

## T. S. ELIOT: A CRITIC OF HIS OWN OR: POETRY AND TAUTOLOGY

### Introduction.

In his critical essays Eliot establishes his own criteria of criticising poetry which he forces not only on other poets but also on himself. In *The Music of Poetry* (1942)<sup>1</sup> for example, T. S. Eliot admits that «...the critical writings of poets... owe a great deal of their interest to the fact that the poet, at the back of his mind, if not as his ostensible purpose, is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write» and that the poet-critic «...is not so much a judge as an advocate».

This is very elucidating on Eliot's part because he gives us a clue to the defending nature of his critical essays. What is surprising, though, is that so many critics should take Eliot's admittedly advocating criticism for granted and would not look for other (literary, historical, philosophical) sources, as well. G. Williamson<sup>2</sup> overemphasizes the importance of Eliot's critical essays in reference to Eliot's poetry. If Eliot's critical essays are taken for «instructions», then the reader is limited to understand only what Eliot expects and means him to understand but this does not certainly answer important questions as: «What is Eliot aiming at in his poetry and by what means?» and «How far do Eliot's critical essays really help his critics understand his poetry?».

### The objective correlative.

The chief, organising principle of *The Waste Land* is the myth of the Fisher King borrowed from J. Weston's book from *Ritual to Romance*, combined to the myths of Attis, Osiris and Adonis borrowed from J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. These myths narrate how sterility comes over the land whose king suffers from a sexual wound and is unable to help his people. Their aetiological purpose is the interpretation of the objective fact of the recurrence of the seasons, the

1. T. S. ELIOT, *The Music of Poetry* (1942), *Selected Prose of T. S. ELIOT*, London, Faber and Faber, (1975), p. 107.

2. G. W. WILLIAMSON, *A Reader's Guide to T. S. ELIOT*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1976, p. 27.



death of the year and rebirth in spring time. Eliot elaborates the seasonal succession into a pattern of reiterated images through which *The Waste Land* becomes the whole of his contemporary world where instances of past love and glory have degenerated into sterile lust and squalor. The need for salvation and catharsis is, therefore, imminent.

In an early essay of his entitled *Hamlet* (1919), Eliot introduces the «objective correlative» concept and defines it: «...The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative”; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion<sup>3</sup>». In this essay Eliot is trying to find fault with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* because this particular tragedy lacks an objective correlative and consequently emotion overflows structure, according to Eliot.

*The Waste Land* was published in 1922 but Eliot had been working on it at least since 1921<sup>4</sup>, two years after *Hamlet*. In fact, in the poem Eliot makes ample use of objective correlatives which, according to his theory, should be the rational dresses of emotion or, as Mathiessen quotes<sup>5</sup> the «emotional equivalent of thought».

Emotion is, of course a poetic commonplace and the nucleus of romantic poetry. Eliot has vigorously fought romantic poetry preaching objectivity and «self-sacrifice» instead: «The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality<sup>6</sup>». A classic instance of objective correlative could be the «hyacinth girl-in-the-garden» image or simply a girl in tears with flowers in her hands, or even a wet girl with flowers in a garden.

In the first movement of *The Waste Land* two lovers are coming back from a garden in someone's memory:

«You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;  
They called me the hyacinth girl.  
-Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence».

The voice is «he», the empty (impotent?) lover.

3. T. S. ELIOT, *Hamlet*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

4. H. KENNER, *The Invisible Poet - T. S. ELIOT* London, Methuen and Co, 1965, p. 125 «*The waste Land* was drafted during a test cure at Margate and Lausanne... during the autumn of 1921».

5. F. O. MATHIESSEN, *The Achievement of T. S. ELIOT*, New York, OUP, 1976, p. 56.

6. T. S. ELIOT, Tradition and the Individual Talent, (1919), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.



T. S. ELIOT: A CRITIC OF HIS OWN OR: POETRY AND TAUTOLOGY

In an earlier poem, *La Figlia Che Piange* (1917), the girl leaning on a «garden urn» has:

«Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers...»

while «he» admits:

«Sometimes these cogitations still amaze  
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose».

Also, in *Dans le Restaurant* (1920) the memory of the wet girl with flowers comes back:

«J'avais sept ans, elle était plus petite.  
Elle était toute mouillée, je lui ai donné des primevères».

while «he»:

«Je la chatoullais, pour la faire rire.  
J'éprouvais un instant de puissance et de délire».

In *Portrait of a Lady* (1917) the smell of hyacinths evokes memory.

«With the smell of hyacinths across the garden  
Recalling things that other people have desired».

Even when the memory of the girl has faded as in *East Coker* (1940), the poet returns to what most resembles the *Dans le Restaurant* scene:

«The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy».

The recurrence of this particular image (wet girl, flowers, garden) assumes a symbolic value. But the image is not independent. It is the «I», the empty lover, the voice of the poet, who recalls those moments of ecstasy. The wet girl with flowers is there but it is the subject, «I», who «could not speak», «I», whose cogitations «amaze the noon's repose», «I», to whom the smell across the hyacinth means ecstasy. In this case the objective correlative turns out to be a personal symbol of the poet's.

F. Kermode<sup>7</sup> states that the objective correlative is a term probably developed from Santayana's «object correlative» «in an attempt to depersonalise what remains essentially the image of romantic poetry, and to purge it of any taint of simple expressiveness or rational communication. Its propriety is limited to Eliot's own earlier verse, which is deeply personal but made inexplicably so by the arbitrariness its logical relations, its elaborate remoteness from the personal, and its position within a context which provides a sort of model of an impersonal "tradition..."».

It is based on this created tradition that the «garden» with its biblical conno-

7. F. KERMODE, *Modern Essays: T. S. Eliot*, London, Fontana, 1971, p. 307.



tations will stand for salvation in later poetry, especially in the *Four Quartets*:  
*Burnt Norton* (1935):

«Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose garden».

or

«To be conscious is not to be in time  
But only in time can the moment in the rose garden...  
... Be remembered...».

Here the garden becomes the final end; after a long, tedious trip, the place of final ecstasy.

Therefore, from *La Figlia Che Piange* (1917) and *Dans le Restaurant* (1920), up to *Burnt Norton* (1935) we can observe a constant elaboration of the same objective correlative which develops through the process of personal symbol into myth. According to Eagleton<sup>8</sup> Eliot uses themes about which certain emotions have been standardized as objective correlatives that may evoke these feelings any time he chooses to. In this way Eliot carefully constructs his argument. Eagleton observes also that the typist episode in the third movement of *The Waste Land* entitled *The Fire Sermon* is elevated into myth. Words like «carbuncular», «small house agent's clerk», «bold stare», «one of the low», «assurance sits as a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire» inevitably lead to create an image of vulgarity and degradation. In fact, «the young man carbuncular» belongs to the «Sweeney» theme which Eliot has been carefully constructing since 1920: *Sweeney Erect* (1920):

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

or

*Sweeney among the Nightingales* (1920):

«Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees  
Letting his arms hang down to laugh,  
The zebra stripes along his jaw  
Swelling to maculate giraffe».

F. O. Matthiessen<sup>9</sup> detects a double feeling of «repulsion from vulgarity» and yet a

8. T. EAGLETON, *Exiles and Émigrés*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1970, pp. 164-170.

9. F. O. MATHIESSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 59.



«shy attraction to the coarse earthiness of common life» that Sweeney evokes. The «shy attraction to the coarse earthiness» is certainly not in Sweeney's theme; the «young man carbuncular» evokes no shy attraction. The function of the objective correlative here leaves no space for doubt. Given the animal-like physical image, Eliot gets the emotional evocation of repulsion. Even the name «Sweeney», which recalls «swine», a dirty, lusty animal, is an objective correlative in itself. A lot of names, especially Hebrew ones, function as objective correlatives in Eliot: *Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar* (1920):

«But this or such was Bleistein's way:  
A saggy bending of the knees  
And elbows, with the palms turned out,  
Chicago Semite Viennese».

The apelike or anyway repulsive image is arbitrarily attached to Hebrew origin: *Sweeney among the Nightingales* (1920):

«The silent vertebrate in brown  
Contracts and concentrates withdraws;  
Rachel née Rabinovitch  
Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;».

or overtly «the Jew» in *Gerontion* (1917):

«And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,  
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,  
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London».

again in *Whispers of Immortality* (1920):

«Grishkin is nice: her Russian eye  
Is underlined for emphasis;  
Uncorseted, her friendly bust  
Gives promise of pneumatic bliss».

Grishkin is quite probably a Russian Jewess. Curtius<sup>10</sup> observes that Eliot has deplored «the spirit of excessive tolerance» and has judged «undesirable» the presence of a great number of «Jewish free thinkers».

In Eliot's mythology most vulgar and glib characters are oriental: As, for instance, Mr Eugenides (*The Waste Land*, 1922), the Smyrna merchant, the greasy Levantine paederast who contaminates the language with his «demotic» French; or Princess Volupine (*Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar*, 1920), the voluptuous, blue nailed «entertainer», or still Mr Silvero (*Gerontion*,

10. E. R. CURTIUS, *Studi di letteratura Europea*, Roma, Il Mulino, 1963, p. 406.



1920), who exercises black magic with his caressing hands and, last but not least, Madame Sosostriis, the famous clairvoyante, who «nevertheless is known to be wisest woman in Europe» (*The Waste Land*, 1922).

### Myths and archetypes.

With the Cockney episode in a public bar in the second movement of *The Waste Land* (1922) Eliot does not aim at any sociological comment such as H. Gardner<sup>11</sup> should have liked: «It is the common tragedy of the working class girl who turns into the prematurely old wife and mother with only spirit enough left to resent her husband looking elsewhere for what she can no longer give him». Lil, the working class girl, has lost her teeth because of those «abortive pills» she took. She pays for her sins. After all, grandeur has never belonged to the plebeian (the word itself meaning coarseness and ignobility). In his effort to construct the myth of the plebeian woman, Eliot gives no explanations. The instances of plebeian women are constantly connected to images of dirt, misery, even disgust. In *Preludes* (1917):

«The worlds revolve like ancient women  
Gathering fuel in vacant lots».

In *Morning at the window* (1917):

«They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens  
And along the trampled edges of the street  
I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids  
Spouting despondently on area gates».

or in *Gerontion* (1920):

«The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,  
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter».

These plebeian women are certainly unattractive, live in ugly, drab places and engage in humble jobs.

In *The Waste Land* (1920), the typist and Lil correspond perfectly to the archetypes. In the Cockney bar toothless Lil is so «antique» that even her friend «can't bear to look» at her while her husband will «look for it elsewhere». And the typist

«... clears her breakfast, lights  
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.  
Out of the window perilously spread  
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,  
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)  
Stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays».

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11. H. GARDNER, *The Art of T. S. ELIOT*, London, Faber and Faber 1968, p. 94.



Mathiessen<sup>12</sup> states that these characters are meant to «stand for something larger than themselves», they will become «unconsciously general». The reader is not expected to ask if vulgarity is a consequence of misery, alienation or ignorance. The objective correlative is meant to function automatically in one direction only. Another myth of Eliot's developing from the objective correlative is that of the upper middle class hysterical lady engaged in tempting an unwilling lover during an endless tea party. As early as the *Portrait of a Lady* (1917):

«With "I have saved this afternoon for you";  
And four wax candles in the darkened room,  
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,  
An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb  
Prepared for all the things to be said or left unsaid».

and further on in the same poem:

«Now that lilacs are in bloom  
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room  
And twists one in her fingers while she talks.  
"Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know.  
What life is, you who hold it in your hands";  
(slowly twisting the lilac stalks)  
"You let it flow from you, you let it flow,  
And youth is cruel, and has no more remorse  
And smiles at situations which it cannot see"  
I smile, of course,  
And go on drinking tea».

Words like «wax candles», «darkened room», «rings of light», «bowl of lilacs» contribute to the stifling effect of «an atmosphere of Juliet's tomb» where the bitter sweet smell of lilacs mix with the odour of an ageing woman's perfumed flesh. This scene is highly elaborate and condensed and does not lack satiric taste. But contrary to Eliot's own preaching against subjectivity and to Mathiessen's reassurance<sup>13</sup> that Eliot «is not writting in his own person», H. Kenner<sup>14</sup> remarks that the lady really existed «as Eliot's college friend Conrad Aiken assures us, a Cambridge hostess, our dear deplorable friend, Miss X, the "précieuse ridicule" to end all curiosity, serving tea so exquisitely among her bric-à-brac». The same circumstance of tea-party appears also in *Hysteria* (1917). «... "If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden..." I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be

12. F. O. MATHIESSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

13. F. O. MATHIESSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

14. H. KENNER, *op. cit.*, p. 22.



H. PARASKEVA

collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end». In *Gerontion* (1920) Madame de Tornquist participates in a black magic ritual shifting candles in a dark room. In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917) female odour has developed into objective correlative of a stimulus that causes a tropismatic response:

«Is it perfume from a dress  
That makes me so digress?».

Later on in the poem having tea with a woman is an objective correlative of tediousness:

«Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?».

and

«And would it have been worth it, after all,  
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,  
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me...  
...Would it have been worth while  
If one, setting a pillow or throwing off a shawl,  
And turning toward the window, should say:  
“That is not it at all,  
That is not what I meant at all”».

Women, ladies, are presented as lusty, odorous animals shut up in suffocating rooms in contrast to girls (innocent virgins) smelling of flowers in open spring gardens.

If Sweeney stands for beastliness and vulgarity, women, especially those with animal names like Princess Volupine, stand for voluptuousness and sensuality with a tendency to hysteria, such as the professional lover of Sweeney's in *Sweeney Erect* (1917):

«...The epileptic on the bed  
Curves backward, clutching at her sides...».

and

«...Observing that hysteria  
Might easily be misunderstood;».

In *Lune de Miel* (1920) the newly wed couple smells of female dog:

«...La sueur aestivale et une forte odeur de chienne...».





Grishkin, the Russian Jewess, cannot help smelling in a drawing room in *Whispers of Immortality* (1920):

«The sleek Brazilian jaguar  
Does not in its arboreal gloom  
Distill so rank a feline smell  
As Grishkin in a drawing room».

Some famous critics of T. S. Eliot's, such as H. Gardner have attempted explanations for the ironic effect of the couplet in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917):

«The women in the room come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo».

The image functions as objective correlative of insignificant people who talk about a subject far beyond their intellectual and moral powers desecrating it with their profane and frivolous talks. H. Gardner<sup>15</sup> observes that «the absurdity of discussing his giant art in high-pitched feminine voices drifting through a drawing room adds extra irony to the underlying meaning». H. Gardner does not explain, however, what the «underlying meaning» is, while the «high-pitched feminine voices» are nowhere in the context. H. Kenner<sup>16</sup> appeals to what is called the poet's «auditory imagination», the effect of sound that penetrates far below conscious levels and bases it on the assonances of the closed and open «o» of «room», «women» and «come» and caesura «before the polysyllabic burst of “Michelangelo”». Serpieri<sup>17</sup> interprets the effect as the contrast between the contemporary reality of a bourgeois ritual (women's party in a drawing room) and the inexorable eternity of a great artist (Michelangelo) reduced to futility.

In Eliot's mythology «women in the room» are sure to come to no good, so much the worse if they dare talk of a great man. The line from the opening episode of the second movement of *The Waste Land*, (The Fire Sermon), which is a quotation from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, alludes to the pharaonic taste of the lady's boudoir:

«The barge she sat in like a burnished throne...».

The flames of the «sevenbranched candelabra» (probably she is a Jewess, too) combined to the «synthetic odours lurking menacingly» about the room contri-

15. H. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

16. H. KENNER, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

17. F. MORETTI: *Interpretazioni di Eliot*, Roma, Savelli, 1975, p. 200.



bute to the creation of an «atmosphere of Juliet's tomb». The lady is also hysterical:

«My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.  
Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.  
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
I never know what you are thinking. Think».

The tea-party has been transformed into a game of chess and, as with Grishkin, we have «...a closed car at four». Once the symbol is established, Eliot can pick and choose any of these elements or all of them together and use them as objective correlatives to evoke the «dead luxury of the upper class with its cloying richness» just as any of the elements of the «typist episode» may be used to evoke the «low».

When both myths are juxtaposed in a technique of deliberately apparent contrast but fundamental similarity, they function as objective correlatives of an inevitable conclusion; as Mathiessen<sup>18</sup> puts it: «At the same time, beneath all these contrasts in appearance, are being stressed the similar human situations in which all these different people are found: they are all playing the same stale game, burning alive with sterile desire. They stand in common need of regeneration». H. Gardner<sup>19</sup> remarks that «in Eliot's early poems as throughout Eliot's poetry, images of taste and smell are remarkably frequent». She attributes this to Eliot's «auditory imagination» through which these immediate senses manage to strike the subconscious long before they reach the conscious mind. J. Joyce dedicated a whole chapter (The Laestrygonians) of *Ulysses* to taste and smell. The quotation from *Ulysses*<sup>20</sup>: «Perfume of embraces all him assailed. With hungered flesh, obscurely, he mutely craved to adore» is representative of the general paroxysm to consume. Eliot works out taste and smell images neither in a Joycean «cold», detached way, nor in a Brechtian provocative style: in *Mahagonny*<sup>21</sup>, for instance somebody eats to death in a world where the majority are starving to death. Eliot, however, manipulates the images as objective correlatives to evoke emotions he has a priori chosen to serve his purpose: In *Burnt Norton* (1935):

«Garlic and sapphires in the mud  
Clot the bedded axle-tree».

Here smell and taste (garlic) together with sight (sapphires) stand for links that bind (clot) body and soul together (bedded axle-tree).

18. F. O. MATHIESSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

19. H. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

20. J. JOYCE, *Ulysses*, London, Penguin, 1968, p. 168.

21. B. BRECHT, *Scritti Teatrali*, Torino, Einaudi, 1977, p. 29.





### Tradition.

In *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), Eliot stresses the importance of tradition in poetry. Tradition involves «the historical sense» which involves a perception «not only of the pastness of the past; but of its presence». This sense of timeless and temporal «is that makes a poet traditional». In *The Waste Land* (1922) the objective correlative of tradition, the link of all characters and instances past and present is Tiresias. «What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem» Eliot informs us in *The Notes on the Waste Land*. Mathiessen<sup>22</sup> treats Tiresias as a unique phenomenon in Eliot's poetry. «Only his (Tiresias') infinitely sensitive power to "foresuffer all" can embrace the violent contrasts (and samenesses) that are now packed into the compass of a few square blocks: the dead luxury of the upper class, the vast uninspired bourgeois existence, the broken fragments of the talk of the poor overheard in a bar». Yet, F. R. Leavis<sup>23</sup> distinguishes an affinity with other «personae»: «In *The Waste Land* the development of impersonality that *Gerontion* shows in comparison with Prufrock reaches an extreme limit». A. Mizener<sup>24</sup> also observes that Tiresias is the «final term in a series which begins with Prufrock». Also H. Kenner<sup>25</sup> discovers that «Prufrock is in all these respects the generic Eliot character», *Gerontion* being one of his metamorphoses and Tiresias the «extreme case». Since *Prufrock and other observations* (1917) Eliot has been creating the archetype opposite to Sweeney. If Sweeney is only able to feel and act, Prufrock is only able to think. Prufrock is the objective correlative of one «fragment» of the dissociated sensibility while Sweeney is, of course, the other. Prufrock's interior monologue of indecision and procrastination aims at emphasizing the hero's inability to pay a visit to a lady, panic stricken at the idea of having «to pop the question» because it does not seem to him worth while. The poem ends with Prufrock drowning in an imaginary sea of self satisfaction but the aspiration remains: Prufrock could have «told us all» if he had dared.

The unwilling suitor in *Portrait of a Lady* (1917) resents the atmosphere of «Juliet's tomb» which is:

«Prepared for all the things to be said or left unsaid».

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22. H. O. MATHIESSEN, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, London, Faber and Faber, 1975, p. 38.

23. F. R. LEAVIS, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, London, Penguin, 1975, p. 72.

24. H. KENNER: *T. S. Eliot*, USA, Spectrum, 1962, p. 23. (A. MIZENER'S essay: To Meet Mr Eliot).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 31 (W. Lewis' essay: Early London Environment).





H. PARASKEVA

The old man by definition in *Gerontion* (1917) resents that:

«Signs are taken for wonders».

but is sure of a cryptic message somewhere:

«The word within a word unable to speak a word».

Tiresias is different only in that he is a legendary character. By quoting Ovid who quotes Hyginus<sup>26</sup> who quotes Homer, Eliot succeeds in giving Tiresias identity, prestige and glory but avoids any social identification which Tiresias certainly had. The blind Theban seer was a kind of priest. Therefore the «protagonist» of *The Waste Land* is a priest. Because he usually foretold plagues, deaths, crimes and other disasters if sacrifice did not intervene, he was respected. But he was also feared because he knew everybody's secrets and could at any moment go ahead and offend kings and queens. In *Antigone* Sophocles reveals what the ancients thought of their priests through furious Creon's speech<sup>27</sup>. Eliot's manipulation of the legend according to which «venus huic erat utraque nota» makes of Tiresias a hermaphrodite priest very close to Origen, the «enervate<sup>28</sup>» or the «epicene» bees<sup>29</sup>. Tiresias' ambiguous nature and legendary origin are meant to act as objective correlatives of a totalized and totalizing experience of all people in all times. But, as Curtius<sup>30</sup> observes, saying that all times are one means that time is not real. This affirmation is made overtly in *Four Quartets* (1935), a decidedly religious poem. In *The Waste Land* (1922) Tiresias is sometimes a listener, a silent outsider and sometimes asks questions, such as: «...What have we given?» or gives only cryptic answers:

«I think we are in rats' alley  
Where the dead men lost their bones».

Eliot is certainly not the first to work on the legendary character of Tiresias in a modern context; Apollinaire's play *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* was presented for the first time on the Parisian stage<sup>31</sup> on June 24th in 1917. Apollinaire surprised his public with his re-elaboration of the Greek myth of Tiresias who had «known» both male and female nature. In this play Tiresias gives birth to Manto, the clairvoyante with a pack of cards. Apollinaire's purpose was to burlesque and

26. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, on voice Tiresias, p. 1078.

27. SOPHOCLES, *Antigone*, Loeb Classical Library, p. 393, 1033-1047.

28-29. T. S. ELIOT: Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service (1920) *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, 1969, London, Faber and Faber 1969, p. 54.

30. F. MORETTI: *Interpretazioni di Eliot*, p. 112 (1975), Savelli.

31. H. BÉHAR: *Il Teatro Dada e Surrealista*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976, p. 27.



satirize the repopulation propaganda in his contemporary France. The use of revival and desecration of myth was also one of the main traits of the Dadaist movement; myth was called for to burlesque reality while at the same time reality was desecrating myth. In *The Waste Land* (1922) Mme Sosostriis, «the famous clair-voyante with a wicked pack of cards» is satirized and debased in comparison to the blind seer but not the other way round. The use of myth is an objective correlative in itself. As we have seen so far, Eliot has been creating a subjective mythology out of contemporary «evils» through subjective correlatives. Following the same path the other way round we may see elements from general mythology acting as objective correlatives of instances of «good». In his essay entitled *Ulysses, Order and Myth*<sup>32</sup> Eliot praises Joyce's use of myth in *Ulysses* (1922): «In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him». Here Eliot is defending his own manipulation of the vegetation myths in *The Waste Land* (1922) and gives his own reason; for Eliot the use of myth is a way of controlling and ordering, of «giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history<sup>33</sup>». While Joyce's use of myth conforms to the Dadaist movement rules<sup>34</sup> according to which myth and reality mock and neutralise each other, in Eliot myth debases history (reality) winning in every comparison. This particular use of myth suggests that history should be remodelled.

In defending Eliot's use of myth Mathiessen<sup>35</sup> argues that also Shakespeare used myth. But in his re-elaboration of the Iliad episode of Troilus and Cressida, Shakespeare exploits prostitution as one of war's evils, which had never been preempted before. Thus Shakespeare desecrates all wars, Trojan war included. Eliot, however, presents the war as a natural calamity. In his systematic approach of the-unit-melting-into-a-whole the war at Mylae seems to be all wars no matter when, where and why they occurred. Nobody is responsible for them, or rather all humanity is. History is confusing and cunning. Eliot's binary system of distinction between history (reality) and myth tends arbitrarily to polarize experience: history (reality) results vulgar, base, low, grim and pitiful while myth is gentle, glorious and gratifying.

### On unity and dissociation.

Despite Eliot's severe criticism of romantic poetry (*The Metaphysical Poets*,

32. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, op. cit.*, p. 177.

33. *Ibid*, p. 177.

34. S. DANESI: *Il Dadaismo*, p. 72 (1976), Milan. Fratelli Fabbri Editori, 1976, p.72.

35. F. O. MATHIESSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 45.





*Tradition and the Individual Talent*), his own essays and poems bear strong evidence of the influence of one of the manifestos of the European Romantic movement in the early 19th century, namely V. Hugo's Preface to *Cromwell*, *Préface de Cromwell*, 1827. One of the most significant tenets of Hugo's romantic principles is the one referring to the three ages of poetry and drama («la théorie des trois âges et le drame»). According to this theory, poetry has undergone three ages: that of the ode, i.e. the lyrical era of myth, or «temps primitif», that of the epic poetry, i.e. the epic era of history and heroes, and that of drama, the modern age of drama and novel depicting reality and real human beings. Drama, claims Hugo, is thorough poetry: «...le drame est la poesie complète...» and he praises Dante, Milton and, above all, Shakespeare for being great poets of «drame».

Eliot has extensively dealt with all the three in his literary criticism but while Hugo considers Milton the last great poet of «drame», Eliot considers him one of the two poets (the other is Dryden) in whose works the dissociation of sensibility took place for the first time: «In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden» (*The Metaphysical Poets*, T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*). Yet the concept of the dissociation of sensibility results surprisingly close to the meaning of Hugo's «drame»: «...le drame, unissant les qualités les plus opposées, peut être tout à la fois plein de profondeur et plein de relief, philosophique et pittoresque...». Drama unifies feeling and thought, philosophy, history and reality, according to Hugo; it also unifies comedy and tragedy, what is grotesque and what is sublime in human nature, the human beast (Sweeney?) and the human soul (Prufrock?). Also the meaning of the dissociation of sensibility is defined as the separation between «feeling» and «thought» in poetry: «...It is something that happened to the mind of England between of Donne or Lord Herbert ...and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose» (*The Metaphysical Poets*).

In the same «Préface» Hugo also criticizes the Aristotelian principles of the unity of time and place in tragedy. Drama, Hugo argues, can neither be imprisoned in the unity of the twenty-four hours nor in the neutral passages where action is narrated rather than enacted. Place is an indispensable witness: «...le lieu...devient un témoin terrible et inséparable...», while limiting the duration of the dramatic action within the twenty-four hours means limiting action in a corridor: «L'action, encadrée de force dans les vingt-quatre heures, est aussi ridicule qu'encadrée dans un vestibule...». This recalls Eliot's quotation automatically (*Gerontion*, 1920):



...«Think now  
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors  
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,  
Guides us by vanities».

It seems, therefore, as if Eliot, like a brilliant but malicious disciple, did exactly what his master had taught him to avoid, justifying this digression with his own master's arguments suitably accommodated to suit his purpose. For instance, stripping Tiresias of his social identity, is exactly what Hugo had preached against: «Croiser l'unité de temps à l'unité de lieu comme les barreaux d'une cage... c'est mutiler hommes et choses, c'est faire grimacer l'histoire...». Humiliating history has certainly been one of Eliot's main purposes in *The Waste Land*, (1922).

### History and Reality.

In *The Waste Land* there is no sequence of time or place; only the underlying myths hold the «heap of broken images» of reality together as if by force. The use of myth as objective correlative has been processed from irony and paradox to an allegory of a metaphysical and religious order. When Sweeney is projected against Agamemnon<sup>36</sup> or Theseus<sup>37</sup>, the effect is satiric as it is ironic when women (reality) are projected against Michelangelo (legend). When the squalid (and secular) love-makings between the typist and the «young man carbuncular» or between the hysterical lady and her unwilling lover are projected against the purifying (and sanctifying) martyrdom of Philomela's rude rape by Tereu, the effect is staleness and moral stagnation in bad need of some metaphysical solution.

From this point on a message that promises salvation or catharsis is inevitable. This conative function in prophetic form is gradually and structurally transformed into an openly dogmatic function. The reiteration of contemporary human degradation defines the waste land in terms of time and place: the waste land becomes a «topos» of squalor and misery scanned only by the inexorable succession of the four seasons. Thus Eliot bases the inevitability of dogma on the inevitable law of a natural phenomenon. The allegorical message of the need for spiritual purification varies through the eras and origins of the apocalyptic presences (St. Augustine, the Bible, the Upanishads, Buddha) but the effect remains essentially the same.

As Mathiessen<sup>38</sup> states, Eliot learnt from J. Weston's book *From Ritual to*

36. T. S. ELIOT, *Sweeney Among the Nightingales*, pp. 56-57; from *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (1969) London, Faber and Faber, 1969.

37. T. S. ELIOT, *Sweeney Erect*, *ibid*, p. 42.

38. F. O. MATHIESSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 45.





*Romance* the recurring pattern in various myths, the fundamental resemblance between «the vegetation myths of the rebirth of the year, the fertility myths of the rebirth of the potency of man, the Christian story of the Resurrection and the Grail legend of purification. The common source of all these myths lay in the fundamental myth of nature — that of the death and rebirth of the year and their varying symbolism as an effort to explain the origin of life». Once it has been established through these myths that the origin of life is metaphysical, it becomes obvious that human degradation is due to history. Eliot abhors history; it is «cunning», «patternless», «confusing», misleading. History exists in time but time does not exist, Eliot claims. This is essentially his argument. In *Ash Wednesday* (1930):

«Because I know that time is always time  
And place is always and only place  
And what is actual only for one time  
And only for one place...».

and in *The Waste Land* (1922):

«Datta: What have we given?  
My friend, blood shaking my heart  
The awful daring of a moment's surrender...».

Time exists only as one eternal, apocalyptic moment. Therefore, if all times are one, then all efforts of the human kind to improve and pointless without metaphysical support, Eliot concludes. Religion is the only refuge from sordid reality. In fact, the final apocalyptic commands in *The Waste Land* (1922) «Give, sympathise, control» reveal a conative impulse for control and order.

Most critics of Eliot have faced the problem whether *The Waste Land* (1922) does not only express chaos and squalor in the modern world but also an effort to control this crisis. In his attempt to give a philosophical interpretation of Eliot's work as a whole, Fei-Pai Lu<sup>41</sup> explains that T. S. Eliot considers «coherence» a quality that distinguishes major from minor poetry: «By "coherence" Eliot means such characteristics as unity in variety, identity in difference and continuity in change. And these features can be manifest in an "œuvre" of long poems, or in one single poem having sufficient variety in unity or in a collection of short poems which "taken individually" may appear rather slight». Since it goes without saying that Eliot considers himself a major poet and given the «advocating»

39. F. R. LEAVIS: *New Bearings in English Literature*, London, Penguin, 1976, p. 80.

40. H. GARDNER; *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

41. FEI-PAI LU, *T. S. Eliot. The Dialectical Structure of his Theory of Poetry*, U.S.A., The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 93.





T. S. ELIOT: A CRITIC OF HIS OWN OR: POETRY AND TAUTOLOGY

nature of a poet-critic of his own writings, this definition of «coherence» applies perfectly to his own poetic work, from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917) to the *Four Quartets* (1935-1942). This is a safe clue that Eliot's poems constitute «an organic whole», therefore should be judged as such. Once the paradox reality-myth is established in early poetry, in *The Waste Land* (1922) it reaches its climax as reality (history) results absurd, finished, waste, dead. But here comes allegory carefully worked out by the piling up of parallel myths: just as god resurrects—because nature must resurrect— so humanity, history, reality, the waste land, may resurrect if it becomes patterned, orderly, cyclical, like the seasons.

«Shantih, shantih, shantih<sup>42</sup>».

Helene PARASKEVA  
(Manchester)

T. S. ELIOT: ΚΡΙΤΙΚΗ ΠΡΟΣ ΕΑΥΤΟΝ

Περίληψη

Ὁ κεντρικὸς πυρήνας τοῦ ἄρθρου εἶναι μία ἀνεξάρτητη κριτικὴ μελέτη στὸ συνολικὸ ποιητικὸ ἔργο τοῦ T. S. Eliot, μὲ ἀφετηρία τὰ ἴδια του κριτικὰ δοκίμια καὶ τοὺς παραδοσιακοὺς κριτικούς του (H. Gardner, F. O. Matthiessen καὶ F. R. Leavis). Ἐνῶ ὅμως ἡ πρώτη ὕλη καὶ τὰ ἐργαλεῖα τῆς μελέτης εἶναι παραδοσιακὰ καὶ παραδεγμένα, ὁ βασικὸς σκοπὸς τῆς εἶναι νὰ δείξει τὸν ποιητὴ ἐνάντια ἀπὸ τὴν εἰκόνα ποὺ ὁ ἴδιος ἐπιθυμεῖ, προβάλλει καὶ ἐπιβάλλει. Αὐτὴ ἡ «ἀνυπακοή» στὸν T. S. Eliot ἐπιχειρεῖται μὲ τὴν ἀνάλυση τῶν βασικῶν θεμάτων τῆς συνολικῆς ποιητικῆς του παραγωγῆς, θέματα ὅπως, ἡ ἀντικειμενικὴ συστοιχία, ἡ ἔννοια τοῦ χρόνου καὶ τῆς ἱστορικῆς αἰσθησης καὶ ἡ φύση τοῦ συνδετικοῦ κρίκου ὁριακῶν καταστάσεων, κατ' ἐξοχὴν φιλοσοφικὰ ἐρεῖσματα ποὺ ὁ ποιητὴς υἱοθέτησε γιὰ χάρη τῆς λογοτεχνίας.

Ἑλένη ΠΑΡΑΣΚΕΥΑ  
(Manchester)

42. «Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. "The peace which passeth understanding" is our equivalent this word». T. S. Eliot: Notes on the Waste Land, (1922) from *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, London, Faber and Faber, 1969.