1948

The Idea of Tradition in the Writings of T. S. Eliot

Francis Joseph Smith
Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation
THE IDEA OF TRADITION
IN THE WRITINGS OF
T. S. ELIOT

BY
FRANCIS J. SMITH, S. J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY.

AUGUST
1948
VITA AUCTORIS

Francis Joseph Smith, S. J., was born in Lorain, Ohio, May 22, 1920. He received his elementary and high school education at St. Mary Academy, Lorain, Ohio, graduating in June, 1938. In the following September he enrolled at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, where he spent one year.

In September, 1939, he entered the Society of Jesus at Milford Novitiate, Milford, Ohio. He received the Bachelor of Literature Degree from Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1942.

In August, 1943, he transferred to West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana, where he was enrolled as a graduate student in the department of English of Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER                                                  PAGE

I. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND METHOD OF THE THESIS... 1
   General critical comment---Eliot's importance in
   modern literature---Statement of the thesis---
   Structure of the thesis.

II. THE GENERAL NOTION OF "TRADITION." ..................... 4
   Objective aspect of tradition: a principle of
   aesthetic criticism---Influence of the past on
   the present---Not a sentimental attachment to
   everything in the past---Subjective aspect of
   tradition---The historical sense---The theory of
   the depersonalization of the poet---Traditional
   techniques---Summary.

III. THE PARTICULAR NATURE OF ELIOT'S TRADITION.......... 16
    A tradition of Christian values---Types of re-
    ligious poets---Correct attitude of sincere, re-
    ligious poet---James Joyce---Baudelaire---Eliot's
    own Christian attitude in his verse---Struggle
    against Liberalism---Influence of "metaphysicals"
    ---Influence of Dante and French Imagists---Influence
    of Baudelaire---Summary.

IV. TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN "SWEENEY AMONG THE NIGHT-
    INGALES"................................................... 30
    General traditional material---The mythic method
    employed---Explication of poem---Ironic contrast
    of present with past---Satire of modern empti-
    ness.

V. TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN THE WASTE LAND............. 37
    Critical comment---Basic traditional plan---The
    use of the mythic method---Explication of "Burial
    of the Dead"---Comparison with other poems---
    Implied solution to the modern waste land.

VI. TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN "EAST COKER"................. 50
    Positive answer to modern lack of traditional
    ideas---Best traditional poem---Explication of
    poem.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

At no period in his life has T. S. Eliot seemed to be standing still. His poetry has developed and matured so that today he ranks as one of the most outstanding serious poets we can turn to. Also, the opinion of critics and his general audience has shifted and changed. No poet in the past quarter-century "has been so often reviled, denounced, defamed, buried so often, revived so often, been so enthusiastically defended, and so passionately denied (by his adverse critics) the merits of human contact and of sincerity."¹ Back in the war period and in the twenties Eliot's minor poetry (and also The Waste Land, for that matter) was considered, and partially was, a sort of arch, sophisticated vers de société. Eliot was the clever young man who shocked the salon reviewers with his risque cameos of bourgeois sin.

However, there was no violent metamorphosis in Eliot's poetry, but rather a gradual development. Along with the continuity between his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published in 1917, and After Strange Gods, which appeared in

1934, there is a similar continuity found in the "Sweeney" poems, through The Waste Land, "Hollow Men," Ash Wednesday, and reaching its perfection in Four Quartets. Those earlier, shallow devotees of Eliot who turned away in disappointment when he wrote Ash Wednesday had quite naively applauded the cleverness, the sophistication, and the obscurity; they completely missed the undercurrent of serious satire. What they didn't surmise was that the world Eliot painted was the one they lived in, one of stuffed scarecrows, that the inevitable development of such an attitude was towards an optimism of faith.

The name of Eliot, with all the opposition offered him, and with all his shortcomings, is a landmark in English letters. His antipathies for the Romantics as a school, for much of Tennyson and all of Swinburne, for the careless attempts of Whitman and Sandburg, and his revivifying Donne and the Elizabethans revolutionized poetry and set scores of poets imitating him and following his precepts.

Fundamental in Eliot's critical attitude and his theory of poetry is the emphasis on traditional values. "No one writing today," says Edwin Muir, "has a more strong sense of tradition... Mr. Eliot feels answerable to tradition for every judgement he makes." What is especially of interest to us is

that tradition for Eliot does not mean a preserving merely of literary techniques, but, what is much more important, of solid Christian attitudes, which is the fruit of our tradition.

Richard Aldington has expressed what Eliot meant to him, saying:

I believe personally that Eliot's greatness...was his insistence that writers could not afford to throw over the European tradition. Just after the war in the confusion and reaction against everything prewar and war there was an almost unanimous belief among artists and writers of the vanguard that all art of the past was so much dead stuff to be scrapped...I was delighted...when I came across a sensitive and well-written article on Marivaux in one of the small, arty periodicals which sprang up in 1919. Evidently here was someone who could write and who did not believe that illiteracy was a symbol of originality.3

In this thesis the aim is, first, to elucidate Eliot's critical theory of "tradition," which is applicable to any time, as it consists only in setting the general norm for a poet who would speak the mind of his age; then, to discuss what in particular is Eliot's own tradition, the tradition he gospels, namely, the Christian tradition of our Western culture. Finally, we will point out by means of explication traditional elements in three of Eliot's poems which represent his early verse, his first great success, and his later poetry; this scheme includes "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," The Waste Land, and "East Coker."

CHAPTER II

THE GENERAL NOTION OF "TRADITION"

To understand the full significance of "tradition" in T. S. Eliot's works, it is necessary at the outset to determine clearly when he refers to it as a virtue belonging to the poet, and when he refers to it as the sum of those elements which constitutes the "tradition" of a given generation or country; or to distinguish between what will be indicated in this chapter as the subjective and objective aspects of tradition. An explanation of the former has to do with the process of creation; that of the latter with the orthodox, healthy complexity of ideas and feelings, that dominant stream of human progress, continuous but ever developing, in which a poet must be, according to Eliot, to produce a work of lasting merit.

First, let us examine Eliot's views on objective tradition. Secondly, we will see how that objective tradition is related to the poet, and the poet's contact with that tradition, which, being a modification of the poet himself, is subjective tradition. Thirdly, we will treat the two chief techniques Eliot uses to achieve this traditional value in his own poetry, namely, the "mythic method" and "the auditory imagination."
Of tradition, then, in the objective sense, Eliot says:

What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of 'the same people living in the same place.' It involves a good deal which can be called taboo...1

Like literary "tone" or "atmosphere," tradition, objectively considered, is mostly intangible and eludes a precise definition. It consists mainly in a "way of feeling" shared by men of the same generation; and "it must largely be, or...many of the elements in it must be, unconscious."2 Eliot further remarks that "tradition may be conceived as a by-product of right living, not to be aimed at directly. It is of the blood so to speak, rather than of the brain; it is the means by which the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present. In the co-operation of both is the reconciliation of thought and feeling."3 This vitality is such that the traditional writer is indebted not only to his recent predecessors but to all the masters of his language and of other kindred languages from the time of Homer on. "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists is his only appreciation. You cannot value him alone...you

1 T. S. Eliot, After Strange Gods, Harcourt, New York, 1933, 22
2 Ibid., 31.
3 Ibid., 32.
must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.⁴

Lest anyone suppose that this principle is merely historical, Eliot immediately states in the essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that this is a "principle of aesthetic criticism." Edmund Wilson cites Eliot's criticism as farthest removed from the historical criticism of literature and admirably sums up Eliot's position:

Eliot sees, or tries to see, the whole of literature, as far as he is acquainted with it, spread out before him under the aspect of eternity. He then compares the work of different periods and countries, and tries to draw from it general conclusions about what literature ought to be. He understands, of course, that our point of view in connection with literature changes, and he has what seems to me a very sound conception of the whole body of writing of the past as something to which new works are continually added, and which is not merely increased in bulk thereby but modified as a whole—so that Sophocles is no longer precisely what he was for Aristotle, or Shakespeare what he was for Ben Jonson or for Dryden or for Dr. Johnson, on account of all the later literature that has intervened between them and us.⁵

Any given civilization strives to maintain its tradition, and rightly so, but, as Eliot warns, it is a mistake

---

"to associate tradition with the immovable; to think of it as something hostile to all change; to aim to return to some previous condition which we imagine as having been capable of preservation in perpetuity, instead of aiming to stimulate the life which produced that condition in its time." The essentials, the "few fundamental things," that a people will naturally adopt from deep-rooted desires, remain constant in a tradition; the accidentals, the modification of these constants necessarily change from time to time. The periodic flux of taste, for instance, on things like women's hats has little to do with the salutary practice of sending children to school or of going to church on Sunday. That this is Eliot's conviction is evident from the words:

...by adding one new work of art to those which constitute tradition we do something which is enough to change, however slightly, its character; and that thus tradition is a thing which is forever being worked out anew and re-created by the free activity of the artist.

Tradition means more, to say the same in other words, than that "the show must go on,"--for not other reason, perhaps, but that it is "traditional." No sentimentalist in this matter, Eliot says, "If the only form of tradition...consisted in fol-

7 Muir, 133.
the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should be discouraged."8

If, however, tradition means that healthy stream of orthodox ideas and manners which are consonant with the best aspirations of human nature, then tradition for tradition's sake is hardly irrational. Loosely used, the term "tradition" is broad enough to include any tradition; we speak of the romantic tradition when really it is a break with tradition; Eliot himself says that "in even the very best of living tradition there is always a mixture of good and bad, and much that deserves criticism."9 And again he says, "I believe that a right tradition for us must be also a Christian tradition."10

But the bulk of his writings points clearly to the fact that he considers tradition ("the by-product of right living") to be the good strain in the midst of less favorable ones. This is especially evident from the way that he makes orthodoxy analogous to tradition.11 Again, the restriction of the term to include only the right tradition is apparent from his choice of traditional writers, which will be treated in the next chapter.

8 Eliot, Collected Essays, 4.
9 Eliot, After Strange Gods, 19.
10 Ibid., 22.
11 Ibid.
Now we come to the subjective aspect of tradition, that is, the habitual awareness of objective tradition on the part of the poet. This habit of seeing the dominant stream of traditional values of the past and its influence on the present is obtained only "by great labor" and, according to Eliot

...involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.12

Eric Mesterton paraphrases this idea in this manner:

According to the idea which Eliot himself has set forth a poet becomes traditional, in the best sense of the word, through the ability to separate the continually living, essential ingredients in tradition and to experience them as an organic unity.13

---

12 Eliot, Collected Essays, 4.
The historical sense, as is evident from Eliot's description of it, must be crowned by an acute consciousness of the contemporary climate of ideas and feelings. For the present, an interpretation of which we ultimately expect from the poet, is the latest point of history continuous with and formed by the past. This concept of the living past, says Eric Mesterton, "is met with in other forms than Bergson's, for instance, in the thought of certain psycho-analysts who... discover in the unconscious of the individual a collection of the essential 'moments' in the psychological history of the race." Likewise, Eliot emphasises the need of a poet to express the living past. To this point he says:

...the great poet is, among other things, one who not merely restores a tradition which has been in abeyance, but one who in his poetry re-twines as many straying strands of tradition as possible. Nor can you isolate poetry from everything else in the history of a people; and it is rather strong to suggest that the English mind has been deranged ever since the time of Shakespeare, and that only recently have a few fitful rays of reason penetrated its darkness. If the malady is as chronic as that, it is pretty well beyond cure.

The implications in tradition brought Eliot (and bring us) to his theory of the "depersonalization of the poet." In

14 Mesterton, 20.
15 Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1933, 84-5.
explaining the individual talent Eliot claims that the particular work of art, though unique and personal in itself, must nevertheless express universal human values—the traditional grist, as it were. "He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same." The role of the individual is analogous to the role of a catalyst in a chemical action. Eliot explains this analogy:

When the two gases (oxygen and sulphur dioxide) are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

Though the analogy may limp, as most analogies do, it clearly attacks the romantic heresy that "all poetry, in which I wish to include all lyrical impulses whatever, is the product of the personality, and therefore inhibited in a character." 

16 Eliot, Collected Essays, 6.
17 Ibid., 7,8.
18 Eliot, After Strange Gods, 71 (The quotation is by Herbert Read).
In the light of this traditional element, namely, that of depersonalization, the hyper-sensitive emotionalizers like Shelley (to a degree) and Swinburne enter the scene as misfits, as reactionaries, with little to offer that is significant to the dominant stream of the English tradition. Unless a poet has the objective, impersonal contact with traditional feelings, whatever life his work has will be in the history of himself, singular, exotic perhaps, but not in the poem. Because such "personal" art, without an intellectual guidance towards the center of true human values, cannot be universal in its appeal, Eliot would have the poet "surrender himself wholly to the work to be done." Then he adds:

And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.19

The commonest device which Eliot recommends and uses himself to tie up the past with the present so as to give a three-dimensional emotional value to poetry is the "mythic method." Of this device Eric Mesterton, in his prefatory essay to The Waste Land, says:

The literary principle motivating the fusion of a complex of elements from past tradition in a poem dealing with the present has been characterized by Eliot himself, in a critique of James

19 Eliot, Collected Essays, 11.
Joyce's method, as the mythic method: the using of a running parallel between the past and the present. 20

This technique, used by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, in which a present day protagonist, a Mr. Bloom, is taken through a series of struggles comparable to those of Ulysses, has been adopted by Eliot and used in his "Sweeney" poems, in *The Waste Land*, in the *Four Quartets*, and especially in "East Coker." We will give a more detailed treatment of this traditional technique in these poems in following chapters. What we wish to convey now is a general notion about the "mythic method" and to show that it springs from Eliot's fundamental theory of tradition.

The "mythic method" is something of a literary stereoscope. It heightens the tone of a given situation or scene in a work by alluding to a similar situation or scene of the past, either historical or literary. Thus by artistically combining the two, the present and the past, a three-dimensional effect is produced. The "mythic method" can be used by simple allusion to the past, as Eliot employs it repeatedly, or as the integrating plan of the whole, as in *The Waste Land*. Nearly always it is used to express an ironic contrast. However used, it has, as Eric Mesterton states,

20 Mesterton, 7.
...when looked at as a hypothesis in the history of ideas, an all-embracing conception of tradition which can be joined with a method of observation not unusual in modern ethnology, psychology, and culture-philosophy, and which is most cogently expressed in the words, 'the living past': the idea that every moment in the historical progression preserves all the past.21

The second means which Eliot uses in his own poetry to achieve traditional value is the "auditory imagination." The argument for this device is founded on the connotative value of words. For Eliot a word must first be seen to conjure up all the wealth of connotation possible; then, heard, so that the over-tones of the word, given to it by all its used in the past, might be felt acutely. Of the "auditory imagination" Eliot says;

The auditory imagination is the feeling for syllable and rhythm penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every work; sinking 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.22

21 Ibid., 20.
Eliot's theory of tradition, briefly, is this. There is an objective tradition, that dominant stream of ideas, customs, etc., which determine the climate of any given culture. It is a complexity of all significant influences of the past. Subjectively considered, tradition is the habitual awareness on the part of a poet of the objective tradition. To be, therefore, a traditional poet, one must sense the continuity and furtherance of objective tradition by traditional writers of the past. Such men in our culture, according to Eliot, are men like Dante, Dryden, Shakespeare, Villon, Baudelaire, James Joyce. Reactionaries, however talented, who ignore or break away from the traditional ideas and methods, especially of thought, that are part and parcel of the development of Christian culture, the Graeco-Roman culture taken up by the fathers of the Church and furthered by truly Christian writers, are, in Eliot's opinion, incapable of truly great literature.

Furthermore, that a man be traditional demands that he sacrifice his own personal views and emotions so as to express objectively the views and emotions, typical of and current with our tradition. He must, in a word, be depersonalized; he must act only as a catalyst in the creation of literature. Once this attitude of depersonalization is achieved, the poet will look for methods which will express tradition in the best way. For Eliot the "mythic method" and the use of the "auditory imagination" best fulfill this job.
CHAPTER III

THE PARTICULAR NATURE OF ELIOT'S TRADITION

Were Eliot not a poet of his own age, or had he been born in a different age, he probably would never have written "Tradition and the Individual Talent," nor After Strange Gods, in which essays his theory of tradition is principally found. For his critical theory of tradition was the positive expression of a reaction against modern Secularism, which indeed has severed the modern age from the past. The tradition which Eliot strives to hold on to, and which he asserts the modern to have lost, does not spring, as I have said, from any sentimental attachment to the past, but from a sane realization that to shelve what we know as Western culture is sheer suicide for our civilization.

That those "great ideas," those bulwarks of nations, like belief in God, in an immortal soul, in Sin and Hell, have lost ground is the ever more serious complaint of all thinking men of our day. Writers like Jaques Maritain, Christopher Dawson, C. S. Lewis, Walter Lippman, and others, come back time and time again to this same theme. With them Eliot joins hands in accepting Christianity as the only firm ground to stand on; for our tradition is essentially Christian and the chief evil of the modern world is that it is anti-Christian, or
what is worse, a-Christian.¹

Eliot, primarily interested in literature, indicates how this same attitude of the modern world infects its poets and writers. Eliot praised the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets for their "firm grasp of human experience," and immediately adds; "This wisdom, cynical perhaps but untired (in Shakespeare, a terrifying clairvoyance), leads toward, and is only completed by, the religious comprehension."² Religious considerations, then, enter effectively into Eliot's integral scheme of tradition. A literature (not necessarily every writer) if it is to mirror human nature accurately, of necessity must at least suggest the deeper human emotions associated with the problem of Evil. And it is of such deeply human and tragic things, like sin, frustration, mental anguish, repentance, and horror, that Eliot connects the term "religious" when referring to great poetry.

According to Eliot, there are three types of religious poets. The division is between the minor religious poet, whose scope is limited, the apologist, who uses his medium for defending his creed, and the truly great religious poet, whose sole concern, as an artist, is to reproduce precisely experience that is human.

The first type of religious literature is better called "devotional." In answering why most religious verse is so bad, Eliot says:

Largely, I think, because of a pious insincerity. The capacity for writing poetry is rare; and it is to be expected that the existence of both capacities in the same individual should be rarer still. People who write devotional verse are usually writing as they want to feel, rather than as they do feel.3

In his essay, "Religion and Literature," Eliot elaborates on this same theme:

For the great majority of people who love poetry, 'religious poetry' is a variety of minor poetry: the religious poet is not a poet who is treating the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit, but a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject matter: who is leaving out what men consider their major passions and thereby confessing his ignorance of them. I think that this is the real attitude toward such poets as Vaughan, or Southwell, or Crashaw, or George Herbert, or Gerard Hopkins.4

We understand better what Eliot means when, in speaking of Vaughan, Southwell, Herbert, and Hopkins, he says:

I feel sure that the first three, at least, are poets of this limited awareness. They are not great religious poets in the sense in which Dante,

---

3 Eliot, After Strange Gods, 30-1.
Corneille, or Racine, even in those of their plays which do not touch upon Christian themes, are great Christian religious poets. Or even in the sense in which Villon or Baudelaire, with all their imperfections and delinquencies, are Christian poets.  

As examples of apologetic religious literature, Eliot cites "such delightful fiction as Mr. Chesterton's Man Who Was Thursday or his Father Brown." And this is the reason why such writing is below the norm of great religious literature:

...such writings do not enter into any serious consideration of the relation of Religion and Literature; because they are conscious operations in a world in which it is assumed that Religion and Literature are not related.  

When, finally, Eliot says that what he wants "is a literature which should be unconsciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly Christian," he is thinking of men like Dante, who wrote as a Christian in an age when there was no need of a deliberate and defiant defense of Christianity, or like Baudelaire, who with an uncanny sincerity recounted his passionate struggle with sin.

The traditional writer, therefore, is a conscious artist, intent only upon the perfection of his art, upon the accurate representation of life in so far as life is related

---

5 Ibid., 97.
6 Ibid., 98.
to the unquenchable appetite for happiness, and the subsequent tragedy of failure therein.

If such is Eliot's idea of traditional literature, someone might object that some of the finest examples of it can be found in the sordid, sex-infested, sin-ridden literature of today. The point that this objection fails to grasp is that subject matter along does not determine the worth of the literature, but the Christian attitude toward that subject matter. Following the course of just such an objection Eliot answers with an observation on Swinburne:

Swinburne knew nothing about Evil, or Vice, or Sin—if he had known anything he would not have had so much fun out of it. For Swinburne's disciples, the men of the 'nineties,' Evil was very good fun. Experience as a sequence of outward events is nothing in itself; it is possible to pass through the most terrible experiences protected by histrionic vanity.7

It is attitude, likewise, Christian understanding of life—the traditional milieu—that sets James Joyce (to take one modern whose preoccupation with sin and sex might lead us to brand him as un-traditional) apart from nearly all our other modern novelists. Eliot contrasts The Dead by James Joyce with The Shadow in the Rose Garden by D. H. Lawrence. What strikes Eliot in Lawrence is the total "absence of any

7 Ibid., 66.
moral or social sense." Then he goes on to say:

The characters themselves, who are supposed to be recognisable human beings, betray no respect for, or even awareness of, moral obligations and seem to be unfurnished with even the most commonplace kind of conscience.8

Lawrence's characters, like so many living today, are to Eliot "hollow men," living and not living. They are the host of souls who walk over London Bridge in the brown fog of a winter morning, and whom Eliot in The Waste Land views as the damned souls of Dante's Inferno. In Joyce, on the contrary, there is the interior struggle of man with passion, of reluctance to be less a man, the desire to be alive to spiritual realities. Lawrence is the heretic, he who is outside of the tradition; Joyce is the "most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time."9

Similarly of Baudelaire, Eliot writes that Evil, Vice, and Sin were real.

The important fact about Baudelaire is that he was essentially a Christian, born out of his due time, and a classicist, born out of his due time. In his verse technique, he is nearer to Racine than to Mr. Symons; in his sensibility, he is near to Dante and not without sympathy with Tertullian. But Baudelaire was not an aesthetic or a political Christian; his tendency to 'ritual', which Mr. Symons, with his highly acute but blind sensibility,

8 Eliot, After Strange Gods, 39,40.
9 Ibid., 41.
has observed, springs from no attachment to the outward forms of Christianity, but from the instincts of a soul that was naturally Christian. And being the kind of Christian that he was, born when he was, he had to discover Christianity for himself. In this pursuit he was alone in the solitude which is only known to saints. To him the notion of Original Sin came spontaneously, and the need for prayer. 10

Any serious reader of Eliot's own poetry, especially of his later poetry, cannot miss there the influence of these traditional writers and traditional ideas. In Eliot's earlier verse, such as "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Gerontion," and "Hollow Men," he is content simply to paint a sordid picture of modern apathy for traditional values; he satirizes, leaving the reader to draw positive conclusions. That satire is emphasised and given a more pointed thrust in The Waste Land. But it is in Ash Wednesday and in Four Quartets that Eliot positively offers a solution to the modern problem. There is in these poems a Dantean presentation of the Christian rise from sensuality and vice to repentance, humility, and union with God.

In all of his later poetry, Eliot insists on what he calls "the moment in and out of time," moments of especial religious intuition or realization of spiritual values; he is

10 Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern, 72.
concerned with the sight of the "central vision of religious being," which, if it is translated into different terms, is the "epiphany," the showing forth, of a timeless moment, of which Joyce was so distinctly aware from the time he wrote his *Stephen Hero* (1904-1906) to the end of his life. It was this showing forth which was the concern of the seventeenth century "metaphysical poets as well as the devotional poets who followed them." Whatever else their verse expressed, "the centers of religious being and of the timeless moment were sought and held within a single vision." These epiphanies for Eliot take the form of a "sudden illumination," when "here and now cease to matter," when we apprehend "The point of intersection of the timeless/With time," which is the occupation of the saint.

Norman Nicholson sums up Eliot's Christian attitude well when he says:

> Eliot holds the Christian conception of Man as a being who has fallen from the state of joy and goodness which God intended for him, but who nevertheless can be redeemed by grace. In *The Waste Land* we are presented with a picture of human society rotten at heart and crumbling, where pleasure is corrupt and the spirit is dead. The *Hollow Men* shows men hopeless and lifeless, like stuffed guys on bonfire night, ready for the burning. All this is in revolt against the nine-
teenth century general conception of the inevitable perfectibility of Man and against the optimism which accompanied it. [The same revolt is well expressed in "East Coker."] And because Eliot grew up among such optimism his reflection of it may have rather too disillusioned a tone, but it is certainly not like the gloom of other modern writers whose sight has little hope for Man. For Eliot does not forget the other side of the question. Man can be redeemed by grace, indeed his redemption has been accomplished already if only he has the sense and the humility to take advantage of it.12

It is noteworthy that Eliot praised Baudelaire because Baudelaire had attained "the greatest, the most difficult of the Christian virtues, the virtue of humility."13 And in "East Coker" Eliot repeats

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire Is the wisdom of humility; humility is endless.

The consciousness of these traditional themes, of human dignity, of struggle with sin, the concept of sin itself, of grace and repentance, was greatly impaired by the rise of modernism, mainly because the integrating framework of Catholic theology was thrown out. Perhaps the most damaging result of the cleavage with the Catholic tradition was individualism. Along with Luther and Rousseau came the exultation of the "personality" that has "no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guid that ever offered itself

13 Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern, 73.
to wandering humanity."\textsuperscript{14} Gradually and inevitably, this cult of the individual, set apart from the wholesome strain of tradition and self-idolized as a seer, came to be a strong influence in letters, particularly in the art of poetry, where the element of personal feelings finds a ready outlet. Eliot, perceiving the kindred, anti-traditional heresies that developed once the cleavage was made, prescribes that the poet of today must be acutely aware of the

\begin{quote}
...struggle of our time to concentrate, not to dissipate; to renew our association with traditional wisdom; to re-establish a vital connection between the individual and the race; the struggle, in a word, against Liberalism.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

With the downfall of healthy thought, effected by the revolutionary leaders in philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, came a corresponding cloudy expression. And so we see Eliot re-finding the Elizabethans, who yet retained a respect for meaning in words, and condemning the prostitution of the English language in much of the Romantic works and especially in the nonsense of Swinburne and his school.

This respect for language properly used led Eliot to the concentrated, meaning-filled, organic method of Donne, Crashaw, and particularly, Marvell. Though disagreeing with Arnold’s loose identification of poetry with religion, Eliot’s

\textsuperscript{14} Eliot, After Strange Gods, 64.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 53.
main complaint was with the copious expansiveness of Arnold's age. Eliot preferred the chaste economy of words found in Dryden and the maturity of emotional stress in the seventeenth century poets. 16

Similarly, Eliot discovered in Dante a language that mirrored nicely the thought-emotional value of deep experience. The true poet tends not to tell a message, nor to set forth a philosophy or doctrine, but to reproduce in the reader through the medium of words the exact or near-exact emotional experience he himself felt. Eliot, therefore, was more concerned with the "objective correlative" of experience which he found to be preeminently done in Dante by means of "clear, visual images" of Dante, for emotion can be just as precise as thought. Like Dante and Donne, Eliot looks for and practices himself a medium that

...would correspond to the felt intricacy of his existence, that would suggest by sudden contrasts, by harsh dissonances as well as by harmonies, the actual sensation of life as he had himself experienced it. 17

Again, there is a link between Dante and the French Imagists for Eliot in this that from both Eliot adopted the method of visual suggestion rather than a logical or direct structure. Eliot will merely state things with no grammatical

16 Mathiessen, 13.
17 Ibid., 10. (This quotation was said of Donne).
connection to represent a sudden psychological sequence. The "lilac and brown hair" image, standing for sensuous attraction or temptation of the flesh in *Ash Wednesday* is an example of this technique.

Baudelaire finds himself in Eliot's hall of fame mainly because of his sincerity, his attitude of detachment, his "instinctive standing-back from the details of experience so as to see the pattern into which they fall." Baudelaire was no random handler of words, no glib artist with a sweet ear for the nice sounding phrase. "For Baudelaire every word counts." On these lines of Baudelaire

> Et comme le soleil dans son enfer polaire,  
> Mon cœur ne sera plus qu'un bloc rouge et glace

Joseph Bennett remarks:

We observe that Baudelaire does not baldly state his feeling by saying 'My heart is cold,' as Shelley, Hugo, Musset, and Lamartine would have. Baudelaire has set himself the problem of actualization: he seeks in the physical realm that correspondent of his emotional state which will bring his state concretely before the reader. To call the heart 'cold' would be to present the state abstractly, merely assigning it a conventional name or sign. But the red and frozen block, the polar sun setting in a red blaze, combined with the poignancy of the cyclical seasonal change, causes the reader to

---

18 Nicholson, 44.  
enter into the labor of the poem. As Baudelaire put it: 'In the written word, there is always a gap completed by the imagination of the hearer.'

These words might perfectly as well have been said of many a line of Eliot. They recall his insistency on "dramatics" in a poem, his "objective correlative," and his "auditory imagination." Like the poetry of Baudelaire, Eliot's...

...religious poems have assumed a loose and rambling, contemplative structure, to account for and frame the inter-realitions of good and evil, or order and disorder; and the solutions and perspectives of salvation and damnation.

When we speak, therefore, of the tradition Eliot himself embraces, we are speaking of the historical tradition of Christian ideas and ideals, a true humanism that looks back to its foundation in the best of Greece and Rome and that was crowned by the philosophy of the middle ages. It is a tradition that accepts man, subject to sin and godlessness, as a fallen creature of God, but redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. A writer of such a tradition must grasp the situation of fallen man in its entirety, reach down to the depths of his nature and depict the struggle with sin, the boredom and horror of sinfulness, and point to the glory of conquest over sin. To do this, as Dante or Shakespeare or

21 Ibid., 162.
Baudelaire or Joyce did it is to be a religious poet. This tradition, according to Eliot, received a severe set-back in the modern age with the appearance of individualism and liberalism. To recover that tradition, "to renew our association with traditional wisdom," is the job for the writer of today.

To achieve this objective, Eliot drew from the closely thought out works of the "metaphysicals." He found in Donne and Crashaw and Marvell an expression that mirrored the heart of tradition. The techniques, as well as the subject matter, of Dante, of the French Imagists, and the undeniable sincerity in the choice of words and images in Baudelaire influenced Eliot in the integral construction of tradition.

Thus far in this thesis we have analyzed Eliot's general notion of tradition and the particular tradition he himself follows and prescribes for others. In the following chapters will be given several explications of Eliot's poetry, in which tradition will be shown to be the main and governing influence.
CHAPTER IV

TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN "SWEENEY AMONG THE NIGHTINGALES"

"Sweeney Among the Nightingales" is scarcely what one would call a religious poem. No doubt many readers classified it as a bawdy piece of humor and thought of its author as an aristocrat indulging a pose. Less discerning readers branded it, perhaps, as a rather crude attempt at being realistic with an erudite, classical allusion. It is rather a prelude to The Waste Land and a cry in the wilderness precursing Four Quartets.

Although the extreme complexity of The Waste Land is not found in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," the general structure follows the same pattern, namely, the "mythic method." The purpose is, as in The Waste Land, to point out not only the contrast between the magnificent past and the sordid present but also the similarity of the two. Here is the poem:

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

The circles of the stormy moon
Slide westward toward the River Plate,
Death and the Raven drift above
And Sweeney guards the horned gate.
Gloomy Orion and the Dog
Are veiled; and hushed the shrunken seas;
The person in the Spanish cape
Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees

Slips and pulls the table cloth
Overturns a coffee-cup
Reorganized upon the floor
She yawns and draws a stocking up;

The silent man in mocha brown
Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes;
The waiter brings in oranges
Bananas figs and hothouse grapes;

The silent vertebrate in brown
Contracts and concentrates, withdraws;
Rachel nee Babinovitch
Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;

She and the lady in the cape
Are suspect, thought to be in league;
Therefore the man with heavy eyes
Declines the gambit, shows fatigue,

Leaves the room and reappears
Outside the window, leaning in,
Branches of wistaria
Circumscribe a golden grin;

The host with someone indistinct
Converses at the door apart,
The nightingales are singing near
The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud,
And let their liquid siftings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

Sweeney is pictured here as a type of the vulgar bourgeois, a coarse and beastly sort of a man with few sensibilities, as his epithet implies. He "spreads his knees" and lets his arms hang to laugh. There is no decorum, no restraint, no breeding nor grace in the man. Everything about him, "the
zebra stripes along his jaw" which swell to "maculate giraffe," suggest the animal.

The scene is laid in a South American tavern (the river Plate is mentioned) or a brothel and it is winter. The "stormy moon" and the mention of Death and the Raven lend an ominous atmosphere to the interlude. There Sweeney sits guarding the "horned gate," which most probably refers to the Gate of Horn where, as Virgil tells us, spring good and true dreams. In other words, Sweeney in his brown study is oblivious of any approaching danger.

No word is spoken in the scene; it is a pantomime of crude "living and hardly living," needing no conversation to complete the picture or to evince the characters. We know how the person in the Spanish cape would speak when we see her as she

Slips and pulls the table cloth
Overturns a coffee-cup,
Reorganized upon the floor
She yawns and draws a stocking up.

The silent, dark man at the window "sprawls" and "gapes," obviously interested and amused at the sordid scene. He, too, is a "hollow" man, only a "vertebrate" that writhes very much like a snake. Across the table from Sweeney and the intriguing lady in the Spanish cape is a married woman who nervously "tears at the grapes with murderous paws." She studies the progress of her partner, for she has much experience of such
foul work and now hopes for Sweeney's ruin. Meanwhile, the man in coffee-brown, seeing that the girl is not making much headway, momentarily loses interest in the "game," and goes out to the window, where his grinning face showing golden teeth is ridiculously surrounded with wistaria, a delicate purple vine. Finally, we are introduced to the "host," who is in subdued conversation with someone indistinct at the door, thus putting a final touch to the mysterious nature of the scene.

After this picture, Eliot in a few lines recalls how Agamemnon cried when Clytemnestra worked out her intrigue against him and slaughtered him with an axe. First there is the violent juxtaposition of the house where deceit, impurity, and treachery are prominent with the Convent of the Sacred Heart. The evil of the one house is emphasised by the innocence of the other and the general emotion of the poem, that of disgust mingled with shock, is heightened. The nightingales are the "inviolable voices," the voices of purity, the exaltation of Philomela who escaped the lustful Tereus. In The Waste Land the song of the nightingale was only "jug jug/ to dirty ears." To those who like Sweeney and his ilk have killed all sense of evil in themselves, the pure and the beautiful are meaningless. They are dulled of sensibility and spiritually barren.
To appreciate the emotional richness of the poem completely, we must bear in mind that this present scene is similar to the ancient one, and also dissimilar. Clytemnestra killed her husband mainly because he had sacrificed their daughter, Ephigenia, but the slaughter of Cassandra, who was Agamemnon's mistress, brought Clytemnestra the spice that crowned her joy. Entangled in both scenes is adultery, intrigue, and murder.

But more ironical is the casual comparison of Sweeney's snare with that of Agamemnon. Apeneck Sweeney holds the same position as did the noble ruler of men, the leader of the Trojan War. Clytemnestra's guilt, with all its horror, is surrounded, one might almost say, with dignity when compared with that of the lady in the Spanish cape. The reader is left to hear the heroic rhetoric of Aeschylus and the deliberately banal lines describing Sweeney and the lady, as it were, at the same time—a fine example of the "mythic method."

It is necessary for the total effect not only to analyze what each line "says," but to catch an over-all view of the movement of the poem, in order to see how each line and stanza is related to the rest, and then to telescope them all together. The poem is "slow to take." The line from the Agamemnon which heads the poem, "Oh, I am struck with a mortal (or merited) blow" is meant to dwell in the periphery of our mind as it takes in the modern scene. Sweeney first amuses us like a modern Falstaff. Then there is the quiet intimation of Death, Raven,
the allusion to the Gate of Horn. The tawdry drama continues with more slapstick humor. Again, our initial reaction of mild amusement is cramped by the appearance of the words, "silent," "concentrates," "murderous." Then, with the lines

She and the lady in the cape
Are suspect, thought to be in league,

the words of Agamemnon for the first time begin to have significance. Finally, we feel the sudden impact of it all with "The nightingales are singing near/ The Convent of the Sacred Heart." Observe how the last two lines fall in a soft cadence—short, alliterative, and without any hint of amusement. It is as though Eliot tricked us into smiling and then shamed us for doing so.

The pattern is skillfully dramatic with a late and sudden climax and a brief aftermath. It is the gayety and the dance, the tragic news, and the shocked anguish on the faces. With this pattern, Eliot interweaves subtle premonitions of the sudden blow he is to land in the last six lines. All the while up to the climax we are amused, but ever on our guard that this is not all smusing. The reoccurrence of the "animal" words—Apeneck, zebra, giraffe, vertebrate, paws—insist on a serious significance to the Falstaffian by-play. The overwhelming lull before the storm is had in the lines

Branches of wistaria
Circumscribe a golden grin.

The detailed description of that face, the gold in his teeth,
the sardonic grin, hints at the abnormal vehemence of sense perception just before or during a horrifying experience. And the horror means to convey to his reader of "Sweeney" is that Sweeney and the others are dead, but that there is a "silent funeral," that it is "nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury."

Eliot in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" is the same word-artisan, the same master of subtle irony, the same prince of sensibility. The subtlety of Donne, the horror of Baudelaire, the intricateness of Villon or Marvell are there, but most of all is the vision of Dante (in a smaller way). Eliot is the observer of a dying humanity, a generation that is starved and barren. Under the disgust and horror there is a plea for faith. Later, in "Little Gidding," he would speak of the "fire" and the "rose." Here, he is content to point out the absence of something that is vital to those

...who were living and are now dying
With a little patience.
CHAPTER V
TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN THE WASTE LAND

The Waste Land, which won the Dial award in 1922, marked Eliot's entrance into the literary scene. Eliot immediately became a figure whom circles and critics everywhere discussed and decried. Antagonists rallied in all quarters and hurled anathemas to this literary "farce." "They implied... that if The Waste Land were not a hoax (which it soon proved itself not to be), admiration of the poem was a sign of sterility, of not something worse."¹ Liberals and conservatives alike so took up the crusade against Eliot that Burton Roscoe, a New York Tribune columnist, who was one of the earliest promoters of Eliot's verse, enjoyed the role of devil's advocate against the host of adverse critics. As late as 1944 Henri Peyre saw in The Waste Land only a statement of "an ironical pessimism" and a "tragic cynicism in which a disillusioned post-war youth reads its own moods."² Peyre predicted that The Waste Land "soon may be opened only as a sophisticated album of the intellectual and moral fashions of souls during a new 'mal de siecle' era."³

¹ Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturnska, 414.
³ Ibid.
But as Horace Gregory and his wife Marya Zaturenska remarked, *The Waste Land* soon proved not to be hoax. Highly complex and packed with allusions to the old Testament, Sanskrit literature, Ovid, St. Augustine, Medieval Legends, Dante, Wagner, Shakespeare, Webster, Baudelaire, Marvell, and Verlaine, (for which Eliot himself supplies the footnotes) *The Waste Land* is not only a masterpiece of technique but a religious poem of deepest significance to the modern world. The interweaving themes resemble an intricate fugue, but one which finally resolves itself into a simple statement. Eliot takes the reader through a gamut of contrasted scenes, wafts him on a magic carpet through the past and when the journey is over, says, "There, we are back at the beginning having seen the same thing over and over again."

The complexity serves not to confuse but to punctuate and concentrate the dominant idea, to underscore again and again the main theme of the emptiness and horrifying disillusion of the modern waste land. It is as if Eliot paused at certain intervals to determine whether the reader had felt the impact of the horror of it all, and seeing that he did not quite respond proportionately, went on to drive his point home by more examples. As Eric Hesterton says of the poem:

The poem seems to be put together of broken pieces without inner connections. But after continued application we be-
gin to understand that the breaking of
the usually accepted forms of discourse
is not only to give a reflection of
chaos; the apparent disintegration
begins to gather itself into a thor­
oughly composed entity.⁴

The basic idea of *The Waste Land* is the feeling of dis­
satisfaction and disgust combined with the inquenchable thirst
of mankind for real life which comes with true being, a state,
Eliot insists, which men are slow to seek or accept. Eliot
found in the primitive rites of fertility through which men
manifested their dependence on water and the return of spring,
a background for his poem. The idea of using these rites came
to him, as he himself confesses, after reading Jessie L. Weston's
book on the Grail legends, *From Ritual To Romance* and Sir
J. B. Frazer's, *The Golden Bough*. In the many versions of the
medieval legend, there are certain more or less similar strains,
which I will summarize here as they lend so much to the under­
standing of the general character of *The Waste Land*.⁵

There are three typical ideas that appear in nearly
all the versions. They are: a) the main object of the Quest
is the restoration to health and vigor of a King suffering
from infirmity; b) whose infirmity, for some mysterious reason,
reacts disastrously upon his kingdom; c) the misfortune which

---

⁴ Ibid., 3.
⁵ Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual To Romance*, Cambridge Univ.
befalls the country is that of a prolonged drought, which has destroyed vegetation and left the land waste.

Eliot adopted this legend and contrasted it with the spiritual waste land of our times. Eliot saw in this "mythic method," which has already been explained, the perfect way to carry the traditional emotional stress he desired from the poem. "The intent of the myth and of the many citations," Eric Mesterton remarks, "is in the end, to reveal and concretely embody a human community through the ages. All the people who appear...says the author, are a single human being." 6

In *The Waste Land* the contrast is "between two kinds of life and two kinds of death. Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be life-giving, an awakening to life." 7 This is the paradox that pervades the poem and is taken through a series of variations.

The poem is introduced by a quotation from the old Sybil, "I wish to die." This wish is echoed in the last line of the poem, "Shantih, shantih, shantih," translated by Eliot as "The peace which surpasses understanding." The thrice repeated word of Oriental nihilism conveys the weariness and the near-despair of the protagonist. The words leave the reader with an image of somber music. There is a natural quiet fade-

6 Ibid., 3.
away into the silence in the line.

In order to see in more detail how Eliot corporates the myth and other allusions in the poem, so that the past is made to relive under a new guise in the present, let us examine the first section of *The Waste Land*, "The Burial of the Dead."

The opening section, "Burial of the Dead," hits upon a theme that is recurrent in Eliot's later works. "April is the cruellest month," says the inhabitant of the waste land because he prefers the torpor of his moral inactivity to the demands which faith (supernatural life) would make on him; he is afraid of "newness of life," of mental health, and emotional vitality. Gerontion, likewise, had expressed his antipathy to "Christ the tiger" who "came in the juvescence" of the year because to accept Christ was to rouse himself into action, the action of willing, doing, restraining and renouncing. And in *Murder In the Cathedral*, the chorus says:

> We do not wish anything to happen  
> Seven years we have lived quietly,  
> Succeeded in avoiding notice,  
> Living and partly living.

Finally, the bird in the opening section of "Burnt Norton":

> Go, go, go, said the bird; human kind  
> Cannot bear very much reality.

After expressing this repugnance for life and the attractiveness of death in life, the protagonist begins a reverie of the talk over coffee in the Hofgarten just before the
war, of the thrill of being in the mountains when a child. But these are only "broken images" of the past, "real" moments he wants no more. This passage ends with one of those casual platitudinous lines expressive of empty living. Just as Prufrock is made to say with trenchant irony, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," the protagonist of The Waste Land says, "I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter." Underneath the entire passage is the ever present emphasis that the "now" is after the war and that one's whole attitude has been changed.

The next passage begins with a reference to Ezekiel and to Ecclesiastes. The protagonist asks in a sort of dumb curiosity:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of Man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
And the dead tree gives no shelter...

The imagery here suggests a Salvador Dali painting; broken pieces of statuary lying on hard ground beneath a scarecrowish tree that withers under a torrid sun. The broken images bring the past to the present which is the land made barren and dry.

The passage from Ezekiel, 2, to which Eliot alludes, is as follows:

...Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me;
they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day.

A similar scene of outright secularization is made in Ecclesiastes, 12:

1. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

5. Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets;

6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Note the words: "And desire shall fail." Eliot sees in the modern waste land the same retribution for the lack of justice and love. In both instances there is the same aridity, absence of health and life, without sustaining water—which signifies grace or faith.

Man is reduced to a mere "handful of dust," a body having forsaken the food of its spirit. And it is afraid. Afraid as they were whom the prophet speaks of.

The quotation from Wagner's song in Act I of Tristan and Isolde, according to Brooks, "States the other half of the paradox which underlies the poem; namely, that life at its highest moments of meaning and intensity resembles death."
The song in the opera is of a happy and innocent love which recalls to the protagonist the hyacinth girl. Then the line, "Oed und leer das Meer," makes the ironic contrast that love is not in sight, that Isolde is beyond the silent sea. This last quotation "reminds us that even love cannot exist in the waste land."¹

Madame Sosostris, "famous clarvoyante," features in the next passage, which needs explanation from Miss Weston's book. Madame Sosostris is a type of crude fortune-teller who uses the old Tarot deck. And Miss Weston explains:

Today the Tarot has fallen somewhat into disrepute, being principally used for purposes of divination, but its origin, and precise relation to our present playing-cards are questions of considerable antiquarian interest.... Traditionally, it is said to have been brought from Egypt...and appears in a calendar sculptured on the southern facade of the palace of Medinet Abou. This calendar is supposed to have been connected with the periodic rise and fall of the waters of the Nile.¹⁰

In The Waste Land the Tarot section, besides introducing the figures of the legend, illustrates a decadent civilization's vain curiosity for the future, the retreat of men without faith or religion to the vulgar superstitions of divination. There is a similar satire on this art in "Dry Salvages:"

¹ Ibid., 142.
¹⁰ Weston, 74.
To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
To report the behavior of the sea monster,
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
...
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams:
 all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, features of the press
...
Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension.

In *The Waste Land* the reader is left to fill in the conclusion
of this satire on divination; in "Dry Salvages" Eliot continues
that to understand the significance of the timeless, of the
disposition of God upon time is the true occupation of a real
man, of a saint.

Madame Sosostris hands the protagonist his card, the
drowned Phoenician Sailor, and warns him against death by water,
"not realizing nay more than do the other inhabitants of the
modern waste land that the way into life may be by death itself."
The drowned Phoenician Sailor is a type of the fertility god
an image of whom was thrown into the sea at the death of summer,
and immediately recalls the story of *The Tempest*.

The reference to *The Tempest* is intimately bound up
with the fertility rites and strikes a violent contrast to the
sterile death of those in the waste land. Ariel sang, one re-
calls, to lure Ferdinand on to fall in love with the innocent
Miranda because it was through this love that regeneration and

11 Brooks, 142.
deliverance was brought to all on the island. The shipwreck of Ferdinand and the rest, the supposed death by water, became a blessing indeed, so that Ariel's words, "Those are pearls that were his eyes," are less fanciful and more metaphorically filled with meaning than we would at first imagine. Ferdinand's father, who was thought to have drowned, actually passes into a realm that is "rich and strange." The description of this "death" is associated in the mind of the protagonist...with that of the drowned god whose effigy was thrown into the water as a symbol of the death of the fruitful powers of nature but which was taken out of the water as a symbol of the revivified god.12

This healthy death is a perfect antithesis to the sterile death of the inhabitants of the waste land.

The final passage, beginning with the words which give it a title, "Unreal City," is brief and concentrated, done with quick and brilliant splashes. "Unreal City" recalls the Four-millante cite of Baudelaire, the swarming mass of souls in Paris, as in a nightmare, wandering aimlessly, undetermined, and deathlike. The protagonist sees a similar spectacle as he views the crowd on London bridge. Pitifully, he muses, "So many," and repeats it in Dante's line from the third Canto of the Inferno: "I had not thought that death had undone so many." The people on London bridge are walking dead-men. They are

12 Ibid., 149, 150.
the damned souls which Dante saw. London bridge for a quick moment becomes Hell before our eyes, while the fog becomes the fumes of its fire. Eliot's London, like Baudelaire's Paris, teems with "hollow men," lacking all purpose and direction, without belief of anykind, with hope withered, and love an impossibility.

The Dante and Baudelaire references come to the same thing as the allusion to the waste land of the medieval legends; and these various allusion, drawn from widely differing sources, enrich the comment on the modern city so that it becomes "unreal" on a number of levels: as seen through "the brown fog of a winter dawn"; as the medieval waste land and Dante's Limbo and Baudelaire's Paris are unreal.13

As the protagonist walks up the murky street in the midst of this fourmillante swarm, he is surprised to see one with whom he fought in the war. "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!" Maylae! Here again with an unexpected mythic turn, Eliot telescopes the past and present so that we understand that World War I is a reenactment, in a sense, of the Punic War—both having had seed in economic greed. The sight of Stetson calls back all the bitter aftermath of the war, of the futility, of the same eternal problems staring one in the face.

To understand the meaning of the buried corpse we must

13 Mathiessen, 144.
keep in mind the main paradox of the entire poem, that of new life from death, as the blossom from the death of the seed or the spiritual rebirth of the soul from the death of self-love, and the sterile death, mentioned above, from which no life springs, the death of the inhabitants of the waste land. The corpse Stetson buried may refer to the supposed solution to conflict had in the peace of Versailles. Or, more probably, it has a more universal significance which includes the travesty of Versailles, namely, that Stetson (or you, hypocrite lecteur!) has tried to cover up the guilt of his past, being afraid to face reality and undergo the death of admission. This thought is strengthened by the memory of the dirge in "The White Devil," which is, according to Mathiessen, "one of the most poignantly terrifying passages in Webster's tragedy."14

Mathiessen then sums up the traditional wealth of this Passage:

And thus the three principal strains of poetry which have spoken so intimately to Eliot merge in a moment of acutely heightened consciousness. Eliot is not making merely allusions for literary purposes. He is not 'imitating' these poets; nor has he mistaken literature for life. Each of these references brings with it the full impact of its special context, its authentic accent of reality, and thus enables Eliot to condense into a single passage a completely focused expression of tragic

14 Ibid., 19.
horror. And lest the reader think that such an awareness of the Unreal City is something special to the reading and experience of the poet, he, as well as Stetson, is reminded that it belongs both to Eliot and Baudelaire, and to himself, as part of the modern world as well. 15

15 Ibid., 20.
CHAPTER VI
TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN "EAST COKER"

Eliot, in his early poetry, was more concerned with the absence of human values in the modern world, values which he saw expressed in the classics, and his attitude was, more or less, cynical towards the modern age. He was content to point out how empty was so much of our times in comparison with the past; he didn't directly offer anything to fill up that emptiness. In The Waste Land that satirical cynicism changed to something close to horror at the abnormal state of war-weary man. As yet his reaction was more of an aesthetical one than ascetical--at least the ascetical was only suggested.

Since then, however, he began to offer a solution to the hollow, meaningless, existence of man; a solution that is as old as sin itself. The plight of moderns resulted from a casting off of eternal criterions of action, from an outright independence of God, in brief, from the heresy of Secularism. So, in Ash Wednesday, Eliot stated the necessity of mortification. The implications in The Waste Land were made explicit and took on a truly Christian character. Finally, in Four Quartets, with sincerity and clarity, he maps out the full routine of the Mystical Way, emphasising the need of humility. Constant comparisons of time with eternity occur, and the im-
impact of the whole of each Quartet is brought to bear on "re-
deeming the time," on the necessity of renouncement, on accept-
ing the "distraction" from earthly concerns. Contrary to the
materialistic view, he stresses the importance of beginning
here and now the life of the beatified. He speaks repeatedly
of that realm outside of time, of that interval out of time,
as Plato called it,1 when the will, in an instant, turns to
God, and begins its determined activity of love. Four Quartets
repeats with directness and surety Eliot's plea to renew our
association with "traditional wisdom."

It is in Four Quartets, more than in any other work,
that Eliot is the "orthodox" religious poet, sincere, and in-
timately in contact with the past, seeing the present as the
issue of the past, and writing, while only subconsciously aware
of his faith, a poem that live out his theory of tradition.

Of the Four Quartets "East Coker" best applies the
critical principle of tradition and best underscores the plight
to which the departure from "traditional wisdom" has reduced
modern civilization. Mr. Eliot, viewing the "twittering world,"
the spiritual impoverishment and sickness of men who "go into
the dark," laments that those who patterned this age violently
severed contact with truth, and proudly set out on their own.
Promoted by free-lance dogmatists, the leading aberrations from

1 Plato, Parmenides, 156 D E.
Scholasticism have, for the most part, taken some form of sub-
jectivism. Thought, once divorced from all authority either
of the Church or of common sense, paced the logical path of
exaggerated criticism, as in Hume or in Kant, and ended up in
an intellectual pride that expresses itself either in the false
humidity of skepticism or the arrogance of rationalism. Instead
of this intellectual pride and all the resulting abnormalities
that inevitably follow upon it, Eliot tells us that

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility; humility is endless.

Without truth, without faith, the bias of modern thought
veers toward a totally unspiritualized world in which man's
stature is measured by matter, and in which the only reality
is mammon. As a result, there is a concerted march against
time, a feverish preoccupation with the "here and now." The
criticism of this heresy runs as an undercurrent in all the
Quartets and finds its most direct expression in "East Coker."
Taking up the line of thought suggested by the last lines of
"Burnt Norton,"

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after,
"East Coker" begins with a meditation on change.

The small village of East Coker, in Somerset, is the "lan-
scape" against which the theme of "East Coker" is developed.
From here, in the seventeenth century, Eliot's family emigrated
to America. The first movement consists, for the most part, of
a reverie initiated by objects and scenes which Eliot encounters as he walks in the village.

All the levels of meaning in the opening line, "in my beginning, is my end," can only be gathered after an analysis of the rest of the poem. As the line stands, it might mean that my end, destiny, purpose in life, was fixed at the time of my birth. Or it might mean that in the beginning of my reformation is the end of my waywardness. Or—and this is the sense that the first thirteen lines develop—it might be another way of saying that "the corruption of one thing is the generation of another." This first level of meaning prepares us for the more significant meaning which occupies the main part of the poem, namely, purgation of the soul and renewed spiritual life.

Christ said that if the grain of wheat "dies, it bringeth forth much fruit." This Christian paradox finds expression in several images in "East Coker," as well as in "Burnt Norton," "Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding." In the exquisite lyric of the fourth movement of "East Coker" Eliot says:

Our only health is the disease
If we obey the dying nurse
Whose constant care is not to please
But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,
And that, to be restored, our sickness
must grow worse.

A line in the third movement of "The Dry Salvages," "And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back," echoes the terse statement of humility in the second movement,
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless,
and the repetitious paraphrase of the paradox that follows and
is climaxed with "And where you are is where you are not."

"In my beginning is my end." Once struck, this theme
is immediately followed by a "variation," the obvious and cold
fact of mutation, sounded by the word "succession" in the first
line. A ruin by its very name contains the past. The "loosened
pane" recalls the time of daily habitation. The "wainscot where
the field-mouse trots" likewise harks back to the glory of no-
bility and station. Death finally is life at its end.

Heraclitus said that the beginning and the end are
common. Perhaps Eliot has this in mind as he outline the inor-
ganic and anorganic cycle of life in these lines. But he would
not subscribe to the Heraclitean formula that "all is movement,
because the whole function of this passage and similar passages
in the Quartets is to heighten the stability and changelessness
of true reality. We imagine time, which is the measure of move-
ment according to a before and after, to be extended like a line.
Thus in "The Dry Salvages,"

Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint--
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
Similarly, Eliot selects as "clear, visual images" for the contrasting realities, the "dance," which represents the meaningless, fitful expenditure of physical and emotional energy of the modern world, and the "still point of the turning world," an image used in Triumphal March, Murder in the Cathedral, and especially outlined in "Burnt Norton:"

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.

So, in "East Coker," after the reflection on mutation, Eliot gives us the long, rhythmical passage of the village midnight festival and the dance. Here the insistent rhythm of life, the daily and unending cycle of growth and decay is imaged so as to carry with it an emotion rising to disgust. The dancing scene, in itself, taken from the Boke Named the Governour by Thomas Elyot² connotes wholesome joy and rural laughter. But further on we read, "heavy feet," "loam feet," connotative of apathetic, day-in-and-day-out living. This mood is emphasised by the rhythm, the repetition, and the words of the final lines of this passage,

Keeping time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons
The time of the seasons and the constellations

The time of milking and the time of harvest
The time of the coupling of man and woman
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

The poem is "told" as if Eliot were standing in the village. It is Summer and "dark in the afternoon." Eliot brings to his imagination ("if you do not come too close, if you do not come too close") the dancing scene which probably took place in this very field that he views. The section ends as

Dawn points, and another day
Prepares for heat and silence.

"Summer midnight" telescopes the generation before ours, and the passage from the Boke alludes to the promising sixteenth century. Midnight looks to Dawn; the age of the Renaissance to the modern age. The more history changes, the more it is the same.

To elucidate the significance of this allusion from the Boke, James Johnson Sweeney notes that Eliot says in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence." Then Mr. Sweeney says that the

Boke Named the Governour has been described as the earliest treatise on moral philosophy in the English language. Elyot was an ardent monarchist, a scholar

3 Ibid.
deeply influenced by the writings of such continental humanists as Pico Della Mirandola and Erasmus, and a thorough churchman... We are struck at once by the link between Sir Elyot's interests and Eliot's... Finally, a fundamental feature of Elyot's interests was language--words in particular.  

Built upon the sand of individualism, materialism and rationalism, the structure of the modern age was doomed to collapse from the outset. Its end was in its beginning. The village of East Coker represents this beginning, while the "open field," the "old timber," and the "tattered arras" image the collapse. Since Sir Thomas Elyot, writing in the sixteenth century, stands for "tradition" rather than the popular liberalism, the allusion is appropriate and effective.

The first movement of "East Coker" ends on a note that is felt in the paradox of the first line. Spiritual realities, the vision of my true destiny and the acceptance of its practical applications are independent of time and place. Succession of day and night, life and death go on but are compressed into an instant by the thought of eternity... "and the time of death is every moment." "I am here, or there, or elsewhere" will be heard in the last movement as

Love is most nearly itself  
When here and now cease to matter.

4 Ibid.
Underlying the truth of this statement is the criticism of "hollow men" for whom "here and now" matter altogether too much. Bread alone would this "twittering world" cry for, but we must aspire to a "further union, a deeper communion" if we would begin to live, if we would see the end for which we began.

The failure of modern culture to fulfill the idealistic promises made in the beginning of our age is precisely imaged in the lyric which opens the second movement. November is pictured as having "late roses filled with early snow." And we are disappointed. "What is the late November doing?" Here it is almost December and we have the vestiges of summer still with us. More than that, there is a terrifying storm raging in the heavens that threatens to bring about the destruction of the world. The sixteenth century promised us so much and left us with so little. "It was not (to start again) what one had expected."

Eliot tried to tell us in the lyric. Now in the prosaic passage that follows, he tries again, but is conscious of the difficulty of expressing in words the entire situation as he sees and feels it. Here we are, he says, in the "middle way," listening to the folly of old men, the fathers of this generation, whose souls know not the serenity and the calm proper to age. Man is not wise just because he is old; "old
men ought to be explorers," not satisfied with a "knowledge that imposes a pattern, and falsifies." Science, once but one discipline in the realm of truth, has become the only legitimate discipline. Science now serves as philosophy, religion, theology. The "limited value...derived from experience" is plainly seen in the inadequate systems of Thomas Hobbes, the French Encyclopedists, Feuerbach, and others. The principle of causality, human behavior cannot be subjected to the tyranny of the microscope and analyzed like a grasshopper, for, because of free will,

...the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

The dark wood, the bramble, the edge of the grimpen, monsters, fancy lights strive to be the "objective correlative" for the present chaotic situation which the "deliberate hebetude" of the "quiet-voiced elders" have put us in. Here Eliot pleas for a return to normalcy. In the next movement he will tell us how that must be done. Selfish greed, smug satisfaction and undisciplined desires have perverted the right order of things and cast us into the darkness. The only attitude for a creature, a dependent creature, is--humility. Humility is the beginning of wisdom and endless. As a final argument, we are reminded of the obvious evidence of the failure in houses "gone under the sea" and dancers "gone under the hill."
In Ash Wednesday Eliot was preoccupied with the need for purgation of the soul from rampant sensual desires. The need for curbing the individual's bodily restlessness, pride and sensuality was sounded in the prayer,

Suffer us not to mock, ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.

This "sitting still," the humble acknowledgement of our nothingness before God, which alone will cure our spiritual sickness and save us from the edge of the grimpen, is the object of the third movement. Eliot here contrasts the darkness of this world with the "darkness of God," namely the dark night of the soul.

Eliot's disgust finds its way into this movement more than in any other. Darkness is qualified as "The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,"--utter darkness and loss of light. Those who go into the darkness are the eminent men of letters, the generous patrons of art, distinguished civil servants..."all go into the dark." Again, the repetition, especially of the "And" at the beginning of the line, conveys a tone of near-despair. Besides the middle-class men are the nobility. But most of all to be lamented is the fact that "we all go with them, into the silent funeral." It is silent and there is no one to bury. If there was a corpse and a procession with wailing, we would be shocked out of our torpor, but as it is we do not even know that we are dying
ourselves, so benumbed and insensitive are we to true and lasting realities.

Those who, in their "deliberate hebetude," turn their eyes from the "darkness of God," who allow themselves to be distracted from the life to which their whole nature summons them ultimately will know the darkness which is separation from God,

...the Void,
Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind
To distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretense,
Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are no objects, no tones,
No colours, no forms to distract, to divert the soul
From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing with nothing...5

Likewise, in Ash Wednesday, temptation is considered as a distraction, a turning of the mind, a pause on the stair. Sensuous attractions which captivate the undisciplined heart are imaged in "The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green" who "Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute."

In "East Coker," Eliot, passing from the Purgative Way, describes the Dark Night in three images given in quick succession; being in a theatre when the light so out, being in the London underground tube when it stops too long, being on the operating table under ether. The result of the purgation is

5 From Murder in the Cathedral.
a correction of vision, a subordination to God by love, which is inchoate beatitude. To worldly men, for whom life means thrills, excitement, and pleasure, the notion of satisfaction through contemplation is folly. "Heaven, too, can wait," they say, not understanding that the vision of God will completely satisfy every desire and yearning, every particle of restlessness in the soul. But the approach to that beatitude in this life must be through the negative way, through prayer and mortification, upon which follows the passive purgation, the darkness of God. "So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing."

Immediately after this climactic passage, Eliot insinuates a contrapuntal theme, that occurs in "Burnt Norton" and again in "The Dry Salvages:"

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

These are the hints, the guesses at reality that we experience at times of especial illumination and inspiration, as Eliot explains in the fifth movement of "The Dry Salvages:"

For most of us, there is only the unattended moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses.
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

As Eliot says in the last movement of "East Coker:"

Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before or after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment.

These isolated moments point to the "agony of death and birth,"
that is, they are signposts leading us on to the "occupation of the saint," the habitual state in which we see all things in their proper order of Being, because the main object of our contemplation is pure Being.

"The third movement ends," according to Helen Gardner, with a deliberately unpoetic, almost light-hearted, riddling paradoxical expansion of this idea of knowing by not knowing." But then Miss Gardner goes on to say, "It has a naive, fairy-tale quality, like a child's riddle-merrie, or like the answers in folk stories, which seem nonsense, but lead the hero to the truth." Eliot did not intend any fairy-like effect from these lines. They serve by their repetition of the paradox to afford a fuller idea of Ascent--not an easy task for either the poet or the mystic. Whether Eliot was thinking of the works of St. John of the Cross, particularly the Dark Night and The

Ascent of Mount Carmel, or The Cloud of Unknowing, as Helen Gardner prefers, makes little difference as far as the effect desired is concerned. Any reader at all acquainted with Christian asceticism can see the meaning, for St. John's method of purification is nothing more than an explicit and detailed account of how he himself followed Christ's and St. Paul's admonitions to die to self.

The first dark night of the soul took place on Calvary. Hence the appropriateness of the vivid lyric of the fourth movement. Through Christ's passion and death life was given to the world, and by our own death of self we shall live in Christ. Intimately linked up with our own cure, therefore, is the fact that our surgeon is himself wounded. This is admirably condensed in the first stanza where Eliot juxtaposes words so that the paradox is evident, while the reader's mind is immediately taken back to Calvary. "Wounded surgeon," "bleeding hands," and "sharp compassion" are good examples of what Eliot calls in "Little Gidding" "the complete consort dancing together."

Curtis Bradford, on these verses, says, "Our indifference to Christianity is reflected in the key images 'wounded surgeon,' and 'dying nurse' (the church)." Then he jumps completely out of context and says:

The ruined millionarie--the bourgeois society of the last three hundred years; all we are promised for the future is the maddening paternalism of the total-
"The ruined millionaire," to fit in with the rest of the lyric (and the poem), means Adam, the father of the earth. And what sense does it make to say that if we do well we will die of the absolute paternal care of the maddening paternalism of the totalitarian state? Eliot has been talking about a paradox: that, if we will live, we must die. The finest thing that could happen to us would be that we should die to self, and that is precisely what the Divine Goodness wants and why He cares for us.

In the fifth movement of "East Coker" the poet comes back to himself and betrays his interest in words. The first part of the movement is something of an epilogue, a personal address to his readers, a confession that he has tried but that he is nevertheless conscious of his inadequacy.

Intrinsically linked up with Eliot's theory of "tradition" is his theory on words. To understand what Eliot means when he says,

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres—
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different

kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the
better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say,
or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it,
it is well to recall how poetry differs from philosophy. The
poet strikes immediately at the core of reality, whereas the
philosopher slowly pares away all the intervening layers of
matter which hide reality. On the contrary, the finished pro-
duct of the two processes is turned around, so that truth de-
ivered in a syllogism is at once patent, while truth in poetic
language has, as Mario Praz says, "an element of extreme pre-
cision and an element of vagueness."8 There is the element
of vagueness because poetry centers upon the beauty of reality
and strives to suggest by means of images, the truly human
reaction to the perception of that beauty. In "Burnt Norton"
expression is likened to music which leaves the mind with a
residue, so to speak, a residue which disposes the mind, en-
riched by the imagination likewise set into action, to grasp
the full meaning.

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form,
the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

8 Mario Praz, "T. S. Eliot and Dante," Southern Review, 1937,
639.
Though admitting that twenty years have been largely wasted, Eliot is not open to the accusation of false humility for Eliot refers not to his poetry as poetry but as an adequate expression of what his whole being has felt—a complaint of every real artist. The communication of a vision takes time, and imposes upon the reader the necessity of beginning, of reading down the page and through the book, but the vision itself, the form, came to the poet in an instant. So that of the form behind the tedious expression, we may say that the

...end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.

This idea (from "Burnt Norton") is repeated in the fifth movement of "Little Gidding;"

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. And every phrase
And sentence that is right...
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph.

It is the purpose of the poet, in other words, to sense acutely the burden of meaning and connotation which a word carries from past usage and association and throw it into a new milieu of meaning.

Eliot's very complaint of the insufficiency of poetry makes good poetry. A similar struggle for precision in expres-
sion is seen in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, by Gerard M. Hopkins:

But how shall I... make me room there:
Reach me a... Fancy, come faster--
Strike you the sight of it? Look at it loom there,
Thing that she... then there! the Master,
ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head.

Words are "shabby equipment" because, as Eliot tells us in "Burnt Norton":

...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.

After this apology for words, Eliot in the last part of the movement gathers up the ideas of the poem and incorporates them in the coda. The word "home" at the beginning of the line immediately recalls the scene of the Eliot home described in the first movement. That was his beginning as well as the beginning of the modern age. Home is where we are born. Home is the training grounds which to a great extent patterns our character. Certainly, the leaders of a generation pattern its development. But home is most connotative of the place of peace and rest, the place not where we start from but to where we go at the end of a day or at the end of a war.

Turned around, the phrase emphasizes the criticism of old men heard in the first and second movements. The elders in their "deliberate hebetude" never faced the problem of our civiliza-
tion and hence never knew the calm that comes from a correct moral order. They began to die as soon as they began to live, whereas life should be a constant growth in real life, so that death will really be the beginning of the life we are intended for.

Good are the occasional moments of inspiration, the moments in a shaft of sunlight, but the habitual ordination of ourselves to the true Reality, of which these moments but serve as hints and guesses, is what we should be striving toward.

Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one many only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

There is a time in our youth, for "the evening under the star-light," for raptures of first love, which are bound up with sensuous associations, but

Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter.

The darkness of our present crisis is imaged again in

The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise,

and the beginning of the poem is echoed in the end, in phrase and in meaning. "In my end is my beginning." For just as man's purpose is set at his birth, so only at death does that purpose begin to be realized.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

When the student of Eliot first studies Eliot's critical principles and then looks at his verse he is apt, as so many have, to see a violent cleavage between the two fields of writing. He will in Eliot's prose works find satisfaction in reading the essays of one who stands firm against the false emphasis given to originality and sensational independence in so much of modern writing. But when he comes to Eliot's verse he will begin to wonder if this can be the same Eliot who wrote the prose, or will see in Eliot, as John Crowe Ransom did, a "poetical Hyde and a critical Jekyll."¹

However, further serious study of what precisely Eliot means by "tradition" will dissipate much of this attitude of surprise and disillusion. We have tried to explain Eliot's tradition, showing the main ramifications and implications in order to show that there is a reasonable proportion between his criticism and his poetry. The structure of the thesis itself is offered as an answer to those readers and critics who retain that original prejudice that Eliot lives a double literary life.

Granted that here and there appear inconsistencies in Eliot's frame of mind, we must in the light of the thesis confess that in Eliot modern poetry has at least a leader both in theory and practice for a saner and a more balanced quality of poetry, a poetry that perhaps in spite of its obscurity is at once more truly human and more universal.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works of T. S. Eliot


----------, Four Quartets, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1943.


----------, Introducing James Joyce, A Selection from Joyce's Prose, with an Introductory note, London, Faber and Faber, 1942.


------------, **Thoughts After Lambeth**, London, Faber and Faber, 1931.

------------, **The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism**, London, Faber and Faber, 1933.

**Other Books**

Aiken, Conrad, **Scepticisms**, New York, Alfred Knopf & Company, 1919.


Cunliffe, John W., **English Literature in the Twentieth Century**, New York, Macmillan, 1933.


Drew, Elizabeth, **Directions in Modern Poetry**, New York, Norton Press, 1940.

Evans, E. I., **Tradition and Romanticism**, London, Methuen & Company, 1940.


----------, American Renaissance, New York, Oxford University Press, 1941.


Winters, Yvor, "T. S. Eliot, or the Illusion of Reaction," The Anatomy of Nonsense, Norfolk, New Directions, 1943.

Periodicals


Bondy, L. S., "Claudel and the Catholic Revival," The Thomist, (vol. 8), 1943.


APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Francis Smith, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Aug. 11, 1948

Date

John B. Conrath, S.J.
Signature of Adviser