

THE DIALECTICAL STRUCTURE OF ELIOT'S POETRY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Timothy W. Crusius
August, 1974

THE DIALECTICAL STRUCTURE OF ELIOT'S POETRY

An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to

**the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston**

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

**by
Timothy W. Crusius
August, 1974**

THE DIALECTICAL STRUCTURE OF ELIOT'S POETRY

The poetry of T. S. Eliot is remarkably consistent in its pattern of development. From "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to the "Four Quartets," Eliot explores the tension between opposing images, symbols, and ideas. The primal dialectic is that of self and non-self, and the closely related pair of order and disorder. The dialectic is finally stabilized and fully developed in "Ash-Wednesday," which features the synthesis of the Word. "Ash-Wednesday" is the structural center of Eliot's poetry.

The dialectical or dramatic form of Eliot's poetry is intimately connected with the personality of the poet. Eliot suffered from an emotional disorder which made it difficult for him to make decisions; his mode of thought reflects this acute sensitivity to opposing formulations. The whole of Eliot's poetry is concerned with the internal debate that precedes action; in a sense, Eliot creates his own moral universe, his own basis for action, within the poetry itself.

Ultimately, Eliot's aesthetic of objectivity expands to an effort to absorb personality into the infinite moment, into God. As long as the moment lasts, it is impossible to tell "the dancer from the dance."

CONTENTS

	Page
I. "DECISIONS AND REVISIONS": CURRENTS IN THE CRITICISM OF ELIOT'S POETRY	1
II. ELIOT AGONISTES: THE PRE-CONVERSION POETRY AND <u>THE WASTE LAND MANUSCRIPT</u>	13
III. REDEEMING THE DREAM: "ASH-WEDNESDAY" AND THE WORD	50
FOOTNOTES	85
APPENDIX A	94
BIBLIOGRAPHY	97

I. "DECISIONS AND REVISIONS":
CURRENTS IN THE CRITICISM OF ELIOT'S POETRY

No other modern poet has received the intense critical scrutiny that T. S. Eliot has received; introductions to recent criticism of Eliot's poetry tend towards a rather apologetic tone, as if to alert the reader in advance that only a few more drops are being added to the vast ocean of Eliot scholarship.¹ Eliot died not quite a decade ago, and already it is time to evaluate the immense critical effort that has been directed at his small quantity of verse (less than four thousand lines). The following chapter has two goals: to categorize the often bewildering phenomena of Eliot criticism, and to introduce the reader to what I believe is the "still point" of Eliot's verse, the structural principle which underlies all of his poetry.

The greater part of Eliot criticism has been concerned with the symbolic content of his poetry. Critics have pursued the extrapolation of Eliot's symbolism in one of two ways: either they have traced Eliot's symbols to sources in other artists, such as Dante, or they have attempted to prove that the total pattern of Eliot's symbols are congruent with, or analogous to, another extra-literary symbolic system, such as the dream symbolism of Jungian psychology. The nature of symbolism allows an almost infinite number of allegorical interpretations,² restricted only by the ingenuity of the critic in discerning similarities between symbolic

systems; for instance, the symbols involved in the process of psychic integration in Jungian psychology have a pattern remarkably like that of, say, the Christian conversion experience. Theoretically, at least, the number of works that could be written on Eliot's symbolism approaches infinity.

A very valuable contribution of scholarship to the understanding of Eliot's symbolism is the tracing of allusions in his poetry. Included in this group are the numerous handbooks and general introductions to Eliot's poetry, such as George Williamson's Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot.³ No individual reader of Eliot is likely to bring with him the encyclopaedic knowledge required to recognize even a majority of the allusions in Eliot's poetry. It certainly helps, for instance, to know that the "word within a word, unable to speak a word"⁴ passage in "Gerontion" is borrowed from a sermon by Lancelot Andrewes, delivered in 1618--and that it refers to the Christ child.⁵ The most noticeable weakness of the method used by the critical allusion-hunters is a tendency to believe that a passage is "explained" by saying "Eliot got it from such and such." Obviously, Eliot's allusive technique cannot be elucidated by merely pointing at the source of a particular line; the passage in the source has a range of meaning within its context, while Eliot's use of the passage within the framework of his poem may substantially alter that range of meaning. That is to say: the second step, once the source of a passage has been ascertained, is to discover how Eliot employed the passage within the structure of his poem.

To illustrate: the line, "But at my back from time to time I hear,"

from "The Fire Sermon," is a verbal echo of line 21 in Andrew Marvell's poem, "To His Coy Mistress." "To His Coy Mistress" is one of the best poems of the English Renaissance; it is elegant, patterned, a powerful expression of the tension between desire and death. In Eliot's poem the modern noise of "horns and motors" are at the speaker's back, while Andrew Marvell heard "Time's winged chariot." The horns and motors bring "Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring"--the customer to the house of prostitution, the bartering of flesh to appease barren lust. The desire for the flesh in Marvell's poem is tempered by a higher argument, a realization of the transience of physical beauty and the finality of death; in other words, Sweeney's neural itch is quite different from Marvell's heightened awareness. Thus, Eliot is contrasting an ordered and human past with a chaotic and animalistic present--but the allusion to Marvell is not that easily explained. After all, Marvell's poem, for all its formal appeal, is an effort to persuade a recalcitrant young lady to surrender her virginity; "The Fire Sermon" is a poem about the ravages of desire in which humanity is, and always has been, "burning." In "Ash-Wednesday" Eliot speaks of the "torment of love unsatisfied / The greater torment / Of love satisfied"; in "Little Gidding" it is Love that wove "the intolerable shirt of flame." Therefore, the allusion to Marvell's poem in "The Fire Sermon" has at least a double face; most of Eliot's allusions partake of the Janus figure.

The network of literary allusions in Eliot's poetry, when viewed in its entirety, forms a gigantic symbol of what he called "tradition." Significant moments in past art are fused with modern materials; the

modern and the past jostle one another and interpenetrate, forming part of the peculiar tension of Eliot's verse. The tracing of literary allusions in Eliot's verse is a necessary step in critical analysis, but the shifting pattern of allusions and verbal echoes, most of which are ambiguous and polysemous, are only stabilized and brought into focus by recognizing the formal principle upon which the poetry is constructed.

Another fertile field of scholarly research, closely related to the tracing of allusions, is the determination of influences on Eliot's thought and poetry. The most pervasive influence, of course, is Dante; no one, I suppose, would disagree with Pound that Eliot's is the "true Dantesque voice." Phillip R. Headings' incisive study, T. S. Eliot, shows the dominant role of Dante in forming Eliot's aesthetic and philosophical point of view.⁶ The symbolism of Eliot's poetry, especially "Ash-Wednesday" and the "Four Quartets," owes much to Dante's La Divina Comedia and La Vita Nuova. The second most important influence on Eliot's poetry is a combination of the French symbolists and the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists; the contributions that these writers made to Eliot's poetic style are chronicled by many critics.⁷ Eliot is one of the most eclectic poets in the Anglo-American tradition; scarcely any intelligent effort to discover sources of influence can fail to unearth something. The Classical poets, philosophers, and dramatists, Eastern and Western religious thinkers (especially of a mystical cast), the Provencal poets, the metaphysical poets--the list is almost endless--have all exerted some degree of influence on Eliot. Stanley Edgar Hyman's assertion that Eliot's "tradition" is really

narrow and highly selective is manifestly false⁸--there is no other English-speaking poet, with the possible exception of Coleridge, that assimilated so much from his predecessors in philosophy, criticism, and poetry.

One very interesting direction that criticism of Eliot's poetry has taken is the correlation of his symbolic patterns with those in the symbolic systems of other poets, as well as with the symbolic systems of extra-literary disciplines. This mode of criticism is distinguished from the study of allusions and influences by the admission that there is probably no causal or conscious relationship between Eliot's use of a particular symbol and someone else's use of a similar symbol. Thus, the correspondences in symbolic content between Eliot and Dante belong to the study of allusions and influences, while Elizabeth Drew's demonstration that Eliot's symbols often parallel the dream symbols described by Jung as arising from the process of psychic integration belongs to this typological mode of criticism.⁹ The most interesting book in this category which I have encountered is Ethel F. Cornwell's The "Still Point".¹⁰ Cornwell compares Eliot's "still point" symbol with Coleridge's "ecstatic moment," with Yeats and his gyres, with Lawrence's "sex mysticism," as well as with certain techniques in the novels of Henry James and Virginia Woolf. I might add that Eliot's "still point" is analogous to every philosophical or religious position which entertains some notion of an unchanging pattern or a fixed verity. Plato's "Idea," for instance, is comparable to Eliot's "still point." Eliot is often considered to be at intellectual odds with Emerson, yet the transcendental ideal resembles

Eliot's "still point." Both Emerson and Eliot derived some of their ideas from Eastern thought. The list is very long: any philosophical system which uses the metaphor of the wheel can be correlated with Eliot's symbolism; any system which seeks a principle of unity amid the diversity of sense impressions has its own "still point."

Cornwell's book brings us to a consideration of my approach to the poetry of T. S. Eliot. Cornwell suggests, without saying as much, that Eliot's symbolism has archetypal significance; the first sentence of her book is:

Ever since the dawn of consciousness, when man first became aware of the distinction between the self and the not-self, he has been subject to the concomitant desires for individuation and for union; the desire to preserve and develop his individual identity, and the desire to merge himself with something greater than and outside himself. . . .¹¹

The distinction between the self and not-self must certainly be the basis for all dialectical discourse; perhaps that has much to do with the first line in the first poem that Eliot published, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "Let us go then, you and I." The individual's sense of being one and of being separated from other "onenesses" is probably also the source for the two kinds of form: unity and diversity. That is, the conscious mind is aware of its own uniqueness, of its own wholeness, yet it perceives a hodge-podge, carnival world of otherness; there is a visceral tendency to retreat to the preconscious undifferentiated state, to return to the womb--the Freudian "death wish"--which translates itself in the conscious mind to a lust for God and to an intellectual attempt to construct unities from diversities, to make one out of many.

I believe that Eliot's poetry is coherently structured around the dialectic tension between opposing forces: between past and present, chaos and cosmos, stasis and action, all of which ultimately derive from the primal dialectic of "you and I." Through the course of his poetry, Eliot uses several methods for dealing with the problem posed by the perception of contraries; Eliot's final vision is the "dance" of the "Four Quartets," but as I shall show in chapter three, the reconciling vision is substantially complete in "Ash-Wednesday." The latter poem is the counterpoise of Eliot's poetry--the earlier poems move toward "Ash-Wednesday," the "Four Quartets" grow out of it.

The poems before "Ash-Wednesday" are a trek through Blake's world of experience. It is Blake's "London," an unredeemed world of human motion. It is a vision of humanity in what Northrop Frye calls the "ironic mode," an "all too human" picture of the cycle of desire and frustration¹²--what Blake called "the same dull round," Sweeney's tropical isle of "Birth and copulation and death." The epitome of Eliot's phantasmagoria, the "cream of his nightmare dream," is the meaningless dance around the prickly pear in "The Hollow Men"; the next dance we shall see in Eliot's poetry, that of the "Four Quartets," is a very different one.

The last poem of the "Preludes" presents two unifying strategies for the succession of images in the four poems. Eliot's persona says:

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

This first strategy is reminiscent of the Romantic extension of the

self in sympathetic identification; but just as we hear "the still sad music of humanity," the persona offers a radically different synthesis, the dialectical counterpart of the sentimental first one:

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

The second point of view is more in keeping with the tone of the "Preludes," and represents one way of comprehending the "same dull round": we can decide that "birth and copulation and death" is "all the facts"; we can choose to laugh at the antic figure of man. The ending of the "Preludes" leaves us in dialectical suspension--the first point of view seems incongruent with the facts; the second seems unacceptable.

The same dialectical suspension is present in "Whispers of Immortality," where the persona, Webster, and Donne are aligned by being "much possessed by death" and by wishing to be "Expert beyond experience," but their metaphysics is countered by Grishkin and her "pneumatic bliss"; thinkers that would stress the primacy of this life are symbolized by Grishkin and the sex mystique; the opposing school of thought looks to life's end and seeks to go beyond. Both want to find the "Abstract Entities." The dialectical impasse, the ironic juxtaposition of opposing points of view, dominates Eliot's early poetry: sometimes it is handled in a humorous manner, as in "Whispers of Immortality"; sometimes it assumes sinister proportions, as in "Gerontion." Perhaps the best emblem of indecision is Prufrock, who cannot goad himself into action, and so hangs uncomfortably in limbo.

These earlier essays in point of view are not, of course, successful organizing principles; their inadequacy is emphasized by the dialectical suspension in which the reader is left at the end of the poems. They do, however, represent embryonic evidence of Eliot's striving toward an ordering structure in which to place contradictory perceptions. The final union cannot be found in "point of view," because a subjective synthesis inevitably distorts and omits evidence that does not conform to what it wants to see. The competition between points of view has much to do with Eliot's advocacy of an objective art, and with the feeling on the part of several critics that Eliot's poetry is "dramatic" or multi-dimensional.¹³

The closest approach to a "still point" in Eliot's poetry prior to "Ash-Wednesday" is his concept of tradition, the historical sense of patterns in art and human society. His attitude toward tradition, which receives its best prose treatment in the famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," is concerned not only with the integrity of individual works of art, but also with the integrity of art as a whole--Eliot perceives the whole of Western art as forming an order of significant moments, frozen within the structure of each individual work of art. The mosaic changes with every new work of art. The notion of art as fixity, as an eternal ideal existence, contrasting with all that is mutable, is nothing new--art "redeems the time" for Yeats, for Keats, for Proust, for probably all artists. However, Eliot's envisioning of the coherency of Art, if not strictly original, is certainly a new emphasis, and has greatly influenced modern criticism, especially the

New Critics.

Eliot juxtaposes the past and the art of the past with modern scenes which suggest social disintegration. There is little sense of community or belonging in Eliot's vision of modern society; usually his personae are caught in a terrifying solipsism, with no way out, no sense of purpose in establishing communion with the not-self. Eliot's encyclopaedic treatment of the dialectic of past and present is, of course, "The Waste Land"; we can view the same process more easily in his miniature masterpiece, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales."

Sweeney and his associates are drawn in terms suggesting the sub-human--zebras, giraffes, monkeys. There is movement in Sweeney's world, but the movement seems without design, except for Rachel and "the lady in the cape" who are trying to attract business. A tablecloth is pulled on the floor; a man leaves the room, only to appear at a window looking in. Eliot gives us a very incomplete picture of the people and the location, as if they and it were not significant enough for a more complete description. In contrast to Sweeney's world of meaningless activity ("shape without form, gesture without motion") there is the eternal, structured movement of the heavens, the highly concentrated, disciplined human intellect represented by the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and the symmetrical and meaningful world of myth, represented by Agamemnon, the shroud, and the unchanging song of the nightingale. There is no connection between the stars, religion, poetry, and myth on the one hand and Sweeney's world on the other. Sweeney's inane, lackadaisical world seems totally separated from the "still points"

Eliot arranges around it--they seem not to belong together.

The dialectical suspension that was characteristic of the "Preludes" and "Whispers of Immortality" is also the final state of "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" and "The Waste Land." The persona that describes the modern wasteland sees it through a colored glass of past significance--if society is dying (and he can hear the thunder, signifying rain, far away in the mountains), shall he at least "set his lands in order"? His is the burden of knowing--unlike Sweeney--that there is the possibility of an ordered, meaningful life. The first step, then, is a turning inward.

Like Blake, Eliot could not find a satisfactory "still point" in the sensual world. Both poets found their unifying principles in a non-tangible world--Blake in his subjective imagination, Eliot in his conversion to Christianity with its central symbolic fusion of heaven and earth in Christ. While Eliot could not subscribe to Blake's dictum that "Mental things alone are real," there are imaginative moments of mystical union in Eliot's poetry--the moment in the rose garden.

Although I do not want to discuss Eliot's ultimate vision in any great detail here since that is the province of the last part of this essay, yet I think it might be useful to characterize the "dance" in general terms. First, and very important, is the persistence of the dialectic--the "dance" is a dialectical entity, like the literal "association of man and woman / In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie." The "dance" is dialectical--but a dialectic "reconciled among the stars." There can be no fixity without movement, no unity without

diversity, no self without non-self--the strategy is to envision a whole picture which contains all dialectical oppositions in one. Eliot's One is the Christian God and the eternal world of heaven. There is no need to retell the Christian story--the Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation--it is a tale of the separation of man from the original One. The road back to union with God is arduous, to be achieved only by conscious striving, by discipline, by elimination of competing desires--and even then, the vision in the rose garden is brief, surrounded by the "waste sad time / Before and after." The "still point" is the hub of the wheel of Eliot's universe; the world still moves, man is subjected to the "time of tension" between attraction to this world and desire for union with God. "Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled / About the centre of the silent Word."

There is an evolving effort on Eliot's part to solve the "dialectical problem" throughout the course of his poetry. I have only discussed the landmarks on the path to synthesis; much that is essential has been left out. So, then, let us proceed, knowing that in life, art, and essays our beginnings are our ends.

II. ELIOT AGONISTES:

THE PRE-CONVERSION POETRY AND THE WASTE LAND MANUSCRIPT

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

In this chapter I intend to investigate a number of points that relate fundamentally to the dialectical problem. Concentrating on the association of Eliot and Pound which culminated in the publication of The Waste Land, I will suggest that Eliot's aesthetic of objectivity is a natural outgrowth of his personality. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the major poems prior to "Ash-Wednesday" in terms of dialectical structure. Only in this way can the symbolic act of "Ash-Wednesday" be fully appreciated, as Eliot's earlier poetry sets the stage for the new dispensation of "Ash-Wednesday."

Ezra Pound recalled in 1962 that ". . . Eliot and I . . . started disagreeing about a number of things from the time we met."¹ One of the most important areas of disagreement was the nature of poetry. To Pound the essence of poetry was concentration: "The test of a writer is his ability for . . . concentration AND for his power to stay concentrated till he gets to the end of his poem, whether it is two lines or two hundred."² Eliot, on the other hand, believed that poetry must fluctuate in intensity, that ". . . in a poem of any length, there must be transitions between passages of greater and less intensity, to give

a rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole. . . ."³ These two points of view are diametrically opposed; in fact, they could provide the polar tension for a dialectical discussion of poetic form. Eliot's statement reflects his lifelong interest in poetic drama, a form of art which depends on "a rhythm of fluctuating emotion" for its primary impact. Pound does not admire drama; he rejects Eliot's impulse toward a form of art with "social utility," which was Eliot's conception of the theater.⁴ Pound, in his characteristically blunt fashion, stated in the Dial ". . . that I (personally) believe 'the theatre' in general is no good, that plays are no good . . . Most plays are bad, even Greek plays. The Greek dramatists were inferior to Homer . . ."⁵ Obviously, Pound theoretically prefers the relation of an artist to his art that Homer maintained, an attitude of "terrifying detachment," as C. S. Lewis said.⁶ It is the didacticism of drama and its appeal to a wide audience that estranged Pound from it.

But theory is best viewed from practice, and here we are fortunate in having the evidence of The Waste Land Manuscript.⁷ Eliot submitted a rough version of The Waste Land to Pound in January, 1922.⁸ Pound criticized the poem, or more correctly, the group of poems which Eliot sent to him, very carefully; his ultimate contribution to The Waste Land was, as Eliot said later, to transform the work "from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem."⁹ Largely because of Pound's work, which he referred to as his "Caesarian Operation,"¹⁰ The Waste Land has what Conrad Aiken called a "spurious" unity.¹¹ Eliot evidently did not view

the poem as a coherent whole even in its final form; he contemplated publishing The Waste Land in separate issues of the Dial with "Gerontion" as a prelude, and it was only Pound's "screaming to high heaven that this was an outrage" which deterred him.¹²

At any rate, the poems composing The Waste Land were published as a single work. On the whole, the poem was vastly improved by Pound's editing: on the large scale, many lengthy passages were cut that had only tangential connections with the core poem; on a smaller scale, Pound took out a passage here, a word there, and added an occasional word of his own. For instance, there is the brilliant stroke of substituting "demobbed" for "coming out of the Transport Corps" in the pub scene of "A Game of Chess."¹³ Many examples could be given; I think we must agree that Pound had a marvelous critical faculty. We should also recognize, however, that the overall improvement of the poem was not accomplished without sacrifice. Donald Gallup summarized "the profit and loss" resulting from Pound's activities:

The poem which resulted from the Eliot-Pound collaboration was in some respects quite different from that which Eliot had had in mind. At least part of what the central poem gained in concentration, intensity, and general effectiveness through Pound's editing was at the sacrifice of some of its experimental character.¹⁴

Of course, the poem as it finally appeared was experimental enough to puzzle the greater part of a generation; it certainly did not need to be any more novel.

The provisional title which Eliot gave to the first two parts of The Waste Land was "He Do the Police in Different Voices."¹⁵ The title, taken from Dickens' Our Mutual Friend,¹⁶ is indicative of Eliot's attraction

to dialectical structure. Eliot intended The Waste Land to be a collage of voices--upper, middle, and lower classes, the poetic and the prosaic, the ridiculous and the sublime. It was to be a further experiment in "musical structure," or as various critics have called it, cubist design or dramatic form.¹⁷ The poem as it was published still has this kind of structure: for instance, Eliot's meditations on marriage in "A Game of Chess" are constructed around two contrasting scenes, one involving an obviously upper-class couple, the other a cockney sage of Lil, her bad teeth, and her lustful husband. The poem is designed as good plays are designed: to achieve maximum contrast by scenic juxtaposition.

"The Burial of the Dead" originally opened with a fifty-line passage that told the story of a "night on the town."¹⁸ Its purpose was undoubtedly to provide the same counterpoint for "The Burial of the Dead" that Lil and her friends provided for "A Game of Chess." However, the passage is rather tedious and does not connect very smoothly with "April is the cruellest month. . . ." By contrast, the scene with Lil is thematically the same as that of the woman whose nerves are bad; furthermore, the closing lines, "good night, sweet ladies, etc.," with its allusion to Ophelia's madness, ties Lil's scene in with the woman who "glowed into words, and then would be savagely still." One can say about these original lines of "The Burial of the Dead" what Pound said about the possibility of including "Gerontion" as a prelude to The Waste Land: "One don't miss it at all."¹⁹ With respect to the poem as a whole, the cockney voice is well-represented in "A Game of Chess," and hence

virtually nothing was lost in eliminating the rather incongruent passage in "The Burial of the Dead."

The next major section to be discarded was the initial 72 lines of "The Fire Sermon." The passage, written in heroic couplets, obviously represents the voice of eighteenth-century satire--the suave, urbane, self-confident voice that had its genesis in Horace. This voice is purely "poetic" in the sense that it contrasts with the dominant metrical scheme of the rest of The Waste Land. Eliot satirized the poetic diction of eighteenth-century poetry in describing Fresca's morning rituals: "needful stool," for example, is the euphemistic substitute for "commode" in line 12. In Popean fashion, Eliot ridicules the kind of reaction to art that he found so distasteful--the subjective, non-intellectual response--by identifying his vacuous heroine Fresca with Symonds, Walter Pater, and Vernon Lee (ll. 55-56).²⁰ The general effect is rather charming, certainly amusing, and definitely harmless--the "artificial" tone of this passage is the dialectical counterpart of Eliot's normally modern naturalistic diction. Also, the passage allows Eliot to assume a different stance in relation to one of his concerns--the decay of contemporary European culture. The usual sense of doom evaporates temporarily in the fun of satirizing the foibles of modern civilization; the dark, sinister tone gives way to the distantly amused, above-it-all attitude of the eighteenth-century satirist.

Pound's reasons for excising the lines are understandable. Eliot said in 1959 that Pound advised him to "Do something different."²¹ The passage is very interesting in its own right, but as in the case of the

deleted opening lines of "The Burial of the Dead," it is difficult to relate to the main interest of the section in which it appears.

"The Fire Sermon" is a meditation on the sordidness of meaningless sex, on the ravages of reflex copulation. Perhaps Eliot is attempting to relate Fresca's immature sensibility and her superficial attraction to art with the idea of the decay of personal relationships--it must be admitted that one has to strain to find a plausible connection. Also, and Pound apparently realized this, Eliot's set of couplets might be particularly vulnerable to unsympathetic criticism. As Pound wrote Eliot, "Pope has done this so well that you cannot do it any better; and if you mean this as a burlesque, you had better suppress it, for you cannot parody Pope unless you can write better verse than Pope--and you can't."²²

I do not believe that Eliot meant his couplets to be a burlesque of Pope's poetry, although I can easily imagine the passage being interpreted as such. Ultimately, of course, one must view Pound's judgment of Eliot's couplets in one of two ways: if you agree with Pound, you are opting for tonal homogeneity; if you regret the exclusion of the passage, you are responding to the poem more as Eliot originally viewed it--as a series of dramatic voices loosely united by Eliot's attempt to evaluate contemporary society. One thing is certain: the removal of this passage from "The Fire Sermon" silenced the voice of eighteenth-century heroic couplet satire.

The last major section of The Waste Land cut out by Pound's editing was the eighty-three lines which originally opened "Death by Water."²³

The passage is based on Eliot's childhood experiences in his family's summer home on the New England coast. His tale of an ill-fated fishing voyage is interesting for three reasons: poetically, he was attempting to use a very old form of narrative in English poetry, the iambic pentameter tale; critically, the passage illustrates the clash between Pound's theory of poetry and Eliot's more clearly than perhaps any other part of The Waste Land Manuscript; and in relation to The Waste Land as a whole, this passage is the only one to feature an explicitly American setting. Pound seemed unimpressed by the passage; there are no marginalia, and his criticism is mainly confined to striking out numerous consecutive lines without comment, a procedure which hardly seems helpful to Eliot. However, in the first thirty lines or so, Pound does offer some specific criticism; for instance, Eliot's first stanza read:

The sailor, attentive to the chart and to the sheets,
A concentrated will against the tempest and the tide,
Retains, even ashore, in public bars or streets
Something inhuman, clean, and dignified.

Pound's revision changes the stanza to "The sailor ashore in public bars or streets retains / Something inhuman, dignified." Pound has simplified the passage, reduced it almost to the essentials of the kernel sentence by eliminating the two appositional phrases modifying "sailor." Also, of course, Pound eliminated the superfluous "even ashore" since the verb "retains" implies the necessary meaning--if a sailor is to retain something from his experience on the sea, he must do his retaining on land. The trite phrase "the tempest and the tide" is taken out in the process. Pound's revision of this stanza is a good

illustration of what he means by emphasizing concentration in poetry-- at least part of this virtue is verbal economy.

While some of the poetry in this eighty-three line opening section of "Death by Water" is demonstrably weak, the passage does serve a definite purpose, and Pound seems to have been more sensitive to its defects than its strengths. The weakest portion of the section is the first three stanzas, which attempt to generalize about sailors; they are adjective-heavy, rhythmically uninteresting, pedestrian, and certainly deserved to be taken out of the poem. However, beginning at line thirteen is Eliot's story of a sea disaster, and these seventy lines have definite poetic merit. (See Appendix)

Much of what Gallup called "the experimental nature" of the excised poems in The Waste Land is related to the concept of dialectic or dramatic form. Pound tended to retain the parts of the manuscript which are of greater intensity, showing a high degree of verbal economy; in other words, those parts like "Phlebas" that are "tight" in construction. He tended to remove sections more leisurely developed, like the narrative in "Death by Water" or the heroic couplet satire in "A Game of Chess." The purpose of my brief discussion of the deleted sections of The Waste Land is not to discredit Pound's work, but to show how thoroughly dramatic Eliot's original construction was.

Before leaving The Waste Land manuscript, I would like to indulge in what may at first appear to be digression from my discussion of Eliot's dialectical or dramatic method of composition. In "The Fire Sermon" Eliot introduces the blind prophet Tiresias, "old man with

wrinkled dugs." Tiresias then proceeds to "perceive" and "foretell" the story of the bored typist and the young man carbuncular; incongruously, Eliot has Tiresias express himself as if he were unsure of his vision of future events--on several occasions Tiresias uses "may" and "perhaps" to qualify his prophesy. Pound's irritation with this favorite linguistic crutch of the intellectual tentatively advancing an opinion mounts through the passage; when Tiresias says of the house agent's clerk, "Perhaps his inclinations touch the stage," Pound circles the "perhaps" and scrawls "Perhaps be damned" in the margin.²⁴ Near the end of the passage, Tiresias again is seized with momentary uncertainty about the thoughts of the typist; he says "Across her brain one half-formed thought may pass." This last "may" proved too much for Pound; his advice to Eliot was "make up yr. mind--you Tiresias, if you know, know damn well, or else you don't."²⁵ Anyone acquainted with Pound knows that he was rarely ever tentative about anything, certainly never reticent in stating his opinion boldly and without qualification; his marginal notations here are revealing, as well as amusing. We are allowed a laugh at Eliot's expense for resurrecting a famous seer who is not confident of what he sees. But more important than our amusement is what we can learn about Eliot himself from a consideration of the original Tiresias passage.

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot says that the poet's task is to "transform personality into a personal work of art."²⁶ Part of the critic's job, then, is attempting to understand the personality of the poet, not for its own sake, but for better elucidation of the

poet's work. To be more specific: the critic must attempt to abstract the pattern of an individual's total response to life, to the stimuli of living. Every work of art may be viewed as an effort to impose form on the chaos of sensation, to secure order from a helter-skelter world of conflicting motives. The total response of the poet and his attempts to achieve form are complicated; they may even appear to lack coherence, to be the obverse of pattern; the fits and starts, the inadequate response, the inadequate form, what Eliot called "the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings," is the agony of creation. However, "if you do not come too close," a form or pattern will emerge that, while remaining a simplification, is capable of providing insight into the relation of an artist to his art.

One of the difficulties in approaching Eliot's personality is that part of his personality was a desire to conceal himself; if Eliot kept notebooks as Coleridge did they have not been revealed to the public, and may not be revealed for some time, in accordance with his own expressed wishes. We know more about John Donne or Samuel Taylor Coleridge than we do about a poet who died less than a decade ago. However, there is enough testimony from people that knew Eliot, and sufficient evidence in his own published writings, to suggest a pattern of personal response.

Sir Herbert Read's comments on Eliot in Allen Tate's T. S. Eliot:

The Man and his Work center about the following passage:

From the beginning there was a withholding of emotion, a refusal to reveal the inner man. I always felt that I was in the presence of a remorseful man that had some secret sense of guilt.²⁷

Read's remark is, I think typical of the impression Eliot made on most of his friends; his was not a spontaneous personality. Bernard Bergonzi in T. S. Eliot observes that ". . . Eliot was chiefly remarkable for his immense taciturnity--Douglas Gouldring was struck by his ability to sit for a whole afternoon in complete silence. . . ."28 It was Eliot's introversion that most impressed the Woolfs; they told a story of walking in the country with him one afternoon: Leonard Woolf dropped behind Eliot and Virginia in order to urinate; when he caught up with the pair, he found that his activity had embarrassed Eliot. In the discussion that ensued, Eliot admitted that he could not bear to shave in the presence of others, not even his wife.²⁹ And so the anecdotes and comments of friends and acquaintances continually dwell on Eliot's shyness; Bertrand Russell suggests that Eliot may have been attracted to his first wife because her personality was so different from his; Russell says that Vivienne was "stimulating" and that Eliot married her "to be stimulated."³⁰

Eliot was acutely aware of the self, of the peculiar sense of the absurd that can only be reached by those who can imagine themselves, as from a distance, acting a role. It was Eliot that said a sense of humor is always present if an individual can step out of his own personality. Who but Eliot could create a Prufrock, a character whose preoccupation was with "Do I dare?"; Prufrock's self-consciousness is painfully exposed ("They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!'") and this is why Prufrock cannot "force the moment to its crisis"--he is afraid; he does not want to appear a fool.

Eliot's mannerisms result, at least in part, from a desire to compensate for his lack of self-confidence. His extreme formality in dress is one aspect of his need for social conformity; the picture of Eliot in front of Faber and Gwyer in his conservative English attire, wearing spats, a proper English bowler, a proper umbrella on his arm, comes immediately to mind. If anything Eliot's habits of dress were, as one of his English friends observed, "a trifle too English to be English."³¹ Conformity to the external norms of society allows for a degree of anonymity, a great desideratum for the shy, introverted personality. Eliot was able to see the humor in his own self-consciousness:

How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!
 With his features of clerical cut,
 And his brow so grim
 And his mouth so prim
 And his conversation, so nicely
 Restricted to What Precisely
 And If and Perhaps and But.

Most of Eliot's critics have not sufficiently recognized his dry, self-deprecating wit; the ability to laugh at one's self is the key to Eliot's humor, and few people in any age can laugh at themselves, I imagine.

Ezra Pound understood his friend's personality well. Early in their association, Pound, "that small but persistent volcano in the dim levels of London literary society,"³² decided that his way of attacking the stodgy London literary establishment, still Georgian in its attitude toward poetry, must be quite different from Eliot's. Pound pointed out that Eliot could never be as "explosive" as Wyndham Lewis, that Eliot should leave the "battering ram" approach to him, and utilize "a more oceanic and fluid method of revolutionizing English culture."³³ Later on,

Pound was inclined to believe that Eliot's infiltration job was a bit too thorough; instead of infiltrating, perhaps Eliot had affiliated. The differences between Pound and Eliot are considerably deeper than surface mannerisms; indeed, they penetrate to the level of modes of perception.

In John R. Harrison's book, The Reactionaries, he quotes Wyndham Lewis's description of Pound as a "revolutionary simpleton." Harrison goes on to say that "Once he [Pound] has accepted some idea or principle, that idea or principle becomes somehow part of his own vanity." Harrison substantiates his assertion by citing Pound's economic opinions, which amount to the reducing of the evils of the world to the practice of moneylending.³⁴ To say the least, such a point of view is a gross oversimplification, a distortion of problems that are multifaceted in cause and cure. But Pound's mode of thought here, as elsewhere, (recall his opinions about drama, previously quoted) is evident: he had an egocentric intellect, the kind of personality that hears its own voice only, that would project itself upon the world untempered by careful consideration of opposing points of view. Pound's intellectual strategy is simplification, the reduction of the complex to an easily understood principle that becomes "somehow part of his own vanity."

Eliot's mode of thought is, as I have said previously, dialectical; therefore, his method is the converse of Pound's. Pound always is convinced that he is right, both in his poetry and his criticism; Eliot is circumspect, tentative. In After Strange Gods Eliot delineates two

basic patterns of organizing experience; Fei-Pai Lu sums up Eliot's argument in the following paragraph from T. S. Eliot: The Dialectical Structure of his Theory of Poetry:

Eliot contrasts two methods: the method of wisdom and the method of heresy. Whereas the method of wisdom recognizes the dynamic process involved in the search for truth, the heretical method is "fixed" and "one-sided," taking what is merely a part as a whole, considering what is merely a stage in the process of knowledge as ultimate, and never looking for common grounds on which the plurality of truth may be restored to its singularity.³⁵

Pound's method is "heretical" by Eliot's definition, while Eliot's own method is, one may infer, fluid, dialectical, evolutionary--a constant struggle to comprehend the total picture in a grand synthesis.

To better understand the method of heresy and the method of wisdom, a connection should be made with personality. Eliot's shyness, taciturnity, and extreme formality are manifestations of an introverted personality--but Eliot's struggle with himself goes much deeper than the face he prepared to meet the faces that he met. The center of Eliot's sensibility is a profound distrust of personality, a fear of the undisciplined response.

The problems of an individual's personality are most likely to surface in a time of unusual stress. The most difficult years for Eliot were those up to and immediately following the publication of The Waste Land, or about 1915-1925. The mental and physical tension of these years is admirably captured in Valerie Eliot's introduction to The Waste Land Manuscript, which is the principal source for my discussion of this period in Eliot's life. In 1915 Eliot left Oxford, where he

had been studying on a Sheldon Traveling Fellowship, and married Vivien Haigh-Wood in June of that year. After two short stints of teaching, he took employment with Lloyd's Bank, where he was to remain until joining the publishing firm of Faber and Gwyer in 1925. Eliot found it necessary to augment his income by lecturing and reviewing in his spare time; in addition, he accepted the assistant editorship of The Egoist. These very considerable duties (a twelve-hour day must have been a luxury for Eliot) were not all to which he was obliged to attend; with the help of Pound, he was attempting to find outlets for his poetry. It was, as Eliot said in a letter to his American friend and patron John Quinn, an "overworked, distracted existence."³⁶ A man of less ability and stamina would have been exhausted by the demanding schedule alone; the stress of making ends meet while pursuing his literary ambitions was increased by problems connected with his wife and family.

Vivien Eliot, whatever her virtues might have been, was a source of continual anxiety to her husband. Her physical health was poor, and she suffered periods of mental instability. Pound parenthetically informed John Quinn that

(His [Eliot's] wife hasn't a cent and is an invalid always cracking up, & needing doctors, & incapable of earning anything--though she has tried . . .)³⁷

Eliot seems to have genuinely loved her, and one can image the distress occasioned him by her illnesses.³⁸ His "sufficiently fatiguing day at the bank" was not concluded with scenes of domestic tranquility. The source of Eliot's couple in "A Game of Chess" who wonder "what shall

we do tomorrow / What shall we ever do?" may have been close to home.

Besides the strain of his unfortunate marriage, Eliot felt he had to prove himself to his parents, who had disapproved of his permanent residence in England. His mother wished to see him settled in someone's philosophy department; she confided to Bertrand Russell that she had "more confidence in his (Eliot's) philosophy than his vers libre."³⁹ Part of the reason for Eliot's publication of an American edition of his poems was to justify his life-style; in a letter to John Quinn, he said ". . . my father has died, but this does not weaken the need for a book at all--it really reinforces it--my mother is still alive. . . ."⁴⁰ The effort to mollify his parents, especially his mother, was an added pressure that he certainly did not need.

Eliot was also worried about his lack of poetic production--there are several references to "a long poem I have in mind" in the correspondence of 1920-1921,⁴¹ but as he explained to John Quinn,

The chief drawback to my present mode of life is the lack of continuous time, not getting more than a few hours together for myself, which breaks the concentration required for turning out a poem of any length.⁴²

The long poem that Eliot had in mind was The Waste Land, and soon he would have the necessary time, for the hectic pace he had maintained since 1915, under the most unfavorable circumstances, was now adversely affecting his health. In a letter to Richard Aldington, dated June 23, 1921, Eliot said wearily,

I have had much to do and have felt so ill that it has taken me twice as long to do it. I have seen the specialist (said to be the best in London) who made his tests, and said I must go away at once for three months quite alone . . .⁴³

Eliot's enforced rest began at Margate ("On Margate Sands I can connect nothing with nothing. . .") and was concluded in Switzerland in the care of a specialist in psychological disorders. In Switzerland ("By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept. . .") Eliot completed the manuscript of The Waste Land, which Pound received in January, 1922, for the practice of what Valerie Eliot called his "maieutic skill."

What Eliot found out about himself in Switzerland comforted him, and is of first importance in understanding the structure of his poetry. With evident relief, Eliot wrote to Aldington:

I am satisfied since being here that my "nerves" are a very mild affair, due not to overwork but to an aboulie and emotional derangement which has been a lifelong affliction. Nothing wrong with my mind--⁴⁴

It is this "aboulie and emotional derangement," this "lifelong affliction," that provides a sound psychological foundation for Eliot's sensitivity to dialectic.

A good example of the functioning of Eliot's aboulie is the following passage from a letter to Richard Aldington, written just prior to the sojourn in Switzerland:

Perhaps you will think: why not simply chuck the bank, rest, and begin journalism. But I feel too ill for that, and I am sure that this would be the worst possible moment for such a change. I should have to brace myself to a new effort, instead of relaxing, and I should worry myself in a short time into a far worse state.⁴⁵

This last sentence is easier to understand when Eliot's emotional

problem is kept in mind. "The thousand decisions and revisions" involved in everyday life were a source of constant worry and tended to aggravate a naturally nervous disposition. Eliot wrote to his brother from Switzerland about the kind of self-control he must cultivate to cope with his own personality:

The great thing I am trying to learn is how
to use my energy without waste, to be calm
when there is nothing to be gained by worry,
and to concentrate without effort.⁴⁶

It is fortunate for modern poetry, if not for his own well-being, that Eliot retained his intense awareness of the conflict, the dialectic between opposing forces--for this is the essence of Eliot's poetry. On the mundane level his psychological make-up made it hard for him to make decisions--he was a "worrier"; on the higher, creative level, it impelled him to a poetic of contrasts, to an impersonal art, impersonal because the voices of the dialectic are at once your own and not your own. In contrast, Pound's is the poetry of personality; the world must come to Ezra Pound's way of thinking, for he will make no concessions--he would "convert the heathens." When Eliot has adopted a position it is not without a feeling for the other side of the question.

When the available evidence concerning Eliot's personality is assembled, it begins to form a definite pattern with an internal consistency and dynamic quite its own, like a well-made novel or poem. His shyness and taciturnity, his attention to correctness in dress and manners, his acute indecisiveness are the syndrome of a personality which does not trust itself, which lacks self-confidence. The extreme

centrality of Eliot's self-doubt is easily substantiated by statements he made about the problem of belief, which is, of course, closely related to the search for truth.

The "heretical" thinker has little difficulty with the problem of faith, since his view of the world is essentially narrow; for instance, a Marxist interprets the world in economic terms, reducing the complex of human activity to class struggle. Such a world-view has one primary advantage--a clear-cut course of action is recommended that everyone can understand. Human motivations not directly related to economic matters are either pushed into the background or reinterpreted in economic terms (e.g., the Marxist has difficulty with the religious motive; he prefers to ignore it, or to label it "the opium of the masses," a description implying "commodity," and hence a reinterpretation of the religious motive in economic terms). The method of wisdom, on the other hand, attempts to comprehend the totality of human experience; it begins with careful observation and always resists the impulse to over-simplify, to reduce to dogma. Eliot eventually adopted Christianity as his faith, as his solution to the problem of belief; even so, he retained a deep sense of the inadequacy of any formulation; that is, in terms of the dialectical of the method of wisdom, he could not ignore "the demon of doubt which is inseparable from the spirit of belief." With disarming honesty, Eliot contrasted himself with the Marxists, who "seem so certain of what they believe. My own beliefs are held with a skepticism which I can never hope to be

quite rid of."⁴⁷ The dialectical method is the only way for a personality like Eliot, who could not, like Pound, accept the pat solution. The strength of the method of wisdom is its comprehensiveness and its intellectual honesty; its weakness is the difficulty of acting with the internal climate of doubt always deflecting impulse.

The problem of acting--the deed itself, the dialectic which precedes it, the consequences which follow--is a basic concern in all of Eliot's poems. It is interesting to note that when Eliot turned to drama, a form of art intimate with the complexities of human action, his plays were criticized for being too talky. Indeed, a significant weakness in Eliot's plays is the lack of action, the quality Aristotle designated the essence of drama; Becket does not act so much as he is acted upon, and Harry, in "The Family Reunion," does not really do anything until he decides to leave in the last scene--but even then, the significance of his departure is far from clear.⁴⁸ Eliot is more interested in the agony of deciding to act than he is in the act itself; this bias reflects his own struggle with the "aboulie and emotional derangement." The major poems before "Ash-Wednesday"--"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Gerontion," The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men"--are vitally concerned with the tension between conflicting motivations, and with the relation of the internal debate to the problem of action; "Ash-Wednesday" can only be understood in the light of the earlier poetry.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Gerontion" have much

in common. In both poems the psyche of the central figure is intimately depicted for the reader, "as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen." The clear visual images form associational clusters around the main tension in the poems--what the central figures are as opposed to what they can envision or understand. Both poems are records of personal failure, the inability of a character to act upon his superior insight into himself and the human situation. Both poems deal with the "agon-y" of communication, and both personae wind up as they began--isolated and inactive, in short, defeated. Gerontion and Prufrock are both haunted by the fear of some ultimate exposure, some merciless inquest into "the butt-ends of their days and ways"; Prufrock sees himself "pinned and wriggling on the wall" and Gerontion asks, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" Both poems capture a personality in a crisis moment of self-realization, like Tiresias in The Waste Land, "throbbing between two lives."

The lives of Prufrock are dialectically conceived around two image clusters. There is the everyday world, "the mornings, evenings, afternoons," "the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets." The images associated with Prufrock's diurnal round have definite connotations. The startling image that opens the poem, "When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table," implies somnolence, or a kind of death-in-life state, as does the celebrated yellow fog, which cat-like "Curled once about the house and fell asleep." The images of sleep are reinforced by the rhythmic tediousness of Prufrock's society, the smothering clap-trap of

"tea and cakes and ices," "the cups, the marmalade, the tea"--Prufrock's society is largely composed of a cycle of lists to be checked off routinely, marking the passage of time. It is no wonder one is inclined toward sleep--the monotony is stupefying. The images of sleep, implying withdrawal of consciousness, are combined with images of the sinister and threatening: "Streets that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent." Prufrock's vision of the eternal Footman and of his head upon a platter also belong to the images that express his paranoia, his sense of being personally threatened by his environment.

The other side of the dialectic is Prufrock's private world of desire and imagination. The images here are primarily concerned with women, and with the closely related problem of communication. Among the things Prufrock tells us he has known already are

Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)

Prufrock's excited interjection is the first sign that he is carnally attracted to women. Before this, they were only part of the tedium of his existence--"In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo." Prufrock's problem in connection with women is his acute self-consciousness; he can imagine the women commenting disparagingly about his middle-aged body: "They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin / . . . They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!'" Prufrock's feeling of inadequacy prevents him from forcing the moment to its crisis; he cannot get beyond the small talk, the "tea and cakes and ices," to the serious business of a meaningful relationship with a woman.

Instead, his desire is transfigured into the vision of the mermaids-- beautiful, but unapproachable products of the fancy. Prufrock says, "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each," but he adds, "I do not think they will sing to me." Nevertheless, Prufrock is enchanted with his dream:

I have seen them riding on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

Prufrock is content to view the subject of his desire from a distance, just as he was satisfied to postpone decisive action with the excuse, "there will be time," earlier in his monologue. Only in the circle of his private musings does Prufrock's world take on power and appeal, as in the vision of the mermaids; otherwise, his life is a series of unrelated, irrelevant events, all of which he has seen before.

Prufrock's feeling that he is ineffectual, that "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas," derives from his own self-concept. He sees himself as a little man, no Prince Hamlet, but "an attendant lord, one that will do / To swell a progress," in other words, a minor figure. Such a conception of one's self tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy; actually, he has much in common with the melancholy Dane--both, for instance, are dissatisfied with their surroundings, both find excuses for not acting, both engage in self-debate, both seek means of escape from conditions they find intolerable. Like Hamlet, Prufrock is a vacillator; visions are followed by revisions, decision by indecision; unlike Hamlet, Prufrock never gains enough faith in himself to act, but remains the detached observer with

his desires and dreams suspended in the limbo of "To be or not to be."

Prufrock might easily be the uncomfortable gentleman in "Portrait of a Lady," or the speaker of the following lines in The Waste Land:

I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison . . .

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," as in all the poems before "Ash-Wednesday," the dialectic begins with the distance between self and not-self. The focal point is the effort to establish contact, to communicate. Part of Prufrock's difficulty in bridging the gap is obviously connected with his feeling of inadequacy, which causes him to view all problems, and especially the problem of communication, (i.e., "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?") hyperbolically. Prufrock is uncertain of himself; indeed, one of his characteristics is morbid self-scrutiny, which leads inevitably toward the kind of humility expressed by the question, "And how should I presume?" Although in Christian terms humility is preferable to excessive pride, in Prufrock's existence it serves only to make him lack the self-confidence to begin the verbal encounter session with another human being ("And how should I begin?")

So part of Prufrock's failure to communicate is the prison his nature has erected, the "I" half of the dialectic. The rest of the problem involves the second party and the medium of communication itself. Most of "Prufrock" is devoted to the persona's self-inquisition, but hints are given about the psychological condition of society; for instance, there is an air of pseudo-sophistication about the women who

"come and go, talking of Michelangelo"--people who use language more to impress than to communicate. Prufrock's descriptions of evening in the city, "half-deserted streets," "muttering retreats," "restless nights," all convey a sense of isolation and frustration, as does the memory of the "lonely men in shirt-sleeves." Prufrock's preoccupation with his appearance is symptomatic of a society that judges people by externals. "The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase" belong to people that categorize other people, that attempt to avoid exploring the particular and the individual by way of the pigeon-holing grand generalization. In Prufrock's society it is necessary "to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" because, one suspects, failure to adopt "deliberate disguises" will result in being transfixed on the wall. The communication problem must be seen dialectically; it is not only Prufrock's humble timorousness that prevents him from establishing any meaningful relationship, but also the indifference and superficiality of the "you" part of the dialectic, which imposes upon sensitive people like Prufrock the nervous urge toward self-concealing conformity.

The burden of closing the gap between the "you" and the "I" falls upon the medium of words. It is easy enough to make small talk "among the porcelain," about the weather, or about what one is wearing, or about what one did today or yesterday, and what one will do tomorrow; "some talk of you and me" is part of the daily round, and like "the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets," routine and unremarkable. But occasionally a deeper discourse is desired, a discussion that penetrates beneath the external and tangential odds and

ends to profound concerns--a self-epiphany in "The awful daring of a moment's surrender." The medium of words must carry "Hot enough for you today?" and the message of Gerontion's "I would meet you upon this honestly." In the first case, since no one really cares about the message, words seem to serve the turn; but frequently words are inadequate to express our innermost emotions, ideas, or perceptions. No one is in a better position to appreciate the frustrating "wrestle with words and meanings" than the foremost word-monger among us, the poet.

Prufrock's exasperated interjection, "It is impossible to say just what I mean," might come from any poet that deals with the complex inner world of thought and desire. Prufrock represents an amalgam, an elaborate symbol, of all the higher-order awarenesses that might exist at any period in time, of what we rather inaccurately refer to as "intellectuals," or "artist-types." Prufrock sees the world with frightening clarity as a recurrent cycle of the pointless and disjointed, in which our "overwhelming questions" become the absurdly comic, "Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" Prufrock's superior insight is a mixed blessing; although he sees more, questions more, than most men, he is isolated from them by this same quality and finds that his efforts to communicate such "abnormal" perceptions are apt to be misunderstood ("That is not it at all / That is not what I meant at all.") Prufrock cannot by what he says escape the "I" side of the dialectic, words have not bridged the gap to "you"; ultimately Prufrock descends impotently into self-centeredness, broken by periodic dreams of felicity, and by justifications of past inaction by the question,

"And would it have been worth it, after all . . ."

"Gerontion" evinces a pattern similar to that of "Prufrock." But the rift between the "you and the "I" widens, and the tone becomes more feverish, more desperate--the "little old man" is closer to running out of time than Prufrock. The first two lines of the poem are a synopsis of the situation: "Here I am, an old man in a dry month, / Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain." The first line alerts us that this is a point of evaluation, a taking of inventory for a life near its end. "Old man" is to "boy" as "dry month" is to "rain" in the calculus of the poem; the presence of the boy is a reminder of Gerontion's youth, now irrevocably lost, not to be regenerated, as the earth is, by rain. Gerontion takes us directly to his problem: "I was neither at the hot gates / Nor fought in the warm rain"; in other words, Gerontion, like Prufrock, has never taken any notable action--he is not doing, but "waiting." Like the Pharisees in Matthew 12.8, Gerontion "would see a sign"; in other words, he lacks the conviction to act, he needs a sensual manifestation of truth upon which to base belief; like Thomas, his spirit is too weak to have faith without touching the wounds.

"Prufrock" and "Gerontion" are both concerned with action, but action on two levels--the symbolic or verbal and the physical.⁵⁰ The physical act is normally what we think of when we think of action; it is the manipulation of objects in space, including brushing one's teeth, driving to work, fighting "in the warm rain." Verbal or symbolic action is mental cogitation, the decision that precedes the act, but is no less an act by this relationship. In fact, physical action, properly

considered, cannot be taken without the symbolic act, the inner debate of right and wrong, ways and means. For without the symbolic act, physical action is really motion, what we sometimes call "force of habit." The term "action" presupposes an agent, a conscious actor, capable of making choices on the basis of his frame of reference, what we might also term his point of view or personality. Planets move, men act.

In "Gerontion" the conflict of agent and scene is, as it was in "Prufrock," the primary concern.⁵¹ By "scene" I mean the external environment, the forces outside the agent's control. Scene functions dialectically in "Gerontion." The first function of scene that we encounter in the poem is as metaphoric extension of agent. Gerontion says, "my house is a decayed house," which connects with "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch"; Gerontion's body has decayed as his house has decayed. There are other details of scene that are congruent with Gerontion's condition as agent: "the peevish gutter," the goat coughing, the dry season, the dry month, Gerontion's description of May as "depraved." Gerontion's scene is old, withered, impotent, sterile, fallen into "the sear, the yellow leaf," out of touch with the fecundity of spring. Beginning with this reference to May and "dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas," we encounter scene as antagonist to agent, powers outside the agent that impinge upon him, forcing him to act. In fact, Gerontion has already acted symbolically in describing May as "depraved"; he has "placed" May within his point of view, performed the mental act of classification. Of course, his use of depraved

communicates an attitude to the reader; the word is usually applied to distortions of the sex act (from Latin depravare, meaning "to distort," "to make crooked") and Gerontion's use of it in conjunction with May is indicative of a diseased consciousness. The same verbal strategy is pursued in The Waste Land with "April is the cruellest month," which expresses the attitude of an unnatural awareness.

Scene as antagonist dominates "Gerontion" after the first seventeen lines. There are five direct and two oblique references to "wind" or "windy." Wind is used as a symbol of the forces that man must deal with in his environment (i.e., "time," as "will the weevil delay?"). The best passage in "Gerontion" utilizing wind as an imagistic shorthand for the antagonism of scene is

Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn
White Feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
And an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner.

The great difference between acting and being acted upon is captured in these lines. There are two images of resistance, of activity, on the part of agents in response to the wind--the bird flying into the wind, and if we see "running on the Horn" as a reference to sailing, a boat harnessing the power of the wind to achieve purposeful movement. In contrast to these images of activity are "White feathers in the snow," and "an old man driven by the Trades," which both express passivity. White feathers are invisible in the snow, just as Gerontion prefers not be noticed, and both are carried by the wind, "driven by the Trades," rather than resisting the force of the wind.

The essential passivity of Gerontion is brought home repeatedly. The forces external to the protagonist are virile and threatening-- "The tiger springs in the new year"--while Gerontion and the other "tenants of the house" are powerless and passive--"Us, he devours." The cosmic cataclysm that overtakes Gerontion's fellow tenants,

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

is an image of frightening intensity and irresistible strength, while the human agents are no more than helpless rag-dolls. In Gerontion's world the human agent is awaiting inevitable destruction, without purpose or belief, knowing that the spider will not suspend its operations, nor the weevil delay.

But what is the source of the helplessness, the passivity, the impotence, of the human agent in Gerontion? First, it is lack of purpose, the absence of a sense of design; Gerontion says, "History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors / And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions, / Guides us by vanities." In other words, Gerontion has no overall scheme of the universe to instruct his meditation. Secondly, there is the problem of timing; revelations come "when our attention is distracted," and when the need for belief arises, we have lost all but the memory of passion, and hence, commitment. Belief and passion are inconstant in strength and variable in duration, both are subject to the vicissitudes of time, and all because of the lack of a structure of faith comprehending human and extra-human motives--hence, the possibility for poor timing. Lastly, there is an overall distrust of any stance,

and therefore, of any act. "Neither fear nor courage saves us," says Gerontion. Motives become confused, "Unnatural vices are fathered by our heroism." Confusion reigns in Gerontion's world, which prevents the conception of purpose.⁵² In "Gerontion" we have the anatomy of stalemate, what we might call "symbolic inaction." The human agent is powerless to act because he cannot resolve his inner division.

As in "Prufrock," much of Gerontion's effort is concentrated on the special act of communication. While Prufrock thinks about trying to close the gap between the "you" and the "I," Gerontion actually makes an attempt, the urgency of which is emphasized by the repetition of "Think now" and "Think." Gerontion is trying to force the necessary concentration and attention upon his audience in a last, desperate effort to make "closer contact." He says, "I would meet you upon this honestly," but the separation has become too great--only feeling can close the gap, and Gerontion acknowledges, "I have lost my passion." And so the effect of his intellection, "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season," is merely to "multiply variety in a wilderness of mirrors." A coherent attempt to communicate, involving the dialectic of thought and feeling working in unison, is impossible for him.

The sense of isolation and fragmentation present in "Prufrock" and magnified in "Gerontion" is carried to something like an ultimate extent in "The Hollow Men," the last major poem Eliot wrote prior to "Ash-Wednesday." The language of "The Hollow Men" is flat, unadorned, ritualistic--powerful, but with no uplift, no lyrical moment, as with Prufrock's enchanting vision of the mermaids. The form of dramatic

monologue is abandoned--reader and poet no longer view the agon of a persona from a distance. Instead, the you and I of the dialectic are collapsed in the inclusive pronoun "we," and the poem makes a corresponding leap from the detailed and personal world of Prufrock and Gerontion to a generalized and abstract climate. To be sure, "The Hollow Men" still manifests Eliot's gift for the incisive image; for example, the comparison of the voices of the hollow men whispering together to "wind in dry grass / Or rat's feet over broken glass" is one of the most effective similes in his poetry. But the word game Eliot plays in such passages as "Shape without form, shade without color, / Paralyzed force, gesture without motion" is something added by "The Hollow Men" to Eliot's poetic language. The passage has a peculiarly opaque quality, produced by terminology having a high level of generalization, and its chant-like rhythm anticipates the litanic movement of "Ash-Wednesday."

It was necessary to abstract the dialectical structure of "Prufrock" and "Gerontion" from the mass of detail and associational flow of the protagonist's mind. We reduced the complex to a dialectical conflict of motives and states of being, such as Prufrock's desire to communicate versus his fear of self-revelation, and Gerontion's agonized awareness of the distance between doing and not doing. Dialectical form in "Gerontion" and "Prufrock" was covert and substantial (in the root sense of that word); in "The Hollow Men," the dialectic becomes overt and essential. For instance, there is a clear and unmistakable opposition between two states of being in "The Hollow Men": the hollow men them-

selves and their limbo-like scene, "death's dream kingdom," and "Those who have crossed / With direct eyes" to a state of being termed "death's other Kingdom." The distance between these two planes of existence is emphasized by the vagueness with which the hollow men and their world are remembered by those in "death's other Kingdom"; the former "Remember us--if at all--not as lost / Violent souls, but only / As the hollow men / The stuffed men." There is a third realm, "death's twilight kingdom," which lies between the other two, and would seem to partake of both worlds, while being neither.

"Death's dream kingdom" corresponds to the mortal world, to the sphere of human activity, with its limited knowledge and vision, while "death's other Kingdom" (note the capital "K") must be the eternal world, or Heaven, the realm of the unlimited and absolute. It follows that "death's twilight kingdom" (twilight: between day and night, a shades-of-gray time) is a median state, the time before the traversing of the only avenue between the mortal and immortal worlds--death. Gerontion was in the twilight kingdom, "twilight in the sense of "any period or condition of decline,"⁵³ the time when life begins to melt into death, begins to resemble death in the decay of the senses. "The Hollow Men" focuses attention on the struggle to achieve the necessary order and meaning in this life to be able to cross to the next one "with direct eyes."

"Those who have crossed / With direct eyes," is the only hint of the state of mind in dialectical opposition to the syndrome of "The Hollow Men." The word "direct" is the key to understanding the difference

between the hollow men and the direct-eyed people. "Direct" in the sense of "proceeding or lying in a straight course or line, not deviating or swerving," is, I think, the most important way the word is meant in the passage, especially since it modifies "eyes." The direct-eyed people have steadily contemplated the next world, have chosen a stance and never looked back, and in doing so, have achieved direction and purpose; they are directed, in the true sense of the word, by their vision of the "perpetual star / Multifoliate rose," an allusion to the final vision of the eternal given by Beatrice to Dante.⁵⁴ "Eyes" function as a synecdoche for the total act of envisioning, by which the protagonist is "moved toward a goal," another meaning of "direct." The goal is communion with the eternal in prayer and vision, "the intersection of the timeless with time," a purpose capable of transcending the "cunning passages, contrived corridors" of earth-centered motives that befuddled Gerontion.

The hollow men are far removed from the grace of vision that regulated the lives of the direct-eyed people. The human condition out of grace is the primary concern of "The Hollow Men." The condition of Prufrock and Gerontion is generalized in the hollow men; for instance, like Gerontion, the hollow men are "Behaving as the wind behaves," blown hither and yon, living a life without continuity or purpose. Like Prufrock, they seek to avoid open confrontation, which would involve display of their inner vacuity; the hollow men adopt "deliberate disguises" as Prufrock hid himself behind the face he prepared to meet the faces that he met. Such strategies of avoidance, taking refuge in a

rented house "under a windy knob," will not defer forever "that final meeting / In the twilight kingdom" when the Eternal Footman comes to us in earnest, when the opportunity for faith is lost irretrievably. The hollow men are doomed to remain "sightless," for the eyes will not reappear without the purposeful concentration of faith.

Thus, "The Hollow Men" is constructed dialectically around two states of being--"death's other Kingdom" and "death's dream kingdom"--and two corresponding states of mind--one with direction and faith, because enlightened by visionary apprehension of the eternal, and one without any of these qualities, and so being "quiet and meaningless." Purely from the standpoint of dialectical form, the most interesting aspect of "The Hollow Men" is the middle three stanzas of part five. Here seven pairs of terms are presented in juxtaposition--"Between the idea / And the reality," motion and act, conception and creation, emotion and response, desire and spasm, potency and existence, essence and descent--a verbal strategy that presents the dialectic schematically in its barest (verbally, at least) form. The impact of these pairs of terms depends upon the distinction I made earlier, while analyzing the dialectical structure of "Gerontion," concerning action and motion in reference to agent. Only the human agent can distinguish between his own mental constructions, "ideas" and "essences," and that which "really" exists, the "descent" from the ideal to the actual. For Prufrock, Gerontion, and the hollow men, the most crucial of the dialectical pairs is potency and existence, not Hamlet's "To be, or not to be"; they have chosen to be, and they are aware of a higher order with which they must

come to terms ("After such knowledge, what forgiveness?"), and what remains is to act upon that knowledge, to find the "direct eyes." It is the vision of an eternal order which must guide our own efforts to "give, sympathize, and control," and this is potency as distinguished from mere existence.

It is time to bring our observations into focus before approaching "Ash-Wednesday," where the dialectic is strangely transfigured. I might sum up what I have thus far said with a statement no more profound than only Eliot could have written what he wrote. But such an absurdly simple observation is complicated in the unraveling, involving no less than everything the term "form" implies. The transformation of "personality into a personal work of art" is an alchemical process, proceeding more on the strength of analogy of form, than by what one considers to be logical or rational grounds. We know that "personality" was a quizzical term to Eliot, a fact not to be trusted if not controlled. His own personality was not a confident one, and he was driven to exhaustion, both physically and mentally, at one point in his life by "an aboulie and emotional derangement." Perhaps his experience with his own personality led him to insist that poetry, and art in general, to be great must be impersonal, or at least, personal plus. Distrust of his own personality seems to be behind his reliance on tradition and learning as outside reinforcement for the personality: Pound called Eliot "Old Possum" as if Eliot tried to cover his true self with enigmatic poses. Eliot's reaction against the poets of the nineteenth century was largely motivated by their elevation of the individual sensibility above tradition. Much

of what Eliot represents revolves around the term personality.

Hugh Kenner called Eliot "the invisible poet." In terms of poetic form, the description is most accurate. Eliot's personality is obscured by the dramatic structure of The Waste Land, where the poet's personality guides, but is not displayed. Eliot is "doing the police in different voices," approaching the subject from various points of view, none of which necessarily represents his private attitude. Gerontion and Prufrock are protagonists Eliot created to say something Eliot wished to say, but they are not Eliot. However, the pattern that "Prufrock," "Gerontion," The Waste Land, and "The Hollow Men" evince is intimately connected with the personality of the poet. In all these poems, there is the dialectic of "you and I," a terrible sense of aloneness. There is the searching inward, the dissection of self, and from this, the recognition that the self is not enough. There are attempts to communicate, always vitiated by a strong desire to retreat into a protective solipsism, and a recognition that modern society offers the individual little sense of bearing or belonging. It is a barren world of vacillators and drifters, not doing or saying anything of significance because they have no ultimate sense of direction or value. The need for a strong personal faith and a vision of God to escape the prison of self and to find relief from the burden of doubt enters the picture--but this is the concern of "Ash-Wednesday," and so brings us to a consideration of that poem.

III. REDEEMING THE DREAM: "ASH-WEDNESDAY" AND THE WORD

Except for the point, the still point
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

Compared to The Waste Land and the "Four Quartets," the sequence of six poems that appeared together in 1930 under the heading of "Ash-Wednesday" has received scant critical attention. There are many reasons for the cold shoulder that criticism has given "Ash-Wednesday"; it seems overshadowed by the two giants that flank it on either side; like the Fourth Symphony of Beethoven, "Ash-Wednesday" is often overlooked. For Eliot's contemporaries, or at least for the more discerning among them, The Waste Land represented a revolution in poetic taste, a new voice for modern poetry. In time there were hosts of imitators on both sides of the Atlantic and gradually The Waste Land was recognized, even by more traditional critics, as the innovation that it was.

But when Eliot grew beyond The Waste Land he left many of his admirers behind--"fixated," to speak, at an earlier stage of development. Eliot's conservative trinity of Royalist in politics, Classicist in literature, and, worst of all, Anglican in religion, seemed to many of his adherents an inexplicable and unpardonable retreat from the realities of the modern world.¹ This kind of misunderstanding--the feeling that, in modern parlance, Eliot had "copped out"--is the root of the critical neglect of "Ash-Wednesday."

More recently, of course, as we move in time further away from

The Waste Land, critics have been able to see Eliot's poetry in better perspective. The post-conversion poetry now receives the acclaim it deserves. The "Four Quartets," however, have received the lion's share of the commentary; "Ash-Wednesday" is usually approached obliquely; critics more often slide over or past it than "frontally assault" it.² Nevertheless, "Ash-Wednesday" is the crossroad of Eliot's poetry, and this chapter is in part an effort to indicate its centrality.

Hugh Kenner's brilliant study, T. S. Eliot: The Invisible Poet,³ has an interesting chapter on "Ash-Wednesday." Kenner locates the dialectical tension in the poem as the "opposite pull of the sense and the devotional spirit." The basic dialectic of "Ash-Wednesday" is an old one--the attraction of worldly things pitted against the desire for imaginative union with God; this tension is integral to Augustine's Confessions,⁴ to seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry, to the poetry of Hopkins, to virtually all religious meditation that derives from a sacred rather than a natural theology. Kenner observes that a poem like "Ash-Wednesday" occurs "when the Christian universe examines its own unworthiness"; it is true that Eliot speaks in "Ash-Wednesday" with the voice of Christian humility. This new voice, so unlike The Waste Land omniscient narrator, is one indication that "Ash-Wednesday" does, as Kenner says, "subsume for good the secular Eliot."⁶

Part of Kenner's chapter on "Ash-Wednesday" is devoted to a discussion of its language. He describes it as "open, tranquil," as "emptied of irrelevant specificity," as "a language never spoken anywhere"; he contrasts these qualities with those he believes are typical

of Eliot's early poetry: "opacity," "succinct impenetrability," and a "tendency to imitate the "gestures of real speech."⁷ These comments are not very useful in themselves (What, for example, is "irrelevant specificity"?). However, Kenner does draw attention to the most arresting feature of the poem--its language--and he does detect the radical change in poetic technique between The Waste Land and "Ash-Wednesday." When a poet alters his poetic modus operandi as much as Eliot did (any sensitive reader will feel a new linguistic climate in "Ash-Wednesday," even if he cannot intelligibly describe it), it usually reflects a profound inner transformation in the poet himself.

The central, transforming event in Eliot's life was, of course, his conversion to Christianity: Eliot joined the Anglican Church and became a British citizen in 1927. We do not know much about the circumstances of his conversion, but from the available evidence, and from what we know about his personality, I think that his conversion is probably more accurately described as a "profound commitment."⁸ That is, I think that Eliot's decision was the result of mature deliberation, not an emotional, spontaneous, impulsive act. He had a long-standing interest in the Christian Church (see, for example, his poem "The Hippopotamus") and his artistic commitment to Dante could easily become a deeply personal faith.⁹

Much has been written on Eliot's conversion and the significance of it in his poetry;¹⁰ I do not think, however, that the full impact of the conversion has been realized on the purely verbal level. Poets are occupationally concerned with words, as carpenters with hammers and

nails, and Eliot was especially a close observer of and theorizer about the verbal medium. He wrote "That Poetry Is Made with Words,"¹¹ an interesting and rarely referred to article; Prufrock worried about the inevitability of being misunderstood; a sizable percentage of the "Four Quartets" is a poetic complaint about words that "will not stay still," that "decay with imprecision." For the Christian poet, words are modified by the Word. God is an ultimate poet in Genesis: "Let there be light" and there was; it was Coleridge, another Christian poet, that termed poetic creation a "dim analogue of the Creation." The primary text for the Word is the Fourth Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and in John 1:14: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The Word, then, is the Word incarnate, Christ; in "The Dry Salvages" Eliot says: "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation." Christ resolves the dialectic of words, the conflict between things and things named--He is the Word made flesh.

The principal text for the Word in "Ash-Wednesday" is the wonderfully tautological passage:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
 If the unheard, unspoken
 Word is unspoken, unheard;
 Still is the unspoken word, the Word Unheard,
 The Word without a word, the Word within
 The world and for the world;
 And the light shone in darkness and
 Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
 About the centre of the silent Word.

The "still point" of "Ash-Wednesday" and the "Four Quartets," at least with respect to words and the Word, is first expressed in this passage.

Since, from the Christian vantage point, words ultimately derive from the Word, any discussion of the Word must be a tautological structure, "words about words." Eliot talks about the Word by contrasting it with the Word in the fallen world, the world of time, where "place is always and only place / And what is actual is actual only for one time / And only for one place." The reader should notice Eliot's movement in the passage from "word" to "Word"--from the only human world of words that move in time and then are silent, to the eternal Word of God, the reconciling Word for the worlds of flesh and spirit. The Word functions in two ways in this passage: first, it is the backdrop for "the unstilled world," "the still point of the turning world"--in that sense, the Word is one side of the dialectic of heaven and earth, previously discussed, and second, the Word is "the light shining in darkness"--in this sense, the Word is an orientation, a goal toward which man must strive with his poor tools and transient powers. When man aligns his word with the Word, "restoring with a new verse the ancient rhyme," he not only approaches the timeless world of the Word, but also joins the ranks of the "higher dreamers," who in their places and times sought the still point of the Word.¹²

We are now prepared to perceive how "Ash-Wednesday" completes the dialectical structure of Eliot's poetry, how it adds the final dimension lacking in The Waste Land. As I have said, The Waste Land is a vision of the all-too-human "fallen" world of birth and copulation and death, the endless cycle of flesh. Through Tiresias, the ultimate Bard of Experience, Eliot contrasts the individual human cycle with the birth,

growth, and decay of a civilization: "Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal." The cycle of a civilization or a tradition transcends the cycle of an individual--the basic dialectical conflict of The Waste Land was between the present and the past, with Eliot seeing the meaninglessness of a present that does not seek to conform with the pattern of experience, that does not have contact with the dead, and yet living, past. However, the individual and social cycles still "smell of mortality," as the beginning of "East Coker" affirms, and besides that, "tradition" in itself is too amorphous a concept to provide a unifying principle. Finally, in "Ash-Wednesday" Eliot arrives at the still point of the Word, an eternal, unmoving center--the Word then forms both the dialectical tension and the resolution of the tension between the ceaselessly changing human world and the divine realm of God. Since the Word is One, and the Word is God, and the world is God's creation through the Word, the many are contained in the One, without being identical--at least, not until the marriage of Heaven and Earth as foretold in Revelation.

If we view Eliot's poetry as a single poem, as a fixed pattern of meaning, a procedure, which, like the criticism of the Bible as a unit, is typologically sound, not historically valid, then we have a Christian epic in reverse--a mythos that develops from an unredeemed world to a world with the possibility of redemption.¹³ One thing is certain: the quest that Eliot began in The Waste Land and the earlier poetry is completed in "Ash-Wednesday"--the "Four Quartets" enlarge upon the vision presented in "Ash-Wednesday," but add nothing substantial

to it. "Ash-Wednesday" is the center of Eliot's poetry.

So far my commentary on "Ash-Wednesday" has circulated above and around the poem in an effort to provide a general framework through which to view it in relation to Eliot's poetry as a whole. Such a gross scheme is "behovely," but, beyond a point, as Blake said, "To generalize is to be an idiot." Having thus reached an end, I propose a new beginning: an examination of "Ash-Wednesday" in the spirit of Ding-an-sich, supplemented by illustrations from the "Four Quartets." Such an examination will fill out the general with the particular, allowing us to see the "symbolic act" of "Ash-Wednesday" in greater detail.

The second poem of the sequence was the first to be written, appearing in 1927 as "Salutation," with the epigraph: "The Hand of the Lord Was Upon Me:--e vo significando."¹¹ The last clause of the epigraph is from Dante's The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio XXIV. The reference is to Dante's explanation of his "dolce stil nuova" to the poet Bonagiunta of Lucca: "I am one who, when Love inspires me take note, and go setting it forth after the fashion which he dictates within me." The clause in Eliot's epigraph is the "and go setting it forth" of the translation taken from the Temple Classics Purgatorio (p. 301).¹⁴

Both the title and the epigraph of the poem are of some significance. A salutation is a "polite expression of greeting or good will"; the English words "salvation," "salutation," "salute," and "salutary" all derive from the Latin salus, meaning "health." A glance at the Indo-European roots listed by The American Heritage Dictionary¹⁵ reveals how carefully Eliot selected his title: the prefix stem of salus is "sol-" meaning "whole," "entire"--it is the root of, among other things, the

Latin sollemnis, meaning "celebrated at fixed dates (said of religious rites)." All of these meanings lie in the linguistic background of "salutation," and all obviously are relevant to the poem. First, and perhaps primary, is the basic meaning of "whole." Eliot's poem is about spiritual wholeness ("psychic integration," if you prefer psychological to religious terminology), and as a result of spiritual wholeness, unity of the imagination. The most immediate meaning of "salutation" is a greeting to the Lady, the female figure to whom Eliot addresses the poem, and who occupies a central position.

The epigraph has always intrigued me. As Philip Headings points out, the allusion to Dante, although specifically to the Purgatorio, has a strong contextual suggestion of Dante's tribute to Love, La Vita Nuova.¹⁶ The reference to Dante certainly supports the association of Eliot's Lady with Dante's Beatrice--one point to which nearly all critics of the poem have assented. The significance of the Lady to her poet-lover is succinctly set down by Headings in T. S. Eliot:

" . . . the love which inspires the poet stands not only for the earthly love of the Lady, but also for the higher love of the Virgin, of whom she is a figure, and also for the final love of God, which is figured in both of them."¹⁷ I might add that, since the Lady is associated with the Virgin, the Lady also represents the poet's approach to the Incarnation, to Christ, the Word made flesh. Also, in the generalizing movement of Love from the Lady to the Virgin to God, we have a structure analogous to the Neo-Platonic "ladder of love," as presented in Castiglione's Courtier.

It is the first part of the epigraph that is most interesting to me: "The Hand of the Lord Was Upon Me." Of course, it anticipates the Biblical allusions in the poem to the prophets Ezekiel and Elijah. In fact, a major allusion in "Salutation" is to the narrative of the resurrection of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37--that chapter begins with "The hand of the Lord was upon me." Elijah also claims divine aid in his efforts to overthrow the worship of the false god Baal. I wonder, along with Elizabeth Drew,¹⁸ if Eliot's epigraph refers to the way in which "Salutation" was written; perhaps the poem came spontaneously, in a flash of inspiration, so that Eliot felt "The Hand of the Lord Was Upon Me." Drew quotes Eliot's essay on Pascal:

. . . A piece of writing meditated, apparently without progress, for months or years, may suddenly take shape and word; and in this state long passages may be produced which require little or no retouch . . . he to whom this happens assuredly has the sensation of being a vehicle rather than a maker.¹⁹

As Drew hastens to point out, there is no way of knowing if "Salutation" was composed by sudden illumination, but Eliot does write about this manner of composition in his essay on Pascal as if he knew more than he was telling, and as Drew says, "Salutation" "reads as if it had come without conscious effort." The epigraph, although Drew does not refer to it, indicates to me that "Salutation" may indeed have been the product of a sudden psychic juncture in the sparking place of Eliot's mind.

For convenience in discussion, "Salutation" can be divided into two parts: ll. 1-23 present a vision of death: to this section of the poem belong the three white leopards, the juniper tree, the desert, and the dismembered body; from line 23 to the end of the poem is the song of the bones, "the burden of the grasshopper," which is an attempt to

express the "still point" idea. First, I will discuss the underlying unity of the symbols and allusions in the poem; then I will discuss the "Lady of silence" passage in the context of Eliot's other efforts to express the "still point" theme; and finally, I will try to relate all my observations to Eliot's commitment to Christianity and the vita nuova. The last step will require a close examination of the other five poems of "Ash-Wednesday."²⁰

We should expect, in a poet so concerned with the Word, to find numerous allusions to the Word of God--the Bible. In the first twenty-three lines, critics have found three definite references to Old Testament texts: the first is to the twentieth chapter of I Kings ("under a juniper tree"); the second is to Genesis 3:8 ("In the cool of the day"); and the third is to the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel ("And God said / Shall these bones live?").²¹ These three references must be examined closely to perceive their relevance to the poem.

The allusion to I Kings is to the story of the prophet Elijah, who struggled against the false god Baal and Baal's prophets; Elijah proved Baal to be a false god in the test of the two offerings, and then he killed the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18). But when Ahab went to the city of Jezreel to tell Jezebel what Elijah had done, she threatened to kill Elijah; he left Jezreel "for his life" (I Kings 19:3); leaving his servant in Beersheba, Elijah went "a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (I Kings 19:4). As Elijah lay sleeping under a juniper tree, an angel came with food and water,

and Elijah was refreshed for his journey to Horeb, the mount of God.

This episode in the complicated story of Elijah is about spiritual (and physical) rejuvenation. Elijah is weary, not of the service of God, but in the service of God ("It is enough"); as the prophet restores his body in sleep, God provides sustenance for body and soul, and thus Elijah is made whole, "recreated," to continue his function as the instrument of God. Elijah's selflessness is shown in his total dedication to the Lord (see I Kings 19:14), his humility in the phrase, "I am not better than my fathers." His weakness is the weakness of flesh, which the angel, in his salutary ministry, succors. The juniper, of course, is an evergreen, and may be considered an emblem of the everlasting life promised God's faithful; the wilderness in which Elijah prayed to die is similar to the desert of "Salutation."

The second allusion, "in the cool of the day," is connected with the "first curse," the disobedience of Adam and Eve. God walked in the Garden of Eden "in the cool of the day," after Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit. The consequences of this event form the Christian story; all the evil and sin which follow are traceable to "man's first disobedience," as is the necessity for the Incarnation. The sin of Adam and Eve is like the Israelites' worship of the false god Baal in the story of Elijah; both acts separate man from God.

The third allusion is to Ezekiel 37 and the resurrection of the dry bones. The prophet Ezekiel is taken by the spirit of the Lord to an open valley, "which was full of bones":

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live: And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.

4 Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

5 Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.

Ezekiel prophesies upon the bones, and God causes them to take on sinews, flesh, and skin; then Ezekiel is commanded to "prophecy unto the wind," after which life enters into the restored bodies. God explains the meaning of these events to Ezekiel: "Then he said unto me, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts" (Ezekiel 37:11). The resurrection of the dry bones is emblematic of the reunification of the Israelites, and the return of the children of Israel to their own land. The story in Ezekiel 37, then, is about the restoration of a people; Ezekiel, like Elijah, is a prophet that seeks to deliver his people from the heathens and the heathen gods.

Eliot's choice of Biblical allusions in the first part of "Salutation" is quite revealing. The reference to the Fall, of course, is basic to the Christian perspective; "Of man's first disobedience" are the opening words of Milton's Paradise Lost. The references to the two prophets Ezekiel and Elijah have more specific connotations. Both prophets are moved by the hand of the Lord (see I Kings 18:46 and Ezekiel 37:1), and they are moved by the Lord to guide their people away from bondage and false worship. The task is not an easy one: the word of the Lord came to Elijah at Horeb and asked Elijah what he was doing there; Elijah

responded, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left" (I Kings 19:10). It seems likely that Eliot sympathized imaginatively with the lives of the Old Testament prophets; they did their work in a hostile, or at best, indifferent, environment. Perhaps Eliot perceived a resemblance between the circumstances of the modern Christian poet and that of the prophets, as Milton saw his plight mirrored in Samson ("Blind in Gaza at the mill with slaves"). As Eliot said near the end of "East Coker":

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious.

The "unpropitious conditions" receive more thorough expression in the third section of "Choruses from 'The Rock'":

The Word of the LORD came unto me, saying:
O miserable cities of designing men,
O wretched generation of enlightened men, . . .
Much is your reading, but not the Word of GOD,
Much is your building, but not the House of GOD.

The twentieth century is not a happy prospect from a Christian point of view; it must have seemed to Eliot that the modern world worshipped Baal in a thousand guises, that indeed it was "after strange gods."

The allusions to Ezekiel and Elijah help to clarify what is happening in "Salutation." Although the stories of Elijah and Ezekiel are quite different in detail, thematically they are almost identical; that is, both are concerned with man's desire for renewal, for spiritual regeneration. The "three white leopards" have puzzled commentators;

Elizabeth Drew's connection of the Leopards and the partially consumed body with devouring myths in general²² (e.g., that of Osiris, which is mentioned in the notes to The Waste Land) is undoubtedly sound, since the devouring myth has the same symbolic significance as Elijah's desire to die and God's resurrection of the dry bones in Ezekiel. And, of course, the devouring myth, the recreation of Elijah, the resurrection of the bones all belong to the rebirth archetype, which includes, among its almost infinite symbolic manifestations, the Christian symbolism of conversion.

The allusions and symbols of the first part of "Salutation" suggest that the poem is closely related to Eliot's conversion to the Christian faith. Further support for the connection of his conversion with "Salutation" is that the poem was written in 1927, the same year that he became an Anglican. Elizabeth Drew summed up the general meaning of "Salutation" in T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry: ". . . the scattering of the bones is the symbol of the dissolution of the old ego as the centre of being, while the Rose and the Garden become the new centre."²³ The movement that Drew describes is from the old life to the new life: the process of conversion.

Integral to every symbolic structure of the rebirth archetype is a variation of "killing" or death. The paradox that puzzled the literal-minded Pharisee, Nicodemus, is at the heart of the mystery: Jesus told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Rebirth implies death, a casting away of the old to embrace the new. Among the most primitive religious rites known to

the Western world are those connected with vegetation deities; every spring the old god is killed in a community ceremony to ensure the vitality of the vegetation spirit. Variations of the spring rites are still observed today; in some of them, significantly enough, the old god is killed on Ash-Wednesday.²⁴ The symbolic death enacted in the "Lady, three white leopards" passage is emblematic of the "killing" of the old way of life:

And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.

The voice goes on to say: "It is this [the willed renunciation of "my deeds" and "my love"] which recovers / My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions / Which the leopards reject." In other words, by consigning his past sensual love to the "fruit of the gourd," the persona is able to be "devoted, concentrated in purpose" in his adoration of the Lady, and hence, the Virgin, and hence, God. The key word is "forget" ("As I am forgotten / And would be forgotten, so I would forget. . ."); the persona must "die" to his old being, to the earth-bound, sensual self wrapped up in the flesh.

The Lady is the unifying figure in the poem: of the symbols in the first twenty-three lines, only She is allowed a part in the song of the bones. Like Dante's Beatrice, the Lady represents both sensual, earthly desire and the higher love of God; She is a mediator between the worlds of flesh and spirit, a guide to the soul lost in Dante's pathless forest. The Beatrice figure is, then, a type for Christ, an intercessor for wayward man. Jesus told Nicodemus, in the passage I referred to above, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of

the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6); therefore, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The first step in the process of being reborn is the renunciation of the old way of the flesh; even then, as the voice of "Salutation" makes clear, redemption is an extension of divine grace, not something that man's actions can effect unaided:

Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We [the bones] shine with brightness.

It is "Because of the goodness of the Lady" that the bones reflect the light of divine grace. The life that remains in the bones is a product of divine grace and the persona's desire for a new life through concentration on the higher love represented by the Lady.

The first part of "Salutation" ends with an allusion to the resurrection of the dry bones in Ezekiel:

And God said
Prophecy to the wind, to the wind only for only
The wind will listen.

The reader will recall that Ezekiel's prophesying to the wind caused life to enter into the bones, after God had restored to the bones sinews, flesh, and skin. Therefore, these lines in "Salutation" may be interpreted as an invocation of the world of spirit, the immutable still-point of the Word. The voice's approach to the spirit is through the "Lady of silences," the Beatrice-figure, who showed Dante Paradise in The Divine Comedy; she is "withdrawn / In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown." Her condition of being "withdrawn" is a necessary step for "contemplation" (a word associated with temples and shrines, originally

a term of augury, meaning "an open space, a place reserved or cut out for observation.") Thus, both the Lady and the voice are "devoted, concentrated in purpose" when the invocation to the world of spirit occurs. The prophecy to the wind is the song of the bones.²⁵

The "Lady of silences" passage is Eliot's first effort to express the "still point," the world of spirit beyond human experience and beyond human sense, except perhaps through mystic vision. An attempt to express this transcendent world is bounded by the limitations of words: in Canto I of the Paradiso, Dante observes that "The passing beyond bounds of human sense / Words cannot tell . . ." (ll. 70-71).²⁶ Language is a human phenomenon, and works tolerably well within the world of sense and human experience, but the world of God is by definition ineffable. In some religions the novitiate is told at the outset that the world of spirit cannot be discussed or expressed; in others, a word that is the name of God exists, but must not be spoken; regardless of the religious persuasion, "the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings" is in store for anyone attempting to use language to express an experience with the spirit. As Dante said in the conclusion to the passage just cited, "Let then the examples sate / Him for whom grace reserves the experience." The religious experience is always primary; again and again religious writers insist that words fail to capture the experience--as Eliot said in "Burnt Norton," "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden."

Nevertheless, for what man desires intensely to say, he will find words. Language has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation--

even to the point of finding words for the ineffable. For instance, Dante describes Paradise with the metaphor of a rose, the Celestial Rose, which is split into two hemispheres, with the male saints on one side, the female on the other. Thus, Dante employs two verbal strategies for describing Paradise: metaphor and the "dialectic-in-one."

The technique of metaphor is, of course, basic to language regardless of purpose, and particularly essential to the language of religion and poetry. I referred previously to the third chapter of the Fourth Gospel: Christ told Nicodemus that "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; Nicodemus answered, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Nicodemus, in his role as Pharisee (A Jewish sect known for strict interpretation of the Mosaic law) interprets Christ's words literally, without a feeling for their metaphorical sense. One might say that Nicodemus accepts only the letter, while he rejects the spirit of words.²⁷

A literal reading of Christ's statement will reveal it to be what Nicodemus apparently thought it was: non-sense. When Jesus attempts to explain what he means to Nicodemus, his effort produces another metaphor: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit." Nicodemus's response is only, "How can these things be?" The conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus points to a very important feature of all language: the principle of the

negative. Metaphor is not possible without the understanding that the thing and the thing compared are not the same, just as it is dangerous and impractical to be a verbal realist: the word "tree" is not the plant referred to. The use of language involves talking about things in terms of what they are not: a "transformation of substance" analogous to Christ's metaphor of the rebirth of flesh through the water and the spirit.²⁸

The phenomenon of metaphor can tell us more about language--especially the language of poetry and religion. There are two kinds of metaphor: "open" and "closed." The poet Robert Burns said, "O my Luve's like a red, red rose." Burns compares the rose to two things in his poem: his "luve" is an emotion, and it is an object, a woman. The rose/lady comparison is an example of what I call a "closed" metaphor: both the thing and the thing compared are objects in the physical environment, and thus both can be "sensibly" compared. However, Burns's comparison of the emotion of love to a "red, red rose" is an "open" metaphor--emotions are intangibles; the only way to express an emotion is through some sort of metaphor, which provides a "sensible" for an intangible. Christ's dialectic of flesh and spirit, his metaphor of rebirth, and his comparison of the spirit to the wind is a higher (in degree) example of the "open" metaphor: Jesus wants to talk about an entire world of intangibles--metaphor is the only way.

The reader has, no doubt, perceived an analogy at work here: the movement from the "closed" metaphor, to the level of metaphor for emotion, to the level of metaphor for spirit, is the verbal equivalent of the

movement of the focus of consciousness in the Neo-Platonic "ladder of love." Dante began his love for Beatrice by admiring her physical attributes (e.g., her voice); he progressed to the writing of sonnets to Love; finally, through Beatrice, Dante was able to contemplate the world of spirit and attain a full understanding of the vita nuova. The implication is that love based on physical attraction is "unredeemed" love, because it is below the circle of the moon: flesh decays and dies. Similarly, a language without "open" metaphors is an "unredeemed language"--a language limited to the strictly physical (e.g., the language of science). Such a narrowly conceived language is forever and irretrievably of the material universe; "open" metaphors are, from this point of view, sheer non-sense. Religious and poetical language moves in the opposite direction--from the "closed" metaphor to the "open"--from the physical to the emotional to the spiritual. The ultimate step in the language of religion or poetry is to move from the "open" metaphor to metaphorical identity, from "a" is like "b", to "a" is "b"--"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

The language of science (or any language which stresses the one-to-one correspondence of word and object) accepts the dialectic of subject and object, of self and not-self, tending to reject movement toward synthesis; therefore, such an externally orientated use of language emphasizes objectivity, logic, the sensual over the intuitive, motion over action. This is the language of modern science, which, of course, is the son of rational empiricism. "When logics die,"²⁹ the language of poetry and religion lives: from the empirical standpoint, the

language of poetry and religion is "nonsense," a hopelessly subjective muddle. The empiricist surveys the paradoxes and "open" metaphors of poetry and religion, and wonders, with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?"

Eliot's first attempt to express his non-sensical eternal theme--the "still point"--is the "Lady of silences" passage in "Salutation"; not surprisingly, Eliot's verbal strategy here is very much like Dante's in the Paradiso. Eliot's "Lady of silences" is Dante's Beatrice; the "single Rose" of Eliot's poem is the "Celestial Rose" of the Paradiso. The symbolic value of Eliot's "Garden" has been thoroughly explored by Elizabeth Drew:

The Garden is a many-faceted symbol, suggesting the Garden of Eden where God walked 'in the cool of the day'; the earthly paradise of Dante; the rose-garden of The Romance of the Rose; and medieval hymns to the Virgin which allegorize the rose and the 'garden enclosed' of the Song of Songs as the womb of Mary.³⁰

All three symbols--the Lady, the Rose, and the Garden--are borrowed (stolen!) from medieval and/or Biblical sources, which use them as metaphors for the spiritual world. In addition, all three symbols are "dialectics-in-one"; the Lady is intermediate between carnal love and the love of God; therefore, she is

Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful.

The string of paradoxes applied to the Lady is one verbal strategy for expressing the spiritual; as we talk about objects in terms of what they

are not (that is, words), so the spiritual is described in terms of what it is not--not the physical world. Nothing of the flesh can be at the same time "calm and distressed, torn and most whole, etc." The paradoxes of the Lady are like other "impossible unions": the rebirth of an old man, the Word made flesh, the Immaculate Conception, the virgin birth.

The difference between a "redeemed" and an "unredeemed" language can be seen by comparing the paradoxical dialectic-in-one of the Lady with the irreconcilable dialectic of "The Hollow Men." After the grimly absurd dance around the prickly pear to a nursery rime's chant, the impotency of the Hollow Men is the dialectic of

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow

In a world (and a language) of the only physical, the only human, there is no way to close the gap between "reality" and "idea," between "motion" and "act." The dialectical intermediary in "The Hollow Men" is the ominous Shadow, which might be that of Death, of nothing, of evil, of ignorance--whatever interpretation one believes is most appropriate for the Shadow, it is very different from the Lady of "Salutation," who is "good," "lovely," and dressed in a white gown of purity. There are no "betweens" in the "Lady of silences" passage, and hence She is not in "the time of tension between dying and birth," She is not in the world of time at all. The persona of the poem, however, is of the flesh, of time, and only through Her can he approach the eternal--the Shadow of

Death in "The Hollow Men" is dispelled by the pervasive "white light" of the Lady.³¹

The use of paradox is only part of the verbal strategy for expressing the spiritual world of "Salutation." Eliot uses his verbs (and verbals) to good effect. The "Lady of silences" passage is not in the realm of time; therefore, the verbs used to express it are "state of being" verbs. The dominant verb is "Is" which appears twice in the passage; another verb is the present tense of "end," which is always connected with "love"--a word having both secular and sacred connotations in the poem. The only other verb is "terminate," having, of course, the same meaning and use as "end." The other verb forms in the passage are participles, present and past. Participles are bound up, self-contained units of energy, "states of being"; when we use them without a subject, they are said to "dangle," to hang in a misty world of the non-grammatical. While the participles of the "Lady of silences" passage do modify something, because of the interchangeability of identity in the passage (Lady = single Rose = Garden = Mother), the participles modify everything and nothing in particular, and so may still be said to "dangle." The interchangeability of identity, by the way, is important; in the world of imagination and spirit, anything can equal anything else (metaphorical identity), another paradox in this world of non-sense.

By contrast, the verbs used in the sections surrounding the "Lady of silences" passage express events in the world of time. The leopards sat under a juniper tree; before that something "had been contained / In the hollow round of my skull." In the past, "God said," with

reference to the future, "Shall these bones live?" Again, the shift is to past before past: "that which had been contained in the bones"; what the bones say, however, because it refers to the Lady, is expressed in the present tense: "She honours the Virgin in meditation." (The Lady's constant presence is expressed in the present, a kind of logic in the verbs.) When "I" enters the poem, "I" is connected to a passive verb; it is the persona's passive receptivity to the Lady, combined with his desire to forget and be forgotten, which allows grace to light the bones, symbolizing "new life." The passage after the middle section of the poem is also of time, and follows the same "verb logic"; the last few sentences of the poem refer again to Ezekiel:

This is the land which ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity
Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

The land referred to is not the "promised land" of the Jews, but the New Testament equivalent: the kingdom of Heaven ("Except thou be born again. . ."). "Neither division nor unity matters" because the inheritance is a spiritual, not a physical domain ("The wind blows where it listeth. . ."). Finally, "This is the land," as the Lady, the Garden, the single Rose, and the Mother are ("Before Abraham was, I am.").³²

Eliot praised Dante for his use of "clear visual images," his ability for "sensuous endowment" of ideas, feelings, and perceptions. In "Salutation," Eliot certainly does give "sensuous endowment" to the idea of "dying" into a new life--to the "killing" of the old self involved in the conversion experience. However, Eliot's effort to express the "still point" is the converse of Dante's imagistic technique; the "Lady of silences" passage is developed through a kind of rarified "poetical

jargoning" similar in technique to the concluding stanzas of "The Hollow Men" and the beginning of the fifth section of "Ash-Wednesday." There is an obvious explanation for Eliot's avoidance of "sensuous endowment" of the "still point" theme: the tension of "Ash-Wednesday" is between attraction for heaven and for earth, between, on the one hand, the appeal of the flesh, of earth and earthly things, the objects of the sense (lower love), and, on the other hand, the desire for a new life of the spirit (higher love); therefore, Eliot cannot use images, as they appeal to the reader through the senses, to express the "non-sense" world of the spirit.³³ To use images to express the "still point" would be a "palpable" contradiction in terms, a violation of the decorum of "Ash-Wednesday."

The almost liturgical concentration of "Ash-Wednesday," its Mass-like lines, meant to be intoned, not spoken, its intricate patterns of words, representing the "chastened wit" of the persona,³⁴ gives way in later poems to a more relaxed format. The "Four Quartets," for example, are explicitly musical in organization; there is a "poetic" voice, a "philosophical" voice, a "conversational" voice, and they are all the same voice, variations on the theme of the Word and the unstilled world. The "poetic" voice represents several "sensual endowments" in "clear visual images" of the "still point," and while it would take us too far away from "Ash-Wednesday" to discuss all of them, I would like to consider at least one example: the opening of "Little Gidding."³⁵

In "midwinter spring," Eliot found the perfect objective correlative for his "still point" idea. The passage (ll. 1-20) from "Little

Gidding" begins with simple description:

Midwinter spring is its own season
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic,
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,

and then progresses to a metaphor for the "still point":

In windless cold which is the heart's heat,
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon,
A glow more intense than blaze of brand, or brazier,
Stirs the dumb spirit. . .
. . . Between melting and freezing
The soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell
Or smell of living thing. This is the spring time
But not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow
Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom
Of snow, a bloom more sudden
Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
Not in the scheme of generation.

The paradoxes of the Lady in "Salutation" receive "sensual endowment" through a sunny day in the dead of winter, "between melting and freezing," being both and neither. Like the Lady, the Garden, the Rose, and the Mother of "Salutation," midwinter spring is "Not in the scheme of generation," and has "no earth smell / Or smell of living thing." Midwinter spring is an elaborate conceit for the "still point"; it is only "suspended in time," while the "still point" is suspended out of time, in the eternal world of "Is."

The "still point" is reality to Eliot, a kind of obsession, as the Trinity was to St. Augustine; Eliot saw a "still point" in the natural phenomenon of "midwinter spring," much as St. Augustine was sensitive to any triad arrangement.³⁶ In The "Still Point" Ethel Cornwall said,

The difficulty is that life continually interrupts the moment (the still point) and dissolves one's vision, so that it must be perpetually remade.³⁷

Life is not always at the fever pitch of vision, nor can it maintain an intense desire for a new life for very long--and conversion is a single event, though it may have long-term consequences. "The waste sad time / Stretching before and after" may be "ridiculous" compared to the moment of complete joy and insight in the Rose Garden; nevertheless, the time before and after is still there, and must be lived: the commitment of a Christian is to a way of living, as well as to a way of "dying." In "The Dry Salvages," Eliot said,

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 is not heard at all. . .

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

Most of "Ash-Wednesday" is concerned with the day-to-day affairs of Christianity, the "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action" of the Christian commitment in "the time of tension."

I have dealt with "Salutation" as an enactment of Eliot's conversion to Christianity. In the word "conversion" itself is a major grouping of verbal motifs in "Ash-Wednesday": the word conversion comes from the Latin convertere, "to turn about." "Ash-Wednesday" is a poem of "betweens" and "turnings," a natural choice of words for a poem about the competition between earthly and heavenly desire, between the old life and the new. It is in Eliot's struggle to live a belief that his essential humanity is shown; most of "Ash-Wednesday" is not the movement toward union with the "still point," but rather self-exhortation, the establishing of the

right attitude toward this life and toward humanity. Eliot "sets his lands in order" in "Ash-Wednesday."

The first poem of "Ash-Wednesday" as it was published in 1930 was actually the second to be written: "Salutation" appeared in 1927, and "Perch'Io Non Spero" followed it in 1928. The title is an allusion to a poem by Cavalcanti, translated by Rossetti and published with the title, "Ballata, Written in Exile at Sarzana." The first two lines in the translation are "Because I think not ever to return, / Ballad, to Tuscany. . ." As George Williamson points out, the allusion to Cavalcanti establishes both the theme of turning and the theme of exile, though the turnings and the exile in Cavalcanti are different from the turnings and exile in "Ash-Wednesday." Like the exile of the Jews, Cavalcanti's exile is a political reality, while the exile in "Ash-Wednesday" is the separation of flesh from spirit. The place of exile is Earth; the only return is through "dying" to another "birth." Cavalcanti wrote his poem to express devotion to his earthly lady--devotion even in death, as he was aware that he was about to die; probably one of the reasons that Eliot placed "Perch'Io Non Spero" before "Salutation" was to affirm dedication to his Lady before "death."

"Perch'Io Non Spero" is a verbal act of discipline and concentration--the symbolic equivalent of wearing a hair shirt and praying in a dark closet. It is a poem of "elimination": there are seventeen "no's" and "not's" in forty lines, as well as words with a strongly negative cast: "renounce," "vanished," "in-firm." There is also, in the class of "eliminating" words, several "limiting" adjectives and adverbs (e.g.:

"only," "always"). "Perch'Io Non Spero" is also a poem of "intensification": "Because I do not hope," "too much," "too heavy," with frequent constructions like "strive to strive," "what is done not to be done again," "thoroughly small and dry / Smaller and dryer"--the poem is largely an intricate pattern of tautologies and repetitions. In fact, if one surgically removed the negatives, the limiting modifiers, the repetitions, the intensifiers, the poem would disappear--in "Perch'Io Non Spero," Eliot takes a verbal trend to "the end of the line."

The symbolic act of "elimination by concentration" (or "concentration by elimination") is, as I suggested by way of comparison with hair shirts and dark closets, the way of mortification, the "negative way" of the mystics, Eliot's "way wherein there is no ecstasy." Mortification is a systematic way of saying "no" to all desires and urges of the flesh, or, conversely, "yes" to the "thou shalt not's." All earthly love is "killed," that is, negated ("Mortify" is derived from the Latin mortificare, "to cause to die."), to allow total concentration upon the non-physical world of the spirit.

It should be clear now why "Perch'Io Non Spero" was placed before "Salutation" in the six-poem sequence published in 1920. The mortification verbally acted out in the latter poem prepares us for the symbolic death of "Salutation." The "killing" of desire for the flesh is an initial step in the turning away from the old life, the "killing" of the old self for a vita nuova. The symbolic mortification and death of "Perch'Io Non Spero" and "Salutation" purifies the persona for

approaching the Lady, who is dressed in a "white gown" of purity, and who is "perfected" in death, removed or withdrawn from the physical. Through her, the persona is able to approach the "holy of holies," the "still point." It is important to keep in mind that the entire movement is willed, a conscious renunciation of a former attitude; consequently, the ultimate vision, the approach to the "holy of holies," is not a product of Freudian "sublimation," which is an unconscious process.

I think that we should recognize the operation in "Perch'Io Non Spero" of a motif basic to the understanding of Eliot's poetry. In Chapter Two, I discussed the relationship of Eliot's reticent personality to his stress upon an impersonal aesthetic. In the first poem of "Ash-Wednesday" I think that Eliot has discovered a more thorough "strategy for encompassing the situation" of his distrust of personality. The "invisible poet" of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," of "Gerontion," and of The Waste Land concealed himself behind personae and a maze of allusions--"I" rarely occurs in Eliot's poetry, and when it does, can never with certainty be equated with Eliot himself. Because of the explicitly religious content of "Ash-Wednesday," and the coincidence in time of Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism and the publication of "Salutation," a poem with symbolism highly suggestive of the conversion experience, I have always felt that the "I" of "Ash-Wednesday" is much closer to Eliot than those of previous poems. If my intuition is correct--if the "I" of "Ash-Wednesday" can be equated with the poet--how appropriate it is that the "I" should be a mortified

"I." The "I" of "Ash-Wednesday" is already in the process of self-denial, of protesting "As I am forgotten / and would be forgotten so I would forget." The "aesthetic strategy" for concealing personality in the early poetry is retained in the allusive technique of "Ash-Wednesday" and augmented by a "theological strategy" that calls for the renunciation of self. Also, in the movement from "I" to "us" (from "Although I do not hope to turn again" to the Christian community of prayer in "Pray for us sinners. . .") is another indication of the motivational drive toward the absorption of self by non-self, the closing of the gap between the "you" and the "I."

The sense of community is very strong in "Ash-Wednesday," and represents another major departure from the perspective of the poetry before it. The stanzas from The Book of Common Prayer belong to this sense of community, but there is a much deeper sense of community in "Ash-Wednesday" than that of ritual observation--Eliot has altered his point of view toward humanity. The fifth poem of "Ash-Wednesday" is most concerned with the Word and the word that will spread the Word to the world:

Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence
Not on the sea or on the islands, not
On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,
For those who walk in darkness.

The modern "unstilled world" is a place of "noise" and ceaseless movement, a world where the economic motive is supreme. Its nervous movement and mad destructiveness was captured in The Waste Land: the falling towers, the crowd flowing over London Bridge, the refuse in the Thames

are all symptoms of a world of misplaced desire and spiritual death--
a place where there is "no grace," but only hunger and frustration.

Eliot asks,

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between season and season,
time and
time, between
Hour and hour, word and word, power and power, those who wait
In darkness?

Eliot's petition to the Lady to aid the denizens of the wasteland is a far cry from the disgust that he obviously felt for them in the poetry prior to "Ash-Wednesday." There are no more descriptions like that of the "young man carbuncular" in "The Fire Sermon," and when Sweeney reappears in Eliot's poetry (in "Sweeney Agonistes") he is not the animalistic parody of a man that he was in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" and "Sweeney Erect"; the "lost violent souls" of "The Hollow Men" are the "children at the gate / Who will not go away and cannot pray," unredeemed people in an unredeemed world, for whom the Lady is asked to pray. The faithless people of The Waste Land are souls with the potential of salvation: the task is that of the Church and the individual Christian.

The altered attitude toward humanity is closely related to the humility of the speaker of "Ash-Wednesday," whose struggle with the "devil of the stairs" is the struggle of humanity. It is the humility of the "I" of the third poem of "Ash-Wednesday" that leads to the collective lament of the penitent, "Lord, I am not worthy"; "when the Christian world examines its own unworthiness,"³⁸ there is no room for

the pride that places itself above the common circumstances of mankind; rather, each man is engaged in the struggle of Everyman for the "strength beyond hope and despair."

The third poem of "Ash-Wednesday" was published in 1929 with the title, "Som de l'Escalina," "the summit of the stairway," which is an allusion to the Provencal speech of Arnaut Daniel (Purgatorio 26). The metaphor of movement for the progression of the soul (viz.: Dante's ascending from the Inferno to the Purgatorio to the Paradiso, the journey or quest of the Arthurian tales and of Pilgrim's Progress, or, simply, the climbing of stairs, as in "Som de l'Escalina") is common in the Christian tradition. The third poem of "Ash-Wednesday" is important because it allows us to see the steps leading up to the state of mind in "Perch'lo Non Spero." If we conceive of the progression of the soul as a narrative, "Ash-Wednesday" begins in medias res, at "Climbing the third stair" of "Som de l'Escalina." Before the movement "beyond hope and despair" is the struggle with the only physical world, the dialectic of "the profit and the loss," with "the devil of the stairs who wears / The deceitful face of hope and despair." It is the movement beyond experience (the second turning of the second stair) and beyond dreams of an earthly paradise (first turning of the third stair), to the desire for ultimate reality, for a rebirth "of the water and of the spirit," that constitutes redemption from the merely sensual world of irreconcilables. The way is the way of humility, of mortification, of "death."

It is always helpful in considering "Ash-Wednesday" to look ahead

to the "Four Quartets"; although these final four masterpieces of Eliot's poetry add nothing substantial to the argument of "Ash-Wednesday," yet they develop some of the ideas at greater length and with more thoroughness. A good summary of "Ash-Wednesday" may be found in the last lines of the beautiful and crucial fifth section of "The Dry Salvages":

We, content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew-tree)
The life of significant soil.

This passage from "The Dry Salvages" can aid us in understanding the concluding poem of "Ash-Wednesday," which brings the sequence of six poems to a final resting place, to a dialectic "reconciled among the stars."

The reader may have perceived some possibility for conflict between the aspiration for God, the life of the spirit, and the need to minister to souls lost in the concerns of the flesh; or, more basic yet, the reader may feel the inevitability for conflict between the worlds of flesh and spirit for any dedicated Christian. Indeed, the conflict is there: it is the "dance" of flesh desiring spirit, of man attempting to approach the heavenly through insight ("Hints followed by guesses") and through "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action," which constitutes the "life of significant soil."

There is no way for a man of this world not to turn back to the appeal of the flesh and of the senses; inevitably he will desire "to rebel / For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell / . . . The cry of quail and the whirling plover." The "temporal reversion" must be

controlled, channeled into the "life of significant soil." This world is still the "time of tension," and for every turning to God, there is a turning to this life: the Christian must pray, "not to be separated" from the world of spirit, despite his "weak soul"; he must learn "not to care" for this world, and yet "to care" for the state of his own soul and that of his fellow man; finally, "Not too far from the yew-tree" of the Church and of "death," he must affirm his belief through action. "Ash-Wednesday" affirms belief through action--it "redeems the time," "the higher dream" of ultimate reality, and it conditions the self for "the life of significant soil." "Ash-Wednesday" collects the "fragments" of The Waste Land into a whole, finding order in the world and words through the Word.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I.

¹ I have avoided the "critical bibliography" format in discussing Eliot criticism. There is simply too much in the way of first-rate criticism--a "critical bibliography" would be a thesis in itself. However, for readers interested in pursuing scholarship on Eliot, I have provided a bibliography of the major criticism of his poetry at the end of this study, broken down into categories according to general emphasis.

² See Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 89-91. He discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the interpretation of literature, unguided by the distinctions he makes with respect to "naive allegory" and the range of allegory between "naive" and the "elusive, anti-explicit and anti-allegorical" end of the allegorical scale. I am, of course, indebted to Frye's Anatomy for part of the theoretical basis of this essay.

³ George Williamson, A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot (New York: Noonday Press, 1966). First published, 1953.

⁴ All references to the poetry of T. S. Eliot are taken from The Complete Poems and Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958). This edition does not number the lines of the poems, and hence line numbers are usually not provided for quotations.

⁵ Williamson, p. 108.

⁶ Philip R. Headings, T. S. Eliot (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964). Headings' book is especially valuable for scholars interested in Eliot's later poems.

⁷ See, for example, Hugh Kenner's T. S. Eliot: The Invisible Poet (New York: Macdowell and Oblonsky, 1959).

⁸ Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York: Knopf, 1948), pp. 214-45. Hyman considered Eliot primarily in the role of critic, but his section on Eliot shows a general lack of comprehension of the complexity and diversity of Eliot's tradition.

⁹ Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry (New York: Scribner's, 1949).

¹⁰ Edith F. Cornwell, The "Still Point" (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962).

¹¹ Cornwell, p. 3

¹² Frye, Anatomy, pp. 40-49.

¹³ Eliot's objective, non-personal theory of art is discussed by Hugh Kenner (see note six) especially well. F. O. Matthiesson was the first to note the dramatic quality of Eliot's poetry; see The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), first published, 1935. More recently, Gertrude Patterson's T. S. Eliot: Poems in the Making (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971) advances the idea that Eliot's poetic method resembles the multi-dimensional technique of the Cubist painters.

Chapter II.

¹ Quoted by Donald Gallup in T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound: Collaborators in Letters (New Haven: Henry W. Henning and C. A. Stonehill, Inc., 1970), p. 12.

² Gallup, p. 17.

³ Gallup, p. 16.

⁴ Gallup, p. 17

⁵ Gallup, p. 17.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, Preface to Paradise Lost (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960), p. 17.

⁷ See T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts, Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound, ed., Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, Inc., 1971). All future references to this work will utilize the abbreviation, WLM.

⁸ WLM, p. xxii.

⁹ Quoted by Bernard Bergonzi in T. S. Eliot (New York: McMillan and Co., 1972), p. 77.

¹⁰ Gallup, pp. 16, 26.

¹¹ Conrad Aiken, "The Anatomy of Melancholy," in A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land, ed., Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963), p. 29.

- 12 Gallup, p. 24.
- 13 WLM, p. 13.
- 14 Gallup, p. 16.
- 15 WLM, p. 5.
- 16 WLM, p. 125. (Editorial Notes: note 1 for page five).
- 17 See my bibliography, the section entitled, "Formal Criticism."
- 18 WLM, p. 5. This passage has been cancelled by Eliot "lightly in pencil," and hence does not represent Pound's editorial work.
- 19 WLM, p. 24.
- 20 WLM, p. 127. (Note 3 for page 27).
- 21 WLM, p. 127. (Note 1 for page 23).
- 22 WLM, p. 127. (Note 1 for page 23). The vehemence of Pound's language indicates that Eliot may have made threatening passes with a naked sword at one of Pound's sacred cows in writing the couplets; as one critic has pointed out, Pound admired Pope's verse greatly for the qualities his own poetry possesses--intellectualism, a high degree of conscious craftsmanship, and satiric intent.
- 23 WLM, p. 55-62 and 63-69.
- 24 WLM, p. 45.
- 25 WLM, p. 47.
- 26 T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p. 23.
- 27 (New York: Delacourte Press, 1966), p. 30.
- 28 Bergonzi, T. S. Eliot, p. 31.
- 29 Bergonzi, p. 70.
- 30 Quoted by Bergonzi, op. cit., p. 33. Russell's comment was first published in his Autobiography (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), vol. II, p. 54. Much about Eliot could be learned if we had more information on his first marriage. Readers interested in Eliot's relationship with Vivien should consult Russell Kirk's Eliot and His Age (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 36-41.

- 31 Read, p. 31.
- 32 So described by Richard Aldington. Quoted by Bergonzi, p. 28.
- 33 Gallup, p. 28.
- 34 (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1968), p. 33.
- 35 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 19-20.
- 36 WLM, p. 36.
- 37 WLM, Introduction, p. xix.
- 38 WLM, p. xxv.
- 39 Bergonzi, p. 62.
- 40 WLM, p. xvi.
- 41 WLM, p. xviii. One such reference to The Waste Land took the form of a New Year's resolution to his mother, made in a letter of the 18th December, 1919.
- 42 WLM, p. xx.
- 43 WLM, p. xxi.
- 44 WLM, p. xxii. An aboulie, or aboulia, is a condition that may be simply described as a chronic inability to make decisions. All of us suffer from time to time from indecisiveness, and it only requires a slight extension of the imagination to appreciate the strain on an individual for whom indecisiveness is a constant state of affairs.
- 45 WLM, p. xxi.
- 46 WLM, p. xxii.
- 47 Quoted by Bergonzi, p. 113.
- 48 See Bergonzi, p. 143-149, for a succinct discussion of the formal weaknesses of Eliot's plays.
- 49 My analyses of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Gerontion," and "The Hollow Men" necessarily stress the structural aspects of Eliot's verse, and are not what one would consider systematic explications. I am not aware of any other critical effort on Eliot's verse that begins with the same preconceptions with which I have begun--dialectical form and its relationship to action, both verbal and physical. Of course,

many critics have recognized the peculiar structure of Eliot's verse, labelling it "dramatic," "cubist," or some other term implying "impersonality," as Eliot used the term. In fact, the first systematic attempt to evaluate Eliot--F. O. Matthiessen's The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (London: Oxford University Press, 1932)--was based in part on the premise that Eliot's poetry was "dramatic."

50 I am heavily indebted for the theoretical basis of my paper, both generally and specifically, to the criticism of Kenneth Burke. Among his works that have greatly influenced me are The Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1953) and Language as Symbolic Action, Studies in Life, Literature, and Method (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

51 Burke would call the antagonism of scene and agent the "scene-agent ratio." See his book, The Grammar of Motives (California: University of California Press, 1957) for a thorough discussion of this relationship.

52 Without "purpose" there can be no act. There are five essential constituents of any act--scene, agency, agent, act, purpose--Burke's "dramatistic pentad."

53 All definitions of words and their derivations are taken from The American Heritage Dictionary, William Morris, ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1969).

54 George Williamson, A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot (New York: Noonday Press, 1953), p. 159.

Chapter III.

¹ For a thorough treatment of the reaction to and implications of Eliot's three-fold stance, see Chapter Four of Bernard Bergonzi's T. S. Eliot (New York: MacMillan, 1972). Eliot's pronouncement was made in For Lancelot Andrewes (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929), p. 4. Bergonzi states that Eliot's conversion "was a cause of surprise and even scandal to many of his contemporaries" (p. 110). Among those surprised were Herbert Read, I. A. Richards, and Irving Babbitt.

² There are only a few efforts to explicate "Ash-Wednesday" in print, of which the most notable are: Leonard Unger's in T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1948), pp. 349-373, E. E. Duncan Jones in T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands (London: Dobson and Co., 1947), pp. 30-40, Elizabeth Drew's in

T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry (New York: Scribner's, 1949) pp. 98-117, and George Williamson's in A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), pp. 168-185.

³ Hugh Kenner, T. S. Eliot: The Invisible Poet (New York: McDowell and Obdensky, 1959), pp. 261-276.

⁴ See Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 43-171, for a brilliant discussion of verbal action in St. Augustine's Confessions. Much of my discussion of Eliot's use of language in "Ash-Wednesday" was stimulated by Burke's observations on the Confessions.

⁵ Kenner, p. 263.

⁶ Kenner, p. 261.

⁷ Kenner, p. 262.

⁸ There are a number of sources that investigate Eliot's activities leading up to his conversion; see, for example, Russell Kirk, Eliot and His Age (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 133-180. See also Phillip R. Headings, T. S. Eliot (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), pp. 70-75. Both Kirk and Headings concentrate on the period 1925-1930 in Eliot's life.

⁹ See "Dante" in T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), pp. 199-237. Eliot distinguishes carefully between "understanding" and "belief" in connection with Dante's The Divine Comedy, but by 1929 (the original date of publication of "Dante") Eliot had certainly combined "belief" with his artistic appreciation of Dante. Kristian Smidt, in Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot (New York: Humanities Press, 1949), termed Eliot an "agnostic" prior to his conversion (p. 191); one of my important points is that Eliot moved from an "agnostic-aesthetic" critique of the modern world in The Waste Land to a "Christian" view of his environment in "Ash-Wednesday."

¹⁰ See bibliography, "Biographical Studies."

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, That Poetry is Made With Words (University of Minnesota Press, 1958).

¹² We might view the "word, Word, world" word play of the passage quoted from the fifth poem of "Ash-Wednesday" in terms of Burke's "actus-status" dialectic and the paradox of "sub-stance." First, the Word is the "substance" (that which supports) all of creation; therefore, quite naturally "word" and "world" are seen "against" this

essential Word. Second, the Word (as agency of God's creative act) is the eternal status ("state") of Eliot's "actus" in "Ash-Wednesday" --that is, the Word becomes the context (scene) for Eliot's use of the word, since the "Word" is the source of the world, in which, from Eliot's point of view, the "Word" is "without a word." Thus, the "Word" becomes an ordering principle for Eliot and a "mission." See Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 21-59.

13 See Northrop Frye's discussion of the Bible in Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 315-317.

14 Headings, pp. 79-80. (See n.8).

15 All definitions and derivations of words are taken from The American Heritage Dictionary, ed., William Morris (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971).

16 Headings, p. 79.

17 Headings, pp. 79-80.

18 Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry (New York: Scribner's, 1949), p. 105.

19 Drew, p. 105.

20 For poems not written within a short space of time, the six sections of "Ash-Wednesday" have a remarkable coherency. It is possible to start with any section of the poem and proceed quite logically to a discussion of all the sections--"Ash-Wednesday" is like a tightly woven garment: pull one thread and all are moved.

21 Drew, p. 102-109.

22 Drew, p. 107.

23 Drew, p. 106.

24 See Sir James G. Frazier, The Golden Bough (New York: MacMillan Co., 1969), abridged edition, pp. 344-373.

25 Elizabeth Drew points out (p. 108) that "the burden of the grasshopper" is a reference to Ecclesiastes: "and the grasshopper shall be a burden (in the sense of a song), and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home." I do not think that "burden" refers here to the refrain of a song. The meaning of "burden" in the Ecclesiastes passage is problematical, since the word in Greek refers to weight and the utterances of an oracle. The song of the bones in Eliot's poem

is certainly oracular in tone, and however one chooses to interpret the passage in Ecclesiastes, one thing is certain: it is about old age. Therefore we could connect the Ecclesiastes allusion with the motif of spiritual aging in "Ash-Wednesday": "Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?" Furthermore, the word "burden" can refer to the bass in music, especially, Webster's Unabridged Dictionary tells me, if it is "monotonous or droning." This more recent non-Biblical meaning of "burden" is, I think, probably what Eliot had in mind: the song of the bones occurs with the burden of the grasshopper.

26 Paradiso, I, 70-71. I am referring to Lawrence Binyon's translation, printed in World Masterpieces, ed. Maynard Mack, et. al. (New York: Norton, 1965).

27 Christ's encounter with Nicodemus may be considered a primal encounter of a poet with men trained only in the strictly literal meaning of words--a lawyer in Nicodemus' case. Lawyers and scientists use a language that recognizes only one-to-one correspondences (as tree=tree), in other words, an "unredeemed" language suited for their only physical and descriptive purposes. The use of figurative language (e.g., metaphor) and parable, so typical of Christ's reported utterances, might be said to "enspirit" language, to "liberate" it from the physical. What we have with respect to Christ's contact with Nicodemus is "a failure to communicate"; one might even say that Nicodemus is not redeemed because his understanding of language is "only physical." In order to raise Nicodemus's language to a higher power, he must be made to "see" beyond this world (It is noteworthy that Christ, shortly after his meeting with Nicodemus, heals the blind man--which opens the way for a good deal of punning on the word "see." John 9).

28 The "transformation of substance" from the physical world to words (or from the mental image of a physical thing in a speaker's mind to words) suggests Christ's role as "the Word made flesh."--the central "dialectic-in-one" of the Christian faith. "Transformation of substance" also, of course, is central to the Eucharist.

29 Borrowed from Dylan Thomas's "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines."

30 Drew, p. 108.

31 Eliot's Lady never speaks a word in "Ash-Wednesday." To speak is to be in time (for language is discursive); it is therefore logical that she is a "Lady of silences." The most "pure" form for expressing the still-point world be silence.

32 Eliot uses Old Testament allusions (e.g., exile) throughout the poem in the "transformed" (metaphysical) sense of the New Testament. It is a commonplace of Biblical criticism that the Old Testament "anticipates" the New, or, conversely, that the New "fulfills" the Old.

³³The Lady, of course, in her capacity as mediator, is expressed imagistically, especially in the fourth poem.

³⁴ See Frye, Anatomy, p. 294.

³⁵ Probably the most often referred to "still-point" in the "Four Quartets" is the beautiful Rose garden passage in "Burnt Norton." I think that the passage from "Little Gidding" is at least as good an expression of the "still point," and more obviously dialectical.

³⁶ Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion, p. 136.

³⁷ Edith F. Cornwell, The "Still Point" (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 48..

³⁸ Kenner, p. 262.

APPENDIX A

Lines 13 through 83 in the original version of "Death by Water" might have been profitably retained in The Waste Land. There are several reasons why I think so.

First, the sea tale complements the Phlebas section very well. The latter employs the strategy of generalization; that is, as readers, we are not concerned very much with the individual case of Phlebas, but with Phlebas as an entelechial example of universal human fate. Our response to Phlebas is conditioned by the almost moralistic conclusion, "Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you." We are not told how Phlebas was drowned; for Phlebas is exempli gratis--the particulars of his death are irrelevant. In contrast, the deleted passage is a detailed development; for instance, Eliot gives us a complete list of the ship's troubles.

A watercask was opened, smelt of oil,
Another brackish. Then the main gaffjaws
Jammed. A spar split for nothing, bought
And paid for as good Norwegian pine . . .
And then the garboard strake began to leak.

I think that Eliot intended his story of a New England fishing boat's misfortune to provide a formal counterpoint for Phlebas--there is no transcending moralistic conclusion to his narrative, only the appropriate beginning, middle, and end. The poetic voice that tells the sea tale is not the same voice that makes a point about the nature of human existence with the fate of Phlebas; first person narrative contends with the poetry of statement, detail with generalization,

elaboration with summation.

A second strength of the original "Death by Water" is its unity. Both parts are about "the profit and loss"; the narrative has an American setting, and represents modern maritime enterprise, while Phlebas symbolizes the ascendancy of Phoenicia during the Middle Ages in the Mediterranean trade. One age melts into another through common pursuits, motives, and manner of death.

Finally, I think the narrative is good poetry in its own right in addition to its value as a complementary section to Phlebas. There are passages of simple, almost prosaic, beauty like

For an unfamiliar gust
Laid me down. And freshened to a gale.

These matter of fact, unadorned lines describing natural phenomena contrast sharply with the narrator's supernatural vision,

One night
On watch, I thought I saw in the fore cross-trees
Three women leaning forward, with white hair
Streaming behind, who sang above the wind
A song that charmed my senses, . . .

The narrator of the poem is a typical Eliot creation, endowed with a superior sensibility in comparison to his fellow shipmates; his companions attend to their daily tasks, laughing, thinking of home, money, and girls, but the narrator says, "I laughed not." Eliot's personae frequently have a profounder insight into life than those around them; this device allows Eliot to contrast the average, "normal" sensibility with a more highly developed moral or artistic consciousness, as with Prufrock and Gerontion--Shakespeare does the same thing with Hamlet.

Such a device is at least as old as Greek drama with the relationship of a character like Tiresias to Oedipus. Eliot also is successful in capturing the idiom of the sailor, the complaint of a hard, uncomfortable life. In sum, I feel that the narrative passage in "Death by Water" is poetically sound and makes a dramatic contribution to The Waste Land; it is another distinctive voice lost through Pound's editing. It is not poetry of concentration, but the antithesis; in keeping with his theory of poetry, Pound disliked this section, but approved the Phlebas poem which says and implies a great deal in only ten lines.

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE CRITICISM OF
T. S. ELIOT'S POETRY

Collections of Essays

- Braybrooke, Neville. T. S. Eliot: A Symposium for His Seventieth Birthday. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1958.
- Gunter, Bradley. The Merrill Studies in "The Waste Land." Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971.
- Knoll, Robert E. Storm Over "The Waste Land." Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1964.
- March, Richard, ed. T. S. Eliot: A Symposium. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1949.
- Martin, Graham, ed. Eliot in Perspective. London: Macmillan and Co., 1970.
- Martin, Jay. A Collection of Critical Essays on "The Waste Land". New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968.
- Tate, Allen, ed. T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work. London: Chatto and Windus, 1967.
- Unger, Leonard. T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique. New York: Rinehart and Company, 1948.

General Studies (single volume)

- Bradbrooke, M.C. T. S. Eliot. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1950.
- Gardner, Helen. The Art of T. S. Eliot. London: Cresset Press, 1949.
- Headings, Philip R. T. S. Eliot. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964.
- Jones, Genesisus. Approach to the Purpose. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964.
- Kenner, Hugh. The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot. New York: McDowell and Obolensky, 1959.

Maxwell, D. E. S. The Poetry of T. S. Eliot. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952.

Montgomery, Marion. T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the American Magus. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969.

Unger, Leonard. T. S. Eliot. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961.

Williamson, Hugh Ross. The Poetry of T. S. Eliot. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932.

Poem-to-Poem Commentaries (single volume)

Bodelson, C. A. T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1958.

Drew, Elizabeth. T. S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry. New York: Scribner's, 1949.

Southam, B. C. A Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968.

Williamson, George. A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1966.

Formal Criticism

Antrim, Harry T. T. S. Eliot's Concept of Language: A Study of Its Development. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971.

Lu, Fei-Pau. T. S. Eliot: The Dialectical Structure of His Theory of Poetry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Mathiesson, F. O. The Achievement of T. S. Eliot. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Patterson, Gertrude. T. S. Eliot: Poems in the Making. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971.

Wright, George T. The Poet in the Poem: The Personae of Eliot, Yeats, and Pound. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.

Biographical Studies

- Gallup, Donald. T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound: Collaborators in Letters. New Haven: Henry W. Wenning and C. A. Stonehill, 1970.
- Howarth, Herbert. Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964.
- Kirk, Russell. Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Levy, William Turner. Affectionately, T. S. Eliot. London: J. M. Dents and Sons, 1968.