian Scott-Kilvert has written:

> The spectators at the Abbey could feel the plays which they saw to be part of their tradition, their accents, their ancestry, their national idiosyncracies, in short the hidden poetry of their lives. In the twentieth century this is probably as close as we can get to the ritual element which lies at the heart of drama, the sense of heredity which links us to the earth and its rhythms of decay and renewal.[2]

The gist of this is that the spectators were able to feel that they were not merely spectators but in some way participants. Eliot in Murder in the Cathedral has aimed at eliciting a similar response from his audience. But his aims go further than this. Just as the ritual element in primitive drama made the audience into participants, so the representation of the myth was accepted by the audience as a form of instruction - not merely 'religious' instruction (since in those societies the dual concepts of 'religious' and 'secular' were unknown), but general instruction about historical matters, spiritual truth, and moral and civic responsibility. Similarly Eliot has often had an element of didactic purpose in his poetic drama, and in his case it usually is of the religious kind. If

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1 See for example Ancient Art and Ritual (1913) and other works of Jane Harrison.

2 'The Language of Modern Drama', Mine 4 (Summer 1950) p. 188.

'didactic' be questioned as a suitable term, we may without unfairness substitute 'homiletic' or even 'evangelistic'. For it is in his plays rather than in his poems (with the possible exception of Ash-Wednesday) that he comes closest to explicit statement about the validity and necessity of Christian belief. There is little doubt that his aim is to instruct and to challenge as well as to entertain; and he sometimes resorts to elaborate devices (like the 'sanatorium' to which Celia goes in The Cocktail Party) in order to allay the suspicions of his audience, lest psychological barriers should be set up by too early detection of his intentions.

His objects, then, were twofold: he wished his audience to have a sense, before the end of the play, of being both challenged and at least sometimes 'included'. The plays are written with an intense awareness of the auditorium, and this makes it dangerous and difficult to judge them adequately outside the theatre.

Bearing in mind the requirements of the theatre, we may add that a subsidiary reason for a dramatist's use of myths may be their usefulness in achieving the necessary compression and concentration, in order that a theme may be fully explored within two or three hours. A mythical theme or central archetype, even, can be made to function in plays like a great extended image, making implicit comment on the action at the same time that it provides a narrative skeleton and imparts an underlying unity to it. But - and the qualification is important - this can only apply to mythical themes when they are consciously apprehended by the audience: and that becomes less and less true of Eliot's successive plays. Whether or not a central archetypal image can operate similarly on the unconscious level, is a problem which begs the Jungian question and which cannot be dealt with in detail here. But on the conscious level, an interesting use of the mythical 'skeleton' is apparent in Gide's Oedipus. The ancient myth is there used as much for its being a widely-known story as for its particular features qua myth. Absolved from having to waste time on narrative exposition, since he can expect his audience to know the rough outline of the story, Gide is able to

devote almost all his attention to achieving his main satirical purpose. He satirises a parvenu 'myth' through a kind of parody of an old one. The ancient sin of hubris is transformed into a modern notion about man's self-sufficiency, and this is mocked at both through the grotesque bumbling of Creon and through Oedipus's answer to the Sphinx's riddle.

> It was I and I alone who understood that the only password, if one didn't want to be eaten alive by the Sphinx, was Man. No doubt it took a certain courage to bring out that word. But I had it ready even before I heard the riddle; and my strength was that I would admit of no other answer, no matter what the question might be.[1]

Anouilh in Antigone uses the same device of economy (the myth) for a different purpose: in order to be able to tease out at length, in a dialogue between Antigone and Creon, the problem of political authority.

Murder in the Cathedral is the only play of Eliot's in which he exploited many of the advantages which a myth gives: familiarity of the story, economy in exposition, opportunity to challenge or instruct, and means of gaining some measure of audience-participation. This is very likely why it remains the most successful and deservedly the most popular of his plays. His debt to Greek drama in the other plays sometimes proves a liability rather than an asset: for while he continues to take suggestions for plots from the myths of Greek plays, his increasing concern to conceal this derivation deprives him of many of the advantages which can only accrue from a conscious recognition of the mythical subject. Indeed, in the last plays it is the plot alone which he uses (and that freely adapted). While this independence of the Greek 'myth-world' gives them a certain unembarrassed autonomy, the characters tend to suffer by becoming pale and two-dimensional. What they have to say is important and holds our interest, but there is very little illusion of their having any independent existence outside of what they say and what is said about them. Yet it is also true that these late plays (The Cocktail Party, The Confidential Clerk and The Elder Statesman) achieve a certain measure of success precisely because their link with the myth has become so tenuous. It is where Eliot tries to link the

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1 Oedipus & Theseus (translated by J. Russell, 1950) p. 41.

myth-world and the 'real' world before an audience conscious of this, without fusing them properly into one world, that he suffers the worst failure: namely, in The Family Reunion. The moral seems to be that if one wants to use the myth one must either place the play fully and frankly in the mythical context, or else retain only the slimmest connection with it via the outline of the story.

These comments will be dealt with in greater detail in individual discussion of the plays. The important thing to note from them here is that Eliot uses the myths in his plays very differently from the way in which he uses them in his poems. What measure of success the later plays achieve, they tend to achieve independently of the myth used. However, the only play which takes place on a full-blooded 'mythological' plane does depend on that myth-context for its success. This is Murder in the Cathedral.

This is, ironically, the only play in which he uses as his mythical theme a Christian and not an ancient Greek subject. Ironically again, it is more deeply indebted to the Greek drama than any of the other plays in which stories from Greek mythology are used. Since it treats its Christian theme in much the same way as Greek drama treated its myths, some discussion of it is necessary although it conflicts with the general title of this chapter.

The circumstances of its composition are unusually important. Composed for a festival of the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, it presupposed a certain religious background on the part of its audience (just as Aeschylus was able to do). Performed in the chapter-house of the very cathedral in which Becket died, it could with justification use Becket himself as a figure of mythological status. The story of his martyrdom could be made to function in a way similar to the 'accepted myths' (such as the binding of Prometheus) in the plays of Aeschylus. This both eliminated the need for detailed exposition of a new plot-situation, allowing maximum concentration on the play's particular handling of its theme; and more important, it united actors and audience from the beginning in their common acceptance of that subject as well as

their presupposed knowledge of it.

The bond between actors and audience was further cemented by a device characteristic of Greek drama: the chorus. The women of Canterbury are deliberately represented as types of the average person, the ordinary man who does 'not wish anything to happen', to whom the demands of great good or great evil, of any intensity of awareness and experience, are disturbing and unwelcome. They are content to go on 'Living and partly living', and are fearful of being drawn by Thomas into any pattern of action outside the normal scope of their emotional and spiritual responses, or which might enlarge the scope of those responses - usually a painful process. These things are given explicit statement in the choruses, in which the women of Canterbury are in effect representing the audience in the action, making articulate their unexpressed and perhaps only half-recognised responses to the situation.

The real protagonist of the play is not so much Thomas as the chorus and therefore, implicitly, the audience. True, Thomas does have a conflict, presented in dramatic terms through the four tempters. But in the case of the first three we are witnessing no more than a resumé of temptations already conquered before the play's action begins. The only real conflict Thomas experiences within the course of the play is the fourth temptation. Once he has rejected that, and set the seal upon his rejection in his Christmas sermon, his pathema is completed. No dramatic conflict attends the actual killing: it is like the ritual slaughter of an appointed victim. It is merely the necessary occasion of the catharsis experienced by the chorus (and implicitly, of course, by the audience):

> Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take the stone from the stone, take the skin from the arm, take the muscle from the bone, and wash them. Wash the stone, wash the bone, wash the brain, wash the soul, wash them wash them![1]

The change wrought in the chorus by Thomas's martyrdom is shown at its clearest and simplest by the change in tense from 'We do not wish anything to happen' to 'We did not wish anything to happen'.[2] It is not merely

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1 Murder in the Cathedral (1935) p. 77.
2 Ibid. pp. 18 and 76.

that the dreaded event has occurred: in doing so it has forced upon the chorus self-knowledge and a conviction of sin instead of the self-doubt that evades involvement:

> Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as type of the common man,
> Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire;
> Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of God, the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted;
> Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of God;
> Who fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,
> Less than we fear the love of God.[1]

Accordingly the catharsis that accompanies Thomas's death is for them inseparable from an awareness of defilement.

The chorus's involvement of the audience is underlined by the knights who, having 'completed the murder' (the stage direction suggests the ritual quality of the action) turn and address the audience directly. Their justifications for the murder consist of statements in which the audience, if possessing any degree of self-knowledge, must recognise certain of its own familiar attitudes.

Through these devices the religious purpose of the play is achieved. The audience has been involved throughout. Detached contemplation, however valid it may be for the reader of his poems, is clearly not regarded by Eliot as an adequate attitude for a spectator at this play. Long before writing Murder in the Cathedral he had written: 'The play, like a religious service, should be a stimulant to make life more tolerable and augment our ability to live.'[2]

Using a Christian 'myth' and the conventions of Greek tragedy, he has in Murder in the Cathedral achieved much more successful communication between stage and auditorium than elsewhere. The Rock's failure in this respect is no great cause for regret, since in any case involvement in a pageant cannot be of the same order as involvement in a play.

His earliest attempt at poetic drama, Sweeney Agonistes, was an experiment primarily in rhythms and verse-forms, and only secondarily in

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1 Op.cit. pp. 87-88.
2 Introduction to his mother's (Charlotte Eliot) dramatic poem Savonarola (1926) pp. xi-xii.

communication. Yet there is an interesting connection between the way in which Sweeney communicates with the audience, and the epigraph from Aeschylus placed before the fragments. It is the cry of Orestes, pursued by the Furies: 'You don't see them, you don't - but I see them: they are hunting me down, I must move on.' The words 'You don't... but I see them' apply not only to the Furies of the myth, and to the fears of Sweeney himself (is he the man who 'did a girl in'?), but to all those meanings in his remarks which are hidden from his hearers on the stage, but grasped by his (more perceptive) hearers in the audience. Doris and the other visionless characters understand only the surface meaning of his words. The story he feels compelled to tell (it looks like a thinly disguised confession) is accepted by the others as simply a chilling tale to add spice to the conversation. Sweeney's knowledge of this barrier in communication is expressed in words addressed half to the audience:

> I gotta use words when I talk to you
> But if you understand or if you don't
> That's nothing to me and nothing to you

Communication is made with the audience by allowing it to overhear (in more senses than one) words which on the stage achieve no communication at all. As the Furies are invisible to Orestes' hearers, so the horror which haunts Sweeney eludes the consciousness of his companions: it becomes apparent instead to the audience. In the same way the Furies of The Family Reunion elude the consciousness of Harry's family but are clearly visible to the audience.[1] The foreshadowing of The Family Reunion that we get in the Sweeney fragments is emphasised by their two epigraphs: the Orestes one, which applies to Harry as well as to Sweeney, and the other from St. John of the Cross, whose relevance to the negative Way embraced by Harry is clearer than its relevance to Sweeney himself: 'Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.'

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1 That is to say, they were visible to the audience in the original productions. The failure of this in terms of the stage led Eliot in his Poetry and Drama essay (1951) to advise that in future they only be imagined. See On Poetry and Poets (1957) p. 84.

Harry's version of the Orestean cry comes immediately on his return to Wishwood: 'Can't you see them? You don't see them, but I see them, / And they see me.' [1] This applies to the Eumenides which he really does see; but like Sweeney he is also conscious of the barrier to communication which prevents the other characters from seeing the meaning of his words:

> But how can I explain, how can I explain to you?
> You will understand less after I have explained it.
> All that I could hope to make you understand
> Is only events: not what has happened. [2]

Again Eliot presents a group of characters with varying degrees of consciousness, this time in the framework of a semi-psychological drama. Harry is its subject, and he and Agatha are the only fully 'aware' persons in Eliot's system of graded consciousness. A little less aware is Mary, and the rest of the family are, like Sweeney's companions, visionless - until at the end Amy is forced into some measure of awareness. At the end, too, the nature of Harry's awareness is changed.

This gradation of consciousness is emphasised by the device of the Eumenides, which at first Harry recognises, [3] and afterwards Mary and Agatha. But it is an unfortunate device, standing out not only as the chief symbol but also as the chief flaw in the play. The weakness proceeds from Eliot's attempt to combine elements of both the psychological and the supernatural in the play. Its being a semi-psychological drama is the cause of its failure.

Eliot is concerned here with the inherited consequences of sin and with its expiation, with a sense of guilt, and with all these things treated in the context of a strong mother-son relationship. These topics had been dealt with at length both by modern psychology and by ancient Greek drama; and Eliot, in trying to use the resources of both approaches, fell between two stools.

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1 The Family Reunion (1939) p. 25.
2 Ibid. p. 28.
3 Mary seems at first (p. 62) not to have seen them, but later (pp. 120-1) it appears that she had seen them, yet pretended not to, presumably in order to reassure him. Downing, not a member of the family, sees them before even Harry does.

Fundamentally his approach to the problem of guilt is from the point of view of Christianity. Why then did he not treat his subject from a frankly Christian angle? The reason lies in the nature of the audience for which he was writing. It was not the Christian audience of the Canterbury chapter-house, but an average secularized modern audience, to whom the language of Christianity is for the most part irrelevant and meaningless. In writing Murder in the Cathedral he could take it for granted that his audience shared certain common assumptions and viewpoints with him. Here it was otherwise. He must needs proceed by a method of indirections. Accordingly he adopted a well-known theme, the Orestes myth, which by demanding poetic assent and not philosophical belief [1] would not be as likely to alienate his audience as a specifically Christian theme. The psychological approach also presented itself. Several years earlier he had written that psychology 'can revive, and has already to some extent revived, truths long since known to Christianity, but mostly forgotten and ignored, and it can put them in a form and a language understandable by modern people to whom the language of Christianity is not only dead but undecipherable'. [2] It seemed the obvious solution for a study of guilt constructed upon a rough narrative outline drawn from Greek mythology.

But instead of transporting this narrative outline completely into the modern world and treating it from the point of view of psychology alone (the only sure method if he wanted to use psychology at all), he imported some supernatural figures from the world of the ancient myth: namely, the Eumenides. This inevitably meant a conflict between the supernatural and the psychological elements. When the Eumenides appear suddenly in an English drawing room, the purely psychological and frankly supernatural worlds clash.

Had Eliot simply translated the notions of Orestes' guilt and the Atreid curse into psychological terms and so dealt with the psychological

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1 See page 95 & Note 3.
2 Quoted from an article in The Listener of March 30, 1932, by Elizabeth Drew: T.S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry (1950) p. 26.

results of guilt in a family, his play might have succeeded. He could still have achieved some transference of significance from the myth (only a little, it is true) by making the parallel clear through the use of similar names and a few correspondences in the details of the plot. Such had been Eugene O'Neill's aim when he too used modern psychology and the Orestes myth; but because he avoided any shock tactics like direct contact with the myth figures themselves, his huge Mourning Becomes Electra is, for all its gloomy rumbling, more convincing than The Family Reunion. We can accept the fates of Ezra Mannon (Agamemnon), Vinnie (Electra) and Orin (Orestes) as presented in terms of psychological causes, since no supernatural figures are allowed to confuse the issue. In many respects his line of thought is similar to Eliot's; but his purpose in writing the play was different and easier to accomplish. O'Neill, we are told,

> asked himself...: "Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into... a play" which would be accepted by modern audiences? Modern audiences, says O'Neill, have no general religious basis, no common fund of tradition to which they may refer the greatest problems with which we are all concerned. The closest modern equivalent is our yet-infant science of psychology; fate, says O'Neill, is what happens to human beings because of what they are, not what some god tells them to be, and it is the business of the tragic dramatist to show how human destiny reacts upon the individual, the family, the race.[1]

Eliot and O'Neill seem to have seen similar advantages in psychology, but whereas Eliot wished to make them subserve a religious rôle, O'Neill wanted them to help him convey something like the Greek sense of fate. The combination of psychology with a Greek mythical theme in which that sense of fate already existed was therefore easier for O'Neill. Since Eliot was not primarily interested in a sense of fate his difficulties were almost insurmountable.

Perhaps Eliot felt that if he presented his entire play from the psychological angle alone, it would succeed merely in confirming that viewpoint and not in subtly presenting the religious one - which was, after all, a large part of his purpose in writing the play. So he brought

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1 Barrett H. Clark; Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays (Dover Publications, New York 1947) pp. 136-7.

in the supernatural and not so much united as confused the religious and psychological categories of thinking. On the religious level the drama leads to the beginning of Harry's purgation; on the psychological level it leads to the final break in his relationship with his mother - which kills her. Eliot himself admits that 'we are left in a divided frame of mind, not knowing whether to consider the play the tragedy of the mother or the salvation of the son.' [1]

To some extent the Eumenides can be seen merely as the symbol of a psychological state: of Harry's own sense of guilt. But they seem to have another function too: to represent the curse upon the family at Wishwood. Therefore Harry cannot see them until he comes home. Having done so, and having also learnt the nature of his parents' guilt, he can go away again to expiate the sins of the family. The fact that understanding must still be followed by expiation is a departure from the purely psychological approach, and indicates that Eliot recognises the objective reality of sin and guilt. To explain them is to come to grips with them: it is not to put an end to their 'being there'.

Perhaps this is the reason why the Eumenides are not represented as simply a figment of Harry's troubled imagination. They too have objective reality: they are seen by Downing, and eventually also by Mary and Agatha. But the objective reality thus accorded them conflicts with their natural psychological associations.

As their name indicates (Eliot never calls them the Furies in the play) they are meant to be recognised, and are finally recognised by Harry, as guiding angels (the 'Kindly Ones') who must be welcomed and followed if the burden of guilt is to be lifted. This would be in order, perhaps, if they were only an objectification of Harry's conviction of sin which he finally recognises as a spiritually healthy state; but as they also represent the curse on the family, they cannot convincingly be revealed as having been in fact guiding angels all along. In other words, there is a confusion between their standing for guilt and their standing

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1 On Poetry and Poets (1957) p. 84 (from Poetry and Drama).

for a sense of guilt. Only the latter is permissible (and even then risky) in the psychological context.

There is no point, not even Harry's acceptance of them after his long dialogue with Agatha, that corresponds with the conversion of Erinyes into Eumenides in Aeschylus. In the Oresteia they have not always been the 'Kindly Ones' simply waiting for recognition as such (Athena has to bribe them to change their character and take on a new function). Harry's discovery in The Family Reunion that they have always been beneficent is simply an indication of his discovery of something new about himself and his family, and about how to expiate the sins of his house. Their character remains static, while Harry's attitude to them changes: the reverse is true of Orestes and the Furies in Aeschylus. Only in the Choephori is there any psychological interest in Orestes: in the Eumenides he is merely a passive, static figure whose persecution causes Athena to bring about the conversion of the Furies from bloodhounds into civic guardians.

If Eliot's Eumenides had not remained static they might have been able to bear some of the weight of symbolic significance laid upon them. But then the play would have been an entirely different play: it would have entered more fully into the myth-world and overbalanced in the other direction - its psychological element would have become incongruous. As it is, the reality they bring to the curse on the family does not fit into the psychological scheme of things. Eliot would have done better to let them represent only Harry's sense of guilt, keeping them invisible to all the other characters, or else to have left them out altogether. Allowing them to be seen by anyone other than Harry jars us with its impossible jump from the psychological to the supernatural plane. For it is a jump. No suitable union of the two has been effected to prepare us for it, nor does it effect such a union itself.

The use of the myth here has failed in another respect: it does not function as a means of economy. Instead of saving Eliot a long and involved exposition, it has necessitated by its complex use an even longer exposition than that of the average play. Indeed almost the whole

play is exposition, and that is a fundamental dramatic weakness. This too is recognized by Eliot:

> I had employed far too much of the strictly limited time allowed to a dramatist, in presenting a situation, and not left myself enough time, or provided myself with enough material, for developing it in action... after what must seem to the audience an interminable time of preparation, the conclusion comes so abruptly that we are, after all, unready for it.[1]

Nor has the audience been both included in and challenged by the action as in Murder in the Cathedral: full inclusion would be impossible for even a Christian audience or one well versed in psychology, let alone any other. And the challenge fails because the dominant reaction is liable to be bewilderment, and because Amy's death (a kind of delayed murder of Clytemnestra after pursuit by the Furies! - although Harry's wife is his real Clytemnestra) reduces the already meagre sympathy we are able to feel for Harry as a character.

One can, however, overemphasise his priggishness. Denis Donoghue does so in the course of some comments on The Elder Statesman. He sees the typical Eliot hero as 'the religious man defining himself in a secular society'.[2] This may be true, but he exaggerates this external conflict while underemphasising the internal conflict. Lord Claverton, he says, is different from the typical Eliot hero: 'It is not a case of a hero, a man of Conscience and Consciousness, confronting a hostile scene - and then destroying it or transcending it - but such a man confronting himself.'[3] This is in fact no new departure. The 'dialectic', as he calls it, of the earlier plays was also personal and internal. He goes on to say of The Elder Statesman:

> The place of the scapegoat scene is now taken by those factors of cowardice, meanness, and emptiness which Lord Claverton sees in himself: he does not put the blame on Society, or on Matter, or Body, or Nature, or on any other capitalised malignity. He does not say, as Harry said in The Family Reunion:
>
> It is not my conscience,
> Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.
> That was an easy way out...[4]

It would have been an easy way out, had Harry's words borne the construct-

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1 On Poetry and Poets (1957) pp. 83-84 (from Poetry and Drama).
2 The Third Voice (Princeton 1959) p. 163.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

ion which he places upon them; but they do not. They have been misinterpreted to fit in with Donoghue's overemphasis on the external rather than the internal conflict. In these words Harry is certainly not putting the blame on Society or Matter or any other capitalised malignity. He accepts full responsibility for the state he is in. The words are no disclaimer of a personal burden of guilt on his part: they are just the opposite. He is countering the view that those who have agonies of remorse and guilt have diseased consciences. The agony is indeed the sign of health, just as the conviction of sin is. In maintaining that his conscience is not diseased he is not maintaining that it is not guilty. To do so, would have been to make a scapegoat of the 'hostile scene' and to appear more priggish than ever. But Harry's conflict is just as internal as Lord Claverton's; although the externalization of Lord Claverton's conflict (in the form of his 'ghosts', Gomez and Mrs Carghill) is much more effective than the externalization of Harry's.

Eliot recognized that in The Family Reunion 'the deepest flaw of all, was in a failure of adjustment between the Greek story and the modern situation. I should either have stuck closer to Aeschylus or else taken a great deal more liberty with his myth.' [1] The latter course is the one he adopted in his later plays. In them the myth used, taken each time from Greek drama, is well submerged in the modern situation. In fact the underlying myths were so well disguised in The Cocktail Party and The Confidential Clerk that when The Elder Statesman appeared, the happy cry of 'Oedipus at Colonus!' showed that 'spotting the myth' in Eliot's plays had become a kind of literary game. Knowledge of the myth used is in some respects useful in throwing light on Eliot's intentions, but it can also lead to irrelevant criticisms. It is important to remember that in The Cocktail Party at any rate Eliot was by his own admission at pains to conceal the myth. Perhaps he felt that The Family Reunion's too obvious connection with Aeschylus had

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1 On Poetry and Poets (1957) p. 84 (from Poetry and Drama).

hindered communication of its spiritual meaning, inviting too much analytical speculation instead. Or perhaps he felt that the skeleton of a mythological story did not need to be consciously apprehended in order to have its effect: that it could operate on the unconscious level as a kind of sound-board setting up deeper reverberations of emotional response to the surface events. But most probably he simply found, on re-reading the Alcestis (and later Ion and Oedipus at Colonus), that its myth (like so many myths) contained features which suggested one or two fundamental Christian truths as he saw them, and so decided that an adaptation would make a good play: the source well hidden, since it must be the adaptation that mattered and not the source. Here, we may imagine him saying, is a study of completely selfless sacrifice - also a wife restored to her rather unimaginative husband (by a feat of great strength). Now, change or split one or two characters; relate the sacrifice to the idea of vocation (but be tactful about this); turn the physical strength into spiritual wisdom, and avoid any embarrassing resurrections; sweeten with a little light drawing-room comedy - and there is our play. A clinical, cold-blooded method of composition, perhaps: but that is after all the impression the plays give.

Whatever his motives, The Cocktail Party showed several important improvements. 'To begin with', as he says, 'no chorus, and no ghosts.' [1] The chorus of uncles and aunts in The Family Reunion was not successful. They were ridiculed too much for the audience to feel identified with them (as it could with the women of Canterbury), and their sudden transitions from individual to choral attitudes were distracting and irritating. The gulf between fools and visionaries was too wide for the audience to sympathise deeply with any character except perhaps Amy, and to do that was immediately to become alienated from Harry. The situations of The Cocktail Party are more familiar and the characters much more sympathetic. The absence of ghosts or any other manifestations of the supernatural is also something to be thankful for: the Alcestis story is freely enough

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1 Op. cit. p. 85.

adapted for Eliot to say what he wants to say without having to introduce distractions. It would have been disastrous to present us with the literal resurrection of a modern Alcestis: we should have been so puzzled as to how to react that we should have missed the point of the play. [1] Unnecessary barriers in the form of suspicion against religious propaganda might also have been set up. Such propaganda (and The Cocktail Party certainly contains it) must be either disguised or very tactfully delivered if it is to be successful. As a noted theatre critic has said, 'In the contemporary theatre the only kind of religious play that has a chance is one that moves up silently from behind and takes us unawares, before we have had time to prepare our resistance.' [2] The comic surface of The Cocktail Party and its transition to the psychiatrist's consulting-room made this ensnaring process possible. The religious pill was well sugared. (In Murder in the Cathedral it did not need to be, since the audience was - and in cathedrals and parish churches very often still is - Christian. In The Family Reunion the attempt to sugar the pill was ineffective.)

The form of verse which Eliot developed for The Cocktail Party was also an improvement. The Family Reunion's disturbing transitions from flattened dialogue to rich lyrical poetry at moments of intensity had lifted the characters away from us and made them even less sympathetic than they already were. This is largely eliminated in The Cocktail Party. The one little pseudo-choral passage at the end of Act Two is justified by the formal toast of the benevolent conspirators (Reilly, Alex and Julia) and is perfectly acceptable.

How does Eliot use the Alcestis myth? He says in Poetry and Drama: 'I was still inclined to go to a Greek dramatist for my theme, but I was determined to do so merely as a point of departure'. [3] We are therefore not likely to add much to our understanding of Eliot's play by seeking exact parallels with the events and characters of Euripides'. The general

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1 Only where the effect of a supernatural resurrection is itself the theme of a modern play is such an event perhaps justified: as in Graham Greene's The Potting Shed.

2 Harold Hobson, in a review in The Sunday Times for March 26, 1961.

3 On Poetry and Poets (1957) p. 85.

themes common to both are a woman's sacrificial death, and the restoration of a wife to her husband by a bibulous but capable intermediary. That the connection is very slender is immediately apparent from the reversal of the two main events (the death and the restoration), and from the splitting of the Alcestis figure into two separate characters. One is Lavinia, restored, not from death but from separation, to Edward. The other is Celia, whose death in Kinkanja is a sacrificial death - not in order to save a husband, but in the course of carrying out the duties of a religious vocation. Edward is the Admetus to Lavinia's Alcestis, and Reilly the Heracles who reunites them. The parallel is only a very rough one. Of Euripides' characters only Heracles has (in Reilly) a counterpart in whom a few trivial features correspond; his arriving at the cocktail party apparently uninvited and his liking for gin link him with the drunken Heracles who arrives unasked at the house of Admetus at a very awkward moment. But on the whole Eliot's debt to Euripides is limited to one or two very rough plot suggestions and the idea of a sacrificial death.

The main objection levelled by critics against this play concerns Eliot's different attitudes to the Chamberlaynes and to Celia. They complain of the division of the Alcestis figure into two separate characters with widely differing destinies. Walter Stein goes so far as to call it a Manichean play, making a dichotomy between Nature and Transcendence.[1] Donoghue says:

> One is tempted to wish that it had been the same woman who had taken up the two vocations in the one act and the one situation. Eliot's breakdown of the matter into two situations and two salvations represents a failure and an evasion... We feel a serious incongruity between the tone of the Edward-Lavinia story and that of Celia's martyrdom.[2]

One wonders whether anyone would have been 'tempted to wish that it had been the same woman' if Eliot had not revealed, some time after the play first appeared, the connection with the Alcestis which no one had recognized. The fact that in Euripides it is the same woman who sacrifices

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1 'After the Cocktails', Essays in Criticism 3 (1953) pp. 85-104.
2 The Third Voice (Princeton 1959) pp. 126-7.

herself and who is restored did not matter to Eliot and could not have occurred to the audience when the play was first presented. Had he not provided them with the clue, critics would not have been in any position to complain of a 'breakdown of the matter into two situations'. Since he took his theme from Greek drama 'merely as a point of departure' we cannot treat The Cocktail Party as if it were meant to be a modern Alcestis; nor can we expect it to conform to certain aspects of the Alcestis which we should not have considered had the 'point of departure' remained unknown.

There is no reason to condemn 'a serious incongruity between the tone of the Edward-Lavinia story and that of Celia's martyrdom.' If we approach the play without irrelevant presuppositions about the Alcestis, the difference between the two 'tones' can be accepted in the manner in which it was intended: as a deliberate contrast. It is right that a sense of incongruity should come with the news of Celia's martyrdom, and that we should sit up with a jolt. That is precisely the reaction of Edward, Lavinia and Peter when they hear Alex's story. Their jaws drop. During and immediately after his account of her death, their reactions are deliberately made to sound slightly ridiculous. Peter: 'Dead. That knocks the bottom out of it.' They are embarrassed and puzzled too. Lavinia: 'But Celia!... Of all people...' And Edward: 'It's the waste that I resent.' [1] They are voicing, simply but more effectively than a chorus could do here, the reactions and sentiments of the average audience. The whole purpose of the play would be defeated if the news were not a shock to both characters and audience, and its contrast with the Chamberlaynes' fortunes helps to make it one. The sugared pill has been administered, and now with sensational suddenness Eliot makes its character clear. The whole process is far better handled than in The Family Reunion. Celia, making her decision in Act Two without really knowing what the decision means, is saved from any suggestion of priggishness, and explicit revelation of the meaning of that decision is

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1 The Cocktail Party (1950) pp. 154, 155, 156.

saved for the final act. Her destiny is simple and final: we are presented in Act Three with a fait accompli, and her absence at the crucial moment is much more effective than was Harry's presence. Perceptive members of the audience are given a few hints in Act Two concerning the nature of her decision: Reilly's 'Work out your salvation with diligence' (which, significantly, he also says to the Chamberlaynes); his suggestive 'It is finished' after the interview; and the words of the libation or toast 'for those who go upon a journey' at the end of the act.[1] But we are given nothing specific enough to destroy the effect of the shock in Act Three. Up to that point the full purpose of the play has been carefully concealed.

The incongruity does not represent the clash of two worlds and categories of thinking that the Eumenides do in The Family Reunion. That was the inclusion of the supernatural in a psychologically understood scheme of things; this is simply the irruption of the idea of religious vocation into no particular scheme of things.[2] And in this treatment of vocation the destinies of the Chamberlaynes and Celia are foils to each other. The unsensational solution offered to Edward and Lavinia may at first sight seem dull, unimaginative and almost 'comfortable'. But retrospectively and on closer investigation it proves to be more than that. Like Celia, they too have a 'salvation' to work out with diligence. Theirs is equally a vocation, which they accept. Perhaps much critical dissatisfaction with The Cocktail Party arises from a failure to appreciate this fully. The Chamberlaynes' is not a salvation through resignation. It has something in common with Celia's:

> Each way means loneliness - and communion.
> Both ways avoid the final desolation
> Of solitude in the phantasmal world
> Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.[3]

Reilly presents the two ways for Celia to choose from, and in doing so he gives a clear picture of the Chamberlaynes' way:

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1 Op. cit. pp. 128, 132-3.
2 The device of the psychiatrist's consulting-room does not in fact suggest that the play's framework is a psychologically understood scheme of things.
3 Op. cit. pp. 125-6.

They may remember
The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,
Maintain themselves by the common routine,
Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
Become tolerant of themselves and others,
Giving and taking, in the usual actions
What there is to give and take. They do not repine;
Are contented with the morning that separates
And with the evening that brings together
For casual talk before the fire
Two people who know they do not understand each other,
Breeding children whom they do not understand
And who will never understand them.

CELIA

Is that the best life?

REILLY

It is a good life. Though you will not know how good
Till you come to the end. But you will want nothing else,
And the other life will be only like a book
You have read once, and lost. In a world of lunacy,
Violence, stupidity, greed... it is a good life.[1]

At the end Edward and Lavinia are left following their appointed way according to the choice they have made, and while their vision does not extend to an understanding of Celia's vocation, they are beginning to know enough about their own to say a few useful words to Peter as his choice faces him. Lavinia's growing insight is noticed by both Reilly and Julia, and Edward's 'Oh, it isn't much / That I understand yet!' proceeds from his slightly increased awareness.[2] It is not much that they will ever understand, but they will go on learning, and they are as firmly embarked on their less spectacular pilgrimage as Celia was on hers.

Each way of vocation illuminates the other. It is fitting that the Chamberlaynes' marital trouble should trigger off Celia's search for her solution, and that the news of her vocation's fulfilment in death should arrive as the Chamberlaynes are preparing for another cocktail party - one of the trivia of their own way of adjustment. Celia's renunciation places her in the line of visionaries and ascetics begun by Thomas and Harry. But the extension of salvation to the Chamberlaynes through a humbler vocation represents a new and important development. The non-visionaries and non-ascetics are no longer necessarily outside the

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1 Op. cit. pp. 123-4.
2 Ibid. pp. 158, 159, 161, 165.

'kingdom'. Salvation may be found in society and in human intercourse, not exclusively in their repudiation or renunciation. Eliot has begun to accommodate himself to the comic spirit: the spirit of social adjustment.

These comments have not been made to illuminate Eliot's use of the myth: we have seen that he made very little use of it except as a point of departure. But they needed to be made in order to show that irrelevant criticisms arise from the wrong kind of concern with the myth. No close comparative analysis was required here, and there is therefore no point in complaining that the Alcestis figure has been split in two. The justification for the split has nothing to do with Euripides - it lies in Eliot's own play. As a study in two different types of vocation it has little in common with the myth which suggested the plot.

The Confidential Clerk is also concerned with vocation. Its point of departure is the Ion, but its affinities range far more widely than that play. It is superficially at least in the tradition of those innumerable comedies and romances which hinge on the discovery of a long-lost child or the search of a child for its parents: a staple theme which runs through ancient fables, Shakespeare, Dickens, Victorian melodrama and (in lighter vein) W.S. Gilbert and Oscar Wilde. It is the play's connection with this general type, rather than its specific relation to the Ion, that enables Eliot to engage his audience. Again a good deal of the action takes place on a high comic level, and the 'source' is heavily disguised. But enough discursive dialogue is included for us to be aware of Eliot's serious concern with problems of identity and vocation and the relation between the two. Here the play's theme has a little more in common with the Ion than The Cocktail Party has with Alcestis. The Cocktail Party is about vocation, whereas Alcestis has nothing to do with vocation. But both in The Confidential Clerk and the Ion it is clear that the hero's future life and work will depend upon who his true parents are. In a sense therefore (though Euripides would no doubt have hesitated to claim it as his dominant concern) each play is concerned with the relationship between identity and vocation. Colby feels that he must be about his father's business,

so he finds his vocation in finding out who his father really was.

The question of identity has a much more serious relevance to Eliot's play than to the Ion, however. Perhaps the leading problem of the Ion (if it can be said to have a leading problem) is the morality of the gods. This topic has led to a controversy about the play which may have some relevance to the plot of The Confidential Clerk. Some classical scholars doubt whether Euripides meant what Athene said: namely, that Ion was the son of Creusa. They maintain that Athene was cynically and dishonestly granting Creusa her wish, whereas the truth really lay in one of several other directions: that he was the son of Xuthus, or indeed of Apollo by some other woman, or even of the Delphic priestess herself. This is based on the argument that if the gods are immoral, and if we are capable of believing that Apollo would commit rape, we are equally capable of believing that Athene and Hermes would tell lies. (Euripides' attitude to the gods is certainly ambiguous.) But the line of argument is not altogether convincing: the sexual mores of the gods were well known, but on the other hand the Greek audience would not expect either the god who presented the exposition at the beginning or the deus ex machina who brought about the dénouement at the end to tell them lies. The facts given by Athene can be accepted as the true ones: Creusa is the mother of Ion by Apollo, and Xuthus' claim to paternity does not hold.

Mention is made of this controversy not because Eliot explicitly supports either side in his play, but because it may explain why there is a general 'granting of wishes' at the end, and why the title character is again divided in two. The chief 'Ion', and the only one who really demands our attention, is Colby. He turns out to be the son of a disappointed musician (shades of Apollo here). He is also the son of Mrs Guzzard, who appears at the end like a fairy godmother to dispense information and grant wishes (shades also of the Delphic priestess, as well as of Athene herself). The minor Ion is B. Kaghan, in whom the wishes of Creusa-Lady Elizabeth for a son are fulfilled. It may even be said at a stretch that Lucasta Angel is yet another Ion figure, Sir Claude

having to be content with a daughter instead of a son: but this does not resemble any granting of Xuthus' wish, since there has never been any doubt about Lucasta's parentage.

Colby corresponds with the Ion of Euripides far more than B. Kaghan does except for the fact that it is Kaghan who is identified as the son of Lady Elizabeth. In this way both her wish (for a son) and Colby's (to have a dead obscure man for his father) are granted. This is Eliot's own adaptation of the plot: and though it may represent a compromise between the views that Ion was and was not the son of Creusa, it is certainly not necessary to suppose that his use of Euripides must have been influenced by the classical scholars' controversy. He may simply have found the situation a suggestive one and proceeded to work out his own solution to a modernised version of it independently of any conclusions that either Euripides or the scholars had come to. His denial of Colby to either Sir Claude or Lady Elizabeth was probably made necessary by the serious attention he wished to give to the matter of Colby's vocation. The life of a humble musician (with the religious possibilities mentioned by Eggerson) had to be the consequence of Colby's discovery of his true parentage; and he could not seriously have pursued such a vocation in the context of the rather ridiculous Mulhammer family. As in Eliot's earlier plays the person who accepts a vocation has to pursue, at least for the period immediately following his decision, a path apart from all family bonds (he does not go back to Mrs Guzzard either). As Edward and Lavinia were exceptions to this (up to now) general rule, so here the Mulhammers are an exception too: they also have a form of 'adjustment-vocation' to follow. There are certain redeeming features in Colby's case too. It is not a vocation to martyred isolation, like Celia's: he is to live with Mr and Mrs Eggerson. And while he is the Guzzards' son in fact and in vocation, he is the Eggersons' son in spirit. He replaces their lost son, and is able to begin to share their garden. The ways of renunciation and of adjustment, contrasted in the cases of Celia and the Chamberlaynes, are here being tentatively reconciled. Eggerson's garden represents an answer to that insecurity and loneliness

which Colby found in his own 'garden', his inner world. Here Eliot is dealing again with the sense of isolation of the individual consciousness. [1] Colby's inner world is one of solitude, and has no connection with his external world; the fruitful union of internal and external worlds afforded by life in a community of common faith (the kind of life Colby finally goes to begin) is symbolized in Eggerson's literally fruitful garden. It is never explicit that Colby intends to be a member of the parish as well as its organist, but Eggerson's hints together with Lucasta's earlier 'You sound awfully religious' [2] lead us to accept the likelihood. Colby and Lucasta discuss the gardens at some length in Act Two, where he shows the advantages of Eggerson's garden over his own: it is fruitful and means fellowship. His own is not like that.

> I turn the key, and walk through the gate,
> And there I am... alone, in my 'garden'.
> Alone, that's the thing. That's why it's not real.
> You know, I think that Eggerson's garden
> Is more real than mine.
>
> LUCASTA
>
> Eggerson's garden?
> What makes you think of Eggerson - of all people?
>
> COLBY
>
> Well, he retires to his garden - literally,
> And also in the same sense that I retire to mine.
> But he doesn't feel alone there. And when he comes out
> He has marrows, or beetroot, or peas... for Mrs. Eggerson.
>
> LUCASTA
>
> Are you laughing at me?
>
> COLBY
>
> I'm being very serious.
> What I mean is, my garden's no less unreal to me
> Than the world outside it. If you have two lives
> Which have nothing whatever to do with each other -
> Well, they're both unreal. But for Eggerson
> His garden is a part of one single world. [3]

Colby's decision to go and join the Eggersons and become the parish organist at Joshua Park means the uniting of his two worlds and the creation of a single real world. The image of a garden has a large place in Eliot's work. It is often associated with experiences of spiritual illumination or renewal, as in Burnt Norton or The Family Reunion. Here

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1 See pp. 75-76 for discussion of earlier and more pessimistic treatment of the same topic.
2 The Confidential Clerk (1954) p. 53.
3 Ibid. pp. 52-53.

there is a contrast between two types of 'garden', and the treatment is more prosaic than usual. But in the last analysis the significance of the image is the same. It is a place (or more properly a state) from which one draws strength, and in which one finds illumination to carry back - if one can carry it back - into the life outside it. It stands roughly speaking for fruitfulness of the spirit, just as the desert stands for that desolation which is often an essential part of the spiritual life. Both are ingredients of Eliot's general pattern of images, of that private world of metaphors which has become increasingly an element of his 'personal mythology'.

Just as The Cocktail Party ends with not only Celia's vocation fulfilled but the Chamberlaynes too embracing their particular vocation to adjustment, so The Confidential Clerk ends with the Mulhammer family about to begin their own process of adjustment. It is a prosaic way they have to follow, but they are not barred from entry into the 'kingdom' as the uncles and aunts of The Family Reunion were. The scope of salvation (for that is in the final analysis what Eliot is talking about) has been greatly widened. Their world is not to be the same as Colby's, but they too have had their wishes granted and have to adjust themselves to what they are given. Lady Elizabeth finds her real son, and with the infinite adaptability of her butterfly temperament begins to make plans for a church wedding for him and Lucasta. Sir Claude too is granted his choice, 'obedience to the facts', [1] although they differ radically from what he thinks them to be. His determination to believe that Mrs Guzzard has been 'inventing this fiction / In response to what Colby said he wanted' [2] echoes the doubt widely entertained about Ion's true parentage: but Mrs Guzzard has told the truth. Eggerson believes her, and Eggerson cannot be wrong. So Sir Claude has to accept instead the determination of Kaghan and Lucasta

> to mean something to you... if you'd let us;
> And we'd take the responsibility of meaning it. [3]

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1 Op. cit. p. 90.
2 Ibid. p. 127.
3 Ibid. p. 135.

His mistake was, as Kaghan says, the mistake of them all: 'We wanted Colby to be something he wasn't.' [1] Even the credulous Lady Elizabeth graduates in her own clumsy way into some sort of awareness:

> Between not knowing what other people want of one,
> And not knowing what one should ask of other people,
> One does make mistakes! But I mean to do better.
> Claude, we've got to try to understand our children. [2]

So despite the comic veneer over the whole surface of the action, the curtains descends on the Mulhammers, like Edward and Lavinia, feeling their way towards sympathy, tolerance and a limited mutual understanding.

In spite of the conflicts it deals with, the fundamental serenity of The Elder Statesman makes it a kind of pastoral epilogue to all that Eliot has written. It is his Oedipus at Colonus; and that is the play which provides him with his point of departure. As in the two plays preceding it, the myth is well submerged, while he has profited from the general suggestiveness of the story. From the Oresteia he had taken the story of a family's release from the inherited consequences of sin; from the Alcestis a story of selfless sacrifice; from the Ion the story of the lost child who discovers his identity and with it his vocation. Now from Sophocles he takes the story of the aged leader going into exile with his faithful daughter to face his last bitter conflict before a serene end.

The Alcestis, as we have seen, provided The Cocktail Party with no more than a few plot suggestions. The Ion's plot had a slightly closer relationship to the theme of The Confidential Clerk, since they had in common some interest in the connection between the hero's identity and the shape of his future life. In The Elder Statesman, the Greek drama is again used as no more than a point of departure. Indeed the differences between the two plays are more striking than their similarity, since it is these differences which help to illustrate Eliot's purpose - a purpose far removed from that of Sophocles. Whereas the aged Oedipus is conscious of defilement, he can still protest that his crime was committed in a state of moral innocence: 'I did not know the way I went'. [3]

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1 Op. cit. p. 134.
2 Ibid. pp. 134-5.
3 Sophocles: The Theban Plays (translated by E.F. Watling, Penguin Books 1947) p. 79.

Lord Claverton is not in this position; his guilt is real and he is compelled to face both it and the knowledge of its consequences. Again, Oedipus's crime is public knowledge, and Antigone is fully aware of it; Monica is ignorant of her father's sins. His confession to her and Charles is in fact his step to salvation. It enables him to face his ghosts without fear. His release from feelings of guilt is also a release from loneliness.

The ideas that are most important to Eliot here, owe nothing to the myth. But a few comments are necessary to complete the pattern of the 'ways of salvation' which we have seen variously dealt with in the successive plays. In Eliot's long examination of the topic, this last treatment of it represents a new departure as well as a fitting climax. Up to this point, renunciation and to a lesser extent adjustment have been the keywords of the 'Way'. Here it is fully human love. It marks the final but indispensable stage in the resolution of Lord Claverton's conflict.

First his suppressed conviction of guilt has to be uncovered and brought squarely before him. His ghosts from the past, Gomez and Mrs Carghill, do this. They are more dramatically effective than Harry's supernatural 'ghosts' in The Family Reunion, both because they avoid any distracting clash of natural and supernatural worlds, and because they provide a salutary reminder that sin affects the sinned-against and not merely the sinner. Also, we are not obliged to regard them as guiding angels in disguise, as we have to do with the Eumenides. They can bring home Claverton's guilt to him while remaining thoroughly unpleasant people, and (which gives them increased dramatic credibility) we can feel some pity for their loneliness without ignoring their unsavoury character.

Claverton's conviction of sin is nevertheless only the beginning of the process of salvation. To know the undisguised truth about oneself is not alone sufficient to redeem one. Gomez and Mrs Carghill accept the truth about themselves, but theirs is unredeemed self-knowledge. It takes love to sanctify self-knowledge, and this is what happens in Act Three when Claverton makes his confession. It is the love of Charles

and Monica which 'saves' him. He asks Charles if he has no guilty secrets which he would like to keep completely buried. In replying that he has had guilty secrets, Charles turns to Monica to add: 'But there's nothing I would ever wish to conceal from you.' [1] Lord Claverton recognizes that here lies salvation, and is encouraged to make his own secrets known, to be accepted 'without his costume and makeup / And without his stage words.' [2] His reply to Charles contains the affirmative solution to the old problem of isolation:

> If there's nothing, truly nothing, that you couldn't tell Monica
> Then all is well with you. You're in love with each other -
> I don't need to be told what I've seen for myself!
> And if there is nothing that you conceal from her
> However important you may consider it
> To conceal from the rest of the world - your soul is safe.
> If a man has one person, just one in his life,
> To whom he is willing to confess everything -
> And that includes, mind you, not only things criminal,
> Not only turpitude, meanness and cowardice,
> But also situations which are simply ridiculous,
> When he has played the fool (as who has not?) -
> Then he loves that person, and his love will save him. [3]

This way to salvation through love transcends (though it does not nullify) the ways of renunciation and of adjustment. Once Claverton has been able to unburden himself to Monica, he begins to become a new person in the security of her love, unchanged as it is by her new knowledge of him:

> I've been freed from the self that pretends to be someone;
> And in becoming no one, I begin to live.
> It is worth while dying, to find out what life is. [4]

There is, then, still renunciation: but it is a renunciation of the old self - not a renunciation of the love of created beings. These lines echo a theme which has persisted throughout Eliot's work: the theme of death as the way to new life. Claverton's confession has cleansed and renewed his spirit, and he is ready to welcome death quietly under the beech tree.

The fate of Michael qualifies the simplicity of this dénouement. The sin is blotted out, but its consequences continue. Claverton has painfully to accept the fact. Yet it is still possible that Michael too

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1 The Elder Statesman (1959) p. 83.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid. p. 106.

may in the end be redeemed by love, for both Monica and her father are determined never to repudiate him, and Claverton can say:

> I love him, even for rejecting me,
> For the *me* he rejected, I reject also. [1]

This contrasts strongly with Oedipus's bitter and scornful rejection of Polynices, which means that the curse on the house of Laius is not yet at an end. It illustrates the limit of Eliot's debt to Sophocles. The Greek myth recognises the power of love to temper distress, but not to save. Antigone's love supports the exiled Oedipus, but does no more than that; and there is no love lost between him and Polynices, who goes off to make his fatal attack on Thebes.

Claverton does not possess the mysterious power of conferring future blessedness that is credited to Oedipus, and we should therefore be wrong in allowing Gomez's anxiety for his friendship to persuade us that Gomez is the Creon of Eliot's play. Such an assumption would only tend once more to lead to irrelevant criticisms. Creon has no true parallel here, nor has Gomez any in Sophocles. It is true that they both seek the friendship of the hero: but the parallel in plot goes no further than this. Gomez and Mrs Carghill are in the play primarily to bring to light and to a crisis Claverton's sense of guilt; Creon's advent only brings out in Oedipus the indignation of a man who sees himself as outrageously victimised. Except within very narrow limits there is no profit in analysing the parallels between the plays. Eliot has borrowed his plot outline, but his purpose is entirely his own.

For the four plays since *Murder in the Cathedral*, Denis Donoghue has suggested four keywords to indicate their respective preoccupations. The progression which they hint at is a useful though necessarily not a precise summary of Eliot's development in his concern with salvation. *The Family Reunion* is according to Donoghue representative of the stage at which Eliot's concern was with Conscience; *The Cocktail Party*, with Consciousness; *The Confidential Clerk*, with Understanding; and *The Elder Statesman*, with Love. 'And' he adds, 'since this is the wisest as well

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1 Op. cit. p. 105.

as the wittiest [1] of Eliot's plays, the nature of Love is defined not by a context of limp "good deeds" but by a genuinely won illumination, a flowering of insight into the relation between reality and responsibility.' [2] It might be said (borrowing terms from Charles Williams) that Eliot was so long and so intensely concerned with the 'in-Godding' of man, that it is only comparatively late in his work - even in his dramatic work - that he begins to give attention to the 'in-othering' of man. [3] This may account for his forsaking the more personal forms of visionary and meditative poetry for the situations of drama with their increased opportunity for dealing with human relationships. That this opportunity is never fully exploited is probably due to the characterization. Eliot's characters never emerge as fully three-dimensional persons: we are always too conscious of them as vehicles for his 'message'.

The 'in-Godding' of man is no less his concern in the plays, but it is presented through different media: more in relation to the 'in-othering' of man, and with progressively less emphasis on the way of Rejections. The ends of both Murder in the Cathedral and The Elder Statesman are hymns of affirmation. The complementary nature of the two Ways is seen at its most striking in the paradox afforded by juxtaposition of two passages: the second epigraph to Sweeney Agonistes (from St. John of the Cross), and Lord Claverton's words quoted above.

> Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.
>
> If a man has one person, just one in his life,
> To whom he is willing to confess everything -...
> Then he loves that person, and his love will save him.

Eliot's masters in the Ways of Rejection and of Affirmation appear to be, respectively, St. John of the Cross and Dante: the former tracing the path of salvation through negation of emotion and stripping of sensation; the latter finding his beatific vision through his love for Beatrice. In finding redemption through love - the love of his daughter and of her

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1 Not the wittiest, surely? Even in the most technical sense The Cocktail Party has a greater claim to this.
2 The Third Voice (Princeton 1959) p. 164.
3 See The Figure of Beatrice (1943) p. 199.

lover - Lord Claverton has followed, however modestly, in the way of Dante. Williams writes:

> Wherever any love is - and some kind of love in every man and woman there must be - there is either affirmation or rejection of the image, in one or other form. If there is rejection - of that Way there are many records. Of the affirmation, for all its greater commonness, there are fewer records.[1]

One record of it appears in The Elder Statesman, but although it is present it is subdued - the whole play seems to be written in a minor key. Marina is the clearest and most unambiguous record of it in Eliot's work. And both Ways appear again in Four Quartets.

It is difficult to generalise about Eliot's use (or rather uses) of myths in his plays. In the later plays he has not used the myths in their fullest sense, but merely adapted their narrative outlines as they are found in certain Greek plays: he makes little if any transfer of their mythological universe, but simply takes from them a few suggestive themes (such as that of sacrifice in the Alcestis) and deals with them anew in his own way. Where he does attempt a partial transfer of their mythological world (the Eumenides in The Family Reunion) he is unsuccessful - and this is not only a failure in terms of the stage, but in terms of the whole framework of thought in which the play takes place.

It is, as we noticed, in the only play that fully inhabits a traditional mythological universe, that his success is complete. This is in Murder in the Cathedral, where the universe is a Christian one. Here he provides little exposition owing to the familiarity of the myth; he involves the audience in a measure of participation; and he allows the tension between the story and the universe in which it takes place to exert the power characteristic of myths. These achievements are almost entirely nonexistent in his other plays. What he has done is to treat his Christian myth as a Greek play would treat a Greek myth. He owes his success, therefore, more to the Greek dramatists' uses of myths than to the myths themselves. In this respect his relationship to myths as a playwright differs considerably from his debt to them as a poet.

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1 Op. cit. p. 200.

CHAPTER VI

THE PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY: FOUR QUARTETS

So far we have examined Eliot's use of several mythological themes and patterns drawn from other literature and other ages. We have now to see how he has evolved a pattern of images of his own which can also be regarded as mythological in function.

Several critics have noticed the mythological quality of these images. One of them writes as follows:

> In his introduction to the Selected Poems of Miss Marianne Moore, Mr Eliot has observed significantly that 'we have all to choose whatever subject matter allows us the most powerful and the most secret release; and that is a personal affair.' Thus Mr Eliot has evolved, and made manifest in his work, a personal mythology as potent as, and more patent than, that of Blake. Certain recurrent motifs have the appearance of obsessive images; obsessive in that clearly they besiege, but do not delude, their author. The events to which these images refer back do not matter, though they are responsible for the passionate intensity, as well as for the rigid impersonality, characteristic of Mr Eliot's utterance. What matters is the architecture of the images into valid poetic structures. The conversion of intensely private matter into matter of wide public interest is the great triumph of Mr Eliot's genius.[1]

The ordering of private matter into a systematic structure capable of wider appreciation is hinted at also by Eliot when he says that 'not our feelings, but the pattern which we may make of our feelings, is the centre of value' in the work of a poet.[2] No matter how subjective the initial experiences and emotions may be, their embodiment in a pattern of images makes for objectivity. This is a qualified objectivity, as Yeats made clear when he distinguished his belief in the poetic validity of his system from any supposed belief in its objective reality.[3] In the same way we cannot suppose Eliot to think that moments of visionary intensity occur only on such occasions as, say, seeing winter lightning or hearing children's voices in an orchard; but images like these are the ones in

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1 Hugh Gordon Porteus, 'Resurrection in the Crypt' in T.S. Eliot: a symposium, compiled by Richard March and Tambimuttu (1948) p. 218.

2 'A Brief Introduction to the Method of Paul Valéry' in P. Valéry: Le Serpent (translated by Mark Wardle, 1924) p. 12.

3 See pp. 12-13.

which Eliot tries to capture such moments in his own experience.

The moments of illumination which play such a large part in Eliot's later work have an intensity of the order of certain mystical experiences, although they are not patently religious moments. The mysterious importance of moments like this is recognized and discussed widely by philosophers and psychologists as well as by creative artists and critics. Some quotations follow which will indicate the kind of experience that Eliot is concerned with in passages like Marina and parts of the Quartets.

The theologian Edwyn Bevan writes in his Gifford lectures:

> Certain objects or experiences or actions have from the most primitive times aroused in man a sense of meaning sui generis, that which we describe as the divine or the religious or, in Otto's word, the numinous.[1]

These he calls 'symbols without conceptual meaning'.

William James wrote of these moments of illumination:

> There are moments of sentimental and mystical experience... that carry an enormous sense of inner authority and illumination with them when they come. But they come seldom, and they do not come to every one; and the rest of life makes either no connection with them, or tends to contradict them more than it confirms them.[2]

Huizinga in his classic study of mediaeval Europe also has occasion to mention them:

> The idea of a deeper significance in ordinary things is familiar to us... independently of religious convictions: as an indefinite feeling which may be called up at any moment, by the sound of raindrops on the leaves or by the lamplight on a table. Such sensations may take the form of a morbid oppression, so that all things seem to be charged with a menace or a riddle which we must solve at any cost. Or they may be experienced as a source of tranquillity and assurance, by filling us with the sense that our own life, too, is involved in this hidden meaning of the world. The more this perception converges upon the absolute One, whence all things emanate, the sooner it will tend to pass from the insight of a lucid moment to a permanent and formulated conviction.[3]

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1 Symbolism and Belief (Paperback edn., Beacon Press, Boston 1957) p. 254.

2 The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) p. 16. James's mention of the tenuous connection between these moments and the rest of life, gains in significance when we read the end of Burnt Norton, where the visionary moment caught in the children's laughter passes swiftly and desolation follows: 'Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after.' In Part V of The Dry Salvages Eliot speaks of the strenuous effort to capture something of abiding value from these moments:

> These are only hints and guesses,
> Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
> Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.

3 J. Huizinga: The Waning of the Middle Ages (1937) p. 183.

Proust's immense work A la Recherche du Temps Perdu appears to be built around such experiences, the memories of which have been transformed into symbols. Edmund Wilson describes how at the end of the first novel in the series Proust's hero (his projection of himself) has the experience which leads him to decide to write his book:

> ...as he steps up on to the kerb, he is visited by a strange sensation - the moment of stepping up seems to be charged with some mysterious significance. He has known such puzzling moments before: in the early part of the story he has told us of the inexplicable impression made upon him by the combination of certain church steeples which he had seen on a drive in his childhood and again, at a later age, by a clump of trees near Balbec. Why had these sights seemed to mean something special? Why had he derived from them a special satisfaction? To-day he resolves to get to the bottom of his feeling in connection with the kerb: he fixes his mind upon it and presently finds himself experiencing a whole series of similar sensations. In every case, he now comes to realize, some accident of the physical world - some odor, touch, taste or sound - has served to revive in his consciousness what he had felt at some moment of the past when a similar sense-impression had occurred - as the uneven steps of the kerb, by reminding his body of the water-steps of Venice, has brought back for an instant into his mind, divorced from the rest of Venice, the bright Venetian light and water. And these memories which move him so deeply, which spring back into his consciousness so promptly at the most irrelevant provocation, must possess some peculiar value. Are they not symbols for the fundamental truths of that internal world of our consciousness which is all we know of reality? Are they not alone among our experiences in having an existence outside Time? - in yielding us a kind of truth independent of Time's flux, independent of the incoherent and ever-changing succession of our other impressions? He must apply himself to deciphering their hieroglyphics... It is hopeless to seek happiness in others - in society or in love. One must turn in upon oneself - one finds the true reality only there: in those enduring extra-temporal symbols - incidents and personalities as well as landscapes - which have been precipitated out by the interaction of one's continually changing consciousness with the continual change of the world. He will make of his life a book, and he will base it upon these symbols. So he may assert his will at last and retrieve his moral surrender - so he may turn at last to swim against the current of the undammed, unchannelled sensibility with which he has been drifting all his life - and at the same time master the world, rejoin the reality which has always seemed to elude him, and, opposing the flow of Time, establish something outside it: a work of art.[1]

Proust's concern with the recapture of Time is something which he had in common with the Eliot of the Quartets. And in both cases the process is connected with particular symbols drawn from private experience.

Finally we have a quotation from Eliot himself, in which he speaks of several specially significant images drawn from his own memories.

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1 Edmund Wilson: Axel's Castle (New York 1931) pp. 160-2.

It appears that in his case the power of certain passages of poetry to move and inspire him in this mysterious way derives partly from their association with certain experiences of his own, and that he is led to draw again and again on such passages for allusion or adaptation in his own work. But of course many of his own experiences find their way into his imagery directly, without first going through the process of association with what another man has written. In the passage quoted below he speaks of both kinds of imagery: that drawn from other writers because of its 'personal saturation value' for himself, and that drawn directly from moments of vision and illumination based on memories of his own. As an example of 'saturated' imagery he quotes from Chapman: a passage from Bussy D'Amboise, borrowed, Dr Boas suggests, from Seneca:

> 'Fly where the evening from the Iberian vales
> Takes on her swarthy shoulders Hecate
> Crowned with a grove of oaks: fly where men feel
> The burning axletree, and those that suffer
> Beneath the chariot of the snowy Bear...'
>
> There is first the probability [continues Eliot] that this imagery had some personal saturation value, so to speak, for Seneca; another for Chapman,[1] and another for myself, who have borrowed it twice from Chapman. I suggest that what gives it such intensity as it has in each case is its saturation - I will not say with 'associations',...- but with feeling too obscure for the authors even to know quite what they were. And of course only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood. Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, at a particular place and time, the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path, six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill: such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer.[2]

The images which recur in Eliot's poems at moments of visionary intensity are not the only images constituting the pattern which we call his personal mythology. And some experiences which may in his own life have possessed this intensity are not necessarily associated with moments of illumination when they are imported into his work: for instance, one of the images he mentions in the passage quoted above occurs in a modified form in Journey of the Magi, but in a context quite devoid of emotion:

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1 Once at the end of 'Gerontion', and again in Part II of Burnt Norton.
2 The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933) pp. 147-8.

> Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
> Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
> With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
> And three trees on the low sky,
> And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
> Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
> Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
> And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
> But there was no information, and so we continued
> And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
> Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

There are also important recurrent images which neither occur at moments of illumination in the poems nor, so far as we know, have any connection with such moments in Eliot's life. They may be the 'objective correlatives' of a sense of release, or a sense of horror, or an experience of thwarted desire, or a shrinking from vulgarity, or a sense of boredom and squalor, or an experience of sensual temptation, or various other experiences and sensations. The Sweeney of the early poems, for instance, becomes a figure of modest mythological status who stands for vulgarity and embodies Eliot's ambivalent attitude towards it. He may stand for many other things as well, according to the personal associations he has in the minds of different readers; but with a fair degree of objectivity he may be said, in Matthiessen's words, to sum up Eliot's 'double feeling of his repulsion from vulgarity, and... his shy attraction to the coarse earthiness of common life'. [1] Another critic writes: 'In Mr. Eliot's private mythology Sweeney is of course the symbol of gross, vulgar, sensual man, the unthinking human animal who lives by his appetites.' [2] The recurrent images associated with a sudden release of the spirit usually have to do with the sea and with birds. No explicit reference is given for each occasion on which these images occur, but the title 'Cape Ann' and Eliot's note to the title of The Dry Salvages suggest that other passages suggestive of this ecstatic release (such as the middle of Ash-Wednesday VI and the end of East Coker) derive their imagery also from the Massachusetts coast so well known to Eliot in his boyhood. These are not of quite the same type as the images connected with moments of illumination, but they may nevertheless (like

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1 The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (3rd edn. 1958) p. 59.
2 Douglas Bush: Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1937) p. 512.

the French railway junction scene) be connected with such moments in Eliot's private memories. Whether they are or not is not strictly relevant: their significance consists in the particular emotion with which they are associated in the poetry itself. Experiences of thwarted desire are often conveyed through imagery whose nature is most clearly shown in the early poem 'La Figlia Che Piange': a girl with flowing hair stands with her arms full of flowers, and the scene is characterised by a sense of failure as well as of unhappy love. It recurs in the little scene of the hyacinth girl in Part I of The Waste Land. A sense of boredom and squalor, with additional sinister overtones, is conveyed by the recurrent imagery which links rats with bones or with wind: it occurs in Parts II and III of The Waste Land and again in The Hollow Men. These and several other instances of recurrent imagery associated with certain emotions or sensations show that Eliot's experiences and sense-impressions have been constantly systematized in symbolic terms for the purposes of poetry. In this respect it is important to remember that the poetry is in fact the end which these experiences and sense-impressions serve, not simply a means of expressing them (that would be to deny Eliot's theory of the impersonality of poetry). To this systematization of images, as to Yeats's more explicitly systematized pattern in A Vision, we give the name of a personal mythology: not a mythology in the fullest sense (see page 8), but in the frequently limited sense acceptable for purposes of literary criticism (see pages 10-12).

The moments of illumination evoked by a particular set of recurrent images constitute one of the outstanding features of Eliot's personal mythology. They are the focal point of Marina and of each of the Four Quartets.

Marina combines both a moment of illumination and a pervading sense of spiritual release. One is especially clear in the lines

> Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
> Under sleep, where all the waters meet

and the other is apparent in

> What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers
> And woodthrush calling through the fog
> My daughter.

The poem is completely devoid of any discursive mode of communication.

Its entire effect is achieved through a kind of kaleidoscope of images, which, while they attain their effect independently of the rest of Eliot's work, do gain further in significance by comparison with passages from his other poems. The 'seas... shores... grey rocks and... islands' are those of Ash-Wednesday VI and The Dry Salvages. Whereas in Ash-Wednesday they appear in the yearnings of a rebellious spirit committed to an ascetic discipline, here in Marina they are accepted and fully affirmed. The whispers and laughter of children among leaves recur with other moments of illumination: in Burnt Norton Parts I and V, East Coker Part III, and the end of Little Gidding. It is probably in one of the minor poems that the prototype of this image is available: 'New Hampshire', in which 'Children's voices in the orchard... Swing up into the apple-tree.' The face 'more distant than stars and nearer than the eye' reminds us both of the face of Beatrice, whose eyes, like her smile, gain more and more in rich clarity and power as she rises with Dante from one heavenly sphere to the next, and the eyes which appear in a very different context in The Hollow Men. The latter are the eyes of 'death's dream kingdom', 'death's twilight kingdom', the hope of the speaker gathered with other hollow men 'on this beach of the tumid river'. They are also the eyes 'that last I saw in tears' of the minor poem which was originally one of 'Doris's Dream Songs' and part of The Hollow Men. It is as if Dante, penetrating to the depths of Hell, were in those gloomy miseries imagining the eyes 'I shall not see unless / At the door of death's other kingdom'. Only 'empty men' (not the hollow men but those who have been 'emptied of themselves') can hope to see these eyes. The eyes which Dante is to meet in the Earthly Paradise will take him to the vision of the multifoliate rose of heaven.

> The eyes are not here
> There are no eyes here
> In this valley of dying stars
> In this hollow valley
> This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms
>
> In this last of meeting places
> We grope together
> And avoid speech
> Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

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

The eyes which will give new vision are still absent. Here in The Hollow Men the despair of them is as strong as any despair to be found in The Waste Land. The contrast in Marina is obvious. There, grace is present in the face 'more distant than stars and nearer than the eye'. The experience corresponds with Dante's entry into Paradise. It is as much the face of a bringer of salvation as the face of Beatrice is.

Ostensibly it is the face of the long-lost daughter Marina, lost at sea as a baby and found again on his ship by her father Pericles - after many agonies and stormy voyages. The speaker appears to be Pericles himself and the scene one of healing recognition such as we find in the play. But the essence of the poem lies not in the specific persons of Pericles and Marina, but in the sense of recognition, restoration, healing and new hope which the images combine to produce. There is also a sense of the recovery of lost innocence, and for this too the discovery of the innocent Marina (like Perdita and Miranda) is a fitting symbol. The female figure who brings healing and salvation is the focal point of the poem, and the tone of the whole is one of unalloyed joy. In this it represents a great advance in the 'Way of Affirmations' from the healing visions of Ash-Wednesday with their qualified joy. Here there is no hint of the necessity, even, of renunciation. All is pure affirmation, and this makes Marina unique among Eliot's major poems. Instead of being renounced by a conscious act of the will, all the images of sin leading to death Are become unsubstantial, reduced by a wind,
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
By this grace dissolved in place

The dark night preceding this rebirth of spirit may be assumed, but is not dwelt upon.

The connection with Shakespeare's late plays, though tenuous, is interesting. It is in those romances that Shakespeare appears to have worked out his own recurring mythological pattern of action. His debt to sources (like The Winter's Tale's derivation from Pandosto) was of

negligible importance in providing this pattern: indeed the process of feeling towards the pattern doubtless affected the choice of sources. The significance for him of this pattern appears from its recurrence in roughly the same form (passion and enmity; separation and sorrow; restoration and reconciliation) in Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest - with a few variations, but basically a similar pattern maintained, in Pericles. Its outlines appear also in King Lear (which has its own recognition and reconciliation scene); but a tragic instead of a serene resolution is brought about by the addition of Cordelia's death with the subsequent death of Lear. The general lost-and-found, court-wilderness-court pattern of the romances (and even of As You Like It) has affinities with that death-and-rebirth, withdrawal-and-return pattern which runs through so much of Eliot's work: in his concern with the comparative death-and-rebirth myths underlying The Waste Land, with the Dantean descent-and-ascent pattern, and with the juxtaposition of the two spiritual processes represented by the ascetic's 'dark night of the soul' and the visionary's 'moment of illumination'.

The visionary moments are the foci of the Four Quartets. Their concern with these experiences and their concern with the nature of Time are closely related: for while the visionary moments bring with them a sensation of timelessness, it is only in Time that they can be remembered, and it is only through them that the apparently hopeless and arbitrary flux of Time can be conquered by being given a meaning. It is through these moments that Time and timelessness, movement and stillness, boredom and ecstasy can be reconciled.

Reconciliation is the keynote of the Quartets, and it is for this reason that so many of its statements and images are presented in paradoxical terms. A complete list of paradoxes would take too much space to reproduce, but a selection of them quoted out of context will illustrate the enormous part played by paradox in the work:

> ...time future contained in time past...
> ...Distracted from distraction by distraction...
> ...World not world, but that which is not world...
> ...In my beginning is my end...
> ...So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the
> ...Our only health is the disease... (dancing..

...the movement of pain that is painless and motionless...
...Time the destroyer is time the preserver...
...regret for those who are not yet here to regret...
...Too strange to each other for misunderstanding...
...United in the strife which divided them...
...To be redeemed from fire by fire...

In view of this it is not surprising that one of the epigraphs to Burnt Norton (and consequently to the whole work) should be from Heraclitus: 'The way upward and downward is one and the same.' For his preoccupation with the reconciliation of opposites Eliot found his master in Heraclitus, who held that 'Whatever are opposites co-operate, and from the divergent proceeds the most beautiful harmony.' [1] The mythological universe of the Quartets is one in which all opposites are reconcilable; in which any of the four seasons can be fused into one; and in which the traditional four elements play a prominent part as ambivalent symbols. All these aspects of the personal mythology are related to the central connection between the moments of illumination and the problem of Time.

The moment of illumination associated with the country house at Burnt Norton appears to take place in a formal garden. The image of walking through a little gate into a rose-garden where an experience of great intensity takes place (accompanied by bright sunlight and the sound of children's voices) is an ingredient of Eliot's personal mythology which we also find outside the Quartets. It comes in The Family Reunion (written at about the same time as Burnt Norton, and resembling it in a good deal of both its garden and desert imagery). Agatha's approach many years before to such a moment is now completed for her by Harry, whom she had loved in his father and whom she has now helped to his own vision. She says:

I only looked through the little door
When the sun was shining on the rose-garden:
And heard in the distance tiny voices
And then a black raven flew over.

Now Harry understands the family's 'curse', whose power is broken ('the chain breaks') and completes for her that unfulfilled experience:

I was not there, you were not there, only our phantasms
And what did not happen is as true as what did happen
O my dear, and you walked through the little door
And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden. [2]

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1 Quoted by Denis de Rougemont: Man's Western Quest (1957) p. 3.
2 The Family Reunion (1939) pp. 107-8.

Judging by the end of Little Gidding, the image of entry into the rose-garden where children's voices are heard also represents a momentary mystical return to a state of primal innocence. (The apple-tree may bear specific relation to Eden, but it is not necessary to suppose so.) How to capture and make something permanent out of such moments is the problem of the Quartets; and it is partly through the recurrence of images associated with such experiences that Eliot attempts on the poetic level this process of recapture. The passage of time is what makes it difficult (and in the last resort impossible) to fix and hold such moments, but 'structural recurrence of themes, as Proust also found, is the chief device by which the writer can convey the recapture of time.' [1] The most frequently recurring theme by which Eliot tries to convey this recapture is the idea that all opposites can be reconciled. All conflicts and opposites in the time-ridden world (the boarhound and the bear, flesh and fleshless, dance and stillness) are 'reconciled among the stars'. The experience with its illumination bringing quiet release from stress cannot be described; only its results can be hinted at:

> I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.
> And I cannot say how long, for that is to place it in time.

To effect a relation between the timeless world of the vision and the time-ridden world may require a descent into the 'dark night of the soul': the ascetic way. It means

> Desiccation of the world of sense,
> Evacuation of the world of fancy,
> Inoperancy of the world of spirit...

- the very opposite of what the visionary moments themselves bring. It is the Way of St. John of the Cross, and should be followed unless one is to have only the limited spiritual illumination vouchsafed in those fleeting moments. They are only hints and guesses; the rest (on the level of a deliberate ascesis) is to be attained patiently through 'prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.' (The Dry Salvages Part V) Without the following of some such Way the intense moments, as at the end of Burnt Norton, simply come and go instantly, and:

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1 F.O. Matthiessen: The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (3rd edn. 1958) p.189.

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after.

Eliot's solution to the problem, as we can see, goes further than Proust's: it involves not only the construction of a work of art in which the experiences themselves shall be symbols, but also the adoption of a religious asceticism and a kind of 'reconciliation-metaphysics'.

In East Coker the time into which the visionary moments irrupt is an endless cycle of 'birth, copulation and death', as Sweeney would call it. It is very rarely, and then under the influence of the illuminatory experience, that this cycle takes on the rhythms of purpose rather than of futility. The moment the vision has passed, one who has seen an ordered world of men and women

Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons

can now see in the perpetual process only 'Dung and death.' Any attempt to reproduce the sensation of cosmic unity gained in that passing moment is doomed to failure. This seems to be Eliot's meaning when, following the lyric of Part II in which a sense of oneness is striven after by fusion of the seasons, he remarks: 'That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory'. Again the patience of the negative Way is counselled: wait in darkness and stillness, without hope, love or thought, 'So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.' There follows, as if in demonstration of the efficacy of this way, a set of recurrent images which connotes one of the visionary moments:

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning,
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
Of death and birth.

So we are pointed back immediately to the negative Way in the next passage: a close paraphrase from St. John of the Cross.

The first explicit reference to any Christian framework of thought comes in the Good Friday lyric, which is rather overfull of conceits. It is striking, but breaks into rather than operates within the personal mythological framework of the poem. At the end of Part V the images associated with old age and death are paradoxically the same ones that connote a release of the spirit. The final way back to the world of

the momentary vision lies in the bitter final journey

> Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
> The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
> Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

In The Dry Salvages the river appears as man's life, with its constant undercurrent of savagery, pouring itself out into the sea, that disordered flux of time that is also eternity. On this time-flux drifts the wreckage of human life, and there is no principle of order in it except that provided by the 'Prayer of the one Annunciation'. There have been the moments of happiness, of sudden illumination, but 'We had the experience but missed the meaning'. Whereas Burnt Norton and East Coker begin from moments of illumination and go on to discuss their recapture in the chaos of time, The Dry Salvages begins with the chaos of time itself, and only after discussion of how to escape that chaos does it present the images associated with a visionary moment. Meanwhile we are to learn, concerning these moments, that 'approach to the meaning restores the experience / In a different form': we shall find that they are moments of Annunciation and therefore of Incarnation, that through them, as through the 'Prayer of the one Annunciation', a redeeming principle of order enters into the chaos. It is only through an Incarnation that healing order can be found, for contrary to popular opinion, 'time is no healer: the patient is no longer here.' The wreckage drifting on the flux of time can be redeemed only by something from outside time: and the moments of illumination are full of redeeming power since they are timeless. They irrupt into and intersect with time: this is the nature of Incarnation. But to capture and hold fast their redeeming power means embracing (here in a modified form) the ascetic way: for to apprehend

> The point of intersection of the timeless
> With time, is an occupation for the saint -
> No occupation either, but something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

Very few are able to follow the ascetic Way: the others merely treasure the few visionary moments vouchsafed to them.

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,

> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts.

This 'hint half guessed,... gift half understood, is Incarnation.' Now that the recurrent images representing the moment of illumination have at last occurred, we find that the long 'approach to the meaning' has indeed restored the experience in a different form, since it is now identifiable as a type of Incarnation. Since time and timelessness meet in such moments, it is in them that past and future can be reconciled.

Little Gidding begins with another fusion of the seasons into one; and this time it is not merely a fusion in order to create an impression of cosmic unity and timelessness, but also a simple device to indicate the springtime of spiritual awareness ('The soul's sap quivers') in the winter of unredeemed nature. The intensity of spiritual awareness is like Pentecostal fire lighting up the winter scene. The place to which the speaker has come is one whose history is likewise rich in spiritual awareness: 'You are here to kneel / Where prayer has been valid.'

A sharp change of rhythm and tone comes in Part II, which presents first a universe in which the very elements prey on one another, and then one in which men prey on one another. The 'dark dove with the flickering tongue' is not the Spirit which descended on Christ, but a warlike instrument of destruction. The Dantean meeting of the poet and the 'familiar compound ghost' of his dead masters brings little encouragement: the message delivered is one of despair in old age, unless the hearer consigns himself too to a potentially destructive element: fire. But since the fire may have an ambivalent function (it is here the refining fire of purgation) one small hope remains of an agonised path to salvation from the predatory world. The saving path is not, however, wholly a negative one, as the next section shows. Liberation may be achieved through an attachment which is also detachment: a detachment which involves 'not less of love', but its increase beyond the point where attachment to things and persons is a tyrant - an expanding of love 'beyond desire' which, like the intersection between timelessness and Time, brings 'liberation / From the future as well as the past.' Affirmation and rejection of love for things and persons do not

contradict but complement each other.

The 'refining fire' mentioned in Part II is also the divine fire of Part IV, and is the implicitly Christian answer to the fire of destruction that consumes but does not purify. Since this divine fire is linked via the Pentecostal flames to all images of the Holy Ghost, the dove here is also the answer to the warlike dove of Part II.

In the final section we return to the problem of redemption from Time; the value of the timeless moments is that they help to effect such a redemption. The intersection of Time and timelessness (which is embodied also in the ordered patterns of poetry - 'The complete consort dancing together') has connected the otherwise shapeless flux of Time with a universe of order and meaning in which all things are reconciled. This has taken place, in the first three quartets, on the level of individual experience: and for all their references to Good Friday, Annunciation and Incarnation, their mythological universe remains basically a private one. In Little Gidding the personal mythology asserts itself once more, but here a much closer connection is made in the thought of the poem with the Christian mythology. The private visionary moments may lend significance to the experience of the individual, but Little Gidding implies that it is the historical Incarnation of Christian tradition which lends significance to the history of mankind as a whole, making it into a pattern: 'a pattern / Of timeless moments.' It is therefore the most Christian in tone of the quartets, and the only one in which there may be said to be a vital fusion of personal and Christian mythologies. The mythology of the quartets as a whole remains personal.

Incarnation as a principle is mentioned in The Dry Salvages. But the specific Incarnation of Christ, though not mentioned, is of greater relevance to the thought of Little Gidding. Yet the line 'With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling' links this Christian thought to the private mythology whose images of illumination follow in the closing lines of the final section.

Apart from the recurring images connected with visionary moments, such as the voices of children in an apple-tree, wild thyme, winter

lightning, a waterfall, there are the other types of recurring images which also form part of Eliot's private mythology, as we have seen: the images, for instance, which are his poetic correlatives for experiences of spiritual release or of thwarted desire. But it is not merely of several sets of images that we speak when we use the term 'personal mythology'. We imply also (as did Eliot when using the term 'mythology' in speaking of Dante) some kind of more or less organized world-view in which all sensations and experiences are related by being seen as parts of one great pattern. Dante's mythology was a public one: mediaeval Catholicism. Eliot's is, in his poetry at any rate (which is all that matters here) private. The fact that he has been for the latter half of his life an avowed Christian does not mean that the mythology of Four Quartets is as a whole explicitly Christian. Christian influences there are, certainly - especially Dante and St. John of the Cross - but the private mythology is basically one of poetic (and does not pretend to philosophic) validity.[1] It is a mythology already emergent in the earlier works such as The Waste Land; it has affinities with the fragments of Heraclitus which, because of their poetic suggestiveness, Eliot chose as epigraphs for Burnt Norton; and its character may be most fitly summed up in the single term Reconciliation. In the universe of the Quartets the things which can be symbolically reconciled include public and private experience, time and timelessness, movement and stillness, darkness and light, winter and summer, birth and death. All these unions of opposites are effected through the prototype of the moments of illumination, revealed in The Dry Salvages as Incarnation.[2]

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1 See p. 95 & Note 3.

2 Eliot relates all the visionary moments to the principle of Incarnation. Doubtless it is only the unique historic Incarnation of Christian belief that he accepts literally, but in The Dry Salvages V the absence of the definite article before the word shows that it is here the principle of Incarnation rather than the one event with which he is concerned. (This may lend point to his passing mention of Krishna in the same poem, although it is probable that the Krishna passage is relevant simply to the injunction to 'fare forward' in a state of detachment. The virtue of detachment is a theme far more common to Christian and Hindu mystics than their respective notions of Incarnation; and if Eliot's mention of Krishna does relate only to the need for detachment and not to Incarnation, then Miss Gardner's objection to the passage is unnecessary: see T.S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, ed. B. Rajan (1947) pp. 69-70.)

There is, too, a traditional aspect of the private mythology: this is provided by the presence in it of the four traditional elements which we met also in the symbolism of The Waste Land: air, earth, water and fire. There four of the five parts of the poem (Part II being the exception) were concerned respectively with earth, fire, water and air. Similarly, as many critics have pointed out, one of these elements dominates each of the Quartets: air in Burnt Norton, earth in East Coker, water in The Dry Salvages, and fire in Little Gidding. In a sense we could say that the whole of the Quartets 'is about the four elements whose mysterious union makes life', [1] although there is a danger that this might rob the visionary moments of the necessary emphasis. At any rate, the elements function again in the Quartets, as they did in The Waste Land, in an ambivalent fashion. In Burnt Norton the 'vibrant air' is the element through which echoes may lead one to a moment of vision, through which in turn time may be conquered. But it is also the vehicle on which all tempting and deceptive mirages and voices are carried:

> The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
> The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

And it is the home of the 'cold wind / That blows before and after time':

> Eructation of unhealthy souls
> Into the faded air, the torpid
> Driven on the wind...

In East Coker the ambivalence of the earth symbol is more obvious: on one hand it is the element of 'Dung and death', the place of burial, on the other it is associated with all the natural rhythms of growth and decay, and of growth from decay:

> Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
> Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
> Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
> Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf...
>
> Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
> Mirth of those long since under earth
> Nourishing the corn.

At the end of East Coker the movement from land to sea prepares us for the symbolism of The Dry Salvages; and the movement through 'the vast waters'

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1 Helen Gardner: The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949) p. 45.

is a movement towards 'a further union, a deeper communion'; but it is through 'the dark cold and the empty desolation', suggesting acceptance of an ascetic way in order to receive spiritual illumination - suggestive also that the death itself which follows old age is the way to a new life and a new illumination.

So the sea becomes both an image of desolation and a symbolic source of mystic illumination; an emptiness with the promise of fulness; the image of death but also the source of life. Much of this ambivalence is implicit in The Dry Salvages, where the sea, like the time-flux with its drifting wreckage of men's lives, 'tosses up our losses', but also tosses up 'Its hints of earlier and other creation', being the element from which all life came. So water, as in The Waste Land, functions ambivalently as an agent of destruction and a bringer of life; and 'Time the destroyer is time the preserver, / Like the river...': the step to the quartets' constant method of paradox is a short one. Finally, in Little Gidding the image of fire is used more than ambivalently: being (with the possible exception of water) the most traditional and universal of the elements as a symbol, its symbolic connotations are at least fourfold. It is an agent of destruction ('the dark dove with the flickering tongue'), of purification ('that refining fire'), of illumination -

> And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
> Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
> In the dark time of the year.

And so it is also the pentecostal fire itself, the fire of the Spirit, of divine love.

The clearest indication that the inclusion of the four traditional elements was not unconscious is the lyric at the beginning of Little Gidding II, where all four elements are seen in their destructive capacity. In addition to their ambivalent use, their function may be also to impart a feeling of wholeness to the universe of the quartets: in the same way that Joyce deliberately wove images of the various arts, crafts, sciences and other departments of learning into the texture of Ulysses in order to produce in the reader a sense of completeness and comprehensiveness when contemplating the universe presented in the novel.

Of the types of reconciliation effected in Eliot's handling of his

symbols, two in particular stand out as major features of his personal mythology: the reconciling of movement and stillness, and the reconciling of time and timelessness. Naturally the two types of reconciliation are sometimes intimately related.

Much of the Quartets is concerned with movement. In each poem there is a section in which some form of movement or travelling plays a prominent part: in Burnt Norton a descent into the London Underground becomes also a descent into the ascetic's 'dark night', and this appears again in East Coker; in The Dry Salvages we have the travellers both by train and ocean liner who are urged to 'fare forward'; and in Little Gidding comes the 'dead patrol' of the air-raid warden and his 'familiar compound ghost' in the streets of London. But it is in more complex passages that the reconciliation with stillness is effected. Perhaps the most important is Burnt Norton II. In this section both parts, the lyric with the tight rhythm and the loosely discursive passage, attempt to give expression to a sense of stillness in motion or motion in stillness. Of the lyric Raymond Preston writes:

> It is a vision of the ordered universe in which movement from one part of it to another seems so effortless that it is not movement at all, and it is the whole of which we are conscious, not the part... Strong sense-impressions which are normally experienced in succession are in these /the first/ two lines registered simultaneously; and they suggest a third sensation - arrested movement. I take this as a way of imagining existence outside time - a way of suggesting what is meant by 'time is conquered'.[1]

At the beginning of the second part comes one of Eliot's notable recurring phrases:

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
> But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
> Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
> Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
> There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
> I can only say, there we have been; but I cannot say where.
> And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

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1 'Four Quartets' Rehearsed (1946) p. 15. The apparent effortlessness of ascending movement reminds us of Dante's mode of ascent from sphere to sphere of Paradise. It is not so much a physical ascent as an illusion of ascent produced by steadfast gazing into Beatrice's eyes. That vision makes possible a kind of movement which is not the denial of stillness.

The whole tortuous passage appears to be an attempt to convey the sensation, which comes with the moment of illumination, of both detachment from all things and the reconciliation of all things: hence the medley of paradoxes. The image of the still point takes us back to Coriolan, where it appears in 'Triumphal March' to emphasise the complete repose of the central figure in contrast with the rest of the scene:

> There is no interrogation in his eyes
> Or in the hands, quiet over the horse's neck,
> And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.
> O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,
> Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water
> At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

In the companion piece, 'Difficulties of a Statesman', appears a related passage in which the speaker seems to be yearning, besieged as he is with responsibilities, for that repose. The imagery takes us straight back to Burnt Norton via the lyrical fourth movement. The Coriolan figure speaks:

> O hidden under the... Hidden under the... Where the dove's foot
> rested and locked for a moment,
> A still moment, repose of noon, set under the upper branches of
> noon's widest tree
> Under the breast feather stirred by the small wind after noon
> There the cyclamen spreads its wings, there the clematis droops
> over the lintel...

Similar but not identical images, apparently Eliot's correlative of a sense of repose, constitute the strangely potent lyric of Burnt Norton IV:

> Time and the bell have buried the day,
> The black cloud carries the sun away.
> Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
> Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
> Clutch and cling?
> Chill
> Fingers of yew be curled
> Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
> Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
> At the still point of the turning world.

These are not the specific images indicating a moment of illumination, but perhaps the sense of repose follows naturally upon such a moment; in any event they are connected to some extent by the 'still point' phrase which in Burnt Norton II is part of the attempted expression of detachment and reconciliation.

The union of movement and stillness contained in this image makes it particularly valuable to Eliot. The notion is of a 'mathematically pure point' which remains unmoving at the centre of a turning wheel or

of any revolving movement. The movement of any point on the circumference of a spinning wheel or revolving disc is dependent on the stillness of the centre point; and also, since one side of the wheel moves down while the other moves up, the opposite movements are reconciled in the motionlessness of the centre point. So the image of circular movement, so often symbolising futility (as in the whirlwind of 'Gerontion') may also symbolise order and reconciliation. Stillness and movement are reconciled by the image of the 'world' which revolves with constant movement at the circumference and perpetual stillness at the centre. This explains the feeling of resolution which is evoked by the whirlpool of The Waste Land IV. Phlebas is approaching the still point at the centre, and so passing 'the stages of his age and youth' in the return to a symbolic state of innocence and peace. It also explains the sense of resolution which Burnt Norton IV evokes.

The main type of reconciliation with which the quartets are concerned is that of time with timelessness. The universe in which this reconciliation takes place is not entirely the universe of any one traditional mythology, not even that of orthodox Christianity; it is peculiar to Eliot in its particular lines of thought and patterns of imagery. Ancient images hallowed by usage, such as the rose, the fire and the dove, are not limited to their traditional connotations in Christian literature; their significance is developed and extended within the framework of the personal mythology with its debt to a variety of sources. The fire of Pentecost, for example, takes on a new wealth of meaning through its association with Dante's refining fire of the seventh cornice, with the burning of the Nessus shirt, and with the fire of the German bomber. Similarly the Incarnation of the Christian mythology which reconciles time with eternity, has its meaning expanded by its association with the principle of incarnation that Eliot sees at work in his visionary moments, each of which is a 'point of intersection of the timeless / With time' and therefore in a sense an incarnation experience.

It is not true that 'The main preoccupation of the Four Quartets

is the Christian doctrine of time and eternity.' [1] Their main preoccupation is not a doctrine at all, but a problem (the nature of time itself) and a kind of experience (the moment of illumination) and the relationship between the two. In the course of working out this relationship, Eliot inevitably touches on the Christian notion of time and eternity: but insofar as the doctrine itself does not relate the time-problem to the visionary moments it is not his pervading theme.

The problem and the experience mentioned above are usually clearly presented in the first part of each quartet, particularly in the first. The quartets' similarity to chamber music has often been remarked on, and here in Burnt Norton I, in the first movement, as it were, the 'first subject' hints at the problem and the 'second subject' presents the experience. The aspect of the problem stated here is that if the passage of time distinguishing past from present and present from future is illusory, that is, 'If all time is eternally present', then 'All time is unredeemable.' Yet such a conclusion appears to be denied by the fact that one can experience moments of illumination which sharply distinguish the time before them from the time after them simply by their very occurrence (here we pass to the rest of the poem). Granted, then, that the passage of time is not an illusion, how can these intense moments, with their feeling of detachment from time, place and movement, be related to the ordinary run of daily life with its oppressive consciousness of past and future? This is the problem not only of the rest of Burnt Norton but of the rest of the quartets: and related solutions are offered to it. It is shown that the solution lies to a large extent in the very facts which pose the problem. For instance, it is only the passage of time that makes memory possible, and it is only through memory that anything at all of the visionary experience may be retained when the moment has passed:

> 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.

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1 R.L. Brett: Reason and Imagination (1960) p. 120.

Another way of escape from the time-ridden world is through the practice of a severe ascesis, the embracing of that darkness which is the subject of Burnt Norton III and East Coker III. Yet it is not in fact a different way at all, since it may lead to the same illuminatory experiences: 'So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.' The ascetic way lies in the same general pattern of death and rebirth, descent and ascent, that recurs throughout Eliot's work as the implicit way of salvation: to be born one must die, to ascend to light one must descend to darkness; 'Our only health is the disease'; 'to be restored, our sickness must grow worse'; 'If to be warmed, then I must freeze'; the way to knowledge lies through ignorance; the way to possession lies through dispossession. The paradoxes of the ascetic way are the property of St. John of the Cross (especially those at the end of East Coker III): but of course they form only a part of the entire notion of paradoxical reconciliation which underlies the universe of the work. In a sense, therefore, it is more to Heraclitus than to Christian orthodoxy, Dante or St. John of the Cross that the private mythology of the Quartets is indebted.

The time-ridden continuum and the timeless moment may be reconciled through other ways in addition to the use of memory and ascetic discipline. In the superficially pointless cycles of birth, decay and death one may recognize (at the visionary moment) a rhythm and a pattern - and it is through these that time reaches into that which is not time. Those who have ever been 'Keeping the rhythm... in their living in the living seasons' have by that patterned rhythm redeemed the cyclic process from futility. It is pattern, too, which enables works of art to be bridges between time and the timeless, since pattern can be independent of time.

> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness.

The recognition of a pattern in things or events is thus a method of reconciling time and timelessness. Insofar as it is such a pattern, history gives meaning to otherwise arbitrary events. If we see every new event as modifying the pattern formed by all previous events, ('every

moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been') [1] then every event may itself assume the quality of timelessness.

> A people without history
> Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
> Of timeless moments.

To see a pattern in past events is to 'capture' them, and to recognize in them a meaning which transcends the time process.

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

The Dry Salvages is largely about the impossibility, and folly of trying, to disown the past or deny its relevance to the present. This is a false escape from the time-continuum. It is like pretending that because the river has been harnessed to the needs of a technological age, it can no longer spread destruction through floods. Other ways of disowning past and future by searching them curiously are the astrology, clairvoyancy and even psychoanalysis mentioned in Part V. Eliot implies that to shuffle off responsibility for past and future is to make the present meaningless. The present moment only possesses its significance (unattended as it usually is by the illuminating vision) by being woven into the pattern of past and future. As Preston says in summarising the thought of another Quartet (East Coker): 'Present human life and achievement is negligible except in relation to the pattern of life of the whole race'. [2] And Elizabeth Drew says of these two Quartets, 'Man cannot dissociate himself from the bloodstream of his primitive ancestry [The Dry Salvages], any more than from the seasonal time-cycle [East Coker]'. [3]

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1 This idea that the pattern is modified by every new addition to it, is a favourite one of Eliot's, and applies to his thoughts on literature as well as on history, and on the relation between the two: 'the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence... with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer... has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.' 'The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new... work of art among them... the whole existing order must be... altered... the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.' (Selected Essays pp. 14, 23.)

2 'Four quartets' Rehearsed (1946) p. 24.

3 T.S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry (1950) p. 214.

We cannot forget

> The backward look behind the assurance
> Of recorded history, the backward half-look
> Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.

Since the patterned forms of art may provide bridges between time and the timeless, Eliot attempts in the Quartets to achieve such a bridge as well as discussing it. As in the patterns of the dance the end and the beginning coincide, so in poetry itself

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
> The end is where we start from. And every phrase
> And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new,
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together)
> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
> Every poem an epitaph.

The reconciliation of beginning and end through the image of a pattern is one of the ways in which Eliot uses temporal terms to suggest detachment from the time process. Another is the device of fusing the seasons. This is done in the lyric of East Coker II ('What is the late November doing...?') and at the beginning of Little Gidding with its 'Midwinter spring'. The scene is 'Suspended in time', it is 'not in time's covenant'. The strange sense of hanging apart from the passage of time is enhanced by the fact that 'There is no earth smell / Or smell of living thing.' Preston writes of this passage:

> We are ordinarily aware of the passing of time in the procession of the seasons; but here there is a transitory moment of winter which seems like spring, and in this union of opposite seasons, in the suspension of time and space, we have a moment, a condition which seem timeless.[1]

Finally we return to the images that are correlatives of the moments of illumination. If these are not apprehended as part of a pattern of timeless moments, their existence is fleeting. They are the points of intersection of the timeless with time, but to make of them, in relation to all other moments and events, a meaningful pattern, is a mystic's calling, 'an occupation for the saint'. Otherwise -

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1 'Four Quartets' Rehearsed (1946) p. 52.

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,

which does not become fitted into a pattern of timeless moments. They are hints on the individual level of a principle at work in the universe as a whole. They are only 'hints and guesses'; but

> 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...

Incarnation is for Christian civilization

> the ultimate symbol of the union of sense and spirit, the resolution of the paradoxes of life and death, time and the timeless; a symbol of totality, of wholeness, to which all time-experience is relative. But in the poems, it has been shown to be a <u>principle</u> active throughout the universe. The shaft of sunlight, the winter lightning, the waterfall, the scent of the wild thyme, the music, are all incarnations; that is, they are all an invisible energy manifesting itself in the phenomena of sense.[1]

The images associated with the moments of illumination, then, are also in Eliot's personal mythology the correlatives of the idea of Incarnation. The general patterns of death-and-rebirth, descent-and-ascent, which he has adapted from mythological sources in so much of his work, make it not surprising that his own mythological pattern of idea and image should include the notion. For in the principle of Incarnation, all opposites are reconciled.

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1 Elizabeth Drew: <u>T.S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry</u> (1950) p. 225.

C O N C L U S I O N

PATTERNS OF SALVATION

It will be clear by now that the subject of salvation (and 'true' or 'false' methods of attaining to it) has been a constant interest of Eliot's - and that his various uses of myths have been closely related to this preoccupation. He has dealt with many aspects of salvation: salvation from sterility in sexual, social and spiritual life; salvation from a personal feeling of sin and inadequacy; salvation from the world-weariness brought about by a sense of the transience of things; salvation from the oppression of guilt and fear; salvation from the sense of meaninglessness and futility in an inexorable time-continuum. As there are many things to be saved from, so there are many patterns of salvation: but they all have a basic pattern in common. And it is this basic pattern which is suggested to us by the mythological themes which Eliot employs.

The comparative mythology underlying The Waste Land (which antedates Eliot's reception into the Church) can be fairly closely correlated with Christian mythology's tradition of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Indeed his face is a part of the multiple face of the Hanged God in the poem. The same general outline is common to both the Gospel and the fertility myths of Adonis, Osiris and others. The difference in the case of the Christian Incarnation is that it is unique and historical, and transcends instead of fitting into the normal cyclic pattern of generation and decay. This difference becomes important to Eliot later, but in The Waste Land it is the Christian myth's similarity of outline which is relevant. The mythological world of Ash-Wednesday, so closely related to Dante's, reveals a pattern which may be roughly summed up in the formula 'descent-and-ascent' - suggestive of the shape of Dante's journey in the Commedia. The speaker whose experience is the subject of Ash-Wednesday undergoes the process of 'hitting rock bottom' in Part II (expressed through the image of the stripping of the bones);

and in Part III comes the symbolic ascent. The pattern is also clearly one of death followed by a renewal of life; and of withdrawal from a garden ('where trees flower, and springs flow') to a desert, followed by return to a garden. A large element of the Quartets is the pattern of ascetic discipline and visionary illumination: the implication being that ascetic withdrawal gives meaning to the visionary moments experienced and makes possible the occurrence of further visionary moments ('So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing'). Again the rhythm is one of withdrawal and return, and the ascetic 'death' of the senses is followed by a renewal of the life of the spirit. The same general idea of death as a bringer of new life is found to some extent - but less obviously and less prominently - in the plays. The death of Thomas, for example, brings about a renewal of spiritual life in the women of Canterbury.

Death leads to rebirth; descent leads to ascent; withdrawal leads to return. The mythological patterns thus have in common a master pattern in which all these opposites are reconciled. And by the end of the Quartets we see that it is the principle of Incarnation which links all these opposites: in that principle lies the reconciliation of all the reconciliations.

Incarnation is, as Miss Drew says, the 'resolution of the paradoxes': and since the paradoxes point to ways of salvation, the principle of Incarnation emerges as the factor common to all ways of salvation. Briefly, salvation depends upon the reconciliation of all opposites, including time and timelessness, life and death; and that reconciliation is made possible by the principle of Incarnation 'active throughout the universe'.

We have seen how Eliot has made mythological themes and patterns serve his purpose by functioning as ordering devices. But they are much more than that: they are ends as well as means. Traditional myths are now widely used as devices to give order to poetry: they originally gave order to the whole of communal and private life. It is natural that the poet who seeks an ordered vision of life should be a seeker after myths, and not surprising that he should sometimes construct his

own. All mythologies are, broadly speaking, patterns of salvation (whether from death, drought, disease, sterility or sin). That this is so is suggested by the original rôle of traditional myths in their ritual context. And in Eliot's personal mythology the patterns of salvation depend on the reconciliation of opposites which the Incarnation principle makes possible.

In the public, Christian, mythology which Eliot has embraced, that principle is focused in the tradition of one unique historic event. Its unique nature does not deny the principle, but may be seen as the translation of the principle into historical terms. D.G. James refers to it as 'the mythology which is divinely given as history', 'the mythology enacted in time through the free act of God'. [1] And according to C.S. Lewis the ancient non-Christian myths are merely less clearly focused glimpses and less articulate expressions of that eternal truth revealed in the one Incarnation - a controversial view, but suggestive when we look at the mythological patterns used by Eliot. This notion that a myth may be 'a real though unfocussed gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination' [2] reinforces the suggestion that Eliot's 'visionary moments' are an essential part of his personal mythology: for of these mystic experiences too, we remember, he says 'These are only hints and guesses, / Hints followed by guesses' - but

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

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1 The Romantic Comedy (1948) p. 209.
2 Miracles (1947) p. 161.

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S Y N O P S I S

Chapter I - Myths and Literature

The difficulty of the word 'myth' is partly due to its frequent equation with the mythopoeic process, to its varied use, and to uncertainty about the origins and functions of what we call traditional myths. An attempted definition based on the theories of Malinowski, Cassirer and Jung, concludes that myths are non-logical in origin, yet not pre-logical but preterlogical, and that their function was to provide the vision of a cosmic order as well as sanctions for the maintenance of social order. These two functions have now been split, so that we have the symbolic 'myths' of art and the ideological 'myths' of politics.

In talking of the myths of individual writers we are using the word in a limited but recognized sense. There are the mythological constructions of Melville and Yeats, for instance. Traditional myths are also widely used in literature. Even when not accepted literally, they serve as a means of imposing order on chaotic experience (Yeats and some Romantics), as a repository of widely-known symbols which facilitate communication (C.S. Lewis), and as a means both of universalising particular characters and events, and of achieving a high degree of compression by combining statement and comment in one (Joyce's Ulysses). They also provide a link with a vigorous tradition in an age when common traditions are few and feeble.

[With these conclusions in mind, the remaining chapters deal with Eliot's various uses of myths and with his construction of an individual mythology.]

Chapter II - Beginnings

In most of Eliot's early poems the use of myths does not play a very important part. As many literary and historical allusions are used for purposes of ironic contrast (the allusions to Antony and Cleopatra in 'Burbank'), so mythological allusions are used from time to time with a similar end in view. In 'Sweeney Erect' the Theseus-

Ariadne parallel provides this ironic contrast. The contrast here is not between past grandeur and present sordidness, but between the grandeur of an idealised world and the sordidness of the real world.

'Prufrock' again uses myth-allusions for purposes of ironic contrast, but here the irony is a little more complex owing to the self-consciousness of the speaker in the monologue. A further degree of complexity in Mr Apollinax derives from the ambivalent attitude of the spectator who describes the scene. The mythical images here have a double-edged effect: they mock Mr Apollinax, but raise him to a status which makes his hearers more ridiculous, so that the ironic light in which Mr Apollinax is seen is softened by the contrast between the two kinds of irony.

'Gerontion' is the first poem capable of interpretation in terms of a mythological sterility-fertility opposition. The sterility motif is presented in the images describing Gerontion's own situation; the fertility motif, in the images associated with Christ. Gerontion's own sterility is moral, emotional, intellectual and sexual. The method used anticipates that of The Waste Land, but lacks its complete impersonality.

The best introduction to The Waste Land's method is 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales'. The myth-references are few but used to maximum effect, and the rest of the poem is so constructed as to give their effect full power when it is exercised in the closing lines. Sweeney and Agamemnon are not simply contrasted at Sweeney's expense: their implicit identification allows their deaths to comment on each other, persuading us that both deaths are important and both deaths are sordid. What unites them assumes greater relevance than what divides them. This fusion of apparent opposites into an inclusive vision prepares us for the more-than-ironical, comprehensive vision of The Waste Land. Use of the myth has also given Eliot a technical advantage, enabling him to unite precision with evocativeness.

Chapter III - The Waste Land

Lack of a common tradition accounts for much of the importance Eliot attaches to myths. He expresses his concern about this lack in After Strange Gods. In his review of Ulysses he enthusiastically discusses

Joyce's mythical method and the advantages that accrue from 'using the myth', but his remarks are more relevant to his own method in The Waste Land than to Joyce's. The theories of psychologists and anthropologists (especially Frazer) had made for an increased self-consciousness about myths, and Eliot shared in it since much of what they said confirmed his convictions about the significance of the community mind. Their theories also bore fruit in Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance. Eliot based The Waste Land on the central sterility situation common to various myths mentioned in her book, and not on the Grail story alone. It was not so much the Grail story that interested him as the field of comparative mythology which its investigation opened up.

Eliot used the comparative myths in three ways: thematically (in adopting their central sterility situation as his theme); structurally (by fusing his personages together just as many of the dying and rising gods had been shown to be basically the same; by linking his characters through the Tarot pack); and symbolically (by drawing on the various myths for symbols apart from the central sterility symbol). These three uses correspond roughly with what he says about Miss Weston's book: it suggested to him the title, the plan and much of the incidental symbolism.

/The Waste Land is then dealt with part by part. Some of the more important points are tabulated below:/

1. The Waste Land is not only sterile, but contains a fear of fertility, since all life-bringing events are agonising.

2. Two important unifying devices are used in the poem: Madame Sosostris's fortune-telling with a modified Tarot pack, which introduces and links the persons of the poem; and Tiresias, in whom all the characters, both male and female, are united, and who represents an inclusive human consciousness, the poem being 'what he sees'.

3. It is significant that Madame Sosostris does not see the Hanged Man (a potential bringer of fertility) although she knows of him. It is occasionally implied that it is not so much in the complete absence of a solution as in the refusal or failure to recognise one, that the perpetuation of the Waste Land's predicament lies.

4. The poem's symbols do not invite abstract interpretation, and attempts at it (e.g. Cleanth Brooks's 'Humanitarianism' for the Dog) are misguided. The way to avoid this is to allow the vivid visual images full play on the imagination.

5. The milieu and period of the vision are not simply London and the twentieth century. The place is everywhere and the vision is timeless. The fusion of persons and places emphasises this.

6. The recurring line 'Those are pearls that were his eyes', suggesting the transformation of disaster into a source of beauty, reinforces the implicit but never explicit idea - hinted at by the underlying myths - that death brings about a renewal of life.

7. 'Death by Water' is not an image of simple destruction. It communicates a sense of resolution, stillness and even purgation. Phlebas seems to be entering a renewed state of innocence.

8. Parts of 'What the Thunder said' are surrealistic, and attempts to extract conscious meaning from them are liable to fail.

Two features of The Waste Land adumbrate the 'personal mythology' of Four Quartets. One is the ambivalence of single images, notably of the four traditional elements as they are used by Eliot. One element dominates each of Parts I, III, IV and V, and in each case the element in question is treated ambivalently: on the one hand as destructive or sterile, on the other hand as life-giving, cleansing or restorative. Part II is an exception in this respect: its inhabitants are cut off from, or cut themselves off from, any real contact with the elements or with natural processes.

The other feature is the reconciliation of apparently opposing images. The images which are superficially contrasted in an ironic way, are at a deeper level identified with each other (e.g. Spenser's London and modern London). Recognition of this fact does away with the fallacy that Eliot's purpose is to denounce modern sterility (sexual or otherwise) by contrast with a supposed ancient fertility. He is simply concerned to deal with the experience of sterility at all ages everywhere, and to hint obliquely through the underlying myths at a

possible source of fertility. Differences of time and place are ultimately irrelevant: Tiresias who 'sees' the vision represents the timeless consciousness of the human race.

The mythological background helped Eliot to achieve this fusion, and enabled him to dispense with narrative method. He was able to suggest instead a kind of dream dreamed by all humanity: and this technique owed much to the psychological and anthropological theories about myths.

In its fusion of persons, places and times, the poem sees beyond the differences to the unity of things, as do mystics. It is to the mystic vision that Eliot aspires.

Chapter IV - Dante's World

Dante's influence on Eliot is easily recognizable. Why include him, though, in a discussion of Eliot's use of myths?

In Dante's time a generally accepted mythology (mediaeval Catholicism) dominated European living and thinking. Dante tried to create a poetic equivalent to this mythology, this ordered vision of the universe. The 'world' of his Commedia is thus a mythological world.

A distinction must be made here between mythology and allegory. Allegory is a kind of literary scaffolding, and is merely a technical device used as a means of expressing the vision. The mythology is that system of experience and belief and thought which underlies the vision.

The general movement of the Commedia from horror through striving to austere serenity is closely paralleled in Eliot's work, but it would be absurd to credit Eliot with the conscious aim of creating a Commedia. Nevertheless comparison of his work with Dante's illuminates some of his achievement, and he is certainly deeply indebted to Dante not only for Dantean images but for a Dantean way of handling images. These factors, together with his direct allusions to the Commedia, connect much of his poetry with the mythological universe of Dante.

Eliot makes occasional but effective use of the Inferno in his work up to and including The Waste Land. Both there and in 'Prufrock' the torment of the isolated consciousness is suggested by either rough

allusion to or direct quotation from the Inferno (Ugoline and Guido da Montefeltro).

It is, however, in Ash-Wednesday that Eliot's mythological universe and images are most to Dante's. The poem is (consciously or not) Eliot's equivalent of the Purgatorio. Renunciation is followed by an image of complete stripping, and then by the ascent of what are clearly purgatorial stairs, to a garden presided over by an interceding Lady. What exactly is renounced, what the white leopards stand for, who the Lady is, are none of them questions of primary importance. What is relevant is that they perform their emotional function as images. The leopards are not the ravening beasts of Inferno I: they are beneficent forces which carry out a purgative process by stripping the bones. The Lady who presides over the garden of Part IV has much in common with Dante's Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise. But unlike Dante's, Eliot's Earthly Paradise does not become the setting for translation to a Paradiso. The experience which Part IV represents takes place on a more modest scale, and is followed by renewed conflict and questioning. The end of Ash-Wednesday seems to emphasise the continuing possibility of spiritual desolation. An ascetic Way has been adopted, and in the middle of Part VI the ecstatic release given by the loveliness of natural things constitutes a hindrance to this asceticism. But the love of created things which here have to be rejected can elsewhere be affirmed - in Marina, for instance, as we see from the similarity of the images there. The contrast between these two attitudes shows the difference between the Way of Rejection and the Way of Affirmation.

Of the other uses which Eliot makes of Dante, the most important occur in Little Gidding. In Part II we have the meeting with the 'familiar compound ghost', described in Dantean terza rima. But more interesting than the imitation of verse-form is the whole situation evoked, which takes us again into the world of Dante. Reference to the 'refining' (i.e. purgative) fire links this passage to Part IV, whose ambivalent use of both dove- and fire-images has much in common with Dante's handling of his mythological images - especially his handling of the fire in Purgatorio XXVI, Eliot's favourite Canto. Eliot is clearly

deeply impressed by Dante's depiction of the penitents' willing acceptance of the refining fire, and by his ambivalent treatment of the fire - it suggests the divine love which purges the penitents of their lust, as well as the lust from which they are being purged. Charles Williams held that in the penance of the two types of lustful, the Ways of Rejection and Affirmation become one. This aspect of the Canto may also have aroused Eliot's admiration. The two Ways play a large part in his own work, but it is doubtful whether they are ever completely fused into one.

Dante had two advantages which Eliot lacked: a generally accepted mythology, and Beatrice. Eliot appropriated some of the benefits of the first, however, by drawing on Dante's rich fund of mythological imagery and on his use of the double-edged quality of traditional symbols. They cannot exert as much power in our day as they did in Dante's, but they nevertheless gain fairly widespread 'poetic assent' independently of 'philosophical belief'.

Chapter V - Myths from Greek Drama

Lack of moral and social conventions is a stumbling-block to poetic drama, says Eliot. It is true that both periods at which drama flourished as an emerging art-form (ancient Athens and the mediaeval Europe of the mystery plays) were well endowed with these. Their accepted mythologies were enshrined in ritual forms out of which in turn the drama arose. The audiences were thus in a sense participants in the action, which instructed and challenged them as well as entertaining them. The well-known mythological subjects also made possible the minimum of exposition, allowing the dramatist plenty of time for his individual treatment of the theme. This advantage of the myth-subject has been exploited by modern dramatists (e.g. Gide and Anouilh).

The only one of Eliot's plays in which he successfully exploits such advantages is Murder in the Cathedral, where ironically his subject is a Christian 'myth'. But by handling it in the way a Greek dramatist would handle his myth, he is able to use the familiarity of the Becket story for economy in exposition, and is able to challenge and instruct

as well as gaining some measure of audience-participation. The latter is achieved through the use of the chorus, which represents typical audience-opinion and becomes the real protagonist instead of Thomas. For it is the women of Canterbury who undergo the real dramatic conflict. Through these devices the religious purpose of the play is achieved.

Sweeney Agonistes is related to Greek mythology through its Oresteian epigraph, which is as much as anything a comment on the play's method of communication. Hidden meanings in Sweeney's speeches are, like the Furies, intended to be accepted by the perceptive audience as 'really there', but are not recognized by his hearers on the stage. The Sweeney fragments anticipate The Family Reunion: the Eumenides are accepted as 'really there' by the audience and Harry, but are invisible to most of his family. Eliot tries to unite the resources of modern psychology and of ancient Greek drama in dealing with the inherited consequences of sin and with its expiation, but the attempt is a failure owing to his use of the Eumenides. A frankly Christian treatment of the theme would have encountered barriers in communicating with a non-Christian audience, but this method does not succeed either: it creates a barrier to acceptance of the play by its incorporation of the supernatural into what might otherwise have been a quite acceptable psychologically understood scheme of things. O'Neill's retelling of the Orestes myth has different aims, avoids the supernatural, and is comparatively successful. Eliot's Eumenides stand both for Harry's sense of guilt and for the 'curse' on the family; and they cannot bear the weight of this dual symbolic significance. The use of the myth has not succeeded as in Murder in the Cathedral: it has necessitated a longer exposition than usual, and the audience has been neither properly included in nor challenged by the action.

In the last three plays the underlying myths are well submerged. Little use is made of them apart from a free adaptation of their narrative outlines: they are taken 'merely as a point of departure'. Thus in The Cocktail Party the Alcestis figure is split into two: Lavinia and Celia. Critics have voiced dissatisfaction with the difference between the two types of vocation they have to follow, but this probably proceeds from irrelevant presuppositions about the way in which Eliot should have used

the Alcestis. In fact the two types of vocation are an essential part of Eliot's purpose: they illuminate each other. The possibility of salvation for the Chamberlaynes through a humbler vocation represents a new and important development. The non-visionaries and non-ascetics are no longer necessarily outside the 'kingdom'. These remarks have been made not to illuminate Eliot's use of the myth but to show that irrelevant criticisms may arise from the wrong kind of concern with it.

The Confidential Clerk's theme has a little more in common with that of its point of departure, the Ion. Both are to some extent concerned with the relationship between identity and vocation. Disagreement about the correct interpretation of the Ion may have had some influence on Eliot's again splitting the title-character in two: his 'Ions' are Colby and B. Kaghan, and in the latter 'Creusa'-Lady Elizabeth's wishes for a son are fulfilled. But Eliot's main concern is the connection between Colby's identity and his vocation. Again (as for Harry and Celia) this vocation has to be entered on in isolation from family bonds: but it is a tempered isolation. The ways of renunciation and of adjustment are being tentatively reconciled. The Mulhammers too, like the Chamberlaynes, have a vocation to adjustment.

Oedipus at Colonus is the point of departure for The Elder Statesman, but Eliot's purpose is far removed from that of Sophocles. The guilty Claverton cannot like Oedipus plead ignorance as an extenuating circumstance. More important than the play's relation to its Greek counterpart is its completion of the 'ways of salvation' pattern which we find in Eliot's plays. There is still renunciation of the old self, but not of the love of created beings. Indeed it is fully human love which now becomes the way to salvation: Claverton is redeemed by the love of others. The 'in-Godding' of man which has concerned Eliot for so long is now presented in relation to the 'in-othering' of man. This is the nearest approach in his drama to the Way of Affirmations.

In most of his plays Eliot uses simply the narrative outline of the myth concerned, making little if any transfer of its mythological universe. The only play that fully inhabits a traditional mythological universe (a Christian one) is Murder in the Cathedral, and it is his most successful.

Chapter VI - The Personal Mythology: Four Quartets

Eliot has evolved a pattern of images of his own which can be regarded as mythological in function. A large part is played in this personal mythology by images indicative of mysterious moments of illumination. The importance of experiences of this kind has been widely discussed (e.g. Bevan, William James, Huizinga, Proust and Eliot himself).

Recurrent images not associated with these experiences also form part of his pattern: the 'objective correlatives', for instance, of an experience of thwarted desire, or sensual temptation, or ecstatic release. Eliot's experiences and sense-impressions have been constantly systematized in symbolic terms for the purposes of his poetry. It is important to remember that the poetry is the end which they serve, not simply a means of expressing them.

The moments of illumination evoked by a particular set of recurrent images constitute one of the outstanding features of Eliot's personal mythology. They are the focal point of Marina and of each of the Four Quartets. One of these images is the laughter of children among the leaves of a tree (its prototype is seen in 'New Hampshire'). In Marina the moment of illumination which this image evokes is also related to the attainment of new life and hope by the discovery of a long-lost face. The connection with Pericles leads to a short discussion of Shakespeare's own mythological pattern worked out in his last plays.

The Quartets are concerned with the reconciliation of time with the timelessness of the visionary moments. Reconciliation is the Quartets' keynote: this accounts for their frequent paradoxes.

In Burnt Norton the moment of illumination appears to take place in a formal rose-garden. How to derive something permanent out of such moments and to relate them to time is the problem of the Quartets. One means of effecting this relation is the embracing of an ascetic Way like that of St. John of the Cross. His asceticism is most clearly set forth in East Coker by a virtual quotation. In embracing it one may give some permanent meaning to the visionary experience which sees an ordered pattern in the endless cycle of generation and decay. In The Dry Salvages the chaotic flux of time, on which drifts the wreckage of human life, is

symbolised by the sea. The wreckage drifting on this flux of time can be redeemed only by something from outside time: and the moments of illumination are full of redeeming power since they are timeless. Each is a moment of Annunciation and thus of Incarnation. They irrupt into and intersect with time: this is the nature of Incarnation. In them past and future can be reconciled. The opening of Little Gidding, with its fusion of the seasons, communicates a feeling of timelessness. But Part II presents a timebound and predatory world. Liberation from it may be achieved by submission to the 'refining fire' of purgation, and by a love which is 'beyond desire'. Fire and love are united in the implicitly Christian imagery of Part IV; and Little Gidding implies (yet does not state) that the historical Incarnation of Christian tradition lends significance to the history of mankind by making it into a pattern, just as the private visionary moments lend significance to the experience of the individual. Here there is a fusion of Christian and personal mythologies, but the mythology of the Quartets as a whole remains personal.

Another feature of this personal mythology is the ambivalence of the four traditional elements, as adumbrated in The Waste Land. Each Quartet is dominated by one of them, used in an ambivalent way.

Of the various 'reconciliations of opposites' suggested by Eliot's symbols, two in particular stand out: the reconciling of movement and stillness, and the reconciling of time and timelessness. The first is most clearly seen in Burnt Norton II. It is achieved by the notion that circular movement depends on the stillness at its centre: hence the characteristic phrase, 'At the still point of the turning world'. The second is the main type of reconciliation with which the Quartets are concerned, and is specifically related to the timeless moments of illumination. They can be remembered only in time, so time can be conquered only through time. But the time-ridden world can be transcended by a severe asceesis which in turn leads to the same illuminatory experiences. This is the paradox of the ascetic way. Time may also be reconciled with timelessness by the recognition, in its apparently chaotic flux, of a pattern. It is through rhythm and pattern that time reaches into that which is not time. Insofar as it is such a pattern,

history gives meaning to otherwise arbitrary events. And since the patterned forms of art themselves provide bridges between time and the timeless, Eliot attempts in the Quartets to achieve such a bridge as well as discussing it.

If the moments of illumination are not apprehended as part of a pattern, their existence is fleeting. They are points of intersection of the timeless with time, and are thus hints on the individual level of a principle at work in the universe as a whole: the principle of Incarnation. Incarnation resolves the paradoxes of life and death, time and the timeless. In the principle of Incarnation, all opposites are reconciled.

Conclusion - Patterns of Salvation.

Eliot's various uses of myths have been closely related to his preoccupation with salvation - whether from sterility, sin, transience, fear or futility. The mythological themes which he uses suggest patterns of salvation: but they all have a basic pattern in common. The underlying myths of The Waste Land suggest the pattern of death-and-rebirth; the Dantean imagery of Ash-Wednesday suggests the pattern of descent-and-ascent, or again of death-and-rebirth; in the Quartets we see the pattern of ascetic withdrawal and visionary illumination - 'death' of the senses is followed by a renewal of the life of the spirit. The plays less obviously confirm this general idea of death as a bringer of new life. Thus salvation depends upon a general pattern in which all opposites are reconciled. And what makes possible this 'resolution of the paradoxes' is the principle of Incarnation.

Eliot thus uses mythological themes and patterns as much more than technical devices: they express for him an ordered vision of life, in which all opposites are reconciled. The Incarnation principle which makes this reconciliation possible is at work not only in the traditional mythologies, but in the 'visionary moments' of the personal mythology.