

Reading William Blake and T.S. Eliot
Contrary Poets, Progressive Vision

THESIS

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Abstract

Many critics resort to explaining readers' experiences of poems like William Blake's Jerusalem and T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets in terms of "spirituality" or "religion". These experiences are broadly defined in this thesis as *jouissance* (after Roland Barthes' essay The Pleasure of the Text) or "experience *qua* experience". Critical attempts at the reduction of *jouissance* into abstract constructs serve merely as stopgap measures by which critics might avoid having to account for the limits of their own rational discourse. These poems, in particular, are deliberately structured to preserve the reader's experience of the poem from reduction to any particular meta-discursive construct, including "the spiritual". Through a broad application of *Rezeption-Asthetik* principles, this thesis demonstrates *how* the poems are structured to direct readers' faculties to engage with the hypothetical realm within which *jouissance* occurs, beyond the rationally abstractable.

T.S. Eliot's poetic *oeuvre* appears to chart his growing confidence in non-rational, pre-critical faculties. Through "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", The Waste Land, and Four Quartets, Eliot's poetry becomes gradually less prescriptive of the terms to which the experience of his poetry might be reduced. In Four Quartets he finally entrusts readers with a great deal of responsibility for "co-creating" the poem's significance.

Like T.S. Eliot, although more consistently throughout his *oeuvre*, William Blake is similarly concerned with the validation of the reader's subjective interpretative/creative faculties. Blake's Jerusalem is carefully structured on various intertwined levels to rouse and exercise in the reader what the poet calls the "All Glorious Imagination" (Keynes 1972: 679).

The *jouissance* of Jerusalem or Four Quartets is located in the reader's efforts to co-create the significance of the poems. It is only during a direct engagement with this process, rather than in subsequent attempts to abstract it, that the "experience *qua* experience" may be understood.

Notes on Abbreviation and Spelling

The following abbreviations have been used to reference primary sources:

CP: Eliot, T.S. Collected: Poems 1909-1962. London: Faber & Faber, 1963.

K: Blake, William. Complete Writings. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

American spelling has been retained when quoting from American critics.

Blake's original spelling and syntax has been retained.

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This thesis is dedicated to

PETER POMPELMOES
&
DE GENTRIJDERS VAN OVERLOON

“I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine”

Chapter 1

A Theoretical Justification

The idea for this thesis grew out of an accident of time-tabling. During my Honours year the Romantics and Modernists courses were held concurrently. It just so happened that I was required to read William Blake's and T.S. Eliot's poetry over the same period. Initially they read like chalk and cheese. There was a dark freneticism about Blake's Jerusalem. His wild sometimes-heptameters seemed nonsensical. It was toil to read. Eliot's Four Quartets were equally challenging, but they lilted rhythmically, mostly gentle, but also, at times, brutal in their unremitting moral glare.

Had it gone on as such, this thesis would not have been written, but something else happened. I realised that if I approached either of the two poems without trying to be too clever, without any preconceptions regarding what they meant, that the poems seemed to behave similarly in my head. I realised that if I took the time to engage, almost emotionally, with the words, and the relations between the words, that a significant effect would gather within me.

I have little faith in my ability to reify this effect. It would begin with a serious effort to restrain the welling of release. Various fragmented allusions and associations seemed to scatter about in my head, as though requiring a principle of organisation that my mind was incapable of providing. Any attempt to classify or categorise these allusions and associations was invariably futile, until my attention was drawn away from the fragments themselves to resettle on the relations between fragments. Then, what I thought I knew – it is more precise to call it the limitation that I placed on my knowledge – would

dissolve. The worldly limits of perception seemed to recede with them. For brief moments I felt as though I knew everything all at once – a heightened state. There would be a surge of no particular emotion; it was more like every emotion in extreme form all at once. I employ the word tentatively, but it felt almost “spiritual”.

I would not have to read the entire poem to arrive at this place. There might be a phrase, or a series of aphorisms, or a perfect opposition, and I would be off. Not that I could do it at will, but more often than not if I took the time and invested the energy, readings of Jerusalem and Four Quartets had this effect. Several other people in my Honours group claimed to have had similar experiences. We called them “brain-gasms”.

Obviously, such experiences raised questions. Not least of these questions was, how does one possibly account for phenomenological occurrences such as members of my Honours group and I had experienced? More specifically, I set myself the task of answering this question:

How do you, in the objective framework of a literary criticism, account for “spiritual” experience arising out of the reader’s engagement with the poem, while still allowing for the subjective elements that, by and large, comprise the experience itself?

Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I realise that any attempts to answer this question are likely to highlight more problems than they will lead to satisfactory solutions. The most immediate of these problems is the inefficacy of conventional critical approaches to further elucidate for readers the nature of the “spiritual” experiences potentially arising out of their engagement with such different poems as Jerusalem and Four Quartets. Any rational attempt to explain such experiences, it will be shown, invariably falls prey to its own limited paradigm.

It is the central contention of this thesis that, in order usefully to elucidate any aspect of the “spiritual” experience potentially arising out of engagements with poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets, literary criticism must recognise the limitations inherent to its own medium. Only when these limitations are kept in mind is it possible to formulate a functional approach to the acquisition of a “critical” understanding of the experience, however limited that understanding might seem in rational terms.

In this introductory chapter the limits of conventional critical approaches with regard to “spiritual” poems will be highlighted. The first section of this chapter serves to highlight the problems and assumptions that have plagued the attempts of several critics¹ to qualify the nature of the potential effects on readers of an engagement with Blake’s prophetic books and Eliot’s later poetry. In so doing several important definitions will be highlighted, and distinctions will be made. This section will end with a short summary that will argue the necessity of a change in the approach of critics to poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets.

The second section of the introduction will attempt to learn from previous critics who have chosen similar (but not the same) paths as I will propose. The third section of this chapter will offer an account of the sort of critical approach that might functionally explain the experience arising out of readers’ engagement with the text. To this end, Wolfgang Iser’s *Rezeption-Asthetik* is suitably amended.

All this is undertaken with a view to discussions, in subsequent chapters, of T.S. Eliot’s and William Blake’s poetry, with specific reference to Four Quartets and

¹ A brief disclaimer: I cannot claim to have extrapolated my commentary on the methods of William Blake’s and T.S. Eliot’s critics on the basis of a definitive reading of all relevant materials. Blake’s and Eliot’s critics, as well as their approaches to the texts, are so numerous and various as to defy such an aim.

Jerusalem respectively. In these chapters, by means of a broad adherence to the principles discussed in the final section of the introduction, it will be shown how Eliot's and Blake's poems are so constructed as to direct their readers to engage in processes for which no rational medium can account.

1.1. The Problem of "Spirituality"

1.1.1. The Poet, The Poem, and the Reader

"Spirituality" is commonly understood to be an underlying aspect of the material world. It is often characterised by believers as a hidden "truth" or "force" that is integral – even causal – to the dynamics of day-to-day experience. It is no different in the general understanding of the dynamics of poetry, especially those dynamics involving poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets. In hypothetical schematisations of the "life-cycle" of poetic thought, "spirituality" has often been attributed to all the constituent elements. In the dynamics that supposedly exist between the poet, the poem, and the reader, all are commonly understood to be "spiritual".

William Blake and T.S. Eliot, it has been widely assumed on the basis of their poetry, their letters, and biographies, were "spiritual" men. As soon as I encounter the word "spiritual", however, I am wary, because it is an especially imprecise term.

"Spiritual" might refer to any one of a multitude of variously represented otherworldly realms that form the basis of countless personal beliefs, religions, and cultures.

More than its generality, however, I am wary of employing the word "spiritual" to qualify another human being: it is a very risky claim to make. I have no entirely

convincing evidence that William Blake and T.S. Eliot were “spiritual” men. I know that T.S. Eliot, on 29 June 1927, was baptised into the Anglo-Catholic Church (Ackroyd 1984: 162). I know that William and Catherine Blake, in 1789, signed a declaration of the founding theological principles of the Swedenborgian Church in London (Davies 1948: 34). Although such information might indicate the nature of the “spirituality” to which Blake or Eliot had claims, it is not evidence that either man was “spiritual”. Mere association with religious institution does not a “spiritual” man make.

There may well have been witnesses to the expressions on the faces of these men as they putatively had “spiritual” experiences. Emily Hale in the manor garden at Burnt Norton might have seen Eliot’s expression, his demeanour, and perhaps even his breathing, change as worlds converged within and around him. However, even her witness of the external manifestations of Eliot’s experience would not constitute infallible proof of the poet’s “spirituality”. During his sitting for the now familiar portrait by Thomas Phillips, Blake claimed he saw an angel (Ackroyd 1995: 267-8). His eyes are large, his gaze is intent but distanced, his expression is curious, his head oddly cocked. It is an evocative portrait, but neither Phillips’s portrayal of Blake’s visionary features, nor Blake’s own claims render definitive proof of the poet’s “spiritual” nature. Not even Blake’s pictorial renderings of the spirits he purported to have met – the ghost of the flea, the entity who dictated his poetry – are sufficiently convincing evidence of the poet’s “spirituality”. Their religious affiliations, their expressions, Blake’s etchings, constitute mere surface representations of what is claimed to be “spirituality”.

In the final analysis, there is no way of knowing whether a person is truly engaged with otherworldly realms, or whether their claims serve another underlying purpose. To

call someone “spiritual” implies that, on some or other level, that person has access to otherworldly realms, and that an aspect of their being commutes between this world and (for argument’s sake) the next. The problem for critics is that, owing to a phenomenological quirk, no one but the poets themselves could have access to the spiritual experiences they claim to have had. Were I to allocate a “spiritual” label to the poets, it would constitute an act of faith on my part. It would imply that I take their word for it.

Such risk, however, has not fazed many critics, who readily identify Blake and Eliot with spirituality. Davies wrote an entire book on the theology of William Blake; Malcolm Muggeridge is convinced that Blake drew his inspiration from a “spiritual reality” (Muggeridge 1977: 86). Kathleen Raine argues that Blake is best understood in terms of a syncretic assortment of Platonism, the “Mosaic account of the creation of man ‘from the dust of the earth’ with the help of Christian Cabbalism, Gnosticism, and other esoteric systems” (Raine 1968: 23). Paul Foster explains Eliot’s Four Quartets in terms of Buddhist influences. Eloise Knapp Hay’s book explains the influence of Christian mysticism on T.S. Eliot’s poetry. Graham Martin attempts to explain the “characteristic events” in Eliot’s later poetry in terms of “Eliot’s conversion to Christianity” (Martin 1970: 113). These are but a few of the plethora of commentaries on these poets that infer their “spirituality”, and the “spiritual” content of their works.

Granted, both Jerusalem and Four Quartets are constructed around the notion of different-to-the-everyday, seemingly otherworldly levels of perception, the experience of which is impossible to express in objective terms. A common tendency among critics has been to employ theological systems as the meta-discourse whereby such experience

might be understood. There can be no doubt that this tendency has been facilitated by the poets' own appeals to theological, spiritual, and mystical discourses in their works.

However, both Jerusalem and Four Quartets, although alluding to the "spiritual", do so without necessarily making it the defining feature of the "otherworldly" experiences they describe. In the first chapter of Jerusalem, for example, William Blake's narrator says that his "great task" is to "open the immortal Eyes / Of Man inward into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination" (K 623). The narrator clearly implies that the focal object of the text is the experience of a perceptual state. Yet, even in this short extract, the text is diverse in the discourses it employs to allude to such a state. It cannot be reduced to either a human or a divine faculty, it is neither material nor "spiritual", limited nor limitless. Jerusalem seems intent on rescuing the experience from the imposition of any such categories, and, perhaps more so, the discursive implications of such categories. The poem evidences the poet's express awareness that "Qualities, with which / Every substance is clothed" may be employed to "make an Abstract". Such an abstraction negates "the Substance from which it is derived, / A murderer of its own Body" (K 629). Maintaining the phenomenological purity – the un-abstracted experience – of the poem's subject matter, is an essential aspect of Jerusalem's meaning.

The first movement of "Burnt Norton" also describes a state of perceptual liberation. Eliot's discursive rendering of this state manages to encompass a vast range of possible perspectives. It is characterised as the emotional convergence of longing and satiation, as the convergence of all time and space, as the convergence of subject and object, as a convergence of Western and Eastern religions. However, to reduce the

experience to any one aspect of these emotional, rational, intellectual, or theological classifications, to pare the experience down to fit into any one of these meta-discursive categories, would undermine the experience itself. Rather, Eliot writes of an experience in which the “shell”, the “husk of meaning”, is rent asunder to reveal “the heart of light” underneath (CP 190).

Neither of the poems settle on “spiritual” as a sufficient characterisation, or classification of the sort of experience they convey. Furthermore, the poems do not offer specific alternative categories. In the light of this, it seems unsuitable to attribute the label “spiritual”, or any other meta-discursive categorisation for that matter, to the subject matter of Jerusalem and Four Quartets.

Still, readers who claim to have “otherworldly” experiences arising out of their engagement with literature, find it very difficult not to attribute them to some sort of “spirituality”. For many readers, the poems of William Blake and T.S. Eliot have become the loci for that which they perceive to be “spiritual” experiences of *their own*. Herein, as will soon become clear, lies the problem for critics.

J.Hillis Miller said in an interview,

there is an aspect of what happens to me when I read Stevens or Shelley or Dickens, which is the experience of something to which I could give no name; which, in that sense is nothing, but which at the same time seems to be the encounter with something other than language which is woven into language and causes these effects. It is impossible to talk about this without mystification, without the misleading implication that you’re falling back into some kind of religiosity. Nevertheless, that’s the way it seems to me. (Hillis Miller 1987: 229-30)

Roland Barthes attempts to explain the experience of great literature in terms that are more general. In his highly idiosyncratic essay The Pleasure of the Text Barthes writes of

a possible experience of pleasure, or *jouissance*, which occurs when “the death of language is glimpsed” (Barthes 1975: 3). On the one hand, the text’s departure from convention is a prerequisite to the experience of *jouissance*. He quotes Freud: “In the adult, novelty always constitutes the condition for orgasm” (Barthes 1975: 41). On the other hand, he claims that “repetition itself creates bliss” (Barthes 1975: 41). By way of demonstration Barthes draws on “ethnographic examples: obsessive rhythms, incantatory music, litanies, rites and Buddhist nembutsu, etc.” (Barthes 1975: 41). Thus Barthes, like Miller, feels it necessary, at least partially, to explain the effect of literature in the terms of religion, a clear indication of the temptation to attach a spiritual label to the experience.

Of course, both Miller’s and Barthes’s claims are made with reference to literature in general, rather than the work of Eliot and Blake *per se*. That said, there are declarations by Blake and Eliot critics that allude to analogous phenomenological effects of Blake’s and Eliot’s poetry. Kathleen Raine, commenting on the complexity of Blake’s poetry, writes that “if we read on it is for the joy of some sudden illumination, some radiant fragment of heavenly vision, or earthly common sense which shatter hypocrisy and shocks and shakes us into amazed admiration” (Raine 1979: 2).

The “spiritual” nature of the experiences that form the subject matter of Eliot’s Four Quartets is not lost on Helen Gardner in The Art of T.S. Eliot. These spiritual experiences that the text purports to be about are, according to Gardner, available to readers through the text. She writes that

The growth of the subject throughout the poem is the growth in the apprehension of its significance. As the significance is appreciated more fully, the experience itself becomes more tangible, and the world in which it takes place gains in richness and reality
(Gardner 1949: 158)

Of course, individual readers should be allowed to classify their experience of the poems in whatever terms they see fit. As soon as readers aspire to explicating the effect of the poems in general terms, they must be aware of the risks inherent to the allocation of the term “spiritual”. Herein lies the distinction between readers and critics. Readers experience the poem directly and understand it in terms of their subjective responses, whereas literary critics attempt to explain the poem in what they perceive to be objective and rational terms. “Spiritual” cannot be considered an objectively significant classification. Nor is the term sufficient in itself to elucidate the experiences of the poet or the reader. This thesis, therefore, does not mean precisely to define the “spirituality” of either Blake or Eliot. Within the context of this thesis, the term “spiritual” merely represents a primary meta-discursive term widely used by critics as a way to classify the personal experiences of both poets, the subject matter of their poems, and the reader’s experience arising out of an engagement with their poetry.

1.1.2. The Critic

To return briefly to schematisations of poetic thought’s “life-cycle”, it will be recalled that, at either end of the poetic process, “spiritual” experience is said to occur. The poet and the reader, it is supposed, both have momentary access to such experiences. On the face of it, there would seem to be an integral connection between the poet’s and the reader’s experiences. The temptation is to explain the latter in terms of the former.

However, the challenge for critics attempting to explain this connection is insuperable. The problem for critics is that they cannot, in their purportedly objective exegetic medium, account for the phenomenological transference of one person's experience, via symbols on the page, across space and time, to the experiential faculties of another. Yet, critics have attempted to do so with varying degrees of failure.

The conflation of the poet's experience with that of the reader is a common phenomenon in criticism of Blake's and Eliot's poetry. A young T.S. Eliot in his essay "William Blake" presents an apposite example. In this work Eliot struggles to qualify the essential nature of Blake's later poetry.

Eliot begins his essay by attributing to Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience the "peculiarity of all great poetry". This "peculiarity" he writes is "honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is peculiarly terrifying. It is an honesty against which the whole world conspires, because it is unpleasant" (Eliot 1997: 128). It is fascinating to observe the early Eliot, in his critical capacity, flailing distractedly in an attempt to isolate something too general for words. The vagueness of the word "honesty", and the "peculiar," "unpleasant," and "terrifying" nature he attributes to it, shows that Eliot was, to some degree, both a victim and perpetuator of those forces that conspired to keep such "honesty" oppressed. What Eliot means by "honesty" is not explicitly broached in his essay. What is essential to recognise, however, is that the "honesty" of which Eliot speaks is the significance that *he* – Thomas Stearns Eliot – attributed to his own experience of Blake's poetry. That the "honesty" is extrapolated from an experience is suitably borne out by Eliot's prolific adjectives.

Eliot does not, however, attribute the generation of this “honesty” either to himself, or to the poem. Instead, he appeals to biographical details of Blake’s life in order to explain the poet’s access to such “honesty”. Blake is set up as an innocent product of “favourable conditions”. The “honesty” experienced by Eliot is attributed to the “fact” that in Blake’s life there was

nothing to distract him from his interests or corrupt these interests: neither the ambitions of parents or wife, nor the standards of society, nor the temptations of success; nor was he exposed to the imitation of himself or of anyone else.
(Eliot 1997: 128-9)

Eliot’s approach is clear: he is attempting to qualify the experience arising out his engagement with the poem in terms of a few details from Blake’s life. This cannot be seen as a rationally justifiable approach.

Jerusalem and Four Quartets give readers clues as to some of the actual circumstances, events, and beliefs that fuelled the spiritual experiences of the poets. The poems were not created by insensible objects living in a vacuum. To readers, however, these aspects of the poems have less bearing on the nature of their actual reading experience than criticism would generally have us believe. One need not be an alchemist, a mystic, or a disillusioned artisan in London, to engage with Jerusalem on a significant level. Nor is it necessary to be an Anglo-catholic conservative royalist from America residing in England to have a “spiritual” experience while engaging with Four Quartets. Such details may remain entirely abstract to readers. Of course, this does not discount the possibility that such aspects would feel merely abstract even to readers who share in details of the poets’ lives – say, an Anglo-Catholic or a Swedenborgian. The poems engage readers more immediately if they occur within roughly similar cultural frames.

This cannot, however, constitute the entire explanation for the experiences arising out of the poems.

The point is this: whereas Blake may have seen the sun as a host of heavenly angels (K 617), and Eliot may have identified the meaning of his life in a pool of water, the readers' experience arises out of their engagement with *a text*. The illuminations that inspired Blake and Eliot are entirely different to the readers' experiences. Blake's and Eliot's experiences were fuelled by lives vastly different to those of their readers. Temporally, spatially, contextually, and circumstantially the experiences differ. They are separated by what I term an "empathetic divide": a phenomenon that no amount of abstract knowledge can overcome. The "empathetic divide" between the poets and their readers is premised on similar ideas to those for which Wimsatt and Beardsley argued in "The Intentional Fallacy". They make clear the distinctions between "criticism of poetry" and the author's "psychology", and "history", claiming that "there is the danger of confusing personal and poetic studies; and there is the fault of writing personal as if it were poetic" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1986: 82). For the purposes of this study, however, Wimsatt and Beardsley are a little extreme in their dismissal of the author's experience or intention as a means whereby to achieve critical clarity with regard to the reader's experience of the poem. Whereas they argue that there is no room in the criticism of poetry for the poet's personal experience, I will show that, if treated as representative of a single paradigm in relation to the many that constitute the dynamics at work in the poems, the poets' testimony of their experiences can be seen to have an effect on the readers' experience of the poems. This will become especially clear in the discussion of Four Quartets in the next chapter of this thesis.

The poets' testimonies with regard to their experiences can only be considered *representations* of those experiences. Although such testimonies are admissible as objects of critical study, they must not be conflated with the experiences of readers arising out of their engagement with the poems. In this regard it is perhaps necessary further to entrench the "empathetic divide" by applying different terms to the respective "spiritual" experiences of poet and reader. Thus, I shall hence refer to the "spiritual" experiences that the poet's claim formed the subject matter of Blake's and Eliot's poetry as "illumination". In order to *know* (as opposed merely to believe) what they actually experienced would require such immense biographical knowledge and empathetic abilities as to be extrasensory. A thorough and rational examination of either of their illuminations is practically impossible and without factual dividend. Because we cannot claim holistically to understand their experiences in any rational sense, we will not attempt to do so. Hence we must readily admit that we *assume* that Blake and Eliot had experiences of illumination. As reason fails, we have no choice but to apply faith.

On the other hand, I shall refer to the "spiritual" experience arising out of the reader's engagement with the text as *jouissance*. I do so in deference to Barthes' essay while admitting that an "empathetic divide" exists between my understanding of the word and his. I lack the prerequisite extrasensory ability to know that Barthes and Miller did, indeed, experience *jouissance* as they engaged with their favourite literature. I take their words for it.

Earlier I quoted Kathleen Raine's and Helen Gardner's allusions to the overwhelming effect of Blake's and Eliot's poetry. The empathetic divide that exists between the poet and the reader must also be evident between the critic and the poet, as

well as the critic and the reader. Whereas I have no grounds to deny that Raine and Gardner encountered *jouissance*, they are in no better position than the poet to dictate the nature of the experience to readers. At the same time, I know that readers of this thesis cannot know that I have encountered *jouissance* as I engaged with the texts of William Blake and T.S. Eliot. I humbly request that I be taken at my word.

Any allusion made in the poem to some or other strain of theology, spirituality, or mysticism represents only one possible perspective of the sort of heightened experience that is the focal object of the poetry. Critics, however, have tended to assume that appeals to such discourses solve the problem of abstraction with which they are faced as they attempt to explain the experience. A simple appeal to a non-rational discourse does not make the experience any easier to understand. Nor does rational discourse solve the problem. To appeal to meta-discourse is to assume “synonymity” between the terms of the poem and the terms of the meta-discourse – but this is itself problematic, as there is no guarantee that individual interpretations of the meta-discourse are synonymous. Rather than desperately re-clothe the focal object of these poems in ill-fitting abstractions, critics should accept it as something that can only be understood in its phenomenological manifestation. The focal object that these poems have in common with each other is “experience *qua* experience”.

Attempts to reduce or reify the “experience *qua* experience” of literary works have yielded unconvincing results. The problem is typified by Northrop Frye. He outlines the definitional difficulties for both the poet and the critic in communicating the nature of such spiritual experiences. Reacting against the tendency to classify Blake as a “mystic”, Frye writes:

‘mysticism’ when the word is not simply an elegant variant of ‘misty’ or ‘mysterious,’ means a certain kind of religious technique difficult to reconcile with anyone’s poetry. It is a form of spiritual communion with God which is by its very nature incommunicable to anyone else, and which soars beyond faith into direct apprehension. But to the artist, *qua* artist, this apprehension is not an end in itself, but a means to another end, the end of producing his poem. The mystical experience for him is poetic material, not poetic form, and must be subordinated to the demands of this form.

(Frye 1947: 7)

Frye’s argument seems insightful and apposite. However, his remarks exemplify a common tendency amongst critics. Having discredited the term “mystic” as an inappropriate classification for Blake, Frye suggests an alternative – “visionary”:

A visionary creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual world in which the objects of perception in this one have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism.

(Frye, 1947: 8)

Frye also refers to Blake as a “spiritual utilitarian” with “the complete pragmatism of the artist” (Frye 1947: 8), thereby implying the wholesale dissemination of “spirituality” through intensely charged symbols. How, or for whom, the symbols are intensified, and what is meant by “spiritual”, is not clarified further. One must presume that Frye believed Blake’s higher spiritual (or perceptual) world to be transmitted, through spiritually “charged” poetry, to readers.

There is a sense in which Frye seems to be on the bandwagon that resulted from Eliot’s coinage of the term “objective correlative”. Eliot asserts in “Hamlet and his Problems” that “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events” can be the “formula” of a “particular emotion”, and that the evocation of that emotion through art is as simple as presenting these “external facts” in poetic form (Eliot 1997: 85-6). Eliot’s claim is rather blithe. The jump from the object poem to the subject reader’s emotive or “spiritual”

faculties is all too casually asserted. It was simply a matter of finding the right universal collection of symbols – understood by poet, reader and critic alike – and that this was enough to evoke the appropriate emotion. Eliot, with the great influence his essays came to bear, was complicit in the understanding of many critics and poets: that everyone's subjective experiences could be reduced to universal abstract formulae.

The popularity of Eliot's conception of universally understandable symbols is not surprising, especially among critics (and poets who are critics). If critics are inspired by their experiences as readers to account for those experiences, they are faced with a problem. In a world that expects logically sound and reasonably constructed exegeses (especially of its critics and theorists), their intensely personal "spiritual" experiences are ones for which there are no accounting. Thus, rather than admit defeat critics have attempted to re-contextualise them with rational critical frameworks, precisely the frameworks the poems themselves seem to challenge.

An unfortunate if understandable tendency among critics has been to grapple only with those frameworks with which they are familiar. Thus, a critic with a particular field of expertise, say Neo-Platonism or Christian mysticism, will read the text in accordance with his field of expertise, and express its "meaning" in terms of that field. These fields come to constitute meta-discursive systems in which the entire literary work risks becoming subsumed. Wolfgang Iser calls the tendency of critics to assert general meanings of literary texts their "zeal ... for classification – their passion for pigeonholing" (Iser 1971: 2).

The fact of the matter, however, is that any given set of terms or systems invariably falls short, thereby prompting immediate attempts to replace it. As Fred

Dortort points out, “most Blake criticism has addressed other Blake criticism, leaving the texts of the poems themselves surprisingly unexamined” (Dortort 1998: 4). This is a sentiment echoed in Harry Blamires’ introduction to his guide through Four Quartets. He highlights his desire to let “Eliot’s poem do its own work in its own way” because there is “criticism about us which is positively hindering Eliot’s poetry from doing its own work” (Blamires 1969:5).

An already quoted example of a redundant terminological squabble is Frye’s attempts to replace the term “mystic” with “visionary”. His allocation of a “spiritual” nature to the world in which the “visionary” poet dwells means that he has stepped from one frying pan into another. If, as he argues, spiritual communion with God is incommunicable, then why should communion with any “spiritual” world differ? What is incommunicable in both “mystical” and “visionary” terms, is the nature of the “spiritual” experience *qua* experience, be it the poet’s or the reader’s. The allocation of the “preferable” term “visionary” to the poet does nothing to alleviate such difficulties.

Another example of such terminological deferring is evidenced in David Bunyan’s work. He writes of the “artistic equivalent to ‘the direct experience of reality’” (Bunyan 1991:2) that is brought about by the verbal arts’ irresistible gravitation “towards a ‘zero-point’ of its own dissolution” (Bunyan 1991: 2). He claims that the “direct experience” is spoken of by the mystics. His thesis attempts to provide an “explicit statement of the principles or direct investigation of what makes it happen” (Bunyan 1991: 2). Bunyan’s solution, however, is to refer to the principles outlined by Jacques Lacan’s discussions of the reader’s “return” to a “state resembling pre-linguistic experience” (Bunyan 1991: iii). Of course, pre-linguistic childhood experience is

something all readers have in common. However, whereas the faculties of a child as yet uncorrupted by indoctrination into abstract modes of thought and expression may, according to psychoanalytical thought, be an accessible aspect of the unconscious, the experience thereof still remains inexpressible. In this case, the attempt to explain the “mystical” in terms of psychoanalysis results, like Frye’s idea, in a mere deferring of terms, rather than an improved understanding. To call a rose by any other name does not explain its rose-ness.

A way must thus be found to separate criticism’s attempts at abstract generalisation of “experience *qua* experience” from the experience itself. It is suggested that the actual phenomenological event be termed the “meaning” of the text. In the case of poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets, it is to be broadly aligned with *jouissance*. A reader’s or critic’s representation of “meaning” will be referred to as a “significance” of the text. Various types of “significance” are possible. Generally they reflect the individual approach of the reader/critic to the interpretative process.

The distinction between “meaning” and “significance” is one for which the American theorist E.D. Hirsch argues expressly. However, Hirsch argues that the “meaning” of the text is objectively the same for all readers. He claims that “meaning has its existence only in consciousness” (Hirsch 1994: 262), and that it exists only “by virtue of a single, privileged, pre-critical approach” (Hirsch 1994: 260). In this he assumes the Kantian stance regarding the existence in every human consciousness of some sort of “transcendental aesthetic” in which certain objective *a priori* categories determine the commonality of the qualities that constitute our experiences (Hirsch 1994: 262).

The obvious problem with Hirsch's stance is that, phenomenologically speaking, the nature of an individual human experience is objectively inaccessible. There is no way in which to ascertain that the quality of our experiences are the same. Thus, whereas Hirsch floats an interesting hypothesis regarding the objective nature of our pre-critical response to a literary work, it must remain hypothetical. The less impositional approach, to my mind, is simply to grant the individual consciousness its privacy, and to tailor literary criticism around experiences that, by virtue of their inaccessibility, we must presume to be subjective. "Meaning" will thus be employed throughout this thesis, to imply a pre-critical, subjective response to a literary work.

Hirsch also argues that readers differentiate their experiences only after their objectively similar pre-critical responses. This differentiation into subjective stances comes in the form of the reader's attributing of a "significance" to the text. Each "significance", he argues, reflects the interpretative approach of the individual reader/critic. Although this is not entirely incongruous with the definition of "significance" employed by this thesis, a further distinction must be made.

Significance may take the form of the reader's personal verbalisation of *jouissance* – be it vocally, or in the privacy of his or her own head. There need be no attempts to make their significance widely understandable. To the critic, however, the broad-scale accessibility of the significance they attribute to the text is the defining feature of their discipline. As such, they abstract meaning into terms and discourses that are generally, rather than merely subjectively, understood. It is the central contention of this thesis that Jerusalem and Four Quartets are resistant to the imposition of "critical significance".

A brief summary: To express the spirituality of a poet and/or their poetry is an exercise in imprecision. There is no way to qualify spirituality verbally, because it manifests by way of objectively inaccessible and entirely subjective experience. It can only be understood in its manifest state. The options of critics attempting to qualify “spiritual” experiences arising out of an engagement with a literary work (what I have decided to call *jouissance*) are very limited. They must not conflate the reader’s *jouissance* with the poet’s spiritual experience (illumination), because an empathetic divide exists between the poet, reader, and critic. *Jouissance* and illumination resist definition and qualification. No single term, or discourse is sufficient as a means whereby to convey these experiences. The difference between critical attempts to qualify *jouissance*, and *jouissance* itself, is denoted by the terms “critical significance” and “meaning” respectively.

The poems that are written by William Blake and T.S. Eliot are difficult. Particularly Jerusalem and Four Quartets are densely allusive, frustratingly elusive, and defy conventional expectations of the way verbal art is supposed to convey meaning. Despite this, the poems are reputed to direct the reader’s faculties to engage in an “experience *qua* experience”. Critics who take it upon themselves to provide an exegesis of these poems and their effects must be confronted with the question, “How is it possible to explain this phenomenon?”.²

Any such critic is presented with a choice of various possible critical approaches. Whichever approach the critic takes, his efforts must culminate in one, or both, of two

² This presumes, of course, that their particular school of criticism is interested in the exegesis of the way in which the poem functions. Several critical schools treat the poems “as forms” as being of secondary concerns to the information they carry. Marxist, Feminist, and New Historical critics, for example, tend to treat the poems as social artefacts rather than works of art.

possible outcomes. In order to be useful, a critical commentary must, in a rational manner, elucidate “what” the poem means, and/or “how” the poem means. An essential distinction must be made between these two critical outcomes. “How?” demands an answer that qualifies the various elements of a poem, and the ways they work together with the reader’s cognitive faculties in order to evoke meaning. “What?” demands an answer that qualifies the nature of the meaning evoked through the workings described in the answer to “How?”.

The problem with the critics that have featured so far is that they were all intent on qualifying the “meaning” of the poems. That is to say that they were looking for an answer to “What?” The breakdown of all the attempts at qualification is due to the simple fact that no objective means exist whereby to overcome the primarily subjective nature of *jouissance*. There is no feasible way to argue “what” the poems mean. It is for this reason that critics attempting to understand the effects of poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets would be well advised to change their focus.

1.2. The Objective Critics

The one constant factor in both the lives of the poet and reader, is the poem itself.

Inasmuch as the poet may have poured the energy and ideas arising out of his personal experience into creating the poem, today the poems exist as inanimate objects.³ Once on the page, or etched into copper plates, with the passing of the poets the text has ceased to be malleable, or subject to the poet’s whim. Today the text, in very close approximation

³ Georges Poulet’s essay, “Phenomenology of Reading” carries an interesting discussion of the distinction between the object text, and associations potential readers project thereupon. The point is that, after it is written and before it is read, a literary work is a material object. The reader’s faculties fulfil its signification potential.

to the original, is mass produced and generally uniform. The copy of the Four Quartets that the reader of this thesis engaged with, will probably be the same as the copy I read. Differences between versions of Jerusalem will be negligible.

The respective texts, therefore, are the safely generalisable aspect of the meaning that is experienced by Blake and Eliot readers. If I want to account for the limits of the rational, then surely, having chosen to *believe* those who claim to have experienced *jouissance* beyond those limits, the only element left to examine rationally *is* the text itself.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, whereas “experience qua experience” cannot be critically explained, the poem consists of a representative form of such an experience. The poem is an abstract of the experience. If the experience itself must remain hypothetical, the poetically abstract version of the experience is actual. The text itself is constituted of elements that may be teased apart and rationally ordered.

The critical challenge, however, is to employ an approach that, whilst recognising the text as an object, still allows for the subjective, critically irreducible nature of the poems’ meanings. The principles that are to be broadly applied in this thesis in order to identify the limits of rational criticism will be outlined in the next section. Before ascertaining how best to examine such a text, it is necessary to learn from the mistakes of critics who have attempted to engage with texts to the exclusion of all extrinsic elements. This was the aim of the “Objective critics”.

For the purposes of this introduction, a brief definition of objective criticism, as provided by Abrams’s Glossary of Literary Terms, suffices. Objective criticism

describes the literary product as a self sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, *which is to be contemplated as its own end*, and to be analyzed and judged solely by 'intrinsic' criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity and the interrelations of its component elements.

(Abrams 1999: 52: my emphasis)

"Extrinsic" elements of the poem, such as its relation to the "poet, or to the audience, or to the enviroing world" (52) were to be disregarded. Aforementioned proponents of this school are Wimsatt and Beardsley. Over and above "The Intentional Fallacy" they also wrote "The Affective Fallacy", in which they argue that a poem cannot be understood in terms of its effect on the reader. The problem for objective critics, of course, is that a poem cannot be contemplated as its own end. The very act of contemplating the poem defies this notion. By necessity, some extrinsic elements *must* be allowed into such contemplation. Critics claiming to be entirely objective are either pretending or self-deluding.

By way of example, a rather extreme proponent of the Objective Criticism school was John Crowe Ransom. He felt justified in arguing that literary criticism should be dislodged from its seat amongst the humanities in order that it might "become more scientific, or precise and systematic" (Ransom 1972: 229) a discipline. Thus, whereas a poem, according to Ransom, "celebrates the object"⁴ which is real, individual, and qualitatively infinite", the poet

knows that his practical interests will reduce this living object to a mere utility, and that his sciences will disintegrate it for their convenience into their respective abstracts.

(Ransom 1972: 239)

⁴ By "Object" Ransom means "a story, character, thing, scene, or moral principle" (Ransom 1972: 39).

All the critic can do is to “take the poem apart, or analyse” its technical details in order to judge the poem’s effectiveness in “elaborating or individualizing the universal, the core object” that the poem celebrates. Ransom has an idea of the poet as a rationalizing and abstracting utilitarian using “scientific” principles to account for the universal and infinite. Accordingly, it is the critic’s business to repeat the poet’s actions, albeit through a critical medium, by reducing the poem to a mere utility; something that is critically manageable and, in the light of its already reduced focal object, rationally explicable.

Yet, even a critic as hard-line as Ransom recognises the shortcomings of a merely objective approach to analyzing poetry. He says that while such criticism must be undertaken “With all the finesse possible, it is a rude and patchy business by comparison with the living integrity of the poem” (Ransom 1972: 239). Indeed, he is not alone in this recognition.

The critics that have most influenced our understanding of Blake and Eliot, those that, in a sense, got there first, were those of the New Criticism era. It would be unfair to place them all into Ransom’s school. Their responses to Blake and Eliot were varied and of seminal importance. Nearly all, however, feel it necessary to render an account of their predominant critical language’s shortcoming in explaining or conveying the true intensity that they claim to have experienced in their encounters with the poems.

Consensus seems to be that a scientific, analytical, objective approach to criticism, in which the critic’s exclusive attention is on those elements intrinsic to the poem itself, is unsatisfactory as a means whereby the poem’s effects may be explained. Rajan’s crisis of faith in criticism counts as one of the most endearing. He argues that the Four Quartets constitute a unity “in which no element is eventually definable except in

relation to the *experience* which is given” (Rajan 1948: 78). Thus, by engaging on a rational level with Four Quartets, he writes,

The rights of the critic are challenged. He cannot analyse because he will kill by analysis. He cannot generalize because there are no categories more general than those which are constructed in “Burnt Norton”. He cannot transpose or represent, because if he does so his inferior imitation will fade in the presence of the poetic fact.
(Rajan 1948: 78)

Conventionally speaking, critics want to be in a position to identify and explain the focal object of a poem. The problem Rajan indicates is that the critic’s medium comes a poor second to that of the poet in qualifying “*experience qua experience*”. Furthermore, to give significance to a pre-critical, non-rational response to the poem, the critic cannot employ merely objective terms, but must explain the poem in terms of that relational/personal experience. Thus, their criticism begins to take on the character of something other than criticism: it begins, awfully enough, to resemble art. Most critics are rightfully daunted at such a challenge. It is not for the critic to take the poet on at his own game. Alternative arrangements must be made. This is where the problems begin, and where the approach that will be advocated in the next section has a persuasive advantage.

For now, however, the three predominant responses of objective critics to the inefficacy of their rational medium will be demonstrated. Firstly, the critic blames the poem and not the shortcomings of critical discourse for such frustrations. In “William Blake”, for example, Eliot claims that what the prophetic books lacked

was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented [Blake] from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attentions on the problems of the poet.
(Eliot 1993: 134)

This represents a peculiarly obvious contradiction to the stance that Eliot espouses earlier in the essay. Previously, Eliot asserted that the “honesty” of Blake’s poetry was attributable to the absence of conventional systems of conditioning – the expectations of a wife, and family, the standards of social standards. Eliot now accuses Blake of lacking respect for “impersonal reason, for common sense, for the objectivity of science” (Eliot 1997: 134). Eliot asserts that it is the absence of an objective standard that limits the greatness of Blake’s poetry.

The analysis of Jerusalem that will be rendered in a subsequent chapter will reveal that Blake’s poetry is not, as Eliot seems to claim, a formless mish-mash of self-indulgent philosophy. Jerusalem deliberately presents a challenge to conventional notions of how a poem should be organised and what it should convey. That Eliot should take issue with the prophetic books is more an indication of the problem with his own critical approach. The Eliot of The Sacred Wood seemed to recognise only theoretically that verbal art had the potential to straddle all manner of incongruous concepts. In essays like “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot argues that poetry must pertain to both the individual and to a larger society. It must be at once emotional and impersonal, subjectively and objectively meaningful, revolutionary and traditional, worldly and otherworldly, understandable and difficult. The problem for Eliot was that, in attempting to carve out a critical manifesto that could account for all sorts of logically incommensurable categories, he failed to re-examine the seemingly exclusive reliance of criticism on objectively logical paradigms.

It is ironic that Eliot’s own poetic methods bore some resemblance to Blake’s – a claim that will be substantiated later – and that he himself would later be the subject of similarly ill-informed criticisms. F.W. Bateson writes:

The verbal brilliance that Pope and Eliot share is accompanied in both by a similar uncertainty, occasionally degenerating to sheer clumsiness in the structure of their poems. Eliot bluffs his way out by abrupt transitions, but to the critical reader this defect is a serious and central one. The poems are too often brilliant fragments only perfunctorily stitched together. (Bateson 1960: 31)

It is interesting to note that Bateson specifies that the “critical reader” would pick out the abrupt transitions from one fragment to the next as structural clumsiness. Classical notions of manner in which verbal art should function would have one thought, or allusion, or image flow seamlessly into the next. It will be contended later in this chapter that the abruptness of the transitions in his poetry is an essential aspect of the poem’s conveyance of “meaning”. Such transitions, far from being indicative of the poet’s stylistic clumsiness, indicate his competence. To the “critical reader”, dependent as he is on rational constructs, the absence of an express justification for whatever transitions occur in the text, would undermine his paradigm of thought.

What Blake ironically calls the “Holy Reasoning Power” (K 629) is sometimes so unquestioningly revered, that everything that does not seem to comply with its dictates is automatically devalued. This is why the poem, rather than the critic’s approach, is often blamed for the critic’s inability to extrapolate a significance out of the poem’s meaning.

The second response of critics frustrated by their inability to signify or explain the meaning of poetry, is to rely, to the point of redundancy, on the idiomatic expression and style of the poetry itself. Perhaps they unconsciously assume the mantle of the poet they study in the hope that they might thus express that which they know to be true but for which they find no words. Perhaps they feel that such stylistic alignment will aid in evoking the “feeling” that they are bound to kill by analysis.

The result, unfortunately, is a lot less spectacular than that. The Blake critic who best exemplifies this problem is Northrop Frye.⁵ A startling example of this tendency purportedly “explains” Blake’s attitude to the body in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,

The body is “vile”: it is the body of a peeled ape, a witch’s cauldron of tangled tissues and sodden excrement cooking in blood. This is as true of the nightingale as it is of the vulture, and as true of the tender virgin as it is of the gorilla.

(Frye 1947: 194)

The quote has it all: it is dark, obscure, visceral, and somehow still manages to exude the tone of aphorism. It might have been written by Blake himself were it not a radical misreading of Blake.

Similarly, Cleanth Brooks analyses the opening lines of “Burial of the Dead” as follows. Here the faint nuances of Eliot’s own words are deafening,

Men are afraid to live in reality. April, the month of rebirth, is not the most joyful season but the cruellest. Winter at least kept us warm in forgetful snow.

(Brooks 1948: 9)

The critic seems driven, by what he may perceive to be a lack of apposite rational terms, to invoke a sense of the poem’s meaning by restating the poem. Such thinly disguised “critical” copying of the poem undermines the purpose of objective criticism. It does not provide an exegesis of the poem’s inner workings or illumine the manner in which the poem invokes meaning within the reader.

The third response of critics to the limitations of a merely objective approach, is

⁵ I am aware that it is perhaps unfair to classify Northrop Frye in the New Criticism School. In his Anatomy of Criticism he distances himself from the New Critics, arguing instead for a theory of literary criticism in which “Historical Criticism”, “Ethical Criticism”, “Archetypal Criticism”, and “Rhetorical Criticism” are all unified. Fearful Symmetry, however, precedes Anatomy of Criticism by some ten years. Although, as Imre Saluzinsky points out, Frye already demonstrated leanings towards the methodology he would later espouse (Saluzinsky 1987: 28), passages in Blakean register such as the one quoted above indicate that in the earlier work Frye was possibly frustrated by his critical medium’s inability to capture or reify poetic meaning, thereby amply demonstrating the point I am trying to make.

to employ blatantly extrinsic ideas as the significance into which the meaning is made to fit. Already it has been discussed how critics often reduce the “meaning” by way of the imposition of meta-discursive constructs. A critic such as Helen Gardner does not extend her frame of reference quite as far as this. In her writings about the poetry of T.S. Eliot, there is evidence of a conscientious attempt to focus primarily upon the text of the poetry itself. However, as the poem does not exist in a vacuum, Gardner is tempted to find a system or standard to which she may relate the text.

In The Art of T.S. Eliot Gardner attempts to explain “the mystery of language” (Gardner 1949: 6) by appealing, not only to the discussions of language in Four Quartets, but also to Eliot’s critical works. In this way, I presume, she hoped to move her criticism beyond the idiomatic expression of the poetry itself. To the hard-line “objective critic” this would be an appeal to extrinsic elements, but as Gardner justifies in an earlier essay, “the best kind of interpretation is that supplied by the author’s other works, and this is particularly true of Mr. Eliot, since he constantly repeats himself” (Gardner 1948: 57). To the end of qualifying “a kind of true life beyond its life in speech” (Gardner 1949: 7) Gardner appeals to Eliot’s own phrase “auditory imagination” from The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. According to Eliot, “auditory imagination” is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far

below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; linking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.

(Eliot 1948: 118-9)

This is the quality that, Gardner claims, sets the great poets apart from their contemporaries – Eliot from his, Chaucer from Langland, Dryden from Pope (Gardner 1949: 4). Such judgements are passed (with an air of objective bombast) on the basis of what must count as a particularly vague proclamation on Eliot’s part. I disagree with her that there exists an easy commerce between the poem’s mechanics and its “true life beyond its life in speech”. By accounting for it in terms of metrical structures, Gardner is conflating the experience of the poem, with the poem itself. In other words, despite her appeal to terms outside of the immediate poem, the terms she chooses limit her to the mechanics of the poem without ascribing the reader a part in the process. She can account, at best, for the poem’s musicality and the relation of that musicality to the verbal content, but she cannot account for the effect of the poem in the terms he has chosen because “auditory imagination” sets poets, not readers, apart.

On whatever level, the objective criticism school was lodged in a battle between the notion of the poem as an end in itself, and the reader’s experience of the poem as an essential aspect of any critical consideration. Although most recognised that no such thing as purely objective criticism was possible, all the critics mentioned in this section seem skittish about extending their commentaries too far beyond the poems themselves. It is my contention that, although their attentions were correctly focussed, in so far as it was possible, on the text, they focussed their attentions with the wrong end in mind.

These texts are not, as the objective school tries to believe, worlds-in-themselves. They depend heavily on the engagement of the extrinsic reading subject for any meaningful effect. Whereas the “intrinsic” elements of the poem are vitally important, they are only important insofar as they potentially facilitate the extrinsic reader’s

experience of the poem. The criticism of the poems that this thesis will offer will not be merely objective, but will attempt to account for the subjectification potential of the objective text.

In order to achieve this, it is necessary to assume the existence and importance of elements extrinsic to the text itself. That there *is* a subjective effect on the reader of the poems, that which I call *jouissance*, is to be taken for granted. It is *assumed* that readers engage with the poems dynamically and on terms too subjective to be accounted for in any other than the broadest sense. Because I take it for granted, there is no need to specify that nature of the experience. As far as this thesis is concerned, *jouissance* is the end of Jerusalem and Four Quartets. If all roads lead to *jouissance*, then it is the aim of this thesis, insofar as it is possible, to show how the poems provide the map.

1.3. The How-Approach

Wolfgang Iser's *Rezeption-Asthetik* constitutes a theoretical departure from conventional notions of how reading and interpretation culminates in "meaning" and, ultimately, "significance". In its simplest formulation Iser's approach explains the phenomenological effect precipitating from an engagement with a literary work in terms of a corruption of the reader's established interpretative processes. In other words, Iser does not ask "what" a text means, so much as "how" text means. Iser uses Roman Ingarden's work to identify an "established" reading process. Prose, Ingarden argues, is comprised of significant correlative units. Literary texts must consist of a series of *intentionale satzkorrelate*, or "intentional sentence correlatives":

Sentences link up in different ways to form more complex units of meaning that reveal a very varied structure giving rise to such entities as a short story, a novel, a dialogue, a drama, a scientific theory ...
(Iser 1975: 276-7)

According to Ingarden, the sequential arrangement of sentences and ideas accounts for the reader's engagement with the text, and conveyance of the text's significance. The process of moving from one sentence to the next, he calls *Satzdenken* (sentence-thought). When engaged in such a frame of mind, Ingarden argues,

we [readers] are ready, after completing the thought of one sentence, to think out the 'continuation,' also in the form of the sentence – and that is, in the form of the sentence that connects up with the sentence we have just thought through. In this way the process of reading goes effortlessly forward. But if by chance the following sentence has no tangible connection whatever with the sentence we have just thought through, there then comes a blockage in the stream of thought. This hiatus is linked with a more or less active surprise, or with indignation. This blockage must be overcome if the reading is to flow once more.
(Iser 1975: 279)

This hiatus constitutes, to Ingarden, a flaw in the construction of the text (Iser 1975: 279), a break in the transference of significance from the text to the reader.

These ideas are based on a faulty assumption. Ingarden assumes that the transaction of significance from the text to the reader flows simply from a transmitter to a receiver. This presupposes that a code is automatically shared between the reader and the literary work. The ideal text, according to Ingarden, must employ this common code, which must be sequentially constructed in such a manner as to avoid disruption of the reader's *Satzdenken*. The effective invocation of significance is dependent on the ease with which the reader decodes the text, and the fulfilment of the anticipation raised in accordance with a previously decoded sentence. Thus, significance is partially defined by

that which comes before, and is, in turn, instrumental in the provocation of anticipation, and the definition of future significance. In other words, Ingarden implies that the text's code must be sequentially arranged in order to mirror the linearity that putatively characterises the reader's cognition process. A breakdown in the sequence, a challenge to the established code, will render the text nonsensical.

Wolfgang Iser's critical departure from Ingarden's stance is a step in the right direction, albeit still limited for the purposes of understanding the potential phenomenological effects of an engagement with Jerusalem and Four Quartets. Iser recognises that Ingarden's assumedly common "code" is not necessarily the only element that culminates in the reader's understanding of the text. This is because the transaction between the reader and the literary work is two-way. The reader receives the code by aiding in its composition. The code is therefore not common to all readers, but unique to each reading (Iser 1980: 107). In the light of this, Iser understands that *Satzdenken* is a limited conception of the process that the reader's mind undertakes when engaging with a literary work.

Another of Iser's essential recognitions is that *intentionale Satzkorrelate* are not the only necessary components of a text's significance. Iser understands that the hiatuses caused by the disruption of *Satzdenken*, by means of the insertion of structures other than *intentionale Satzkorrelate*, are essential to the provocation of a response on the part of the reader. It is through the strategies employed by the reader to cope with the hiatuses presented by the text that phenomenological events are produced. In other words, when the text ceases to be immediately significant to the reader, "meaning" is evoked. While engaged in *Satzdenken*, the reader allows the text to dictate the flow of the code.

However, when *Satzdenken* is undermined, the reader must bring to the text the components necessary for the resumption of an effective cognition process. The realm of negotiation between text and reader is what Iser calls the “virtual” aspect of a work of literature. Iser writes: “It is the virtuality of the work that gives rise to its dynamic nature, and this in turn is the precondition for the effects that the work calls forth” (Iser 1975: 275).

Another way of understanding the virtuality of a literary work is to think of it as the midway point of an omnipresent polarity. Iser distinguishes between the *artistic* and *aesthetic* poles of a literary work. The former refers to the text that was created by the author. It is imperative to note that the emphasis falls on the text rather than the author: the text that is objectively manifest regardless of the reader’s engagement with it. The latter refers to the “realisation” of the literary work that is “accomplished by the reader” (Iser 1975: 274). Iser writes:

From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text or with the realisation of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realised, and furthermore the realisation is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.

(Iser 1975: 274-5)

For the purpose of clarity, it is necessary to reassert some of the distinctions that Iser makes. It is best to organise the various elements that constitute the reading process into a rough continuum at either end of which rest the artistic and aesthetic poles.

Halfway between the two rests the virtuality, where, in a hypothetical sense, the reader’s

faculties and the literary work converge in order to negotiate “meaning”. The virtuality is a precondition, one might say a critical forerunner, to the reader’s realisation of the text, or the “significance” that the reader eventually attributes to the literary work.

There are several possible means by which the text encourages the reader to enter the virtuality. Although, as Iser points out, the virtuality of a literary work cannot be identified with either of the poles, the artistic text provides the only possible concrete focus for the critic attempting to account for that work’s dynamic character. To be more precise, the critic can isolate those instances of hiatus in the literary work that are the preconditions to the reader’s subjective engagement with the text. Furthermore, by positing the character of the components that surround the hiatus, the critic may venture a guess at the disposition with which the artistic text encourages the reader to enter the virtuality, and to negotiate the “meaning”.

Insofar as the components that surround the hiatus are concerned, Iser indicates in “Indeterminacy and the Reader’s Response in Prose Fiction” that the focal object of a literary work is substantiated by various views or perspectives. Roman Ingarden, he points out, referred to these as “schematised views” (Iser 1971: 10):

between ‘schematised views’ there is a no-man’s-land of indeterminacy, which results precisely from the determinacy of the sequence of each individual view. Gaps are bound to open up, and offer a free play of interpretation for the specific way in which the various views can be connected to one another. These gaps give the reader a chance to build his own bridges, relating the different aspects of the [literary] object which have thus far been revealed to him. It is quite impossible for the text itself to fill the gaps. In fact, the more a text tries to be precise (i.e., the more ‘schematised views’ it offers), the greater will be the number of gaps between the views.
(Iser 1971:11)

Iser's approach is suited mainly to "searching for the structures that will enable us to describe the basic conditions necessary for the reader's composition" (Iser 1980: 107) of meaning. In keeping with this, he isolates four main "perspectives" in narration: narrator, characters, plot, and the reader implied by the text. The flow of any one textual perspective may be undermined in a variety of ways. The thread of the plot may be suddenly broken, or may go off on a seemingly inexplicable tangent. The reader may be confronted with the sudden introduction of a new character. The textual perspective may change from one narrator to another. If clear distinctions (chapters, subsections, paragraphs, sentences) mark breaks from one perspective to another then the object is not to separate views, "so much as a tacit invitation to find the missing link" (Iser 1980: 112).

Until now the discussion has focussed on Iser's attempts to account for the phenomenological events – the keen disturbances – that arise out of the reading of literary prose. This thesis, however, places its focus on the later work of two poets. Iser's ideas need to be amended in order to be suitable, not only for all poetry, but particularly for poetry that explicitly contains an inexpressible focal object / process such as the "experience *qua* experience".

Iser's four main perspectives of narration are insufficient for the purposes of poetry. Although all four of these perspectives, it will be shown, play a part in Blake's and Eliot's poetry, there are also other perspectives at work. In poetry, for example, the reader can expect a consistency of rhyme scheme, rhythmic structures, and stanza structures. Poetic form thus comes to constitute an important perspective on its own, blockages being as disruptive of an established cognition process as they are when evidenced in the other four perspectives. Iser notes that, in Ulysses, each new chapter

marks an objective change in style. He indicates that literary prose works often mark changes in perspective by means of new chapters, paragraphs, or sentences. Similarly, changes in perspective in the poetry of Blake and Eliot are often (but not always), indicated by a change in form, be it a change in stanza form, rhyme scheme, rhythm, a caesura. Jerusalem and Four Quartets, it will be shown, rely on the fragmentation of form for their phenomenological effect.

Another example of possible perspectives that are more prevalent in this poetry than in conventional prose are those implied through the use of allusions. Blake's and especially Eliot's poetry are extraordinarily rich in allusion, be it to other literary works, meta-discursive systems, even their own lives (hence it is necessary to soften Wimsatt and Beardsley's stance on the intentional fallacy). Allusions may be employed simply to evoke an apposite atmosphere, to invoke a sense of irony, even to undermine another perspective.

In Jerusalem and Four Quartets, the importance of any given perspective is defined more by its corruptibility than by its consistency. Each instance of negation constitutes a blank or "indeterminacy". The reader is rarely allowed to slip into a cognitive comfort zone. As soon as the text renders even a glimmer of perspectival consistency, it is undermined by the sudden insertion of a different, often contradictory perspective. The absence of an express link between perspectives creates an indeterminacy which the reader must overcome by establishing a connection between the two.

Iser indicates that, in prose, the undermining of a perspective is generally achieved via one of two techniques. The first technique Iser calls "a principle of contrast

or opposition” (Iser 1971: 22). For the sake of contraction I will refer to it as the “internal negation” of a perspective. Internal negation works from within the perspective. The perspective is so characterised as to seemingly undermine itself. In Oliver Twist, when the Oliver asks for some more gruel,

The supervisors of the workhouse are appalled at his monstrous insolence. What does the commentator have to say? Not only does he support [the supervisors], but he gives his reasons for doing so. The reaction of the reader is unequivocal, for the author has formulated his commentary in such a way that the reader simply has to reject it. (Iser 1971: 21-2)

In Jerusalem and Four Quartets perspectives are often undermined internally. This will become apparent in the subsequent chapters. Such actions seemingly impose upon readers of the poems only one conceivable outlet, the rejection of that perspective. Indeed, Iser indicates that the technique is rather prescriptive of the stance the reader may employ in order to solve the text’s indeterminacy. In other words, although it is left to the readers to decide whether they should be opposed to a particular perspective, that perspective’s characterisation makes the appropriate stance abundantly clear.

Iser refers to the second technique employed by literary works to disrupt perspectives as a “cutting – montage – or segmenting technique” (Iser 1971: 21). He shows how various perspectives in Ulysses are fragmentarily arranged in such a manner as to necessitate from the reader active participation in the creation of links between them. In the case of the cutting technique, the integrity of a perspective is undermined by a perspective external to itself. For this reason, I will refer to it as a technique of “external negation”. This technique is also often employed in Jerusalem and Four Quartets.

External negation, according to Iser, demands greater independence from the reader in asserting the connections between the perspectives offered by the text (Iser

1971: 22). The reader is encouraged to consider more possibilities as they attempt to concatenate the textual perspectives with which the text confronts them.

The more numerous the perspectives evidenced in the literary work, the more numerous are the indeterminacies. Iser indicates that part of the difficulty of Joyce's later works, Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake, may be attributed to the extreme levels of direct participation the texts require. Iser argues that more perspectives of a literary work's focal object do not imply a more precise rendering. The increased number of blanks that arise as a result of the increased number of perspectives employed, precipitates in a more indeterminate rendering of that focal object. Such heightened indeterminacy is a challenge to the reader. Iser notes that Ulysses is a stimulating text precisely because of its difficulty:

On the one hand, the density of the allusions and the continual segmentation of the style involve an incessant changing of perspectives, which seems to go out of control whenever the reader tries to pin them down; on the other hand, the empty spaces resulting from the cuts and abbreviations tempts the reader to fill them in.
(Iser 1971: 35)

It will be shown that Jerusalem and Four Quartets rely on a similarly high density of perspectives and indeterminacies. This, in part, accounts for the difficulty readers experience, and the tremendous cognitive effort that the texts require of them. Indeed, as will be argued, the difficulty of their works constitute the fulfilment of manifest principles on the part of both poets.

The reading process might occur as follows: a perspective is internally negated, and readers assume what they perceive to be an appropriate stance on that perspective. In turn, that stance is externally negated by previous and subsequent perspectives. Caught up in such a catch-22 scenario, readers are encouraged to confront the difficulty of

ascribing any significance to the text whatsoever. In the relevant chapters it will be shown, with reference to select fragments of both poems, how they undermine the readers' attempts to abstract the relation between purposefully elusive perspectives. Thus, it will become evident, the focal object of the poems – that which the reader would otherwise substantiate as the locus of the relation between perspectives – becomes a rationally irresolvable puzzle.

The reader's dynamic attempt at the solution of this puzzle, the bringing to bear of personal and text-induced predisposition upon this process, constitutes the poem's virtuality. It is a demonstrable fact that the text presents such rationally irreconcilable anomalies. The pre-critical strategies employed by the reader to solve such problems – the experience of which is the "meaning" of the poem – are *not* demonstrable or abstractly reducible.

The phenomenological occurrences within the virtuality must, as has already been shown, remain merely hypothetical aspects of the reader-poem relation. It would be injurious to attempt to abstract the experiences of the reader within the virtuality. No critic can claim to understand definitively and abstractly these aspects of the reading process. Exegeses comprising claims to the contrary, as has been shown, are either false or critically untenable.

Hence, as Iser writes in The Implied Reader:

One text is potentially capable of several different realisations, and no one reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each reader will fill the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. (Iser 1975: 380)

The above statement is apposite to the sort of poetry Eliot and Blake have written in all respects but one. Iser's assertion that any given realisation of the text is the result of the reader's exclusion of all other possible realisations is contrary to the purposes of this thesis. I contend that Jerusalem and Four Quartets resist abstraction of their focal objects, thereby discouraging the imposition of a particular significance upon the poem by the readers once they emerge from virtuality. Both works encourage the reader to experience the perspectives offered by the text *simultaneously*, rather than *individually*. This is why the experience of the reader is so difficult to reduce to any particular perspective. No single perspective constitutes a sufficient framework for the experience.

What then, can be the significance of poetry such as Four Quartets and Jerusalem? The answer to that question, surely, is that it must remain unspoken by critics. The "meaning" is irreducible in any other than the broadest possible terms. The phenomenological "meaning" contained within the text's virtuality, and the significance a reader eventually attributes to that experience, are aspects of the poems about which the critic can only hypothesise.

The time has come to take a step back, and to re-examine what aspects of literary works such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets are open to rational arrangement by the critical mind, and which aspects are best left to the realm of the phenomenological. That is the central aim of this thesis: to draw the necessary distinction between those elements of the poems that are knowable, and those about which the critic can only hypothesise. In the subsequent two chapters it will be demonstrated, with broad reference to the ideas expressed in this introductory chapter, how the poetry of T.S. Eliot and William Blake is constituted of various perspectives that gravitate towards the zero-point of their own

dissolution. In so doing, it will hopefully also become clearer how the poems encourage dynamic engagements from their readers that have the potential to culminate in some sort of *jouissance*, or “experience *qua* experience”.

Chapter 2

Reading T.S. Eliot: Two Waves of the Sea and the Stillness Between

According to John Carey, Eliot's earliest collection of poems, Prufrock and Other Observations, transformed English poetry, and challenged Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads for sheer originality (Carey 2000: 40). Eliot's innovation, writes Carey, was to challenge the intellect by setting it "impossible tasks" (Carey 2000: 40):

The special power of [Prufrock and Other Observations] is to impel you to understand and simultaneously stop you doing so. [The poems] unhook you from your normal connections with reality and leave you adrift in a region which is the more poignant because it is vague. (Carey 2000: 41)

Carey's sense of Eliot's early poems is astute to a point. I will show that, while most certainly directing the reader's attention towards "vague regions" in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and The Waste Land, Eliot is less inclined to "leave you adrift" there, then he was in Four Quartets. To the early Eliot the state or the "region" of irresolvable "mental tasks" in which the poems impelled the reader to engage, was symptomatic of disaffection and disillusionment. In Four Quartets this "region" was the locus for perceptual liberation.

I am also less inclined than is Carey to employ Eliot's method and the effects of his poetry as the bases for claims regarding the poet's originality. It will become clear in the next chapter that Blake's methods are not dissimilar. The decision, therefore, to examine Eliot before Blake in this thesis may seem anachronistic. It is, however, justifiable. One can better demonstrate the process of reading to the point of *jouissance* in contrast to poems that stop the reader short of such experience. Eliot's earlier poetry,

whilst still encouraging readers to “experience” their engagement with the poems, limited those experiences by, on some or other level, prescribing an “appropriate” significance to the experience. In Four Quartets, perhaps because of methodological development after Eliot’s much publicised conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927 (Ackroyd 1984: 162), the poetry simply allows the “experience” of the poem to occur for the sake of the “experience”. Eliot’s poetic *oeuvre* therefore represents a particularly apposite body of literature for this study because it allows the comparative examination of the anatomy of poetry that encourages mere “experience” as opposed to poetry that encourages “experience *qua* experience”. This leads to the possibility of comparison with Blake, who seemed, throughout his poetic *oeuvre*, to believe that the abstract signification of meaning had the effect of numbing the pure experience of the poem.

In this chapter, after a general discussion of Eliot’s poetic practices, three poems, each representative of a different phase of Eliot’s methodological development, will be examined. The first poem will be “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”. It will be argued that the poem directs the reader’s attention towards, and in itself enacts, the “absence” of a centralising principle. The poem very definitely implicates this “absence” in a dysfunction of sorts, thereby limiting the terms in which its experience might be expressed.

The second poem that will be discussed is The Waste Land. This poem directs the reader’s attention towards a centralising myth, which supposedly serves as a principle with which to organise the multitudinous and seemingly irreconcilable fragments and perspectives that constitute the poem itself. However, as will be shown, the myth proves insufficient for this purpose. Thereby, The Waste Land critiques the obsession with the

“embodiment” of a centralising “significance”, implicating it in society’s moral and “spiritual” ambivalence.

In “Little Gidding” Eliot writes of “The stillness / Between two waves of the sea” (CP 222). If the dysfunctional “absence” around which “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” revolves represents one wave, and The Waste Land’s failed mythological “embodiment” of the ultimate reference point, represents the other, then Four Quartets represents the stillness between. With special reference to “Burnt Norton”, it will be demonstrated how, in this later work, the reader’s attention is directed to, as Carey would have it, a “region” – as Iser would have it, a “virtuality” – that is neither “absent” nor “embodied”. At the same time, however, the “region” is both. It is because of the ultimate indeterminacy of the region’s nature, that the reader is inclined simply to experience rather than interpret it. Thus, whereas the act of attributing “significance” to the experience of the earlier poems draws the reader out of the virtuality, in Four Quartets the reader is “left adrift” there because the “meaning” rather than the “significance” of the poem is paramount.

2.1. Eliot’s Poetic Meaning

Either by tailoring their criticism to comply, or by reacting against it, critics of Eliot’s work have been affected by his assertion that the creation of poetry is a “process of depersonalisation”.

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.
(Eliot 1997: 44)

Even if we ignore what Frank Kermode calls the “nasty political implications” of this statement, of Eliot’s “claim to poetic or spiritual election” (Kermode 1991: 285), it invites controversy.

Although Eliot’s notions were instrumental in the emergence of the New Criticism, the sad fact is that those selfsame notions have opened his poetry to the sort of criticism that he seemingly meant to avoid. Lyndall Gordon writes, “The idea that Eliot’s poetry was rooted in private aspects of his life has now been accepted” (Gordon 1988: v). That there was ever any doubt regarding the influence of Eliot’s private life upon his poetry may be attributed to his claims of depersonalisation. The unwritten, unintended, implication of Gordon’s claim is that Eliot *failed* to keep his emotions and personality out of his art. Through the theoretical denial of the poet’s personality as a relevant aspect of poetic creativity, Eliot turned his own personality, and the circumstantial elements that defined and refined it, into critical fair game. Hence, many critics have attempted to understand Eliot’s poetry in terms of his life.

Gordon’s biography, as a prime example, documents the influence of Eliot’s long-time and (she claims) unrequited relationship with Emily Hale upon his later poetry. Her aim “is to take Eliot’s own point of view, to imagine a man with immortal longing, and to reconstruct the strategy by which he attained immortality” (Gordon 1988: 7).

Similarly, Joseph McLaughlin writes of the influence Eliot’s job in the “Foreign and Colonial Department of Lloyd’s Bank” would have had on his conception of The Waste Land. McLaughlin argues that, against the backdrop of the First World War, not only was Eliot transposing fragments of a shattered European culture into a single unified text, the poet’s job meant that he was engaged with a “financial attempt to unify Europe

and prevent ... financial and political instability and chaos. As both poet and banker, he was a piece-keeper and a peacekeeper” (McLaughlin 2000: 174).

Bernard Bergonzi draws the personal links between Eliot, and the cities that are mentioned or alluded to in his poetry. For example,

The ‘sawdust restaurants with oyster shells’ of ‘Prufrock’ should indicate that we are in an American city, and all the evidence points to the poem’s origins in Eliot’s experience of St Louis, Missouri, the city where he grew up, and which was notorious for fogs.
(Bergonzi 1999: 88)

To a greater or lesser degree, all three of these critics read Eliot’s poetry in terms of his biographic details, and the larger context within which these details unfold.

Although Bergonzi’s and McLaughlin’s readings form part of larger thematic studies, the implication of their ideas is the same as Gordon’s. All three imply that Eliot’s poetry can be reduced to, or at least explained by, a series of allusions to the various events, circumstances, and relationships that the poet experienced. This they offer to their readers as the “reality” of which the poetry constitutes an abstract form. The temptation for their readers is to confuse this reality with the “meaning” of the poem. It is my contention – indeed, it is Eliot’s contention – that the conflation of the poet’s experience and poem’s “meaning” is problematic, if not downright illegitimate.

The critical problem “depersonalisation” poses should be obvious. If the poet is not the source of the poem’s “meaning”, if he refuses even to take responsibility for the poem’s “meaning”, then where does the proverbial buck stop? What can a poem exist in reference to, if not reality itself? Outside of the “actual” experiences it represents, can a poem “mean” anything?

The shortcomings of interpreting poetry in terms of the poet's own experience is something that Eliot manifestly understood. In his lecture "The Music of Poetry", delivered in 1942, Eliot speaks of the French poet Mallarmé, whose language the French sometimes say "is so peculiar that it can be understood only by foreigners" (Eliot 1975: 111). Of an English translation with notes to "unriddle the meanings" Eliot writes:

when I learn that a difficult sonnet was inspired by seeing a painting on the ceiling reflected on the polished top of a table, or by seeing the light reflected from the foam on a glass of beer, I can only say that this may be the correct embryology, but it is not the meaning. (Eliot 1975: 111)

Studies like those undertaken by Gordon, McLaughlin and Bergonzi deal in the "embryology" of poems, rather than their "meaning". Eliot's understanding of poetic "meaning" warrants further discussion because it offers some insight into a function for poetry other than that of the merely representative.

The influence of the French symbolist poets on the conception of Eliot's poetic manifesto should not be underestimated. Eliot's call for a depersonalised author was not without precedent. In his famous essay "The Death of the Author", Roland Barthes indicates that Mallarmé was an early exponent of a literary aesthetic in which it is necessary to

substitute language itself for the person who, until then has been supposed its owner. For [Mallarmé], for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write, is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not to be confused with the castrating impersonality of the realist novelist), to reach that point, where only language acts, 'performs', and not [the author].

(Barthes 1989: 115)

Barthes's description of Mallarmé's understanding of verbal art bears some resemblance to that which Eliot would come to outline in his critical essays. The subject matter the

poet brings to his poem, based on unique sense impressions, and chosen for reasons only the poet understands, becomes an entirely different thing once committed to an abstract form:

the author may have been writing some peculiar personal experience, which he saw as quite unrelated to anything outside; yet for the reader the poem may become the expression of a general situation, as well as some private expression of his own. The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid – it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author is 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. (Eliot 1975: 111)

The peculiarities of the poet's experience, seemingly so important in the poem's conception, are ultimately unimportant in its reading. Eliot recognised that in the committing of such experience to abstract form, the experience was open to the subjective interpretation and association of those who then encounter it. Eliot wrote that the "meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins" (Eliot 1975: 111).

In Eliot's conception of poetry writing, the poet's function is not the revelation or generation of new subject matter. The author's experience, albeit unique to his vantage point, is still derived from an engagement with an object world that, it must be presumed, he shares with his readers. Similarly, the poet must presume that he has similar emotional faculties to his readers. There is, however, no way of qualitatively distinguishing between, or conflating the poet's experience with that of readers. The abstract communication of emotion is notoriously difficult and the results so vague that, for the sake of social cohesion, we must assume emotions to be somewhat similar. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot writes that:

One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search for novelty in the wrong places it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones ...

(Eliot 1997: 48)

In this light, the subject matter of poetry, be it an abstraction of the object world, or a generalisation about emotion, cannot be presumed to be new. Indeed, the subject matter is that element of the poem that functions as the common denominator between the poet and the reader. Saving the poet's employment of obscure and immensely personal details, the subject matter is that aspect of the poem with which the reader most immediately identifies. However, it is necessary to distinguish the reader's identification of the poem's subject matter from the "meaning" of the poem. According to Eliot, the *form* of the poem communicates a unique experience of the poem's subject matter. Thus, mere recognition of, or identification, with the poem's subject matter does not explain the "experience" arising out of the reader's engagement with the poem.

In "The Metaphysical Poets" Eliot writes:

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. (Eliot 1976: 287).

Once again overlooking what seems to be Eliot's assertion of "poetic election", the implications of his claims are of interest. It is the "forming" of subject matter, the "amalgamation" of abstracts based on actual experience, that, according to Eliot, is the province of the poet. It is the contours, the shape, the poetic arrangement of the subject matter that has the potential to be revelatory to readers.



But what is the nature of this revelation? What does the poem then “mean”? In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot expounds on his belief that poetry should express “emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet” (Eliot 1997: 49). Further, in “The Music of Poetry” Eliot writes that if “we are moved by a poem, it has meant something, perhaps something important, to us; if we are not moved, then it is, as poetry, meaningless” (Eliot 1975: 111). It is obvious from these remarks that Eliot understood the “meaning” of his poetry to be experienced rather than abstracted. It is fair to say that with every poem Eliot had a particular kind of experience in mind, even if we can only speculate as to its precise qualities. In the next three sections of this thesis it will be demonstrated how the poet’s form developed in order to encourage the reader to experience “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, The Waste Land, and Four Quartets differently.

2.2. **“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: The Overwhelming Absence of Meaning**

In “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”¹ that which would be a necessary component of any “unitary” interpretation of the text – an object, a concept, a paradigm which could be isolated and critically reduced to signify the central “meaning” of the text – is missing.

In this section of this chapter it will be demonstrated how “The Love Song” resists attempts by critics to impose such “unitary” interpretation upon the poem. There are three main levels upon which critics are generally tempted to impose singular significance upon the text. The first temptation is to interpret the poem, and its protagonist, as an extension of the poet himself. The second temptation is to try to

¹ Hence referred to as “The Love Song”.

understand the text in terms of the character that the poem purports to be about – to employ the peculiar psychology of J. Alfred Prufrock as the unifying paradigm of the text. The third temptation is to interpret the poem in terms of a literary “singularity” – as though, through its allusion to other literature, it represents some or other reducible “truth”.

It will be demonstrated how “The Love Song” is constructed in such a manner as to undermine attempts to reduce the text to any particular unified significance. However, in their tacit realisation of the absence of a central organising principle, readers are granted the essential clue as to the significance that they are directed to attribute to the experience of the poem. In their efforts to negotiate the relations between various fragments that constitute the poem, readers are encouraged to experience the hopelessness of their task, and bewilderment with regard to its completion.

The first temptation – using the personality and biographical details of the poet as the unifying principle of the poem – may be most readily dismissed. Such critics might put a heavy emphasis on details such as the overly effete St Louis high society in which Eliot would have mixed. They might attempt to explain the poem in terms of Eliot’s own discomfort and feelings of inadequacy. However, as has already been argued, one of Eliot’s manifest principles was that of his poetry’s “depersonalisation”. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot claims that he struggles to attack the point of view related to

the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is that the poet has not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. (Eliot 1997: 46-7)

This quote is particularly apposite for a discussion of “The Love Song”. It is inappropriate to employ the personality of the poet as a unifying principle of the poem because, according to Eliot at least, personality is not, in itself, unified. Still, the poet’s personality and biographical detail is not entirely to be dismissed in the critical appreciation of a poem: it will be recalled that in the introductory chapter of this thesis the suitability of a softened version of Wimsatt and Beardsley’s “Intentional Fallacy” was suggested. The reason for this softened stance is well-expressed in the quote above. Eliot suggests that the emphasis in poetry falls not on the personality of the poet, so much as on the manner (or medium) in which that personality is expressed. Thus, it is the “discourse” of personality that is the appropriate object of critical commentary. However, because neither “personality” nor its discursive rendering can stand as the text’s overall unifying principle, they must be treated as aspects, rather than the quintessence of the text’s meaning. In keeping with the “how-approach” that was outlined in the introductory chapter, the poet’s perspective represents one of many at work in the text. What should be of interest to critics examining the text’s facilitation of the reader’s experience, is the characterisation of the poet’s perspective and its placement in relation to other perspectives that comprise the poem. In his earlier works Eliot seems less inclined to align his subject matter with biographical detail. The potential effects of “The Love Song” and The Waste Land therefore arise independently of the poet’s own perspective. In the discussion of Four Quartets, however, it will be demonstrated how Eliot employs biographical details as essential – but *not* definitive – aspects of the poem’s potential effects.

The second temptation is to read the poem as though it represents the “unified” personality of its protagonist, J. Alfred Prufrock. One is inevitably tempted to read J. Alfred Prufrock as a psychological “entity”, a “real” personage.

Prufrock is a character whose understanding of social and personal norms are constantly challenged by a seemingly dysfunctional, but at the same time habitual, rationalistic worldview. His uneasiness seems to be a reaction against the seemingly empirical, almost entomological, watchfulness of the overly effete society within which he moves for a large part of the poem’s action:

I have known the eyes already, known them all –
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

(CP 15)

At all costs, it seems, Prufrock must avoid the negative judgement of his society. His feelings of inadequacy are no doubt facilitated by his hailing from

certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells:

(CP 14)

It is within the context of an ever watchful, ever judgmental high society that these streets follow Prufrock “like a tedious argument / of insidious intent”.

By virtue of what he perceives to be “questionable” origins Prufrock employs a defense strategy that is gleaned from those whose judgement he wishes to avoid *and* to court. It is evident that Prufrock’s social actions are the result of a painstaking methodology akin to science in its rigour. Prufrock observes minutely; from these

observations he abstracts principles of appropriate behaviour or dress. There is, for example, no causal connection between aging and the rolling of trouser bottoms (CP 17); hence, Prufrock's association is most likely based on occasional observation extrapolated into an overriding principle by which he defines others and hopes and fears to be defined himself. The principle is no stronger than a platitude: "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to my chin, / my necktie rich and modest but asserted by a simple pin" (CP 14). The inflexible iambic rhythm and the traditional couplet rhyming of these lines serve to emphasise the dogmatic conventionality of their content, and the deference of the speaker to such conventionality.

Prufrock's reticence to reveal his origins is justified by what he perceives to be society's readiness to fix him in a "formulated phrase", in other words, to bring their preconceptions to bear upon their judgement of his character. It is ironic that Prufrock attempts to avoid this by formulating preconceptions of his own, preconceptions that come to bear on his superficial representation of himself. That is to say, Prufrock indirectly encourages the sort of judgement he purportedly wishes to avoid.

Throughout his love song, Prufrock displays a superficial self-knowledge undermined by self-delusion. He is characterised as an habitual fence-sitter, "In a minute there is time / for decisions and revisions that a minute will reverse" (CP 14). Prufrock occupies a limbo born of half-hearted commitment to, and indecision regarding, opposing paradigms. This limbo is demonstrated by his uncomfortable juggling of a social rationalism with religious faith.

His declaration that he has "measured out [his] life with coffee spoons" (CP 14) exemplifies the makeshift nature of the rationalistic methodology Prufrock employs; an

indication of the crudeness inherent in his attempts to control the parts that constitute his social make-up. The ineffectiveness of his systematisation is further emphasised by his nervousness. He does not dare to step beyond the boundaries of what is immediately and provably acceptable: “And indeed there will be time / to wonder, ‘Do I dare?’ and ‘Do I dare?’” (CP 14).

According to the ideal Eliot would later express, faith should take over where rationalism fails. In “‘The Pensées’ of Pascal” he wrote:

every man who thinks and lives by thought must have his own scepticism, that which stops at the question, that which ends in denial, or that which leads to faith and which is somehow integrated into the faith that transcends it.

(Eliot 1976: 411)

Prufrock is reluctant to commit to *or* to dismiss matters less readily definable than social trends.

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
brought in upon the platter,
I am no prophet – and here’s no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and
snicker,
And in short, I was afraid. (CP 16)

Prufrock is not a nonbeliever, he is merely afraid of not knowing or understanding the “Ultimate” consequences of his actions. Thus he contrives a system whereby the probability of any given consequence is deduced. He perceives faith to be a threat to his carefully constructed social persona. We are made aware that he does not dismiss the possibility of prophetic vision, or ultimate enlightenment, but that it is unsuitable within his material and social context.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among the talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all' –
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.' (CP 16)

Prufrock prioritises the satisfaction of immediate needs, social affirmation, the favourable attentions of a lady, over an engagement with issues greater than those presented by his immediate context. His priorities are fixed despite the dysfunction of his social rationalism, and his inability to fully dismiss claims to a higher power. Indeed, it is perhaps more correct to assert that Prufrock's suspect priorities are a direct result of, or a defense against, his failure as both a skeptic and a rationalist. As a later, less sympathetic, Eliot wrote in "The Pensées' of Pascal":

The majority of mankind is lazy-minded, incurious and absorbed in vanities, and tepid emotion, and is therefore incapable of either much doubt or much faith; and when the ordinary man calls himself a skeptic or an unbeliever, that is ordinarily a simple pose, cloaking a disinclination to think anything out to a conclusion.
(Eliot 1976: 411-2)

Prufrock's "disinclination" to commit to an overarching paradigm means that he is almost entirely subject to the shifts and changes of his material context. The result is a man who, like the Greek God Proteus, "linger[ing] in the chambers of the sea, / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown" (CP 17), changes his shape to suit his context. To avoid becoming identified as an old man, for example, is as simple to Prufrock as rolling the bottoms of his trousers – a trendy style at the time of the poem's writing (Southam

1968: 35). He finds comfort in the fact that “there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet” (CP 14).

But the very coherence of this reading is, in a sense, shattered by an alertness to form: one has to then see that the form enacts the fragmentedness of J. Alfred Prufrock’s own non-identity. J. Alfred Prufrock turns out to be only a “simulacrum” of an identity. It is imperative to recognise that, like Proteus, “Prufrock” has lost touch with what may have constituted his essential shape. “He” finds it impossible to commit himself to any particular face. The psychologist Robert Jay Lifton refers to a case study in which one of his patients referred to themselves as “wearing a number of masks” (Lifton 1995: 131). The patient asks whether or not there is, or should be, “one face that is ... authentic”. He compares himself to an actor:

Which is the real person, so far as the actor is concerned? Is he more real when performing on stage, or when he is at home? I tend to think that for people who have these many, many masks, there is no home. Is it a futile gesture for the actor to try to find his real face?
(Lifton 1995: 131)

Prufrock, like Lifton’s patient, is comprised of many faces. The “you” addressed in “The Love Song” may be seen as just another projection of his own personae, as may the “I” whose monologue comprises the poem. The dichotomies that at the same time rend and comprise Prufrock seem to be consciously recognised in such statements as “I should have been a pair of ragged claws” (CP 15). In this light “The Love Song” becomes a complex negotiation of the many masks that constitute an apparently single man.

It is possible to postulate a psychological singularity through a strenuous act of interpretation, a “reading into” the poem from the analogy of a “real” person. However, an attentive “reading out of” the poem – taking seriously the formal disjunction –

destroys the faith in this singularity, even as we search for it. For example, it is because of the “negotiation” of the many masks of J. Alfred Prufrock, that we are led to examine the “overwhelming question” that Prufrock timorously avoids asking throughout “The Love Song”. The poem may be explained as the extended marriage proposal of a nervous suitor. As an inner negotiation, however, the question takes on a new significance, although it need not necessarily negate the notion of a marriage. The answer to the overwhelming question must constitute a commitment of sorts, not so much between Prufrock and his lover, as to a single perspective or identity. A meaningful engagement with the question would rescue Prufrock from his “disinclination to think anything out to a conclusion” (Eliot 1976: 412).

Prufrock does not engage with the “overwhelming question”. In fact, it is not asked once through the course of “The Love Song”. It is, rather, revealingly avoided, “Do not ask what is it?” (CP 14). If an authentic face does exist, and a satisfactory perspective is “out there” to be assumed, then Prufrock shows very little willingness to, as Lifton’s patient would have it, go “home”. In Prufrock’s world, as in the patient’s, such a home is marked by its absence, rather than by its attainability. Thus the protagonist’s most explicit attempt at self-definition begins with a denial, rather than an affirmation of identity:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –
Almost, at times, the Fool. (CP 17)

Prufrock's representation of himself is indicative of his confusion. He demotes himself from attendant lord and adviser to the prince to the station of court Fool. This final station is contradicted by what he claims to be his "politic, cautious, and meticulous" nature, neither does obtuseness or ridiculousness easily associate with the adviser to the Prince. For Prufrock, a man in constant bafflement because of "decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse", such contradictions are perpetual. In a sense, all the decisions or revisions Prufrock makes nullify any other perspective or identity he might have or might yet assume. The Fool thus nullifies the Adviser. Rationalism cancels faith and vice versa. Prufrock's social persona seems, often, to work in contradiction to his immediate, intuitive impulses.

The poem does not offer the reader an "authentic" centre around which a coherent "J. Alfred Prufrock" can be constructed. Like Lifton's patient, Prufrock offers only masks which change with his context, and his perpetually changing context precipitates a chaos of identity that is without resolution. A literal "nothing" binds the disparate bits of and pieces of his character. This literal "nothing" becomes the anomaly of the poem to which the reader's attentions are drawn.

To quote Eliot in The Waste Land, written ten years later, Prufrock, and readers of "The Love Song", "cannot say or guess" because they know "only / A heap of broken images" (CP 63). The poem, with its protagonist's existential uneasiness and social nervousness, substantiates the inadequacy of *only* perceiving the fragments of one's worldview.

The third temptation is to read the poem as a "literary" singularity. Granted, the poem does not merely tell the story of a putatively singular character and his

dysfunctional ways. It is “A Love Song”. That is to imply that outside of Prufrock’s head, in its poetic form, it constitutes a communication that is as open (or closed) to interpretation as the context within which the protagonist finds himself. The poem’s achievement is its success in stylistically enacting its protagonist’s state of paradigmatic aporia. While engaging with the poem, the reader’s attention is required to shift constantly between stylistic fragments, disparate allusions, and seemingly unrelated sense impressions.

Hugh Kenner writes in The Invisible Poet that the Eliot who wrote “The Love Song” dealt “in effects, not ideas” (Kenner 1960: 4). By “effect” I presume Kenner to imply that which the reader experiences when engaging with the poem. It is a potential effect of the fragmented and diverse styles juxtaposed within the context of a single poem, that they evoke a sense of the disparities within the context of a putatively single man.

Kenner points out that Eliot characterises Prufrock’s very observations so that they cumulatively come to evoke a sense of the irresolvable and contrary pressures that exert themselves on the fragmentary mind. This is not only achieved through the inconsistency of style – as has been briefly discussed with regard to the inflexible iambic couplets that render Prufrock’s platitudes in seeming opposition to his more relaxed register. It is also, and especially, evident in the seeming incompatibility of the poem’s literary allusions. Those seeking to establish a consistency in amongst the various allusions present in the text, perhaps a commonality of theme, are bound to be frustrated by the poem. The poem offers few such consistencies and, as will become evident, is at times patently contradictory.

The poem's epigraph, as Southam points out, refers to the words spoken by Count Guido de Montefeltrano in Eighth Chasm of Hell in Dante's *Inferno* (Southam 1968: 33). The epigraph preempts the journey that begins with Prufrock's utterance "Let us go then, you and I" (CP 13). It is a journey through eerie half-deserted streets, replete with monuments to the human appetites, represented by oyster shell restaurants and one night cheap hotels. These monuments, and the malevolent feline presence of sulphurous "yellow fog" and "yellow smoke" indicate that the poem's opening alludes to and evokes Dante's Hell. It is a hell "neither sustained by a theology nor gradated by degrees of crime [but] a genteel accumulation of stage effects, nothing quite in excess. It isn't punishment so much as a state" (Kenner 1960: 10).

The characteristic tedium of this Hell implies disaffection with the morality it implies. The "stage effect" that evokes this (a)morality is immediately juxtaposed with an entirely different effect aimed at evoking opposing imperatives to those provided by the carnal appetites. In the next twelve lines of the poem, "and indeed there will be time ... Before the taking of toast and tea" (CP 14) the word "time" reverberates as it does in *Ecclesiastes*.² The biblical passage expresses the ultimate control that God supposedly wields over the events in our lives. In "The Love Song" this Biblical allusion is corrupted to indicate the mere protagonist's need to maintain control "there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (CP 14). Furthermore, the passage is

² "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace" (Authorised Version: Eccles 3: 1-8).

indicative of the protagonist's inability to consistently maintain such control, "And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions" (CP 14).

A reader, noticing either the Biblical or Inferno allusions, perhaps both, is tempted to contextualise such references within the framework of the poem, or vice versa. Allusions offer the hope of "explanation" via a singular reference point – Joyce's fragmentation of Dublin life, for example, the vast stylistic changes between sections of his Ulysses, are unified by the underlying, if express, presence of the Homeric mythology. A reader might expect the allusion to represent some principle of unification. In "The Love Song", however, allusions are arranged as to defy such principles. The effect of the disparate and contrary fragments of allusions is to cast the notion of an imagined singularity into the doubtfulness of irony. As will be shown a little later, the destabilization of allusion as a unifying principle of a literary text is the central device employed by Eliot in The Waste Land.

The religious allusions, to both spiritual determinacy and Dante's Hell, would enact within in the reader an awareness of transcendent possibility and / or descendent materialism. Both, however, are decontextualised. The abandon of the half-deserted streets is countered by the prudent division of time. The determinism of God is countered by the flagrant immorality of Hell's one-night cheap hotels. In a sense, they are reduced and satirised, even bowdlerised, with the effect of undermining the credibility of either a religious or skeptical perspective when engaging with the poem. Both religion and scepticism would prove to be insufficient as paradigmatic sources of unifying principles within the poem. Thus, readers are discouraged from making up their minds too quickly about the "meaning" of the poem. In "The Love Song" Eliot undermines the tendency of

readers to formulate the “meaning” of the poem, to fix it in a formulated phrase, to squeeze the poem into a manageable paradigmatic system.

What then, can be concluded from the inappropriateness of unitary interpretations of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”? To the reader the poem reveals neither one suitable paradigmatic approach, nor any unifying principles. It is, however, through the suggestion of their possibility that their absence is made most glaringly apparent. From the opening of the poem the certain half-deserted streets “lead to an overwhelming question” (CP 14). The idea of such a question is often evoked, but is, in itself, never revealed to the reader.

Similarly, to the reader, the absence of the overwhelming question, that towards which the poem purportedly “rolls”, enacts the absence of a plausible organising and unifying principle. Although the poem encourages readers, through its indeterminacies, to actively engage in the negotiation of the relation between its various perspectives, it frustrates their efforts by offering neither an explicit statement of – nor a method of approach to – its “meaning”. Thereby the poem leaves the reader, like the character that purports to sing it, isolated and alienated from “meaning”.

Like Mallarmé’s, Eliot’s poetry is difficult. It is something about which the poet had no compunction. Indeed, it was a manifest principle. In his essay “The Metaphysical Poets” Eliot indicated that he believed difficulty to be a necessary characteristic of modern poetry (Eliot 1976: 289). The necessity of this “difficulty” had as much to do with the mirroring of an increasingly complex society, as it had to do with interpretative process it required of its reader. As Prufrock’s journey is without destination, so is the reader’s through the poem. It is thus not entirely coincidental that Eliot later understood

readers' behaviour in response to difficult poetry to bear some resemblance to Prufrock's response to his perplexing environment. In "The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism"

Eliot wrote:

The ordinary reader, when warned against the obscurity of a poem, is apt to be thrown into a state of consternation very unfavourable to poetic receptivity. Instead of beginning, as he should, in a state of sensitivity, he obfuscates his senses by the desire to be clever and to look very hard for something, he doesn't know what – or else by the desire not to be taken in. There is such a thing as stage fright, but what such readers have is pit or gallery fright ... there is the difficulty caused by the author's having left out something which the reader is used to finding; so that the reader, bewildered, gropes about for what is absent, and puzzles his head for a kind of 'meaning' which is not there, and is not meant to be there.

(Eliot 1948:150-1)

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a poem that directs the reader's attention towards a state of awareness, a perspective, a paradigm, that the protagonist cannot access, and that the poem has no pretensions to describing. Instead, the poem offers an experience of the absence of a satisfactory interpretative stance. Like Prufrock's environment, the poem provides the reader with a context that defies approaches based in either faith or reason. The poem grants the reader a literal "nothing" with which to make sense of its fragmented and disparate construction. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" invokes the experience of the absence of ultimate "meaning".

Throughout the poem, the overwhelming presence is that of absence; to the point where absence, is the poem's defining feature. In this respect, the lack of a singular identity *is* Prufrock's identity, and the absence of a formal reference point *is* the reference point that galvanises the poem's "meaning" into "significance". In other words, because "The Love Song" is prescriptive, to a considerable degree, of the type of experience it invokes, the "unabstracted" integrity of that experience is compromised. In this

regard, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is not suitably structured to facilitate the reader’s *jouissance*.

2.3. “The Waste Land”: The Embodiment of “Meaning”

Commentators on The Waste Land, like those on “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, are also tempted to explain the poem in terms of a singular or unified paradigm. Such readings generally occur on two main levels: the personal (embryological), and the cultural or mythical level. The latter of these readings forms the major object of discussion in this section. It will be shown how, through the employment of mythology as representative, the poem seems to pander to the reader’s demand for a unifying principle, and that this principle is, at the same time, purposefully undermined. It will be argued that the poem’s form also enacts this same sense of disruption and failure more objectively than can be achieved through its relatively erudite mythological references. The central hypothesis of this section, therefore, is that the reader’s experience of the The Waste Land is one of destabilisation arising out of its overt suggestion of unifying principles and its simultaneous negation of such principles. Thus, if “The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock” enacts the personal irresolution arising out of the “absence” of ultimate significance, then The Waste Land enacts a cultural ambivalence that precipitates out of the objective inadequacy of any single “signification” or “embodiment” of ultimate meaning.

Embryological readings of The Waste Land – those that attempt to explain the poem in terms of the poet’s biographical details – can contribute little to an understanding of the reader’s experience of the poem. Personal references are evident in the poem -

Margate Sands, for example, where the speaker could “connect / Nothing with nothing” (CP 74), was the Thames estuary resort where Eliot convalesced in 1921, and where he wrote large parts of The Waste Land. Whereas such lines do resonate within the context of the poem as a whole, such resonance is not necessarily (if at all) reducible to the poet’s own experience or state of mind at the time of the poem’s creation. It is essential to remember that this thesis is interested, as was Eliot, in emotion that “has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet” (Eliot 1997: 49). The poet’s life, therefore, cannot be employed as the unifying principle of the poem, but must be seen as but one source of allusions among many.

At the time of the writing of The Waste Land Eliot most certainly had the notion of a unifying principle in mind. Jewel Spears Brooker writes that:

The notion that the creation or perception of art is dependent on the existence of a reference point (or centre) is crucial in the understanding of form in art. This notion was a given in Western art before the twentieth century, and its problematization is part of the crisis of modernism. The herculean effort to cope with the loss of a shared reference point, involving ingenious attempts to retrieve or discover or create substitutes, characterises modernism in all art. (Brooker 1993: 84-5)

If “The Love Song of J. Alfred Pufrock” evidences the problematisation of a reference point in art and life, then The Waste Land would seem to evidence an Herculean attempt by the poet to cope with the problem. All may not be as it seems, however.

As Brooker points out, Eliot, in his 1923 review of Ulysses, engages with the problem for artists of creating order in the absence of a reference point. Published the year after the publication of both The Waste Land and Ulysses, Eliot’s excitement regarding Joyce’s method may have resulted from the affirmation of his own poetic

method. In Ulysses Joyce employs an “Homeric reference point” (Brooker 1993: 85), The Odyssey, which becomes the centralising foundation for the fragmented and obscurely rendered narrative of Bloom’s and Stephen Dedalus’s journeys towards each other through the streets of Dublin. This method, the “mythical method”, was 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” (Eliot 1975: 177).

The focus of “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” is decidedly literary. Thus, in as much as Eliot propounded the benefits of the “mythical method”, it is essential to recognise that Eliot’s terms of reference were limited. He saw the method as a way of controlling futility and anarchy *as it is represented* in literature. Thus, the mythical method provides Eliot with a way of *representing* a unifying foundation within representational constructs, rather than in any actual sense.

This distinction indicates a possible approach to understanding the sense of ambivalence that a reading of The Waste Land instills. Were the poem an affirmation of an ultimate reference point, this ambivalence would not be an appropriate response. It is my contention, however, that the poem is skeptical of its own literary medium’s ability to render such an affirmation. Although The Waste Land employs the promise of an ultimate reference point, it also offers a critique of the modernist obsession with the representation or abstraction of an ultimate reference point. Thus, if “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is a poem about the dysfunction resulting from the absence of a personal centre, then The Waste Land is about the dysfunction that precipitates from misplaced adherence to a cultural reference point that is misapprehended as ultimate. Whereas the phenomenological effect of the “The Love Song” relies on the reader’s

awareness of the absence of a centre, the effect of The Waste Land is elicited by the poem's negation of its own textual embodiment of the reference point.

A demonstration of the manner in which this embodiment is negated in The Waste Land necessitates a fair amount of groundwork. Firstly, it is necessary to understand how the poem posits a solution to the problem of the absence of a text's unifying principle, by what method a myth becomes the reference point by which the reader may, through active participation, control and order the text. The recognition of this reference point, in itself, accounts for an essential part of the experience arising out of an engagement with the text. Only thereafter is it possible to understand how The Waste Land undermines its own reference point, thereby undermining the sense of recognition the reader may have experienced, and making the resultant disappointment and ambivalence the poem's lasting impression.

The mythical method represents a literary appropriation of a prevalent psychological and ethnological school of thought. In "Notes on The Waste Land" (CP 80) Eliot indicates his indebtedness to The Golden Bough by Sir James Frazer. Frazer's initial intention of providing a study of the myth of the Golden Bough became the work of thirty years, containing twelve volumes, that explored the theological, mythical, anthropological, and ethnological points of departure evidenced in the myth. The myth itself is colourfully narrated in the opening pages of Frazer's study, and is alluded to throughout The Golden Bough despite the seemingly extreme variability. As Brooker explains, Frazer

extended Darwin's thesis (evolution) and Darwin's method (comparative study of fragments) into the social sciences ... and as Darwin postulated a common ancestor for human beings, [Frazer] postulated a common ancestor for all religions ... And they believed that although the common ancient myth had been broken up in prehistoric times, it could be reconstructed through a comparison of its remaining fragments. (Brooker 1993: 87)

The Golden Bough was an attempt to explain a single myth by proving that its fragments were comparable to analogies from widely ranging ethnic groups, cultures, and theologies. Thus, by proving that the myth was comprised of traditions and analogies traceable throughout various and seemingly unrelated cultural and historical groups, Frazer hoped to prove the commonality of humanity's ancestral religion.

Brooker points out that the methodology of Frazer's study is not entirely distinct from Eliot's in The Waste Land (Brooker 1993: 87-8). However, The Waste Land represents a reversal in method to that of Frazer's. The Golden Bough begins with a complete myth and demonstrates how it contains elements traceable to vastly variegated sources. In this way the myth becomes fragmented along theological, mythical, anthropological, and ethnological grounds. Readers of The Waste Land, on the other hand, are not presented with the luxury of a complete centralising myth at the beginning of the poem. Instead, they are confronted with seemingly disparate fragments. Different allusions (literary, theological, mythical, ethnological), changing contexts, seemingly disparate voices: these are the constituents of "the poem". It is less evidently poetry even than "The Love Song", let alone other lyrics, or epics. There does not seem to be any particular convention of form. There are no overriding rhythmical structures or rhyme schemes. The poem's five sections are apparently haphazardly arranged and fragmented in themselves.

All these elements assault the reader's expectations of how a poem should evoke "meaning". The reader would be forgiven, in the light of the apparent "difficulty" of the poem, for, once again, assuming the character traits of Prufrock within such an alien context (the obfuscated senses, the desperation for "meaning", the puzzling). In The Waste Land, however, patterns do eventually emerge, but not by themselves. The reader is obliged to search for and choose which aspects of the poem fit together. Readers might detect a commonality of theme, they might detect several themes. The relations between these themes might accumulate. Readers might then pick out several allusions to a single myth with which they are familiar. They might associate the themes with this myth. Thus, they might feel they have, in the myth, a textually represented, or "embodied" reference point to which many of the poem's constituent fragments relate. In this way, readers might experience the recognition and promise of the myth.

However, I argue that the mythic reading holds similar status to, for example, the "personality-based" reading of "The Love Song". This can be demonstrated through the isolation of a myth, which will be related to fragments of the poem. This isolation is, in itself, problematic. The Waste Land alludes to several myths. There are arguments for the centrality of many of these. In this study I will focus on one particular myth, the Grail Legend. I choose this legend for two main reasons. Firstly, in "Notes on The Waste Land" Eliot indicates his indebtedness to Jessie L. Weston, who employed Frazer's method to explain the Grail Legends in her book From Ritual to Romance. Secondly, the Grail Legend is perhaps the most prolifically alluded to of the myths evident in the poem.

There are two relevant versions of the legend: in one version, the King is wounded in the genitals, and owing to his intrinsic connection with the land, the land in turn becomes barren and desolate. Images of bareness abound in the poem, “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / out of this stony rubbish?” (CP 63), “Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water” (CP 76). In another version, the moral order is destroyed. The land falls into a state of war owing to the illness of the King. Moral and spiritual confusion is arguably one of the central themes of The Waste Land, ranging from the loveless sex between the typist and the young man “carbuncular” (CP 71-2) to the shady solicitings of Mr. Eugenides (CP 71); from the demolition of Magnus Martyr (CP 73), to the gimmicky spiritualism of Madam Sosostriis (CP 64-5).

The interpretative potential of both versions of the Grail Legend within the context of the poem should be apparent despite this extremely cursory rendering of the legends’ central crises. In both versions a *general* malaise is directly attributed to the dysfunction, or redundancy of a *particular* element *common* to all that lives in the land, namely, the King. Intrinsic to the legend itself is the futility and anarchy of which Eliot wrote in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”. Just as the King’s health is the foundation upon which the moral order and prolificacy of the land is maintained, so the familiar Grail Legend can be seen as the reference point that draws the themes evidenced by the fragments of the poem into a sort of order.

In the legend, the only way the King can be restored to health is if he drinks from the Holy Grail. The ceremony of healing is alluded to by the foot-washing ceremony in “The Fire Sermon”: “Mrs. Porter / And ... her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water” (CP 70). It precedes a quote from Verlaine’s Parsifal (as alluded to by Eliot in his

“Notes”) “*Et O ces voix d’enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*” (CP 70).³ These words are spoken by the knight upon his successful return from the Chapel Perilous where he has sought the grail. All the indications are that the King will be healed. Accordingly the *particular* element common to the *general* populace will be restored, as will the land’s moral order and fertility. Similarly, the ascendancy of myth as the ultimate reference point of the poem would be assured if the narrative of the Legend is completed in its familiar manner. As the body of the Fisher King would convalesce and bring order to the land, so the textual embodiment of a reference point would provide the sense of an underlying order to the text.

However, The Waste Land is structured to assault, rather than fulfill these expectations of meaning. The myth is itself alluded to only fragmentarily, rather than narrated in any familiar sense. Furthermore, the allusions to the myth are often bowdlerised. The ceremonial earnestness of a foot-washing ceremony in a cathedral, for example, is alluded to in the form of an Australian nonsense ballad (CP 82). The most grievous assault on the notion of the myth as the text’s unifying principle is presented by one of the last, and most explicitly ambivalent voices in the poem: it is the voice of the Fisher King himself,

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least put my lands in order?
...
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
(CP 79)

Seemingly cured, the supposed solution to the bareness and moral disorder of the Waste Land, has come to nothing. The Fisher King himself is subject to the inert indecisiveness

³ Translated: “O those children’s voices singing in the dome”

that characterises those caught up in “the immense panorama of futility”. If the King is the particular element common to all the inhabitants of the land, and if, even with the King in a state of health, the land remains barren and in disorder, then the value of this foundation is questionable at best. If we accept the earlier association in which the King is to the land as the Grail Legend is to The Waste Land, then the King’s indecisiveness undermines the value of the Legend within the poem. The underlying presence of the Legend implies the potential to draw the fragments that constitute the surface material of the poem inward to a single centralising core. This core now reveals itself to be fragmented and disordered in itself.

Whatever objective “truth” might have been disseminated from the poem’s archetypal and mythical foundation is thus shown to be in itself questionable. Herein lies the central “meaning” of the poem. Myths and archetypes, however resonant, remain abstracts, mere symbols. They provide, at best, the *appearance* of an underlying truth. That to which all roads seemingly lead, the focal point of fragments and allusions, the underlying meaning of the poem, in itself, amounts to very little more than a literary fragment or allusion.

It will be recalled that attempts to employ the “personage” of J. Alfred Prufrock as the single unifying principle of “The Love Song” failed, because J. Alfred Prufrock was himself merely constituted of fragments. In The Waste Land, however, the poem apparently provides readers with a hook – the myth – onto which they might hang various of the cultural fragments that comprise the poem. However, the recognition of this hook, however flawed it might be, demands that readers approach the text with a foundation of knowledge that exists extrinsic to the poem itself. Their recognition of the myth, although

the result of an active engagement with the text, does not comprise the meaning, or experience, of the poem. It is mere recognition – highly subjective and dependent on the reader's knowledge of myths and other texts. These myths and texts are no more the meaning of the poem than is the biography of the poet, or the embryology of the poem's images. It is the form that these allusions take, the manner in which they are represented, and their arrangement in relation to other allusions and fragments, that will, ultimately, direct the reader to the poem's meaning, and beyond that, its significance.

Before its dismissal as a mere fragment or abstract, The Grail Legend represents the unifying centre of a fragmented world. It is the representation of an ideal: the universe squeezed into a narrative ball. Such representation poses a question more recently asked by Baudrillard:

All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in [a] wager on representation; that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a *sign* could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange – God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say reduced to the signs that attest his existence?
(Baudrillard 1983: 10-11)

Baudrillard argues that the credibility of a system for which such a god was a foundation would be destroyed. The entire system would exist as a mere representation of the truth, not meaningless, but only ever meaningful as a representation. The signs within this system would be incapable of being exchanged for what is real; any postulated guarantor of ultimate meaning is proven to be merely abstract. Instead, the system would continue into perpetuity, exchanging one abstract for another, with no ultimate resolution. It is such a system that, I believe, is enacted in the relation between, or the formal arrangement of, the fragments that comprise The Waste Land.

The reader, when engaging with The Waste Land, is confronted by a poem that seems to follow no particular convention of style. No single rhythmic structures seem to predominate; there is no uniformity of stanza, or lyrical constancy. Readers' problems do not end with the stylistic inconsistency of The Waste Land. In their active attempts to solve the problem of the text's "significance", and as their engagement with "conventional" poems will have disposed them to do, they search for recurrent motifs. Such motifs do exist within the poem, but they are in themselves unstable and unsatisfactory as starting points whereby the poem may be gradually deciphered. Thus, the promise of coherence implied by the recurrence of motifs is undermined by their inconsistent rendering. A single motif is, through the course of The Waste Land, treated as the locus for many irreconcilable associations.

One of many motifs that appositely captures the problems with which The Waste Land confronts its readers is that of music and song. It is especially appropriate to this discussion because, as representative of an expressive art form, the problematisation of the music and song motif can, in some ways, be seen to parallel the problems of poetry and literature that The Waste Land highlights. Readers' inevitable confusion concerning the place and function of music and song within the context of the poem, is microcosmically representative of their confusion regarding the ultimate significance of The Waste Land.

The Waste Land is so constructed as to baffle the reader's attempts to ascertain a stable significance for even a single instance of the motif's citation. The fragmentariness of form throughout the poem has the effect of dislocating the reader from any particular context out of which the motif can be shown to grow.

To take just one example:

‘Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?’
But
O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag –
It’s so elegant
So intelligent
‘What shall I do now? What shall I do?’
I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
With my hair down, so. (CP 67)

“‘Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?’” are the eight and ninth questions asked in the preceding fifteen lines. This insistence on querying has the effect of evoking a sense of bewilderment and confusion. In the light of this, the “But”, isolated on the subsequent line, becomes ambiguous in its function. On the one hand, read out loud and with a licensed disregard for punctuation, it sounds as though “But” acts as a conjunction between the preceding and subsequent lines. In this view, “that Shakespeherian rag” is presumed by the questioner to be the trivial content of “your head”. On the other hand, “But” may be read as the plosive indication of a defiant tone, as though “that Shakespeherian Rag” represents the narrator’s refutation of the accusation concerning the vacuity of his head.

In the former reading, then, music and literature is derisively depicted as a trivial mental undertaking. In the latter reading musical and literary concerns are depicted as worthy endeavours in stark opposition to mental vacuity.

The form of the citation itself does little to solve the reader’s conundrum. The phrase “that Shakespeherian Rag” is at once evocative of high literary tradition and popular culture. However, the automatic association of Shakespeare with the former, and ragtime with the latter, is by no means uncompromisingly

assured. The integrity of “Shakespeare” is undermined by the insurgence of a heavily stressed added syllable. It is not the purist’s “Shakespeare” that is represented here. Rather, it is a bowdlerised version, one converted to perform a function within the context of popular ragtime syncopated rhythms. Similarly, “Rag” is imbued with greater substance by virtue of its capitalisation alongside “Shakespeherian”.

The rhythm of the subsequent two lines is ingeniously tailored to offer the reader no relief. Both lines superficially serve to emphasise the intelligence and elegance of “that Shakespeherian Rag”. In fact, in both lines, the word meant to underscore the adjectives, “so”, is heavily stressed. The sonorous quality of this word is largely determined by its rhyming with “O O O O”. However, in both lines the stressed adverbs are undermined by the dactylic ends to the adjectives they qualify, “elegant” and “intelligent”. The seemingly resolute beginning to the first line is undermined by the rushed frivolity with which it ends, a frivolity that is then further accentuated by the rhythmic repetition of the second line. Thus the rhythm of the two lines, rather than merely highlighting the somber traditional worth of “that Shakespeherian Rag”, also evokes its flightiness.

The fragmentariness of form again evokes aporia as the three-line citation concerning music and literature ends with a diversion into a new fragment comprised largely of questions. No answers concerning the function of music and or literature have been rendered. “That Shakespeherian Rag” cannot be satisfactorily aligned with any particular referent. It is neither a worthy refutation of the head’s vacuity, nor a valueless token of intelligence. It is neither traditional nor contemporary; academic nor

mainstream. The reader, and, it would seem, the questioner in the subsequent fragment, remain as dislocated and confused as they were before their encounter with the citation. The lack of singular resolution evidenced in the citation is continued into subsequent fragments. The questioner's sworn actions, "I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street / With my hair down, so" can be read either as those of a remarkably self-assured individual, *or* as the conduct of a mad person.

As indecisive as readers are about their encounters with this citation of the music and song motif, should the motif recur, they might still, through the relations between its various citations, attempt to establish a common pattern. By varying the motif's representations, the poem undermines attempts to pin down the ultimate purpose of the motif within the context of The Waste Land.

Music and song is identified with religious ceremony. This is alluded to by the voices of the children in the dome ("*ces voix d' enfants*") after the "Mrs Porter" foot washing ceremony (CP 70). Music and song (and, by association, literature) may thus be seen as an instrumental aspect of one's "spiritual" journey. Although music and song are associated with "spirituality", they are also implicated in the deviation from such concerns. St Augustine, upon his arrival in Carthage, was attacked by temptations that "sang all around [him] in [his] ears a cauldron of unholy loves" (Augustine, Confessions, III, 1). As much as music and song is instrumental in the deviation from spiritual purity, it also represents a distraction from the feelings of guilt and emptiness that might result from faltering to such temptations. The typist, after her loveless encounter with the young man "carbuncular", "smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone" (CP 72). Here, the music soothes the transition to denial regarding the

experience – only one “half-formed thought” is “allowed”. This is confirmed by the following line, which hails from The Tempest, where Ferdinand is distracted from his father’s death by Ariel’s song.

Song and music can be a popular distraction – as was implied by “that Shakespeherian Rag” – but such distractions quickly turn into lies. Music and song offer false hopes of redemption. What may be the voice of Perceval on the journey to the Chapel Perilous seemingly obsesses over the absence of water. The word is mentioned no less than ten times leading up to the song of the hermit thrush, “Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop / but there is no water” (CP 77). The bird’s song, its promise of relief, is false.

Music and song are thus variously represented within the context of a single poem. Music and song may be representative of literature, and by association the poem itself, it may represent spiritual salvation, or fiery damnation, a distraction, denial, or an outright falsity. Readers, searching for coherence, and perhaps labouring under the misapprehension that the recurring motif of music and song is a means to this end, are bound to be struck by a sense of their own failure and disruption. At any given moment the significance of music and song in The Waste Land is destabilised by the interchangeability of its various associations.

The association of song and water – to take another example – ramifies this destabilising effect into other recurring motifs. The foot washing ceremony brings to mind the recurring motif of water, which is also associated with religious ceremony, particularly spiritual cleansing. By contrast, in “The Fire Sermon” the Thames’ waters carry the grimy dross of humanity’s everyday urban existence (CP 73). In the opening lines of The Waste Land, water is associated with renewed life, “stirring / Dull roots with

spring rain” (CP 63); in its complicity in Ophelia’s demise, alluded to at the conclusion of “A Game of Chess” (CP 68-9), and in the fourth section of the poem, it is associated with death. These are but a few of many such associations with water.

Another recurring motif that is associated with music and song is that of sex and sexuality. It is the unholy songs of the Carthaginians that raise St Augustine’s ire. To him sex is a mortal sin. It is, as was the case between the typist and the young man carbuncular, loveless and empty (music here functions as a distraction); with regard to Tereus and Philomele, it is rape, “So rudely forced” (CP 71); to the gossip at the conclusion of “A Game of Chess” sex is the only possible salvation for Lil’s and Albert’s marriage.

The ultimate ramifications for the process of reading of the interchangeability of various associations within singular motifs are perhaps best demonstrated with regard to the closing phrase of the poem. It is the chant, “Shantih shantih shantih” (CP 79). It is the formal ending to an Upanishad, a section from the Hindu Holy scripture. According to Eliot’s notes, its nearest English equivalent is “The Peace which passeth understanding” (CP 86). Eliot thereby represents the highest possible ideal through the recurring motif of music and song – it is a representation of the experience of an “otherworldly” consciousness. But the “meaning” of this chant, however holy and austere its surface representation may seem, is prone to the same flux that plagues various other representations of the recurring motif. In the end, “Shantih shantih shantih”, as an abstract form, may be as hopelessly misleading as the “drop drop drop” of the hermit thrush.

In summation, it is possible to speculate that the overwhelming aspect of the experience of reading The Waste Land, is frustration and disappointment at the failure to resolve the anomalies the poem presents. On a mythical level, and on the more objectively accessible formal level of recurring motifs, The Waste Land encourages the reader to adopt a single perspective, or lens, through which the poem as a whole, may be interpreted. Readers are temporarily encouraged to adopt an abstract form – a textual “embodiment” – of this perspective, be it myth- or motif-based, as the unificatory principle whereby they might ascertain the poem’s ultimate resolution. In the end, however, any given “embodiment” will collapse under the weight of readers’ expectations because it is merely the fixed abstract form for something inconclusively interchangeable.

2.4. **“Burnt Norton”: Meaning both Flesh and Fleshless.**

Written about a decade and a half after The Waste Land, Four Quartets is by no means an “easier” poem to read, or about which to write critically. Like the previous two poems its effect grows out of the “anomalies” that the reader is required to confront. In his discussion of the poem’s use of “echoes” Harry Blamires alludes to the difficulty with which critics and readers are presented:

the poem is *about* echoes; the poem *utilizes* echoes; the poem *is* echoes. Echoes inhabit the garden, the poem, the culture of our day, the temporal world we live in; other echoes and echoes of the Other. Correspondingly the poet’s words echo thus in your mind.
(Blamires 1969: 3)

The problem for critics is that the poem functions as a series of cross-referential points of departure. Thus, any given image, when analysed within the context of the poem as a

whole, echoes many of the images that come before it, and will, itself, be echoed by images yet to be encountered. A line by line analysis of the poem is a giant undertaking because, in the light of countless subsequent allusions, the significance of the line *will* alter, often to oppose or contradict the original reading. The significance of the poem as a whole is therefore impossible to pin down in abstract terms.

The problem for the reader is that the poem overturns the mode of reading that relies on the linear time-space narrative sequence – the sort of “conventional” idea of reading represented in the introductory chapter of this thesis by Roman Ingarden’s neatly sequenced *intentionale Satzkorrelate*.

Yet, despite the fact that it is, in many ways, similarly demanding of the reader as the earlier poems, Four Quartets seems entirely more at ease with its own inconsistencies. In this regard, it represents a direct response to the sense of failure and ambivalence evoked by the irresolvable nature of the challenges set by the earlier poetry.

The problems substantiated in the earlier poems seemed still, very much, to have been on the poet’s mind. In the third movement of “Burnt Norton”, for example, Eliot seems to rattle old Prufrockian bones in his description of underground commuters:

Distracted by distraction from distraction
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
Tumid apathy with no concentration
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
That blows before and after time,
Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
Time before and time after.
Eructations of unhealthy souls
Into the faded air, the torpid
Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London
Hampstead, and Clerkenwell, Camden and Putney,
Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate...

(CP 192-3)

The source of the commuters' malaise is here identified in terms of a temporal and geographical context. Men and bits of paper are mutual victims to movement (wind) in space. They are characterised as souls at the mercy of their rationalistically arranged contexts. This rationalism is inferred by the carefully timed movements of the London underground. The wind precedes and follows carriages with the dreary perpetuity of breath "in" "before" and breath "out" "after". There is no meaningful present, just a continuum stretching from the places from which the commuters hail, to the places at which they have yet to arrive. As is the case in Prufrock's understanding, there is no meaningful present, no centralising vantage point, at which the commuters might locate themselves. There is only an obsession with what was, and what has yet to become. Such a perspective of the world results in

Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property,
Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;

(CP 193)

As is the case in The Waste Land the absence of a centralising reference point is not to be solved by its mere textual embodiment. The final movement of "Burnt Norton" expressly communicates the inadequacy of abstractions as substitutes for such meaning.

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

(CP 194)

This is an express recognition of the phenomenon demonstrated in The Waste Land. The Grail Legend, and any given recurring motif, buckled under the pressure of being the

identified the single, ultimate point of reference to the seemingly irreconcilable fragments of the poem.

To the sceptic it might seem as though Eliot had exhausted the possibilities in so far as the invocation of a reference point, or unifying principle, is concerned. Both “The Love Song” and The Waste Land were referential poems: referring the reader, through their fragments, to an absent and a merely abstracted centre, respectively. Neither an absence within the text, nor the textual embodiment of the centre could, nor were meant to, unify the fragments of the poem in the eye of the reader. In order that the reader might enter a state of awareness beyond fragmentary logocentrism, it is the reader, as well as the text, that had to change.

Still, Four Quartets is no less constituted of fragments than are the earlier poems. Neither are these fragments somehow more easily ordered, or shaped into a consistent whole. As will become evident, the poem thrives on rational contradiction. However, whereas the earlier poems highlight the absence or inadequate signification of a unifying principle *within the poem*, Four Quartets is constructed to facilitate principles of unification *inherent to its readers*. That is to say, the poem’s effect depends on the ability and willingness of its readers to engage a subjective faculty whereby such principles of unification may be actively applied.

There are several indications in Eliot’s critical work of his awareness of the workings of such faculties. It will be recalled that in his 1921 essay “The Metaphysical Poets” Eliot spoke of the entirely new wholes that the “poet’s mind perfectly equipped” was constantly amalgamating. By the time Eliot wrote “Burnt Norton”, it would seem as though he willingly granted readers the same capability, or faculties, that he had earlier

reserved only for poets. The later Eliot, it would seem, was more inclined to grant individual readers the freedom to assert their own relations between fragments. In “Religion and Literature” Eliot describes, in broader principle, the idea of a faculty that unifies disparate pieces of information based on subjective, rather than general directives:

Wide reading is not valuable as a kind of hoarding, an accumulation of knowledge, or what sometimes is meant by the term ‘a well-stocked mind’. It is valuable because in the process of being affected by one powerful personality after another, we cease to be dominated by any one, or by any small number. The very different views of life, cohabiting in our minds, affect each other, and our own personality asserts itself and gives each a place in some arrangement peculiar to ourself.

(Eliot 1976: 395)

Prufrock’s was a “well-stocked mind”, observing and accumulating, but without the means with which to organise that which it acquired. The Waste Land’s significance relied on the perpetual deference of its fragments to a “powerful personality”. Thus myths and recurring motifs inadequately dictate the significance of the poem. Four Quartets, constituted of many seemingly contrasting discourses and paradigms, highlights the faculty, peculiar to each reader, that organises the information it receives in accordance with principles unique to that reader. By placing varying discourses in opposition to each other, by allowing them to cohabit within the framework of a single poem, Four Quartets draws attention to the indeterminacies between them, and challenges the reader to find a perspective that can accommodate or transcend them by recognising their limitations and those of any meta-discursive terminology, including that of the “spiritual”. Brooker explains: “In simultaneously emphasising disparate terms, Eliot is actually displacing focus from the terms themselves to the relation between them” (Brooker 1993: 99). It is more accurate, to my mind, to extrapolate Brooker’s claim a little further. In focussing on

the relation between disparate terms, the poem draws attention to the state of awareness – or faculties – requisite for such relations: a consciousness in which “visions of simultaneity” (de Masireveich 1965: 13) are possible, in which the reader might engage with the points of tension between “the object side and subject side of human experience” (Childs 1993: 109).

Thus, in order to facilitate the reader’s experience of simultaneous significance, the poem is structured as a cross-referential system of echoes. The final aim of this section is to show how this system might ideally function, on several levels throughout the poem. However, without first establishing the nature of the new approach, or highlighting the faculty through which such cross-referential echoes might be interpreted, the multifarious significance of terms or motifs might lead to ambivalence and confusion, as they do in The Waste Land. Therefore, before discussing the poem’s structure, it will be argued that its content, or subject matter, initially predisposes the reader – perhaps “invites” is a more apposite term – to adopt a new approach whereby the cross-referential nature of the terms that are to be encountered become the catalysts for “visions of simultaneity”, rather than the source of debilitating anomalies.

Of all the movements in Four Quartets the first can depend least on previous echoes for its significance, at least on a “first reading”. In this regard the opening movement of “Burnt Norton” serves in two main capacities. Firstly, it establishes the subject matter, as well as many of the themes and motifs that will be echoed in later movements. The true significance of the opening movement in this regard can only really be established in relation to later citings or echoes. By way of groundwork for later

discussions, the brief outline of the opening movement that follows will highlight important aspects of subject matter, themes, and motifs.

The second capacity in which the opening movement of “Burnt Norton” serves is to expressly introduce notions of simultaneous experience. This capacity may, in itself, be considered in two parts. The first part is the movement’s explicit attestation regarding the possibility of simultaneous experience; this is enacted by the testimonial aspect of the movement. The second part is the essential choice that confronts the reader as a result of this testimonial. To summarise it crudely (for more detailed discussion will be contained in the outline of the movement) the implicit choice is one between scepticism with regard to the testimony, and “belief” with regard to the testimony. The act of choice-making, it will be argued, has no small part to play in the reader’s experience of the poem as a whole.

“Burnt Norton” opens on a lofty philosophical note, a reasoned discourse dealing in the relation between past, present and future: “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future / And time future contained in time past” (CP 189). The conclusion this leads to is that the present consists of the collocation of past and future, that “all time is eternally present” (CP 189).

Memories and fantasies are constituted visually, that is, in spatial terms, within normal consciousness. We are incapable of perceiving the past, present, and future in non-disparate terms. The constituent parts of a lifetime, for example, represented within the memory, cannot be simultaneously brought to mind. Although we are abstractly conscious that the whole of our lifetimes exist, we are forever doomed to experience it in distinct episodes. Our intuitive collocation of a lifetime’s worth of encounters, incidents,

thoughts and emotions, is separated and fragmented by the linearly constructed, systematically divided and divisive imposition of time. The horizontal continuum of time is paralleled by an imagined sequence of events. Events that may have occurred had different decisions been taken to the ones that govern the actual continuum: “What might have been is an abstraction / Remaining a perpetual possibility / Only in a world of speculation” (CP 189).

Normal consciousness is incapable of engaging with more than one of these continuums at a time. Neither is it capable of collocating more than one memory at a time. In the opening movement of “Burnt Norton” the parallel continuum is “the world of speculation” that “might have been”. Each event is a “footfall” in memory, each continuum, a passage. Each, individually, signifies the limits of normal temporal perception. We perceive in the present, *or* we remember the past, *or* we hypothesise about how we might have changed the past and the present, *or* how we might, with our present actions, alter the future. But, according to Eliot, it all “Points to one end, which is always present” (CP 189).

Philosophically pitched, perhaps even didactically rendered, Eliot’s (or the poem’s) thoughts about the nature of time and memory are followed by a gradual immersion of the same voice into a different consciousness. A marked change in tone is initiated by the use of the plural personal pronoun. In the past tense, these pronouns imply a shared memories or fancies, “the passage which we did not take”, the “door we never opened”. This is very different to the abstracted notions of “memory” the reader has so far engaged with. It is with these memories, past possibilities, or past fancies in

mind that the reader is suddenly introduced to the present tense with intonations that are even more personal.

“My words echo / Thus, in your mind”, “Other echoes / Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?” (CP 189). These echoes seem to hark back to a time of innocence or naiveté, “our first world”, a child’s world; “the leaves were full of children, / Hidden excitedly, containing laughter” (190), a world of imagination and make-believe, in which the subject’s consciousness is willfully imposed upon the world of objects. This conflated vision of the world, as a co-creation of subjective consciousness and external circumstances, takes on a new significance in the awareness of the adult. It is somehow different to the imaginative capabilities of a child.

Eliot goes to great lengths, however, to distinguish the moment in the rose garden from a conventional, objectively constructed, logocentric fragmentary encounter. The fantastical, or non-logical nature of the experience is purposefully evoked. The journey into the rose garden is evocative of Alice’s as she follows the White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland. Alice’s own journey to the rose garden is marked by the choice of passages and doors (Carroll 1963: 4-7) and anthropomorphic guides. Through these allusions Eliot distances the reader from conventional realms of perception into one in which there is more leeway for non-logical constructs.

At this stage, readers are confronted with what amounts to their own choice of passages and doors. It is a choice implied by the question “Shall we follow?” This of course begs the question: “into what?” There are no simple answers to this question. The experience in the rose garden that is subsequently described by the poem is so fantastical as to be unbelievable, never mind expressible in rational terms. Efforts to reify the

experience in terms of the poem's embryology – Eliot really did walk through the gardens of a manor called Burnt Norton – cannot ultimately shed light on the sort of experience in which the reader is invited to take part. Although Eliot seems more inclined than he was in his earlier poetry to include explicit references with regard to personal details, this act does not constitute an absolute departure from the principles of depersonalisation espoused in his earlier critical essays. The reader can only engage in the abstract form, the testimony, of the poet's experience. In this regard, Eliot's experiences remain private, phenomenologically impenetrable, forever positioned on the poet's side of the empathetic divide. As Eliot's biographer writes with reference to Eliot's time in the chapel at Little Gidding, "the events can be known, but not the experiences they provoke, so we cannot hope to understand Eliot as he knelt in that chapel or in the presence of God" (Ackroyd 1984: 239). In this sense the poem, far from being a revelation of Eliot's personal life, maintains the privacy of the poet.

Thus, the question "Shall we follow?" is situated at a cross-section of various perspectives: the rational and the non-rational; the past and the future; the private and the general; the artistic and the aesthetic. The manner in which readers engage with this cross-section may be seen as indicative of the sort of experience that might arise out of their encounter with the poem.

They might bypass the question, or choose to read it as addressed to a character other than themselves. Such readers ignore the possibility that the question constitutes a *personal* address. They would not infer that the question constitutes an invitation to join the speaker on his fantastical journey. They would also miss the inference that such an invitation implies their capability, their ownership of requisite faculties, for an experience

of their own. They would acknowledge neither the question's pivotal situation between various perspectives, or their own agency in supplying principles of unification. The result will be an engagement with Four Quartets that is similar in its effect to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or The Waste Land. Either such readers might feel the absence of a unifying principles altogether, or they might accept single perspectives represented in the poem as the lens through which the poem's significance may be ascertained. Readers who bypass the question wait for the poem to dictate its meaning to them.

The other option is to take the question personally. Such readers would recognise the tacit affirmation of their own ability to find a way between the various perspectives that suggest their presence around and about the question. They would project themselves, their own problem-solving faculties, into the hiatus between the various perspectives that are represented. In this way they not only extend their attentions beyond the limitations of their own perspectives, but they engage actively with what, through representation, is made available of other perspectives by the poem. Their choice to engage actively initiates them into the hypothetical space – the virtuality, as Iser terms it – within which negotiation between various perspectives offered by the text might fruitfully take place. This is amply demonstrated in the relation of equality between the reader and the speaker. Although readers would be correct in their inference of the "equality", or co-creative function, with which they are charged, it is still the speaker's perspective that is narrated. The events that are subsequently described are, to them, merely the testimony of another, rather than personally experienced. Still, their active engagement with the details of another person's experience, their attempts to understand

– their attempts, in other words, to empathise – constitute the sort of imaginative, pre-critical, pre-abstract engagement that is essential to an “experience *qua* experience”. It is no matter that readers can never fully understand the speaker’s perspective. It is not important that the empathetic divide can never be crossed. The pre-eminent achievement of readers is the dynamism and openness of the faculties they engage in their attempts to do so.

The potential effects of such a subjective engagement with an object (such as the text itself) are soon implied in the opening movement of “Burnt Norton”. In the child’s fantasy world, the material and the ideal are dependent on each other for their definition. This symbiosis is captured by the crossing of the “unseen eyebeam”: “for the roses / had the look of flowers that were looked at. / There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting” (CP 190). The roses watch and are watched, they have agency, as does their perceiver. The subject and object are thus shown to be integrated, the consciousness of the perceiver defining and being defined by the object world. This process of co-definition is enacted in the rose garden as the transformation of an empty pool via the projections of the subject perceiver:

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of a heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
The a cloud passed and the pool was empty.
(CP 190)

The images projected by the perceiver are not necessarily of random, purely subjective significance. They may allude to resonant traditions or systems. The “lotos rose”, for

example, may signify the integration of Western and Eastern transcendent traditions.⁴

The lotus is an important Indian religious symbol: “The fully opened lotus is the condition of what we could call sainthood. Yet the stem of the lotus still touches the bottom of the pond, signifying contact between both extremes of the spiritual ladder” (Foster 1998: 81). The rose, in turn, may be associated with the traditions of the Church of England.

The moment in the rose garden passes, the pool empties again, “Go, go, go, said the bird” (CP 190). The movement closes in the same philosophical tone with which it began. The lines “Time past and time future / What might have been and what has been / points to one end, which is always present” (CP 190), signal a final withdrawal into rationality from the integrated reality that has just been experienced by the speaker.

Having highlighted and perhaps engaged the reader’s imaginative capabilities, the poem subsequently echoes many of the particular image and larger axioms to which the first movement of “Burnt Norton” alludes. These echoes, however, are cross-referential. That is to say that they are unspecific (although not entirely) with regard to their referents. In this way, the poem draws readers’ attentions away from “meaning” of any particular echo, to the relations between echoes. As Jewel Spears Brooker argues, the basic principle, or method, “of the Four Quartets is repetition, the function of which is to permit the emergence of a common pattern beneath particulars” (Brooker 1993: 90). The pattern that is repeatedly evoked is the silent relation between explicit particulars or polar opposites – the stillness between two waves of the sea, to recall the title of this chapter. The focus is repeatedly on “in-betweenness, on what is absent or ‘not there’” (Brooker

⁴ An interesting pun: more than just an allusion to religious hybridity, “the lotos rose” also alludes to the rising or gathering in the intensity of the experience.

1993: 90). In turn, this absence is a recognition of ultimate “fullness” or plenitude through the inference of the reader’s infinite imaginative potential.

In the opening movement of “Burnt Norton” several opposing concepts may be inferred through their particular representation – past and future; fantasy and reality; subjective and objective; etc. The implication of the experience described in the movement is that such opposing ideas need not be seen as irreconcilable. Within the hypothetical negotiation of “meaning” undertaken between the reader and the text, such perspectives are potentially merged, as is implied by “the roses / Had the look of flowers that were looked” (CP 190). This awareness, which an active engagement with the movement should have instilled, has the effect of destabilising, in the eye of the reader, the conventionally accepted opposing relations between these perspectives.

Instances of such destabilisation, which function as ideal points of departure for the reader’s simultaneous perception faculties, is enacted on many of the levels that constitute Four Quartets. In concluding this discussion, I will demonstrate how such ideal loci for the reader’s experience exist on the greatest, and the smallest level: on the level of overall form, and on a verbal level.

An overview of Four Quartets might describe it as representative of Eliot’s *personal* transcendence of a consciousness based in a fragmentary logocentric world. There is evidence in the poem of much personal detail. The titles of each of the four quartets form a significant pattern only if related to the life of the poet. The title of the poem’s opening quartet, “Burnt Norton”, shares its name with the abandoned English manor where Eliot and Emily Hale walked through the gardens together. An incidental illumination in the rose garden serves, as Constance de Masirevich argues, as a spark for

a journey towards an “intensified and one might say, solidified” state of enlightened vision (de Masirevich 1965: 11). The second quartet’s title, “East Coker” refers to the Calvinist village from which Eliot’s ancestors began their pilgrimage to the new world in the late 17th century (Ackroyd 1984: 15). “Dry Salvages” is named after the rocky islands off the coast of New England where Eliot lived as a child. “Little Gidding” is the site of a religious community founded by John Ferrar in the 17th century; Eliot is known to have visited the chapel on the site of this community in August 1936 (Ackroyd 1984: 239).

There is a circularity about the sequential arrangement of the titles. The poem begins at the site of a personal spiritual experience, and ends at the site of another personal spiritual experience. Geographically, the opening quartet is set in England. In the second quartet England is a point of departure, the third quartet is set in the new world, and the title of the fourth quartet marks a return to England. Temporally, Burnt Norton’s significance is dependent on a present-day experience. East Coker’s significance relies on an ancestral past. The Dry Salvages is the site of Eliot’s early childhood, and Little Gidding’s significance relies on the return to, not only a site of the stout religiosity evidenced in Eliot’s ancestral past, but also the experience of the present day. Thus, in their sequence, the titles of the quartets enact the idea that

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

(CP 222)

However, the “circularity” of the quartets’ arrangement is not a sufficient description of the poem’s outward form. Each quartet is one of four. Over and above the musical allusion in the title, it is also geometrically allusive. That is to say, each quartet represents

a corner, and the poem might be interpreted as square, rather than circular, in its outward arrangement. There seems to be no compunction about the contrariness of this arrangement. In fact, the poem encourages readers to be drawn “into the box circle” (CP 190), which symbolises the paradoxical conjunction of greater apparent antinomies. The poem thereby invites readers into a realm in which the private and the public, the particular and general, the artistic and mathematical, the material and the ideal, the past and the future, do not exist at cross purposes with each other, although that the connections between them must remain tacit.

In the second movement of “Burnt Norton” Eliot attempts to describe the hypothetical point at which the opposing perspectives supposedly merge. He cannot express it directly because such a point is ultimately irreducible into abstracts. All he can do, and does beautifully, is to provide the abstractable boundaries of the point, with the intention of leaving readers to infer the vast imaginative potential that characterises the point of their merging. Eliot writes:

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.
(CP 191)

The success of the passage as a point of imaginative departure for the reader, rests in its ultimate lack of prescription with regard to the nature of the perspectives that constitute the “boundaries” on either side of the irreducible moment of their merging. There are a

few ways in which Eliot has achieved this. Firstly, the terms he has used to evoke opposing perspectives are unspecific with regard to their referents. Although they seem highly allusive, they are very broad in their possible applicability within the context of the poem. Thus, “flesh” and “fleshless” might refer to the material and the ideal, or the physical and the spiritual, or the living and the dead. “From” and “towards” might refer to temporal or spatial movement.

Secondly, auxiliary to the unspecific nature of these perspectives, it will be recalled that ideas with regard to their conventional binary opposition to each other have also been drawn onto doubt by the moment in the rose garden. The indeterminate nature of the relation between perspectives is carefully invoked. This is achieved through the consistent use of disavowal at the point that would conventionally mark their opposition: “flesh *nor* fleshless”, “from *nor* towards”, “ascent *nor* decline”. This does not, however, entirely undermine the opposite arrangement of the perspectives.

What, then, is the effect on readers of this non-specificity with regard to the nature of the perspectives invoked, and the relation between them? Simply put, the effect is to draw readers into the hypothetical “still point” so that they might fill in the gaps that the text has left open. It is up to them to determine, employing largely personal rather than externally prescribed directives, the perspectives that circulate around the still point. It is up to readers to determine the nature of the point at which perspectives merge. There is no ultimate resolution to their efforts: at least none that the text can signify. The achievement of Four Quartets is that it allows readers the space simply to engage with their own imaginative faculties. That experience, in itself, is resolution enough.

2.5. Concluding Remarks: “Experience qua Experience”?

It will be recalled that, in the introductory chapter, the possible locus of a hypothetical negotiation of meaning between the reader and the text was suggested. It was termed *virtuality*: the hypothetical locus for the negotiation between the reader and the text of the poem’s meaning/experience. It was further suggested that the indeterminate spaces between the various perspectives that constitute the text could be seen as gateways into the *virtuality*. This was, however, established to be a general phenomenon of literature, rather than specific to poems such as Four Quartets and Blake’s Jerusalem.

Early in this chapter, therefore, it was suggested that an examination of the development of Eliot’s poetry was apposite because, whereas it is a general feature of the literary medium that text contains indeterminacies that require the reader’s personal input to resolve, not all texts evoke “*experience qua experience*”. The aim was to ascertain how Eliot’s various poems were different in the way that they encourage, or facilitate, the reader’s response with regard to the indeterminacies of the text.

It was discussed how “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” predisposes the reader to consider the irresolvable nature of the indeterminacies as indicative of a debilitating absence of a unifying reference point. In The Waste Land, attempts to provide the abstract form, or textual “embodiment”, of unification principles through the use of a centralising myth or the recurrent motif, prove spurious. The Waste Land and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, although demanding subjective engagement, in the end, prescribe the sort of experience readers will take *out of* their engagement with the poems, or invalidate any attempts to inject a unifying significance.

The difference between the earlier poems and Four Quartets, is that the latter encourages its readers to read *into* the poem and to validate the subjective experience of those readings. That is to imply that the poem seems to mark a resigned comfort on the part of the poet with the fact that a verbal medium is incapable of expressly signifying an ultimate point of reference. Rather, Four Quartets willingly relinquishes such responsibility to its readers. It highlights and trusts the efficacy of their pre-critical, pre-abstract, imaginative faculties in determining their own point of resolution between conventionally disparate and opposing perspectives. Having done this, the poem provides many loci for readers to engage with such faculties.

Of course, it would be wrong to assert that the exercise of the reader's imaginative faculties is the only concern with which Four Quartets engages. The poem is full of ideas and commentaries with regard to the psychological and cultural effects of our perception of perspectives and the relations between them. There was not enough space in this chapter to even begin to discuss these concerns. What *is* immediately apparent, however, is that Four Quartets does not prescribe its significance to the reader. Rather, it encourages readers to engage in processes, the experience of which cannot be rationally signified. In other words, the value of the experience lies not in its external expression. It lies rather, in its pure, unmitigated experience.

Chapter 3

Reading William Blake: “Rouzing” the Faculties to Act

Although, in Four Quartets, Eliot alludes to many personal details, it is a futile critical practice to attempt to understand the poem’s “meaning” from the poet’s point of view. This is a point of view only ever occupied by the poet himself. The same is true of approaches to William Blake’s work. From the places in which he lived, to the name of the soldier who charged him with sedition, Blake seems consciously to draw details of his own life into his prophetic books. He did this not in justification of his own perspective, but, on the contrary, with the awareness that the details of his life could be discursively *representative* of only a single perspective amongst many. As is the case in Four Quartets, in Jerusalem it is the reader’s active attempt to negotiate the relations between perspectives, rather than the perspectives themselves, that accounts for *jouissance*.

David Simpson correctly argues for the de-emphasis of “the model of a unitary subject ‘William Blake’” (Simpson 1996: 150) in commentaries on Blake’s work. He reasons that the “wider range of historical and discursive options” inherent to Blake’s poetry would reveal themselves to commentators should they consider the poet’s biography as but one of many discourses. I contend that Simpson’s de-emphasis should apply to any particular “model of a unitary subject”. No single discourse provides a sufficient context within which to comprehend the “meaning” of Jerusalem. Instead, the “meaning” arises out of the range of discourses within Jerusalem, the manner of their *arrangement*, and the implicit choices for readers between them. This chapter will discuss

the manner in which Jerusalem accommodates, and encourages the reader to attempt to accommodate, a range of seemingly irreconcilable discourses and perspectives.

Much of the effect of William Blake's poetry rests in its concise, almost miraculous, contraction of vast and seemingly contradictory discursive systems into short, meticulously constructed, and contextualised phrases. My contention will be that broadly allusive phrases, or perspectives, negate each other to the point where readers, in attempting to bridge the gaps between the perspectives, find themselves in a logically inescapable state of aporia. Readers' engagement in the virtuality of the text is longer and more intense as a result of the aporia's inescapability.

Before continuing it is necessary that I assert a brief disclaimer: The space allotted to this discussion of William Blake's poetry is far too small to engage with the poet in a manner even approaching definitiveness. Blake's fascination with contrary aspects of all experience means that, often, we must forsake detail in the interest of airing both sides of the story. This ought not to cause too many objections in the abstract discussion of Blake's ideas. It may, however, incur a certain amount of criticism as far as it limits the discussions of Blake's characters and how they represent various contrary aspects of experience. Within the space allotted there is no way to do justice to the poet's complexly constructed immortals. Their every action seems to add to, alter, or contradict the everyday realities they represent.

Some of these characters feature and evolve throughout Blake's thirty odd years of prophetic writing. I cannot begin to represent them fully here, and must admit to attempting merely to convey the "idea" of each character in order that they may be examined within the context of select passages of Jerusalem.

3.1. Blake's Discursive Awareness

3.1.1. Art and the Divine

It will be recalled that both Joseph Hillis Miller and Roland Barthes found it difficult, if not impossible, to *rescue* their experience of great literature from the imputation of mystification and religiosity. Both critics imply that such imputations have the effect of invalidating such experience as an area of concern for traditional academia. For William Blake the collocation of art and the divine was a necessary condition rather than a problematic state of affairs.

Blake's works are replete with references to the connection between art and the divine. In The Laocoön he writes:

A Poet, A Painter, a Musician, an Architect: the man or Woman
who is not one of these is not a Christian.

You must leave Fathers & Mothers & Houses & Lands if they
stand in the way of Art.

Prayer is the Study of Art.

Praise is the Practise of Art.

Fasting & c., all relate to Art.

(K 776)

Blake's idealised relation between "art" and the "divine", however, needs to be more carefully defined. Blake seems to have had specific conceptions of "Art" and the "Divine" in mind. Both words, he believed, were respectively subject to contrasting associations.

According to Blake, "Art" such as is meant by Joshua Reynolds, refers to a discourse constructed to oppress subjective freedoms. The poet's annotations to Reynolds's "Discourses" indicate his distaste for art that "mocks Inspiration & Vision" (K 477):

I always consider'd True Art & True Artists to be particularly Insulted and Degraded by the Reputation of these Discourses, As much as they were Degraded by the Reputation of Reynolds's Paintings, & that Such Artists as Reynolds were at all times Hired by the Satans for the Depression of Art – A Pretence of Art, To destroy Art. (K 452)

The problem with “Bad Art” such as Reynolds’s, as opposed to “True Art”, was that the former was created in accordance with generalised principles, rather than being the result of an engagement with the subjective visionary faculty.

This faculty was, according to Blake, the divine essence of every true man and that with which he wished his art to engage. His “great task” as an artist, as has already been indicated, was “To open up the immortal Eyes / Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination” (K 623).

Blake’s understanding of the “divine” must also be seen as subject to ambiguity. He treats the generalisation, or institutionalisation of the “divine”, as he saw it to be perpetuated by the church, with scant respect. “Every black’ning church appalls” (K 216) Blake writes in “London”. In “The Chimney Sweep” he exposes the church’s hypocritical inability to live up to its own doctrine of compassion. It is therefore not surprising that Blake’s more abstract conception of the divine is different to that imposed by church doctrine.

The church required blind adherence to dogmatic moral law sanctioned by an omnipotent being; Blake saw the development of the subjective intellect as the means to salvation. According to Blake, at the final judgement, humans will be neither condemned for their inability to sublimate physical desire, nor extolled for their acts of spiritual consecration. The church would have them believe otherwise. Blake writes:

Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & govern'd their Passions or have no Passions, but because they have cultivated their Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion, but realities of Intellect, from which all the Passions Emanate Uncurbed in their Eternal Glory. The Fool shall not enter Heaven let him be ever so Holy. Holiness is not the Price of Enterance into Heaven.

(K 615)

“What is the Divine Spirit?” Blake asks, and answers, “is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain?” (K 717). He also wrote that he knew of “no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination” (K 716-7). Divinity, according to Blake’s conception, is the human Intellect or Imagination developed so as to be free of the limitations of prescriptive systems.

It is essential to recognise that art, true and bad, is by definition a discursive construct. The same may be said of both the church’s and Blake’s conceptions of the divine. Without Blake’s, Reynolds’s, or the church’s communication, neither their art nor their ideas would exist for us. Blake was immensely sensitive to the discursive constructs that surrounded him and that he perpetuated. He was fully aware that his poetry stood the risk of falling into similar traps to those that he identified to be the downfall of the church and bad art. From Reynolds he would have learnt that all art stands the risk of becoming as dogmatic a system as that imposed by the church. Yet, he strove to show a True Art – its creation and its consumption – that was integral to humanity’s deliverance from such fetters.

Blake had to create a discursive method that would not prescribe, in general terms, *even his own system of belief*. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, an ironic refutation of religious institution with a special emphasis on Swedenborgian failures,

Blake claims to adopt the “infernal method” of printing by corrosives, in order to displace the church’s erroneous notions of dualism between body and soul. These methods:

in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting app-
arent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.
If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear
to man as it is, infinite.
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all thro’ the narrow
chinks of his cavern.

(K 154)

Later in this chapter we will take a closer look at Blake’s attitude towards dualism, especially insofar as its epistemological manifestation affected his understanding of the relation between the subjective reader and the art object. For the time being, however, it is enough to know that Blake wanted to create a discursive method that, rather than reveal a single prescriptive system, would reveal an infinity of discursive possibility.

Blake was thus faced with a singular difficulty. Bound as an artist to working within some or other form of discourse, he had to find a way to do so without being prescriptive. He had to, at once, to shape readers’ perspectives, while simultaneously allowing them the freedom to shape their own.

3.1.2. Blake’s Epistemological Aporia

By virtue of the fact that Blake was attempting to create an artistic method which would avoid prescribing any single paradigm or discourse, it must be expressly stated, at the risk of repetition, that even Blake’s own preferred systems and paradigms could not be shown to take precedence over any other. Because they attempt, in general terms, to dictate the processes through which experience translates into general paradigms of thought and discourse, various epistemological stances presented Blake with especially juicy targets.

They typified the notion of prescribed, rather than liberated, experience. That said, Blake must have understood that the uncompromising assertion of his preferred epistemological stance would itself result in a prescriptive method. It must be understood that, within the context of his poetry, Blake's personal epistemological stance, insofar as it is possible to ascertain, forms just one of many possible and necessarily negated perspectives on the processes that facilitate the understanding of experience. Thus, although Blake's epistemology is of interest because it goes a way towards explaining the development of the poet's method, it does not, to my mind, constitute an epistemological stance that the poet wished to prescribe to his readers. Like every other epistemology, it constitutes just another discourse, just another perspective that needs to be understood in relation to an infinite number of discourses and perspectives.

Still, it is necessary to ask the question: How did Blake's epistemological sensitivities influence his understanding of the relation between the art object, and its subjective perceiver / reader?

Kathleen Raine, whilst recognising that Blake is not only dismissive of science but also praises it at points, writes that

William Blake is the only English Poet whose central theme is the confrontation between science and imagination. To Blake the radical error of Western civilization, lies in the separation ... now universally accepted within modern secular societies, between mind and its object, nature. (Raine 1991: 9)

It is my contention that the predominance of science over imagination was not Blake's central theme. To Blake the problem was not so much a monopoly of science as such, as a single-minded adherence to a discourse, any discourse. Science merely provided Blake with a prime example of a discourse that oppressed the Imagination. He characterised

science as a system that necessitated from its adherents the uniform understanding that material objects were distinct from the immaterial qualities the subjective mind projected upon them. The poet writes in his annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms on Man:

Deduct from the rose its redness, from the lilly its whiteness, from a diamond its hardness, from a sponge its softness, from an oak its height, from a daisy its lowness, & rectify everything in Nature as the Philosophers do, & then we shall return to Chaos ...

(K 81)

According to Cartesian Rationalists the qualities that individual perceivers associate with the objects they observe are objectively unverifiable and may therefore not be admitted to an objective epistemological system. Thus, the only worthwhile knowledge was universal or objective, and this was achieved by the isolation and invalidation of those qualities recognised only by the subjective perceiver. The separation of the subjective from the objective perspective, the rending in twain of the world into physical realities and mental fantasies, meant that the predominant epistemological paradigm was dualist.

In response, in A Vision of the Last Judgement, Blake asserts that

Mental Things alone are Real; What is call'd Corporeal, Nobody
Knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, & its Existence an
Imposture. Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought? Where
is it but in the Mind of a Fool? (K 617)

Both Damrosch and Raine point out that this passage might have been written by Bishop George Berkeley. Blake annotated Berkeley's Siris in 1820; Raine claims that Blake would have been familiar with the philosopher from an even earlier date (Raine 1991: 23). Berkeley's epistemology was written as a direct response to the dualist paradigm. In A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding, the philosopher wrote:

as to what is said of absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds of thinking things which observe them. (Berkeley 1939: 524)

However, to leave all of creation over to the fickle and untrustworthy human temperament was a step Berkeley was not brave enough to take. He saw the necessity of an organising principle for all that is perceived, and thus contended that God was the “Eternal Invisible Mind [that] produces and sustains all things” (Berkeley 1939: 555). He argued that man’s faculties are merely the thoroughfare via which God’s creation is manifested.

Blake’s major point of departure from Berkeley lay in his belief in the necessity of the individual’s creative will and capability. Ultimately, according to Berkeley’s conception, God was the creator and sustainer of all perceived things. The specific, innate qualities of that which the subject perceives were therefore determined and imposed by this separate being. To Blake such an idea accomplished little in validating the subject’s creative will and capability. According to Berkeley, perceiving things were subject to God, rather than to themselves, for the nature of their experience. Hence the subject’s status merely altered from epistemologically invalid to epistemologically inconsequential. Blake’s reaction against the notion of a God as creator and sustainer of all things is typically ironic. Faced with the question, “‘Is not God alone the Prolific’ I answer: ‘God only Acts & Is , in existing beings or Men’” (K 155). The implication of Blake’s answer is that Berkeley’s God is reduced from creator and sustainer of man’s perception, to something created and sustained by the mind of man. In other words, as

science is merely a discursive construct that commands blind adherence, so is Berkeley's God. His *esse* is also *percipi*.

Kathleen Raine suggests that although the seeds of Blake's epistemology lay in Berkeley's conception, the poet was more indebted to Thomas Taylor's Neoplatonism. According to Morton Paley it is likely that Blake would have read Taylor's Restoration of the Platonic Theology (Paley 1970: 208). Consequently he would have been aware of Plotinus's mystical understanding of the highest possible state of subjective experience. According to Taylor, Plotinus argues that, in perceiving beauty

the spectator is no longer external to the spectacle: but he who acutely perceives, contains the object of his perception in the depths of his own essence; though while possessing, he is often ignorant of what he possesses. For he who beholds anything as external, beholds it as something visible, and because he wishes to perceive it attended with distance ... It is requisite we should transfer the divine spectacle into ourselves, and behold it as one, and as the same with our essence: just as if any one hurried away by the vigorous impulses of some god, whether Apollo or the Muses, should procure in himself the intuition of the god; since in the secret recesses of his own essence, he will behold the divinity himself.¹

The experience described by Plotinus consists of a synthesis of aesthetic, spiritual and epistemological elements within the perceiving subject. The perception and recognition of "external" beauty is accounted for through the internal and divine essence of man. This *a priori* recognition faculty, although not termed "Imagination" as Blake might have it, "is an antecedent of that Romantic extension of consciousness by which ... we become what we behold and our perceptions are temporarily raised to another level of existence" (Paley 1970: 208). In his annotations to Reynolds's discourses on Art, Blake wrote that

¹ The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid's Elements London, 1792 (1788-9), ii. 262 (cited in Paley 1970: 208).

“Knowledge of Ideal Beauty is Not to be Acquired. It is Born with us. Innate Ideas are in Every Man, Born with him; they are truly Himself” (K 459).

Berkeley’s account of an external God who determines everyday perception stands in stark contrast to Plotinus’s idea of an inherent divine faculty that allows the perceiver to commune with the divinely beautiful. Yet, through their concatenation, Blake highlighted what he perceived to be the best of both systems. The result is “Imagination”, which seems to be Blake’s word for a divine human faculty from which all creation stems. In annotating Berkeley’s Siris Blake writes, “Man is All Imagination. God is Man & exists in us & we in him” (K 775); and in Jerusalem that “all Animals & Vegetations, the Earth & Heaven [are] contain’d in the All Glorious Imagination” (K 679). Blake’s idea of man’s divine essence creating and sustaining all that is perceived may be aligned with the monist epistemological paradigm.

This said, it has to be admitted that Blake is notoriously inconsistent in his allegiance. An example of this inconsistency is evidenced in Blake’s tempestuous relationship with Swedenborgianism. A central proposition of the 1789 Swedenborgian declaration that William and Catherine Blake signed (Davies 1948: 34) was the belief:

That immediately on the Death of the material body, (which will never be reassumed,) man rises again as to his spiritual or substantial body, wherein he existeth in perfect human form.

(Davies 1948: 34)

Blake seemed to take such dualist beliefs to heart. Even late in his career, when he had supposedly rejected the Swedenborgian theology almost entirely, he claims with seeming dualistic conviction,

Imagination [is] the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more. (K 717)

On the other hand, between 1790 and 1793, within a year of endorsing the Swedenborgian position, Blake wrote The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. There, in all earnestness Blake wrote that “Man has no body distinct from his Soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of the five Senses, the Chief inlets of Soul in this age” (K 149). Thereby Blake refuted the dualistic “Error” (K 149) which claims “That Man has two real existing principles: Viz: a body & a soul” (K 149).

There are many passages in Blake’s work that make the distinction between the natural and Imagined worlds. Whether, as Damrosch indicates, these passages “refuse to be rescued from the imputation of dualism” (Damrosch 1980: 166) is neither here nor there. Neither does his assertion that “Blake is a dualist who wishes he were a monist” (Damrosch 1980:166) solve such issues. Such claims strike me as self-defeating attempts at unanswerable questions. We will never know what Blake believed, only what he wrote.

The contradictions in Blake’s work are numerous, various, and obvious. In the entirety of his *oeuvre* it is impossible to establish whether he sided with monists or dualists, whether he aligned himself with the “Prolific” or the “Devouring”, the infinite or the particular. So glaring seem the contradictions in his thinking that it is not beyond the realm of conception that there is method to the poet’s “madness”. It could be argued that the poet who wrote that “Singular & Particular Detail is the foundation of the Sublime” (K 415) would not allow glaring contradictions to *flaw* his work (recall Ingarden’s assertion that hiatuses in the ready flow of a text’s conveyance of “meaning” constitute

textual *flaws*, and Iser's assertion to the contrary). If, then, they are not flaws, we must presume that they serve some purpose.

It is important to recognise for the moment is that Blake's epistemological sensitivities were such that they directly affected his understanding of the relation between the art object and the perceiver / reader. The implications are manifold, but none of greater import than Blake's awareness that subjective perceivers, in their recognition that they determine the "qualities" of the objects they perceive, make those objects their own. This was what, epistemologically speaking, those who assumed the dualist perspective were self-deceivingly trying to avoid, and the monists were trying to preserve. Neither could deny, however, that the inevitable personalization of the objects of their perception was a trait common to all subjective beings. In such personalisation, for Blake, lay the key to validating the subjective creative faculties. Blake had to find a manner in which his art might tap into this tendency. The poet's attempts to do so are reflected in the character of both the general and minute constituent elements of his poetry.

3.2. **The Poetry**

There are three main levels at which I will show that Blake's poetry directs it readers to engage with their subjective creative faculties. At each of the three levels it will be shown that Blake negates various perspectives alluding to broader paradigms of thought and their discourses. The idea is to move from the broader manifestations of these perspectives, to their minute manifestation. The first level will outline the broad forms and genres that Blake employs, and the manner in which they constitute the opposing

perspectives which frame readers' experiences. The second is the mythological level. Here, it will be shown, Blake employs "characters", like Los and Urizen, to represent various and contrary paradigmatic perspectives. He relies on the negation of his mythology's plot, the inconsistency of the characters. The third level is the micro-discursive level. It will be shown that, on the minutest level, the syntactical arrangement of broadly allusive short phrases comes to evoke the vital indeterminacy of the relation between perspectives.

3.2.1. Blake's Broad Forms and Genre

In the first book of Jerusalem Los makes his famous pronouncement:

I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's,
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.
(K 629)

According to Vincent Buckley this pronouncement indicates Blake's "ruinous" identification of creation with system-building. He writes:

there is too much *prose* in Blake's total *oeuvre*, too much eccentric and self-justifying statement; and it is this, rather than his poetic practice, which has led so many commentators into speaking as though the poetry existed for the sake of the system that is thought to support it, as though the verse served chiefly to validate the prose.
(Buckley 1968: 118)

There is much that is wrong with Buckley's approach to the pronouncement. At its root is his "ruinous" identification of Los with Blake. This problem will be given more coverage later. What is of interest to us more immediately is Buckley's objection to the "self-justifying" "prose" that seems, for him, to undermine Blake's poetry.

Throughout his book Poetry and the Sacred, and especially in the final chapters, Buckley shows an unhealthy respect for the opinions (and, in a particularly sycophantic

chapter, the poetry) of T.S. Eliot. His argument bears a close resemblance to that posited by Eliot in The Sacred Wood. It will be recalled that Eliot wrote of what he perceived to be Blake's lack of

a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet.

(Eliot 1997: 134)

Both critics seem to begin and end their enquiries at The Songs of Innocence and Experience, and treat the prophetic books as though they are inconsequential. Both adopt the stance that Blake's later works, owing to a series of unfortunate stylistic decisions and omissions, do not constitute poetry. Rather, I presume, they would have Blake's later works classified as some sort of eccentric philosophical / theological / political self-justification.

We will answer the "prose" charge first, or rather, we will allow Blake to answer. There seems to be no question in the poet's own mind that Jerusalem, for example, does constitute poetry, albeit a purposefully untraditional appropriation of the form:

I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence, like that used by Milton and Shakspeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming, to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put in its fit place; the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild & gentle for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic for the inferior parts; all necessary for each other.

Poetry Fetter'd Fetters the Human Race.

(K 621)

Of course, it is insufficient to rely merely on Blake's assurance of his work's poetic nature. However, there can be very little doubt as to the consideration Blake put into not only the "problems of the poet", but also "Every word and every letter".

"Self-justification" constitutes an essential part of Blake's method, but this is not the "self-justification" of which Eliot and Buckley accuse him. When he consciously employs non-poetic language, he does so in order to justify every perceiver's subjective vision, rather than his own. In A Vision of the Last Judgement, a commentary to his now lost painting, he writes that "its Vision is seen by the [Imaginative eye *del.*] of Every one according to the situation he holds" (K 604), and "I have represented it as I saw it; to different People it appears differently as everything else does" (K 605). The oft-cited extract that ends A Vision of the Last Judgement must not be read as an holier-than-thou justification of Blake's favoured perspective. It is merely an example of the freedom Blake grants every subjective being (including himself) to interpret and represent their perceptions in accordance with whatever *informed* perspective *they* choose:

I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation &
that to me it is a hindrance & not Action; it is as the Dirt upon my
feet , No part of Me. "What," it will be Question'd, "When the Sun
rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?"
O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host
crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.' I question not
my Corporeal or Vegetative eye any more than I would Question a
Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it.

(K 617)

Thus, even when writing prose, when seemingly justifying his own vision, Blake actually employs himself as an example of one exercising a subjective choice of which he wishes everyone to be aware. The "Heavenly host" stands merely as a single perspective amongst an infinite number of perspectives by which the sun may be perceived and

represented. Blake's decision to opt for the "heavenly host" rather than the "coin" representation of the sun should be read as the author's entirely subjective choice. The heavy emphasis of the personal pronoun throughout the quote bears witness to Blake's awareness of the subjectivity he employs. There is no attempt to qualify his vision as an objective representation, either of the sun, or of the last judgement. From the beginning of A Vision of the Last Judgement Blake associates the act of representation with the subjective divine faculties of the Imagination and Vision. "Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably" (K 604). He even recognises his use of the word "Imagination" to be a discursive construct.

Blake meant his words to function as points of departure to the reader, not as a closed statement of his own worldview. His prophetic works are difficult to understand in any logical sense. With this, I am sure, neither Eliot nor Buckley would disagree. If they are self-justifying prose works, then, according to these critics, apart from not being a poet, Blake is also a confused and confusing philosopher. The poet, however, seems to have absolutely no compunction about the difficulty of his work; on the contrary, he sees the difficulty as an essential part of his artistic manifesto. The Revd. John Trusler criticised the watercolours he had commissioned from Blake as being "unreal" and "incomprehensible" (Ackroyd 1995: 209). Blake responded with a fiery letter:

You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients consider'd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouses the faculties to act.

(K 793)

As it was Blake's intention to "cleanse the doors of perception", to rouse the faculties to act in attributing personalised qualities to the art they perceive, he had to create a poetic

style that elicited active participation from its readers. Naturally Blake would treat with contempt those who insisted that he should explain his poems, or that they should explain themselves. He would read their admonitions to be akin to his advocating a perpetuation of “Bad Art”.

In the light of this, it is not surprising that there is an air of didacticism about some of the passages from the prophetic books. A prime example is the tendency of Jerusalem's narrator to explain aspects of characters within the poem in such a manner as to lay out, with seeming precision, what they represent and how we are to respond to them. Sometimes the characters and their emanations argue with obvious reference to reasons for fallen humanity's state. This is surely what Eliot and Buckley were picking up on, as does Northrop Frye in his essay “The Key to the Gates”. Frye claims that “Blake expressed an abhorrence of didactic poetry but continued to write it” (Frye 1970: 234).

Whereas to Frye the realisation of Blake's didacticism seems a rather hard pill to swallow, it is a tendency that is entirely congruous with Blake's larger stylistic vision. If Blake's poetry is *only* didactic, then it would seem that the poet has indeed failed to create a poetic form that avoids the pitfalls of prescriptive bad art. Blake's poetry is not, however, merely didactic. He was not interested in merely abstracting and re-presenting epistemological, theological, and aesthetic arguments to suit his own perspective. That would defy the object of his artistic endeavour entirely.

It is eminently clear that Blake was aware of the larger implications of the form and genre he employed in his poetry. The unquestioning use of any particular form and genre, in itself, would come to represent the poet's mindless adherence to a single, and

prescriptive, perspective. In turn, readers would be subject only to that single perspective thereby directing their attentions in a singular and prescriptive manner. In order to avoid the imposition of any single perspective, Blake's poetry contains an unconventional array of forms, stretching across a number of genres.

3.2.2. The Mythological Level

The didacticism that stands the risk of undermining Blake's principle of allowing the reader subjective freedom is negated by means of a highly idiosyncratic mythology. That is not to say that the didactic passages are rendered senseless. By virtue of the mythological context within which they function, their didacticism and meaning is challenged. Blake employed his mythology in order to represent the various states of Imaginative and Visionary awareness, and the factors that both facilitate and hinder them. The theological and epistemological perspectives that have been discussed in abstract so far, and that Blake alludes to in his didactic passages, are thus both symbolically represented and undermined in Blake's mythology in the form of its characters, plot, narrator, and implied reader.

Blake achieves this by negating, both internally and externally, those aspects of the mythology that Iser would later come to identify as a literary work's predominant perspectives of its focal point. I do not think that Blake intended for his mythology to be constructed along conventional means. Rather, Blake probably saw the mythology as just another discourse, the negation of which would "rouze" the subjective reader's faculties. As such, Blake does not allow readers of his mythology to settle into a comfort zone. Characters are inconsistent and unpredictable. The plot of his mythology is by no means

easy to follow. His narrator seems to be sometimes authoritative, and at other times his authority is expressly negated. The implied reader's task is not salved by means of direct and express signposts to the appropriate significance of the text.

Here is an example. The Cartesian dualist demand for objective and universal truths at the expense of subjective qualification is represented, at times, by Urizen. In The Book of Urizen, Urizen envisages a world that is constant and predictable, "solid without fluctuation" (K 224). He sought understanding constituted of changeless, objective truth. He wrote down his "secrets of wisdom / the secrets of dark contemplation" in "the Book / of Eternal Brass". These "wisdoms" constituted

Laws of peace, of love, of unity,
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness,
....
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure,
One King, one God, one Law.

(K 624)

Blake felt that these "objective truths", espoused by philosophers, governments, the church, and scientists, when blindly accepted undermined the inherent faculties of the observing subject. So that Urizen is depicted as having his senses denied by being thrown into a dark, stony and intractable sleep. Thus the Cartesian dualist's perspective is undermined.

It is interesting that Blake should choose to represent Urizen's system as a book "form'd of metals". His biographer, Peter Ackroyd writes:

Urizen is, after all, the maker of books and is always associated with them – his ‘book of iron on his knees’ on which ‘he traced the dreadful letters’ might be an image of Blake himself at his copper plates ... But he is the worst part of Blake – the earthly part, the unhappy and thwarted aspect of his life, which led him to calculate, to systematize ... (Ackroyd 1995: 359)

It is essential to recognise that, despite his vilification, the calculating, systematising Urizen is seen to be involved in an activity not unlike that of the poet. Urizen’s prescriptive system takes the form of the written word, in metals, in much the same way that Blake etched his poetry into copper. According to The Four Zoas Urizen writes and regulates his books with “iron pens” led by a “Divine hand” (K 316). One is drawn to compare Urizen at work with the narrator of Jerusalem extolling the “Saviour” to “Guide thou my hand” (K 623). Divinely inspired, ironically or otherwise, Blake saw, in the activity of writing, inherent traps like those into which Urizen fell. Blake’s efforts to avoid such pitfalls are the key to understanding the manner in which his poetry evokes *jouissance*.

Los presents a case that is both parallel and contrary. Incorrectly, Peter Ackroyd argues that “Los or Orc” are employed by Blake as “idealized” self-portraits (Ackroyd 1995: 359) in contrast to his vilified Urizenic aspect. Such a comparison might be fair if Los were consistently ideal. Blake characterised Los as the prophet and bard figure, and critics have chosen to interpret this characterisation as demonstrative of the poet’s direct association with Los. As further evidence from the prophetic books they cite Los’s labours at his furnaces and anvil over Golgonooza, the city of the liberated imagination, an ideal that critics readily associate with Blake.

However, Los is *not* always the idealised image of Blake: He is capable of acts with consequences as dire as Urizen’s. This is demonstrated in both The First Book of

Urizen, and The Book of Los. From the first, Blake characterises Los as being witness to the desolation that has resulted from Urizen's systematisation. Chapter IV[a] of The First Book of Urizen illustrates his immediate reaction to the suffering Urizen brought upon himself:

1. Los, smitten with astonishment,
Frighten'd at the hurtling bones
2. And at the surging, sulphurous,
Perturbed Immortal, mad raging
3. In whirlwinds & pitch & nitre
Round the furious limbs of Los.
4. And Los formed nets & gins
And threw the nets round about.
5. He watch'd in shudd'ring fear
The dark changes, & bound every change
With rivets of iron & brass.

(K 226-7)

So indignant is Los at Urizen's changes that he captures the Immortal with nets and gins and secures the changes he wrought with rivets of metal. Los's actions mirror those of Urizen himself, who cast creation into a dictatorial system of Laws "in books form'd of metals" (K 224), and who cast the "direful Web of religion" (K 345). As a result of Los's actions Urizen falls into a nightmarish "stony sleep". Thus, the Los perspective, that of totally liberated passion and creativity, is negated.

In The Book of Los we find Los in the same situation as in The Book of Urizen. He is forced to watch Urizen while "raging furious" at the damage perpetrated by Urizen against Eno's vision of "Times remote! / "When Love & Joy were adoration, / And none impure were deem'd:" (K 256). So reactionary is Los that "His feet stamp the eternal fierce-raging / Rivers of wide flame" set by Urizen to purge Eternity of the "seven

deadly Sins of the soul” (K 224). Los’s actions are not, however, remedial. His ardour does more damage than good, and his stamping threatens to destroy whatever is left of the burning desire. Like Urizen before him, for opposite reasons, the impassioned Los finds himself bound up in a place of intransigence:

Coldness, darkness, obstruction, a Solid
Without fluctuation, hard as adamant,
Black as marble of Egypt, impenetrable,
Bound in the fierce raging Immortal;
And the separated fires froze in:
A vast solid without fluctuation
Bound in his expanding clear senses.

(K 257)²

Thus, in Los we have a character who, in allowing himself to be driven by his fury, is capable of destroying the very freedoms he values, as is signalled by the repetition of the phrase “solid without fluctuation”; a good example of the way “meaning” in Blake will shift according to the context the reader chooses. This constitutes an internal negation of Los’s perspective.

In Urizen and Los we have two “creative” immortals, both of whom are prone to falling into opposing yet equally destructive practices. They negate each other externally by means of their opposition. However, in a sense aspects of the form, or temperance, that Los requires are embodied by Urizen. As S. Foster Damon points out Orc, the fiery son of Los, “burns himself out” (Foster Damon 1973: 310) when Urizen stops trying to control him (K 366). In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell it is written that “Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy” and yet “Energy is Eternal Delight” (K 149).

² I am indebted to Jon Mee for his exegesis of the conflict between Urizen and Los in Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790’s. In order to contextualise Los’s indignation, Mee argues that Eno’s account of the Seven Deadly Sins of the Soul is contrasting to Urizen’s. He writes “What the moral law have classified are a potentially positive set of desires....Blake suggests that conventional categories of morality often bring about the deformations they claim to prevent” (Mee 1992: 203).

As aspects of Urizen's system must provide the bounds and outward circumference of Los's creative energy, so Urizen's system must allow for the liberated imagination that is the purpose of Los's work. Their failure to compromise within their respective discourses represents the dangers inherent to the work of the poet: that his work is either too prescriptive (as was Urizen's), or that it is destructively formless (like Los's at its worst).

In this regard Leopold Damrosch asks questions that characterise the dilemma that faced Blake as he sat down to write:

Is Reason here the inevitable but thwarting contrary to Energy, or the agent that shapes and fulfils it? Clearly man must be saved from the indefinite, but do not the "bounds of the Infinite" represent a considerable price? (Damrosch 1980: 319)

Of course, these questions have implications that permeate man's relation to his environment, an environment with which the socially conscious Blake was concerned. Within the context of William Blake's art, however, questions like these must have affected the manner in which the poet set about creating his work. A poet with an awareness of the dangers inherent to both prescriptive and formless discourse – an awareness that is amply demonstrated when one considers the seemingly opposing characters of Los and Urizen – would have attempted, insofar as it was possible, to avoid either.

3.2.3. The Micro-discursive Level

This chapter has so far highlighted some of the major difficulties that readers of William Blake's prophetic books encounter. Not least of these is Blake's seeming theoretical and stylistic "indecision" or "inconsistency". Thus arises the popular conception of Jerusalem that, when all the various, contrasting and numerable minute particulars are considered

“the poem may well be incoherent and therefore inaccessible to sustained, detailed analysis” (Dortort 1998: 4). Critics attempting to provide exegesis of the prophetic books have, by and large, revealed more about their approaches to William Blake’s poetry, than about the poetry itself.

The attempts by critics to impose a significance upon their experience of the text will serve as a springboard for a discussion of how, on the minutest syntactical level, perspectives negate each other. This section will respond to critics such as Eliot and Buckley who do not grant that Blake concerned himself with the problems of the poet. Blake, it will be shown, was immensely sensitive to the “reading process”, and tailored his text, to the minutest detail, in order to direct readers’ attention away from a blind adherence to any single perspective. This he achieved by refusing to construct his work to facilitate what Ingarden would later call conventional and unchallenging *Satzdenken*. Indeed, as will be shown, Blake was intent on encouraging the reader to look beyond their expectations of easily interpretable phrases and sentences.

Fred Dortort’s work in this regard is immensely useful. Obviously influenced by reader-response theory, the focus of Dortort’s seminal book The Dialectic of Vision: A Contrary Reading of William Blake’s *Jerusalem* is the manner in which the text of Jerusalem encourages a different kind of reading process. This process, Dortort claims, potentially culminates in keenly sensed phenomenological events. He writes that “the text of Jerusalem proves to be densely interladen with hints and reminders about how to read it, almost as if Blake composed his poem with a new kind of reader in mind” (Dortort 1998: 5). Dortort argues that, in order to fully appreciate Jerusalem,

readers must significantly adjust their own internalized, yet consensually determined, strategies for problem solving and reality testing. In looking outward at Jerusalem they must look deeply inward at the constituent factors determining the makeup of what appears to be perceptually and intellectually derived everyday experience. To a considerable degree these inward-directed efforts will transfer the arena of redemption from the page to the readers' actual lives. (Dortort 1998: 10)

According to Dortort, then, the poetry of William Blake is characterised by the “problems” and challenges to an ordered conventional “reality” which it presents to the reader.

By way of his discussion of a prominent hint within the text of Jerusalem, Dortort indicates not only the sort of reading process that the text encourages, but also points out some telling responses by critics regarding this hint. He points out that at the beginning of Jerusalem, above the Public Address on Plate 3, on opposing corners of that plate, Blake inscribed the words “SHEEP” and “GOATS” (K 620). Dortort asserts that the various responses of critics to these words is indicative of the various problematic approaches of criticism to Blake’s prophetic works.

Dortort points out that the presence of the words “SHEEP” and “GOATS” outside of the apparently generalised context of the rest of the plate’s text, and in opposing positions either side of a heading, lures readers into making an implicit choice.

By enticing readers to make an implicit choice between SHEEP and GOATS, Blake “divides them into two classes: those who choose passivity, wishing to be led, and those who learn to mould the text to fit their own desires, desires expanded by the very process of reading Jerusalem” (Dortort 1998: 6). In making this choice critics adopt a variety of approaches, each approach being indicative of a different type of reading of the poem in totality.

The first approach is either to ignore the words entirely, or to ascribe them no significance. Dortort argues that it has long been evidenced in the practice of Blake critics who ignore those elements of the poem that “do not fit [their] preordained schemas” (Dortort 1998: 6). This is the approach adopted by critics such as Eliot and Buckley, both of whom disregard Blake’s prophetic works because they do not fit into their preordained conception of poetry. Buckley cannot (or will not) see the sense in identifying creation with “system building”, and thus disregards almost the entirety of Blake’s poetic *oeuvre*.

The second response is to ascribe to SHEEP and GOATS, despite their placement outside the main body of the text, a “familiar contextual ground” (Dortort 1998:6). The Biblical allusion that associates sheep with “saved” persons and goats with the unredeemed masses would be a typical example. Dortort indicates that there is no evidence in the text or on the plate itself, to indicate that this biblical allusion is what Blake meant. Interestingly, though, Dortort writes that “in reducing the meaning to a non-controversial Biblical allusion, readers holding to this approach have, already, unwittingly, chosen sides; chosen, furthermore, to be one of the passive, manipulable sheep” (Dortort 1998: 7). Dortort indicates that this response probably underlies those readings of the poem that interpret it to represent Blake’s final reconciliation with Christianity.

Third, with an awareness of Blake’s iconoclasm, critics are likely to recognise that Blake’s sympathies rest on the side of the unrestrained GOATS, rather than the obedient and sublimated SHEEP. However, Dortort exclaims, “few [critics] have dwelt on exactly what Blake might have regarded as an appropriately contrary response”

(Dortort 1998: 7). Had Blake intended the text of Jerusalem to be merely subversive and revolutionary, he might well have placed only the word GOATS at the top of the plate, thereby forcing this association upon the reader. This is not the case. GOATS and SHEEP are oppositionally arranged.

This approach, of the three erroneous approaches, is the one most commonly adopted by critics in their attempts to understand Los's pronouncement. It is treated as though Los's system, as opposed to "another man's" contains within it "The secrets of wisdom, / The secrets of dark contemplation" (K 224).

Of course, such critics take great glee in pointing out that Blake's references to "darkness" and "sin" are often ironic. No Blake critic worth his salt is unaware that the poet revelled in subverting the view "That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body" (K 149). Did not Blake's argument in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell state that precisely this energy is "Eternal Delight"? Furthermore, did not the poet despise the law of Reason that restrained and repressed Energy under the guise of goodness? Did Blake not write that "One Law for Lion & Ox is Oppression" (K 158)? There are few Blake critics I have read who do not readily see the poet as one who strove to convince his readership that their thoughts and senses, freed from general paradigms, could rise to new, and shattering, realms of experience. This, however, has resulted in another kind of critical myopia.

Kathleen Raine and Morton Paley, for example, argue that Blake advocates a theological and philosophical opposition to rationalism and materialism, and that the poet prophesied the emergence of a new system: a syncretic system of alchemical, Swedenborgian, neo-Platonic, Berkeleyan descent in which "Mental Things are alone

Real”³ (K 617). David V. Erdman, in a similar vein to Bronowski’s socio-political reading, writes that “Los and Blake” strive to reform established political and social systems, “to ‘Create a System’ to draw mankind out of the systems which accommodate greed and war” (Erdman 1977: 462). These critics take Blake’s poetry merely to be evidence of abstract systems that they believe the poet wishes to perpetuate through his work. While I do not deny that the evidence for these systems exists and is useful (parts thereof having been used in this chapter), I do not believe that Blake’s *oeuvre* commits him or his readers to any particular standpoint. Urizen, not Blake, wrote “Laws”.

A more sophisticated example of a critic who treats Los’s pronouncement as though it is demonstrative of Blake-as-ironic-Urizen, is Leopold Damrosch, although, to be fair, the critic recognises that more is at work than meets the eye. Dortort points out Damrosch’s recognition that “the many attempts to define the form of Jerusalem have failed because Blake is either indifferent or opposed to the kind of form the critics have been looking for” (Damrosch 1980: 350). As Dortort indicates, this recognition could have been the catalyst to an entirely different approach to the poem (Dortort 1998: 425). The following example will show, however, that Damrosch’s method is that of one who, unable to account for the inconsistencies inherent to Blake’s work, decontextualises bits and pieces from the work and interprets them as indicative of a prescriptive system. I will quote extensively from his exegesis of Los’s pronouncement:

³ Much of Raine’s work is dedicated to the teasing apart and categorisation of countless allusions to alchemical, Swedenborgian, neo-Platonic and Berkleyan notions (amongst others) in Blake’s work. A useful essay in summary of her ideas is the final chapter of Blake and the New Age, entitled “Berkeley, Blake and the New Age” (Raine 1979: 151 – 179).

One of Blake's most famous pronouncements is "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another man's". The emphasis falls on 'Create' rather than on 'System'. Los labors to make *us* creative, 'Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems' (K 629). The point is to use the system as a temporary structure that can be left behind, not to treat it as an end in itself. Thought is impossible without system; Blake creates his own because only in his own can he be imaginatively free. It follows that each reader must re-create Blake's system even as he studies it, approaching its symbols 'on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought' (K 611) (Damrosch 1980: 83-4)

The gist of this explanation is that, although Damrosch believes Blake grants the reader choice, he cannot argue beyond what he perceives to be the answer that Blake ultimately prescribes. It is Blake's *system* of perpetual imaginative creativity that Damrosch believed the poet intended the reader to realise.

There are several mistakes that Damrosch makes in his attempt to explain the Los's pronouncement. The first is that he too readily conflates Los with Blake. Damrosch, like Ackroyd and Mee, falls into the trap of treating the "bard-prophet" (Mee 1994: 84) Los as the direct emissary of Blake and his idealised vision of the world. The reason that this idealisation is flawed should be clear on the basis of Los's destructive reaction against Urizen's prescriptive system. In this way Los cannot, as I have already argued in opposition to Ackroyd's claims, be representative of the Blakean idealised self. Los's creation, his unbridled, fiery and passionate outpourings, would close us off from the "Fiery Chariot of Contemplative Thought" (K 611) in much the same way that enslavement by "another man's" system would.

The second (related) mistake is that Damrosch pays scant attention to the context surrounding Los's pronouncement. Had Damrosch paid closer attention to this aspect of the text such notions of counter-enslavement may not have escaped him. In fact, as will

be shown in the next section, as didactically simple as the pronouncement may seem, the mythology within which it is integrated does much to undermine the reading that Damrosch and the other critics perpetuate.

The final mistake is that Damrosch does not examine the pronouncement in its entirety, only including the first line of the couplet in his consideration. To his credit he includes more of the couplet than, for example Erdman, who imposes on the phrase “Create a System” *Blake's* entire socio-political model. Blake obviously thought both lines important enough to isolate them, together, on Plate 10 of Jerusalem, between quotation marks, in the midst of the narrator's explanation. Such factors do not bear much weight in Damrosch's appreciation.

It is my intention to show how intricately the elements of the poem work together to convey an understanding entirely different to the ones proposed by the critics mentioned until now.

3.2.4. Indeterminacies

On the level of micro-discourses, mythology, and broad form and genre, William Blake constructed his poetry, including Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion, in such a manner as to undermine the traditional approach to reading. D.G. Gillham suggests that this is evidenced in Blake's early writings, especially Songs of Innocence and Experience. The critic writes that

Blake subscribes to no one [dogma], he presents no ultimate truths but leaves us to forge our own. He does attempt to awaken us to the responsibility of becoming alive to the best truths of which we are capable, but the poet detaches himself from the task of saying what those truths should be. (Gillham 1966: 5)

Gillham's notion of readers' "becoming alive" finds support in the criticism of Fred Dortort. Blake's unconventional understanding of readers is suggested not only by his claims to breaking from established literary forms in his address "To the Public", but also by the implicit choices Blake leaves open to readers in Jerusalem.

Fred Dortort argues that the first of these choices is presented by the words "SHEEP" and "GOATS" at the head of the address.

The fourth and final response to Jerusalem's opening words differs from the others in carrying with it the realization of the need for all the readers to decide which party to join, that of the sheep or that of the goats. Anyone who perceives that the choice always lies with the reader, who moreover must choose based on internal directives, rather than ones externally dictated by explicit admonishments in the text, has already chosen the party of the goats, the party of dynamic interaction with the poem.

(Dortort 1998: 7)

By definition, that which is relativistic is not subject to a central authority, but acquires its character in relation to its specific context. In the case of Jerusalem, it is the text's meaning that is mutable, and the readers who are responsible for its determination.

Dortort writes that

Such a relativistic, anti-authoritarian text [requires] that its readers decide what, if anything, constitutes the primary text, and so share responsibility with the author for any completed sense of the poem. In so doing, readers must make choices; in making these choices they may also undergo experiences somewhat similar to those of the poet, and share as well in the process of perceptual liberation that originally led to the composition of the poem.

(Dortort 1972: 24)

Whether or not the experience of the poet and readers are in any way similar is impossible to ascertain. Neither is it possible to guarantee or describe perceptual liberation. At best we can point out how the text "opens up" for readers' re-constitution or co-creation of meaning within the text's virtuality.

Dortort points to Blake's purposeful inconsistency of perspectives throughout the text of Jerusalem. These inconsistencies occur on the level of visual arrangement, style, syntax and language. I have argued that this constitutes inconsistency on a micro-discursive level. He claims that these *particular* inconsistencies mirror the *larger*, more explicit inconsistencies of the narrative, characters, and plot – this is equatable to the mythological level that I have identified. Beyond this, the broader form and genre of the poems are so constructed as to reflect the *abstract* inconsistencies that characterise Blake's *oeuvre*: those that we have already identified in the poet's theological and epistemological awareness.

Not only do these inconsistencies destabilise, or undermine, the preconceptions that readers may well have had upon initially approaching the text, they also have the effect of undermining any authority that the text itself may otherwise appear to establish.

Dortort writes that

A text actually constructed in accordance with relativistic principles most likely will draw its reader's attention to its anomalous aspects precisely because its construction contrasts so greatly with more familiar ways of organizing perceptions. In the course of our normal perceptions we suppress the gaps and lacunae that we encounter as we attempt to maintain what Blake called "One command, one joy, one desire / One curse, one weight, one measure / One King, one God, One Law" (K 224). In the construction of his poems, Blake took advantage of this perceptual tendency, its philosophical implications, and its ramifications in our everyday lives. (Dortort 1998: 24)

In drawing our attention to the problems of its construction, and undermining their solutions, the text encourages readers to encounter the gaps and lacunae that they would otherwise habitually suppress. It is through their efforts to overcome the gaps and lacunae that readers enter into the text's virtuality.

I will demonstrate these ideas by relating them to Los's pronouncement:

I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.

Los's pronouncement forms a potential entry point to the text's virtuality. However, the mistakes made by Damrosch (the conflation of Los with Blake, the ignoring of the context that surrounds the pronouncement, and the consideration of an incomplete couplet), means that the critic treats the pronouncement as the locus for what ultimately amounts to an imposition of Blake's ideas, rather than the reader's equal engagement. Although Damrosch recognises readers' agency, he cannot move beyond what he perceives to be Blake's ultimate prescriptiveness.

In his address "To the Public" on the third plate of Jerusalem, the narrator associates writing with Law making:

Reader! *lover* of books! *Lover* of heaven,
And of that God from whom *all books are given*,
Who in mysterious Sinai's awful cave
To Man the wondrous art of writing gave:
(K 621)

The narrator claims that, as to Moses on Sinai, the text was dictated to him, but asserts the choice to make his own stylistic decisions. He distances himself from conventional poetic forms, insisting that "Poetry Fetter'd Fetters the Human Race". From the first, the text opens with the suggestion of contrary systems at work: prescriptive as opposed to liberated. The introduction also collocates the creation of the discourse with the divine.

The narrative of Plates 4-8 of Jerusalem might be roughly summarised as follows: The action of Jerusalem is set in Beulah, a mythical "space" between the material world (Ulro), and Eternity. One of the immortal beings that occupies Beulah is Albion, that is representative of England / humanity. Albion rejects the Saviour's call to spiritual,

intellectual and sensual liberation, a state represented by the Eternal being Jerusalem. Albion opts instead to “build Laws of Moral Virtue. / Humanity will be no more, but war & pryncedom & victory” (K 622). Jerusalem becomes “scatter’d abroad like a cloud of smoke thro’ non-entity” (K 623); he is drawn into Ulro and is thus lost to both Beulah and the Eternal world.

Against this backdrop Los forges Golgonooza, a city of imaginative freedom, at his furnaces and anvil. Los, observing all these happenings, “labours as he mourns” (K 624) and his Spectre separates from him. For simplicity’s sake we shall describe the Spectre as Los’s alter-ego, with the concession that the relation between Los and his Spectre would be better served by several pages of close analysis. The Spectre berates Los for his friendship with Albion, “suggesting murderous thoughts against Albion” (K 624). The Spectre argues with Los that his creation indirectly perpetuates the prescriptive order of the Sons of Albion (who are with Urizen on Plate 7): “O! Thou seest not what I see, what is done in the Furnaces” (K 625). It is within Los’s Furnaces, the Spectre observes, that the Sons of Albion are being prepared to reign over Los, “To separate a Law of Sin, to punish thee in thy members” (K 626). Los is unwilling to concede to his Spectre, saying that the time will come when all will “Embrace [Albion], tenfold bright, rising from his tomb in immortality” (K 626). In a characteristic fury, he attempts to bend his Spectre to his own will: “Take thou these Tongs, strike thou alternate with me, labour / obedient” (K 627).

Crude though this guide to the mythological narrative of plates 4-8 of Jerusalem is, it indicates the continuation of the conflict between perspectives. The first is the conflict between The Saviour, Jerusalem and Albion – the hope of liberated perception

undermined by the repression of faith and imagination in the name of a higher order. The second conflict is between Los and his Spectre. Although Los labours over Golgonooza with the express purpose of liberating perception, he stands the risk, because his Furnaces facilitate the development of the Sons of Albion, of indirectly repressing the very freedoms he protects. Los is unwilling to admit his indirect agency, and suppresses the aspect of himself that reveals it to him, his Spectre. Los imposes his will on his Spectre, a will that is represented as an image of automated machination – “strike thou alternate with me” (K627) – rather than wilful freedom.

Such counter-enslavement is further alluded to in Los’s speeches directly before and after his famous pronouncement to his Spectre. Preceding the pronouncement Los says that:

“he who will not defend Truth may be compell’d to defend
“A Lie: that he may be snared and caught and snared and taken:
“That Enthusiasm and Life may not cease;
(K 628)

Thus, his system is seemingly created as a liberation from another man’s lie, a lie that enslaves and robs creation of its passions. In the speech directly after the pronouncement,

Los cries, “Obey my voice & never deviate from my will
“And I will be merciful to thee!
I break thy brazen fetters!
“If thou refuse, thy present torments will seem southern breezes
“To what thou shalt endure if thou obey not my great will.”
(K 629)

For an immortal intent on countering enslavement, Los is immensely prescriptive and assumes ultimate power over his Spectre. Also, in refutation of Erdman’s misappropriation of the phrase “Create a System”, Los’s insistence on obedience does

little to convince that he is neither power-greedy nor unwilling to engage in conflict to secure his objectives.

The arrangement of Plate 10 is of interest. We have broken away from Los's rebuking of his Spectre. The narrator describes Los and his Spectre "Obeying Los's frowns" (K 628) at work with "heavy Hammers" at the anvil to "bring the Sons & Daughters of Jerusalem to be / the Sons & Daughters of Los, that he might protect them from / Albion's dread Spectres" (K 629). In other words, Los and his enslaved Spectre labour to invoke and vouchsafe perceptual liberation.

The narrator then breaks form, drawing our attention from the mythological to the abstract. The narrator offers an exegesis of the "manner of the son's of Albion", thus highlighting the abstract concepts with which Blake infuses his mythological characters. The didacticism of this passage is a stark contrast to the often obscure mythology to which readers have been subject. According to the narrator, the Sons of Albion

take the Two Contraries which are call'd Qualities, with which
Every Substance is clothed: they name them Good & Evil;
From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation
Not only of the Substance from which it is derived,
A murderer of its own Body, but also a murderer
Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power,
An Abstract objecting power that Negatives every thing.
This is the Spectre of Man, the Holy Reasoning Power,
And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation.
(K 629)

There is an obvious likeness between the method of the Sons of Albion, and the understanding of the Cartesian dualist. The prescription of suitable qualities, the abstraction of the qualities, undermines the personalisable aspect of any experience, thereby "murdering" or invalidating the subjective divine essence. However, it is imperative to note that, in employing a didactic form in this passage, by himself

abstracting rather than mythologising the actions of the Sons of Albion, the narrator undermines the disdain with which the passage treats the “Abstract objecting power”. It is this faculty that the passage, by adopting its form, appeals to directly. This is an instance of the text’s systemic inconsistency, the internal negation of a perspective. The authority of the narrator to pass judgement on the Sons of Albion is undermined by his own failure to avoid their discourse.

Directly after Los’s pronouncement readers are confronted with a contrasting scenario. Instead of the measured didacticism of the preceding passage, as might be employed by the reasoning Spectre of Man, they are made subject to the uncontrolled desperation of Los’s Spectre:

Shudd’ring the Spectre howls, his howlings terrify the night,
He stamps around the Anvil, beating blows of stern despair,
He curses Heaven & Earth, Day & Night & Sun & Moon,
He curses Forest, Spring & River, Desart & sandy Waste,
Cities & Nations, Families & Peoples, Tongues & Laws,
Driven to desperation by Los’s terrors & threat’ning fears.

Los cries, “Obey my voice & never deviate from my will
“And I will be merciful to thee!

(K 629)

It is Los, who is identified with the liberation of energy, himself characterised as the “uncontroll’d Lord of the Furnaces” (K 627), who imposes the “outward circumference” of his Spectre’s Energy. By compelling his Spectre / alter-ego to labour at his system, by imposing a duty upon an unwilling aspect of himself, Los reveals himself to be prone to the imposition and judgement of “Qualities”. In doing so, he becomes a murderer of the energetic faculty that is represented by the Spectre. This is another example of a textual inconsistency. Los, so far the hero of Jerusalem, characterised by his own furious outbursts, undermines his own creative principles of freed expression. Having decried the

“pomp of religion / Inspiration deny’d, Genius forbidden by Laws of punishment” (K 628), Los threatens to punish his Spectre for exercising the very right he himself upholds.

Throughout Jerusalem to this point, the reader would have been confronted, not only by irreconcilably opposed perspectives, but also by irreconcilable oppositions at work within those perspectives. The authority of “the holy reasoning power” has been undermined, as has Los’s authority as the quintessence of liberated creativity. Furthermore, the narrator, in having fallen prey to the discourse of the Sons of Albion, has undermined his own authority to determine the significance of Jerusalem.

The failures of any of these elements to establish any sort of authority will have the effect of destabilising readers. As Dortort indicates, attention will be drawn to the anomalies of the text, precisely because they challenge the conventional expectations with which readers approach it. It is imperative to note that it is between the narrator’s didactic passage which decries the faculty to which it appeals, and Los’s hypocritical attempts to control his Spectre’s ravaging, that the famous pronouncement – “I must create a system ...” – is situated. Occupying the gap between three dysfunctional systems, the pronouncement serves to concentrate the aporia that the reader may otherwise only have sensed subliminally.

In order to show how the couplet concentrates readers’ perceptions of the anomalies of the text, it is necessary to analyse its arrangement. Damrosch’s emphasis on the word “create” is understandable if we read the pronouncement in an entirely linear fashion, or as a promotion of Los’s generalisable creativity principle. The pronouncement does begin and end with Los’s personal imperative. However, with Los discredited, readers cannot take the pronouncement at face value, and must examine it more carefully.

I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.

The couplet consists of four main clauses. The first clause highlights Los's perspective: "I must Create a System". Implicit in this perspective is Los's agency and creativity. The second clause, "be enslaved by another man's", is indicative of an opposing perspective "another man's", one that denies the individual agency of the speaker. In the light of the description of the method of the Sons of Albion that precedes the pronouncement, the reader will logically associate "another man's" system with the reasoning power. The relation between the first two clauses, as implied by the "or" that separates them, is a causal one. Creation of a system is undertaken in reaction to the system that threatens to enslave.

In the light of the causal relation between the clauses of the first line, it would seem that the third clause, the first clause of the second line, reveals an inherent inconsistency within the pronouncement. "I will not Reason & Compare" implies that no oppositional relation exists between the systems that are implied in the first line. This lack of causality is emphasised by the rigid separation of the colon between the third and fourth clauses. The final clause thus asserts the creative imperative without reference to the abstract reasoning system of the second and third clauses.

Thus, the relations between clauses in respective lines reflect the inconsistencies and oppositions at work in the text as a whole. Los is represented as a foolish idealist, one who would create a system at random, rather than employ the method of the Sons of Albion. The fact of the matter is that his reactionary impetus to create a system implies the employment of his faculties of reasoning and comparison. To create with no reason whatsoever would fulfil no purpose.

There is further evidence that the pronouncement is arranged in such a manner as to be representative of an understanding different to the one imposed by Los. In the second line of the pronouncement the order of systems implied is an inversion of the order of systems that characterises the first line. This cross-over has the effect of diffusing the emphasis from the purely creative imperative to include the reasoning / comparative system. The chiasmus effect is to dissipate the emphasis that Damrosch placed so squarely on “create” throughout the couplet. No single clause, no single perspective, is preferentially represented by the text.

The pronouncement is not a promotion of Los’s viewpoint, or Blake’s for that matter. It is an extremely concentrated conglomerate of the anomalies that the text presents to readers. This concentration serves to highlight the irreconcilable nature of the oppositional perspectives that constitute these anomalies, with the effect of creating “gaps” or “lacunae” in the text. Only readers who, through an engagement with the text, has acquired a “meta-awareness” of the abstract, larger perspectives that work in irreconcilable opposition to each other, would be in a position to engage with these gaps.

The gaps proliferate as the readers’ contextual awareness widens – the more perspectives readers recognise, the more gaps will appear. This seems to be precisely Blake’s point – as long as one is actively involved in the process of negotiating the relations between perspectives, then one’s “Immortal Eyes” are opened into “The Eternal Worlds” of “Thought, into Eternity / Ever Expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination” (K 623). It is this sort of engagement that Jerusalem facilitates, indeed, seemingly necessitates, in order for readers’ experience of their engagement with the poem to be rewarding.

3.3. Concluding Remarks: “Experience qua Experience”?

The challenge that was set at the beginning of this chapter was to present a feasible hypothesis with regard to *how* the text of Jerusalem facilitated readers’ “experience qua experience”.

Jerusalem employs various discourses which lead to a number of paradigmatic approaches to the perception and interpretation processes of the individual. Each of these discourses and paradigms come to constitute perspectives of the poem’s focal object. It has been shown that these perspectives are evidenced on at least three distinct but interlocking levels: on the level of form and genre, on a mythological level, and on a micro-discursive level. The poem employs a high density of contrasting perspectives on all three of these levels.

No single perspective constitutes a sufficient account of the experience that the poem purports to be about. Perspectives are undermined internally, as was evidenced by Los’s hypocrisy, and the narrator’s inability to transcend the discourse he decries. On the micro-discursive level of Los’s pronouncement, the relation between contrasting perspectives is evoked in a single line – Los’s creativity, and the destructiveness of the Sons of Albion. However, within the context of the pronouncement as a whole, the relation between these perspectives is itself thrown into flux. The first line’s proposed relation (causal creation of liberated perception) is negated by the second line’s predominant proposed relation (independent creation of liberated perception). Thus we have contrasting perspectives of the same focal object contrastingly related to each other.

There is no way rationally to reconcile the anomalies presented by the text. Yet, the interpretative faculties of readers gravitate towards those aspects of the text that do

not readily elucidate themselves. Readers are drawn to ascertain, to co-create, the nature of the relations between the perspectives with which they have been presented. The hypothetical process within which the negotiation of these relations takes place is the virtuality of Jerusalem.

What happens in the virtuality, the “meaning” of the poem – *jouissance* – is dependent on the dynamic engagement of the reader, driven by private rather than objectively definable directives. Whatever the nature of their experience, the text does not encourage readers to explain their experiences in terms of any single perspective. The experience results from the non-rational, pre-critical, and subjective concatenation of many contrastingly represented perspectives. No single perspective suffices, no objective paradigm exists that can capture the quality of the experience, no expression of critical “significance” is satisfactory. The value of reading Jerusalem lies in the experience thereof, rather than the significance.

Conclusion

Four Quartets and Jerusalem are difficult. Hence, the poems have attracted the attention of many critics, nearly all of whom take it upon themselves to make the poem, on some or other level, understandable, to explain “what” the poems mean. This presents a problem.

The poems are written in such a manner as to undermine the conventional reading process with which the reader might initially engage with a poem. The conventional reading process has been summarily characterised by Roman Ingarden’s conception of uninterrupted *Satzdenken* facilitated by neatly arranged *intentionale satz-korrelate*.

Jerusalem and Four Quartets (indeed, the *oeuvres* of both Blake and Eliot) are purposefully replete with logical contradictions, inconsistency of form, references to varied and disparate paradigms of thought, and the employment of seemingly incompatible and obscure allusions. To even the most educated reader the poems seem recondite, if not incomprehensible or impenetrable.

Yet, as has been demonstrated, for both poets the difficulty of their work could be described as a manifest principle, or a formal device: it comprises a built-in feature of Jerusalem and Four Quartets. The poems demand that readers struggle, because it is only through a direct engagement with the irresolvable problems of the text, that readings might culminate in the sort of response that I believe – but cannot prove – the poets envisaged.

It was suggested that the response encouraged in the reader by Jerusalem and Four Quartets be termed *jouissance*. However, in making this suggestion it was noted that

jouissance must constitute a very broad definition. I have suggested that, phenomenologically speaking, it is not appropriate blindly to generalise about the specific characteristics or qualities of the reader's experience. Readers' *jouissance* experiences are private to them. On the basis of personal experience, the reports of others, and the covert admissions of certain critics, however, it was suggested that *jouissance* may be very broadly characterised as a keenly experienced disturbance to the reader's everyday perceptual processes.

There is another reason why it is impossible to generalise about the nature of *jouissance*. Barthes himself was reluctant to define the term specifically. He wrote:

terminologically, there is always a vacillation – I stumble, I err. In any case, there will always be a margin of indecision; the distinction will not be the source of absolute classification, the paradigm will falter, the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible, the discourse incomplete.

(Barthes 1975: 4)

It is certainly because of the problems of definition that critics are almost invariably tempted to explain the meaning of the poems in terms of spirituality, mysticism, or religion. Indeed, commentators on *Jerusalem* and *Four Quartets* often seem to employ the “supernatural” as an escape hatch by which to avoid the revelation of the shortcomings of their critical approaches. However, spiritual, religious, and mystical discourses, in both poems, feature as merely representative of singularly limited perspectives.

The sort of experiences about which the poems are written, and in which, I hypothesise, the reader's engagement with the poems may culminate, are impossible to substantiate in any single abstract form. In the introductory chapter it was suggested that *jouissance* is only understood at the moment that it is experienced. The poems were written with deliberate reference to such “experience *qua* experience”.

Four Quartets and Jerusalem are so constructed as to encourage the reader to discard any single discourse within which such experiences might otherwise be framed. Such discourses may be, with reference to Wolfgang Iser's *Rezeption-Asthetik*, represented as perspectives that were consistently and purposefully negated.

Eliot's characterisation of the "still point of the turning world" is constituted of indeterminately allusive images that are oppositionally arranged despite a constant disavowal of binary opposition. The readers' impulse to generate the connections between the various aspects of these anomalies necessitates their direct engagement with the text. Their subjective faculties thus become drawn into a dynamic negotiation between the perspectives rendered by the literary work. In virtuality, there is no rationality or abstraction with which to solve the inherent contradictions within and around these perspectives. It is only by virtue of the pre-critical (pre-rational, pre-abstract) nature of the reader's consciousness that virtuality serves as a unifying framework for these perspectives.

Similarly, Los's pronouncement, "I must Create a System ...", represents an irresolvable series of negated and counter-negated perspectives. The reader is encouraged to enter a dynamic negotiation regarding the relation between these perspectives. Only in a pre-critical apprehension may the relations between these perspectives be conceived of, or experienced, as unified.

Still, the negation of various contrasting perspectives represented within the text does not, in itself, justify the reader's *jouissance*. On some or other level all literary works substantiate their subject matter through a series of incongruous perspectives, and yet not all literary works encourage *jouissance* to the same extent. That is why the

development of Eliot's method from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", through The Waste Land, to Four Quartets was traced. The method of all three poems is similar, although in the earlier poems the experience arising out of the reader's dynamic engagement with the text is not an end in itself. Both "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and The Waste Land are substantive of scepticism regarding the very possibility of "experience *qua* experience". "The Love Song" substantiates the effect of scepticism on what is seemingly a psychological singularity. The Waste Land is demonstrative of the irreconcilable fragmentation of culture and society. Inasmuch as the earlier poems suggest to readers that it is up to them to reconcile the various fragments or perspectives represented in the poem, both poems characterise attempts (or non-attempts) at ultimate resolution with irony bordering on disdain. Thus, although the reader might have an intense experience while reading the earlier poems, both poems encourage them to dismiss such occurrences as mere and inappropriate discursive constructs. The experience is thus reduced again to a single, and limited perspective. The experiences are more closely defined in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and The Waste Land. The critic is left with more tangible clues as to the effect that the poems are supposed to generate within their readers.

Fewer limits are imposed by Four Quartets and Jerusalem, although the verbal content of the poems do predispose the reader to interpret the experience within virtuality as a sensual and perceptual liberation that is greatly to be desired. The poems rarely extend beyond such broad invitation to, rather than definition of, the experience. Neither Four Quartets nor Jerusalem serves to substantiate the experience itself; they actually *constitute the process* which the reader must undertake in order to have the experience.

The poems, thus, do not abstract or define “experience *qua* experience”, they provide propitious circumstances for “experience *qua* experience”.

Critics who attempt to interpret the poems in terms of an abstracted form of “experience *qua* experience” – who focus their attentions on “what” the poems mean – invariably fail to provide sufficient accounts of the meaning. They are faced with a major problem. Their medium is insufficient. The rational paradigm to which their medium limits them, perhaps by way of self-preservation, rails against the notion of an inexpressible, pre-abstract, pre-critical, pre-rational experience. Within the critical medium, the rational exegesis of such experience represents progression from an uninformed and insensible state. Accepting the non-rational aspects of the experiences arising out of the poems means that critics find themselves at odds with generally accepted notions of their purpose.

Roland Barthes cogently expresses the issues with which the critic is confronted.

In The Pleasure of the Text he asks his readers to

Imagine someone ... who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: *logical contradiction*; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible, who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity; who remains passive in the face of Socratic irony (leading the interlocutor to the supreme disgrace: *self contradiction*).... Such a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversation would cast him out: who endures contradiction without shame? Now this anti-hero exists: he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure. Thus the Biblical myth is reversed, the confusion of tongues is no longer a punishment, the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages *working side by side*: the text of pleasure is a sanctioned Babel. (Barthes 1975: 3-4)

The tendency of critics has been to *not* sanction this Babel, and to treat the anomalies, the irresolvable problems of the text, as a punishment. Theirs is to undo the

work of the poet: to categorise the fragments with which they are presented; to place their categories within larger classifications; and to arrive, eventually, at the almighty general truth that the poem, they say, conveys. It is as if critics feel they should reorganise that which the poet has confused.

The questions that need to be asked are, in the case of poems like Four Quartets and Jerusalem: who benefits from the intermediary status assumed by critics between the poem and the reader? What do critics achieve through their resistance of – their battle against – the non-rational outcome of a dynamic engagement with the poems?

The poems do not benefit. In fact, a great disservice is perpetrated against the poems. Their particular details, carefully arranged, are often ignored in the name of the broad paradigm the critic wishes to impose. The references in the poems to various broader paradigms are overlooked if and when they do not seamlessly fit into the single paradigm within which the critic is comfortable. Because of the objective medium within which critics are bound, they seem mostly uninterested in that which makes the poems dynamic and original to the individual.

Neither does the reader benefit. If readers believe critics, then they are liable to reduce their experiences of the poems to the specific paradigms and terms of the criticism. This act, in itself, undermines the potential effect of a dynamic engagement with the poem: liberation of the reader's perceptions from any singular perspective. The essential subjective aspect of the poem's meaning is thus steam-rolled out of contention by the seemingly indomitable force of objective argument.

Only critics benefit. In the final analysis, the only meaning they qualify, is the one they might have experienced if they engaged with the poems' virtuality. The significance

they attribute to such meaning, albeit couched in “objective” splendour, constitutes nothing more than an elaborate “private significance”.

It is the contention of this thesis, therefore, that poetry such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets is especially adept at revealing the limitations of critical attempts to explain poems as though they are abstract and confused versions of a “real” and readily reducible experience.

What are the implications of this? I believe it to be important for commentators, upon entering their critical engagements with poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets, to do so with a new-found awareness of the shortcomings with which their medium is hindered. Criticism must recognise these limitations, and readjust its focus accordingly. By this I mean to imply that criticism which attempts to explain the experiences arising out of engagements with poetry in terms of characteristics or qualities, or in terms of a singular paradigmatic framework, should be recognised as inherently limited and limiting. Criticism that imposes its rational meta-discursive authority upon the text, that attempts to reduce the complexities of the poem to a single over-arching “truth”, should recognise itself as representative of one among many perspectives.

None of this means to imply that critics have no place in the exegesis of poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets. In their considerations, however, *jouissance* is most appropriately left an unqualified culmination of the reading experience. It has been suggested in this thesis that criticism readjust its focus towards the processes that facilitate *jouissance*, as they are encouraged by the poems. This constitutes a shift away from “what” the poems mean, to “how” the poems evoke meaning. The texts themselves

– rather than the poets’ and readers’ critically inaccessible experiences or insufficient singular perspectives of the texts – thereby become the primary, and the only safely generalisable, objects of study for those intent on critically explaining readers’ experience. In this thesis, a possible approach to text-based analysis was represented in the form of an amended version of Wolfgang Iser’s *Rezeption-Asthetik*.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis a question was posed:

How do you account for “spiritual” experience in the objective framework of a literary criticism, while still recognising the subjective elements that, by and large, constitute the experience itself?

The answer to the question, without sugar-coating it, is that you cannot. Both “spiritual” experiences, and the subjective elements that constitute them, necessarily fall outside the frameworks that literary criticism can usefully provide. That is not to imply that the critic must ignore *jouissance* or the subjective involvement it necessitates. In poems like Jerusalem and Four Quartets every clue, every perspective, every word, and punctuation mark seems to gravitate the attentions towards the critically undefinable. There is no need to deny this, but rather, it should be embraced. There is plenty for critics to do, if they are to take up the challenge of explaining “how” the poems are constructed to do so.

Perhaps the greatest implication of poems such as Jerusalem and Four Quartets is that their very construction is premised on the existence of appropriate faculties within the reader. Both Blake and Eliot seem purposefully to want to validate these faculties, and to foster awareness of their absolute value. I speak of those inherent faculties that, without the necessity of closed paradigms, provide a lens through which the seemingly irreconcilable and incoherent may briefly unify in unexpected and beautiful ways.

The implications of this faculty extend beyond their relevance to Jerusalem and Four Quartets. Its existence, so powerfully brought to the fore by these two poems, highlights the importance of literature and reading as a whole. In the introduction to his book Pure Pleasure: A Guide to the 20th Century's Most Enjoyable Books, John Carey asks "So what is special about reading?" I quote extensively from his answer.

What is special, oddly enough, is the result of an imperfection in the medium books use by comparison with the medium of film or television. Pictures of the sort relayed by film or television are an almost perfect medium, because they look like what they represent. Printed words do not. They are just black marks on paper. Before they can represent anything, they have to be deciphered by a skilled practitioner. Although accustomed readers do it instantaneously, translating printed words into mental images is an amazingly complex operation. It involves a kind of imaginative power different from anything required by other mental processes. If reading dies out, this power will disappear – and the results are incalculable. For reading and civilization have grown together, and we do not know whether one can survive without the other. The imaginative power reading uniquely demands is clearly linked, psychologically, with a capacity for individual judgement and with a capacity to empathize with other people. Without reading, these faculties may atrophy. (Carey 2000: xi)

The exercise of such "imagination" (a word of which Blake would approve) is *the* benefit of the engagement with literature as a whole. Literature, above all other things, must remain, as Carey infers, an "imperfect medium". To pretend that it is otherwise, to attempt, objectively, to fill in the indeterminacies that draw imaginative processes out of readers with critically "objective" stopgaps is a hugely counterproductive endeavour.

It is my fervent belief that no criticism should attempt to solve the "mysteries" of a literary work. Ideally, commentators might highlight the work's indeterminacies, and invite their readers to search for answers there, rather than in a critical commentary.

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