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***‘In my end is my beginning’: T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and after.***

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ABSTRACT The publication of *The Waste Land* established Eliot’s reputation as a major poet. The poem was written out of an experience of emotional ‘breakdown’, and its innovative free associative form conveys a sense of psychological fragmentation. While Eliot emphasised the necessary distance that must be achieved between personal experience and successful creative expression, all his major poems were written out of periods of personal crisis and growth, and remain intensely personal. This paper explores links between Eliot’s personal emotional experience and the poetry. It suggests that for Eliot poetry was part of a journey of self-exploration, and at the time of *The Waste Land* and subsequently, became a vital part of his struggle towards a new integration within his self.

T.S. Eliot’s nervous breakdown in 1921 coincided with his completion of *The Waste Land*, and constituted a turning point in his life. A movement towards psychological breakdown can be traced from the time of his first marriage up until the writing of *The Waste Land*, while his subsequent life, at least until his second marriage at age sixty-eight, manifests a slow and painful struggle towards a new integration within his self.

In his paper *T.S. Eliot and The Waste Land*, Harry Trosman (1974) has comprehensively documented the events leading up to Eliot’s breakdown, his treatment with the Swiss psychiatrist Dr Roger Vittoz, and his writing of *The Waste Land*. Trosman points out that the poem captures a process of psychic disintegration, and suggests that the writing itself, as part of an attempted reintegration within the poet’s self, constituted a form of ‘partial self-analytic work.’ (1974, p. 717)

Although Eliot took steps to limit the material that would be posthumously available to biographers, two major biographies, Peter Ackroyd’s *T.S. Eliot*

(1984) and Lyndall Gordon's *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (1998), have appeared since the publication of Trosman's paper in 1974. The present paper draws on the currently available biographical information, and Trosman's analysis of the 'psychopathological antecedents and transformations' of *The Waste Land*, in order to further explore the idea of the writing of *The Waste Land* as a form of partial self-analytic work, and to suggest that throughout Eliot's life poetry constituted a vital part of his analytic work towards reintegration within his self.

Eliot was much interested in the question of the relationship between lived experience and poetry, and his critical writings emphasise the distance he felt must be achieved in order for emotional experience to be successfully transformed into a work of art. In his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, he advocated an 'Impersonal theory of poetry': '...the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.' (1920, p. 54) As Ackroyd (1984) has pointed out, this statement, paradoxically, confirms just how intimately Eliot's passions and suffering were linked to his creative expression. All his major poems are intensely personal and written out of periods of personal crisis and growth.

The truly creative act can be understood as a form of thinking about lived emotional experience. Wilfred Bion saw creative growth as the outcome of the realisation and awareness of emotional experience, as represented in his categories of linkage: Love, Hate, Knowledge [in notation L,H,K]. Bion believed that growth within the mind depends ultimately upon the presence of the K link, the wish to get to know, which confers the capacity to confront and tolerate the frustration and suffering inherent in the realisation of psychic reality (Bion 1994).

This paper takes as its starting point Eliot's own observation that his passions and suffering constituted the raw materials for his art. It explores how the emergence and realisation of emotional experience and, often painful, self awareness, was linked to his transforming creative expression. It suggests a mutual relationship between the poetry and Eliot's struggle towards integration within his mind. While the paper explores the poetry within the context of these ideas, there is no wish to suggest that the essence of creativity can be reduced to a psychoanalytic theory; as a manifestation of life the creative act remains as mysterious in its essence as life itself.

## ***Background***

T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1888, the seventh and last child, of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Champe Stearns, both aged forty-five. He was nine years younger than his nearest surviving sibling. Another child had been born in 1886 but died after a few months. The family was Unitarian, and Eliot's paternal grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, a Unitarian minister who died shortly before Eliot was born, was a family exemplar of rectitude whose influence continued to dominate from the grave.

Eliot seems also to have experienced his parents as remote figures (Gordon 1998). Charlotte Eliot was a high-minded woman who, by the time of his birth, was devoting much of her energy to a variety of social causes. She had probably not anticipated another child, although a wish to replace the lost baby cannot be discounted. While her conscious intention was to provide the best for her son, she may have had considerable ambivalence about the demands of motherhood being renewed at forty-five when she had begun to develop a life of her own. In the light of one relative's observation that she was not particularly interested in babies (Ackroyd 1984, p. 20), it is possible she was not fully available to her son during his first years. He had a nurse as a young child, Annie Dunn, described by Trosman as a 'rigid, Irish Catholic nursemaid' (Trosman 1974, p. 295), although the picture of their relationship offered by Gordon, and Eliot's comment that he was 'greatly attached' to her (Gordon 1977, p.3), suggest a more sympathetic figure.

Charlotte's attitude towards the body was highly ambivalent: 'Purge from thy heart all sensual desire, / Let low ambitions perish in the fire' (Gordon 1998, p. 163), are lines from one of her own poems, inspired mostly by her religious values and reforming zeal. Having aspired to be a poet she met with little success, and when Eliot's precocious abilities became evident his mother began to hope he would vicariously fulfil her own failed literary ambitions. She wrote to him at Harvard: 'I hope in your literary work you will receive early the recognition I strove for and failed.' (Gordon 1977, p. 4) In Herbert Howarth's assessment:

the family guessed at an early date that T.S. Eliot has unusual abilities, and exerted all their care to foster them and guard him against bruises. Mrs Eliot looked forward to the day when he would take his place in New York among his country's most prominent

writers and perform the work she had longed to perform and win the acknowledgment she would have most desired to win. (Howarth 1965, p. 33)

Charlotte's tendency to regard him as a young adult is reflected in the letter she wrote to the headmaster of Milton Academy before his entry into that school at age seventeen. Ackroyd has summarised its content: 'Mrs Eliot explained in a letter ... how her son had been deprived of companions of his own age: she was used to talking to him as though he were a man, which was perhaps not good for him.' (Ackroyd 1984, p. 28)

Henry Ware Eliot chose a career in business and after initial unsuccessful ventures went into brickmaking, becoming president of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company in St Louis, and relatively wealthy in the process. In justifying his rejection of his own father's ambition that he become a Unitarian minister, Henry Ware Eliot is purported to have said: 'Too much pudding choked the dog.' (Ackroyd 1984, p. 18) The title of his memoirs; *The Reminiscences of a Simpleton*, suggests a self-deprecatory attitude; he had aspired to be a painter but the fulfilment of this creative ambition remained restricted to his habit of making sketch drawings of cats, and he appears to have regarded his career as in some respects a failure.

Eliot recognised that most of his childhood experience had been constrained by a Puritan family ethic of self-denial. Throughout his life he was unable to buy sweets which he had been taught to regard as needless self-gratification (Ackroyd 1984). His parents' ideal of sensual mortification included the sexual. According to Gordon, Henry Ware Eliot considered sex 'nastiness', and syphilis as God's punishment for sin. He hoped no cure would be found for this disease, because if it was it might be necessary 'to emasculate our children to keep them clean' (Gordon 1977, p. 27). To compound the difficulties Eliot was born with a congenital double hernia. It can hardly be imagined that this socially invisible physical defect, and his consequent need to wear a truss, did not have a profound psychological impact; it constituted a narcissistic injury, and seems to have exacerbated his mother's and sister's tendency to anxious over-protectiveness (Ackroyd 1984). At an unconscious level it may have represented concrete evidence of parental retribution against unacceptable sexuality. The hernias were not surgically repaired until 1947 when Eliot was 58.

Gordon has suggested that aspects of Eliot's writing reflect a wish to recapture an ideal and 'remarkably happy' early childhood experience

(Gordon 1977, p. 14). While there is a detectable ‘*nostalgie de l’enfance*’ (Ackroyd 1984, p. 180) it is in the nature of a wish for something insufficiently present; a sense of loss and longing for some ineffable aspect of childhood experience, on the border of consciousness. Biographical details actually suggest Eliot’s loneliness as a boy, and the unequivocally happy memories are mostly associated with the sea and summer holidays at Cape Anne, New England.

Although he would fulfil his mother’s ambition that he become a successful poet, Eliot’s ambivalence about his parents’ influence and ideals is readily traced in his life and work. In 1910, after completing his masters degree at Harvard, and influenced by ideas of Symbolism in literature, Eliot left America and his family to spend a year in Paris.

### ***Aboulie***

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
I do not think that they will sing to me.

*(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)*

In Paris he seems to have experienced a sense of emotional isolation, at least from women, and been tormented by frustrated sexual desire (Ackroyd 1984). He completed his two major early poems, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady*, which show a self-conscious recognition of the symptom complex he would later diagnose as his ‘aboulie’. *Prufrock* opens with its memorable image of unconscious paralysis:

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table;

We are invited to enter the world of Prufrock’s subjective experience in company with his self-observing ego, and Prufrock clearly reflects aspects of Eliot’s own self at the time of writing. Prufrock and the protagonist in *Portrait of a Lady* are depicted only in relationship to women; society women who exist in worlds refined and trivial; and with whom they maintain relationships both tenuous and ambivalent. Faced with the enervation consequent upon his emotional detachment, the protagonist in *Portrait of a Lady* seeks to console himself with the satisfactions of his apparently superior sensibility. He is nevertheless half-aware of sentiments that cannot safely be verbalised:

Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins  
Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,  
Capricious monotone  
That is at least one definite 'false note'.

This suppressed, primitive, and hostile energy, seems to offer a possibility of definition, but it is an aspect of the inner self that is avoided. In both poems such primitive energies, and desire in relation to the feminine, are held in check, and conversation fails as a vehicle for truth. The portrait of Eliot they suggest is of a man with a well developed social persona concealing considerable narcissistic vulnerability, and of the loss of vitality and instinctual energy consequent upon the withdrawal of the 'true self' (Winnicott 1960). Eliot was at an impasse; he had an intuitive appreciation of his affliction, his 'aboulie', but no idea what the remedy should be.

He returned to America to pursue doctoral studies in philosophy at Harvard, and seemed to be heading for an academic career. In 1914 Bertrand Russell, who was visiting professor at Harvard, described the young Eliot as, '...proficient in Plato, intimate with French literature from Villon to Vildrach, very capable of a certain exquisiteness of appreciation, but lacking in the crude insistent passion that one must have in order to achieve anything.' (Clark 1975, p. 231) Russell's judgment was astute but he could not observe the evidence of a rebellion against self imposed orthodoxy that was incubating within Eliot.

Eliot took up a travelling fellowship to return to Europe, arriving in England just before the outbreak of war. In London he met Ezra Pound and was introduced to the contemporary literary scene, already one of innovation and experiment. Pound, a successful fellow American, championed Eliot and his work, asserting confidently that he would become a major poet. Pound's eccentricity and extroversion challenged Eliot's conformity and introversion, and it seems, as Trosman (1974) and Edel (1982) have speculated, that Pound's influence on the direction Eliot's life was to follow was considerable.

In 1915 Eliot met Vivien Haigh-Wood and two months later the couple were married. She was attractive, vivacious, and intelligent, with a keen dramatic sense. As an embodiment of an energising and exciting feminine principle,

she seemed to offer the promise of liberation. Eliot, however, had been unable to perceive the extreme emotional vulnerability and dependence that lay beneath Vivien's extrovert social persona.

### ***'Memory and desire'***

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow...

*The Waste Land –Part I. The Burial of the Dead (l 1-6)*

The importance of the sexual attraction in facilitating Eliot's marriage is suggested in his comment, written a year afterwards: 'For the boy whose childhood has been empty of beauty, who has never known the *detached* curiosity for beauty, who's been brought up to see goodness as practical and to take the line of self-interest in a code of rewards and punishments, then the sexual instinct when it is aroused may mean the only possible escape from a prosaic world.' (Gordon 1977, p. 72) Gordon has commented, 'Eliot married quickly on the crest of a moment of rapport .... It was almost necessary for Eliot to act impulsively – to forestall habitual scruples – if he were to act at all.' (*ibid*, p. 74)

In his hope for a new freedom Eliot was to be disappointed. In a much quoted passage Bertrand Russell wrote to Ottoline Morrell, 'she [Vivien] says she married him to stimulate him, but finds she can't do it. Obviously he married in order to be stimulated. I think she will soon be tired of him.' (Russell 1968, p. 54) [Russell's comments should be interpreted in the context that he was soon to begin an affair with Vivien (Gordon 1998, p.121)]. Ultimately the couple's emotional difficulties and incompatibilities would prove beyond their capacity to resolve, but they struggled on together until Eliot finally left Vivien in 1933. As Ackroyd (1984, p. 85) has commented, 'it would be wrong to underestimate the bonds between Eliot and Vivien even in the midst of their difficulties.'

From the outset the marriage constituted an enormous strain for both parties. Eliot experienced bouts of exhaustion and depression, while Vivien was increasingly subject to severe episodes of anxiety and depression, as well as

a variety of hypochondriacal preoccupations, and physical illnesses (Ackroyd 1984), probably substantially psychosomatic in origin.

Eliot had married without seeking his parents' approval, a radical departure from family tradition. To their further disapproval, he was considering giving up his doctoral studies. With the express purpose of explaining himself to his parents he travelled, alone, to America. The meeting did not go well and Eliot left feeling that he had failed to close the rift that had been opened. Objective evidence that the estrangement was real is found in the fact that his father changed the terms of his will so that his son's inheritance was 'in trust' only and not left outright, as to Eliot's siblings. It would revert to the family upon his death (Eliot V. 1971). Back in London Eliot was forced to seek employment, and eventually took a job in Lloyd's bank, where he would remain for nine years.

In 1919 Henry Ware Eliot died. The loss was complicated by the guilt Eliot felt consequent upon his estrangement from his father. He had hoped to effect a reconciliation by becoming a successful poet, and was working towards the publication of his first book of poems. After his father's death he wrote, it, '...does not weaken the need for a book at all – it really reinforces it. My mother is still alive.' (Eliot V. 1971, p. xvi)

In the period of mourning Eliot wished intensely to see his mother. In 1920 he wrote, 'I am thinking all the time of my desire to see her. I cannot get away from it. Unless I can really *see* her again I shall never be happy.' (Eliot V. 1971, p. xviii), and in 1921 Charlotte Eliot along with Eliot's sister Marian and brother Henry visited him in England. Vivien, who had recently been seriously ill, spent most of their visit recuperating in a country cottage. Probably the animosity between herself and Charlotte (Ackroyd 1984, p. 111) was the real reason for her absence. Rather than reassure Eliot, the family reunion proved extremely stressful, and his mental health began to deteriorate from the time of their leaving. He wrote, '...I really feel very shaky, and seem to have gone down rapidly since my family left.' (Eliot V. 1971, p. xxi) Eliot consulted a neurologist who diagnosed 'nerves' and prescribed three months rest.

An attempted rest cure of several weeks in Margate was not sufficient, and on the recommendation of Lady Ottoline Morrell Eliot travelled to Lausanne to receive treatment from a psychiatrist, Dr Roger Vittoz. Vittoz's methods were non-analytic and involved helping his patient develop a sense of

personal integrity and efficacy through a variety of interventions ostensibly focused on regaining control of thought and behaviour. Trosman comments, 'He saw his method as opposed to psychoanalysis. He had no interest in understanding unconscious processes which he believed endangered the unity and integration he attempted to bring about.' (1974, p. 713) Trosman documents Vittoz treatment of cerebral 'reeducation', which began with exercises involving concentration on sensations without thought. Exercises of graduated complexity involving attention and concentration upon ideas were introduced, and finally the patient was 'taught to exercise the will and given lessons in how to use it.' (1974, p. 713) Throughout there was emphasis on calm and rest, and the treatment involved much personal contact with Vittoz who believed he could feel his patients' brainwaves by placing his hand upon their foreheads. In so doing he assessed the extent of disordered cerebral functioning, and monitored the progress of treatment. Patients found him 'an exceptionally gentle and saintly person.' (Trosman 1974, p. 713) Eliot liked and trusted Vittoz and it seems there was a degree of idealisation towards this paternal figure. The approach was helpful; Eliot felt better and was able to complete his draft of *The Waste Land*, which had been under way at least since the beginning of 1921.

In January 1922 Eliot submitted his manuscript, probably for the second time (Gordon 1998), to the critical eye of Ezra Pound. Pound now suggested editorial revision, particularly the omission of sections he considered weakened the overall effect, and for the most part Eliot accepted the revisions. What Pound referred to as his 'Caesarean Operation' sharpened the focus and improved the poem.

### ***The Waste Land***

In its final published version, the poem is in five sections of varying length, content, and style. Eliot's original title, *He Do the Police in Different Voices*, taken from Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, reflects the polyphonic intention of the poem, and the way in which apparently disparate parts or fragments are united into a whole. As well as the narrating voice of the poet/persona, many other voices and characters speak their own lines or make brief appearances. Eliot sets out to capture 'demotic' language and the contemporary scene, as in an episode in Part III, *The Fire Sermon*, where a 'young man carbuncular' engages in an act of automatic sexual intercourse with a 'typist home at teatime.' After *The Waste Land* was published many commentators focused on its depiction of contemporary life, offering

interpretations of the poem as a rejection of the values of the fragmented wasteland of contemporary Western culture, and as a critique of the emotional alienation suffered by its members. Such interpretations became commonplace and Eliot was moved to issue a disclaimer of his poem as a social critique: 'To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling.' (Eliot V. 1971, p. 1)

If, as Eliot invites us to do, we read the poem as a statement of the poet's self, the fragmented wasteland becomes an internal reality, revealed in the 'objective correlatives' (Eliot 1920, p. 100), to use Eliot's own term, of the scenes and images of the poem.

The opening lines of Part I, *The Burial of the Dead* (quoted above), communicate resistance to the thawing life force of spring, mixing 'memory and desire'. The 'dead land' of inner objects and of desire within the old self, is stirring to life, creating the possibility of breakdown; 'fear in a handful of dust' (l 30), but also the possibility of a new beginning: 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?' (l 71-2)

Written after the disillusion and sexual failure of his marriage, the death of his father, and the failure of reconciliation with his mother, the poem contains no portrayal of a satisfactory love relationship. The encounter with the idealised 'hyacinth girl' is desired but 'my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing' (l 39-40). The encounter which remains, and takes place in a land of 'dry stone' with 'no sound of water' (l 24), is essentially with one's self, and the shadow of one's self: 'Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you' (l 28-9).

Part II, *A Game of Chess*, suggests an anxious interlude and the wish to defer breakdown. The passage and pressure of time is felt and heard 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME' (l 141), but there are various devices, 'a closed car at four' and 'a game of chess' (l 136-7), which might be employed to further its eventless passage. Central to part II is the devastating portrait of failed communication between an introspective ineffectual man and an agitated near hysterical woman. While these lines achieve the necessary 'impersonality', the experience of Eliot's marriage was essential to their composition.

In Part III, *The Fire Sermon*, ‘The river’s tent is broken’ (l 173), and movement restored: ‘Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song’ (l 183). Eliot probably wrote the draft of part III in Margate during the unsuccessful rest cure, then completed it in Lausanne on the shores of Lake Geneva [Lac Lemman] where he received treatment from Vittoz (Gordon 1998, p. 172). In *The Fire Sermon* Eliot makes his personal emotional crisis explicit by reference to his state of self fragmentation and alienation: ‘On Margate Sands. / I can connect / Nothing with nothing.’ (l 300-2) But *The Fire Sermon* also identifies Lausanne as the place where inner connection can occur: ‘By the waters of Lemman I sat down and wept...’ (l 182). The presence of water is linked to movement and release.

In counterpoint is the ‘fire’ motif. The ‘human engine’ (l 216) that brings the sexual encounters, ‘Sweeney to Mrs Porter’ (l 198), and the young man to the typist, is also a combustion engine, like ‘a taxi throbbing waiting’ (l 217). Immediately after the point of recognition of self-fragmentation; ‘I can connect / Nothing with nothing’, the poet identifies himself with St Augustine, ‘Burning burning burning burning’ (l 308), in the “cauldron of unholy loves” that Augustine describes in Carthage [see Eliot’s Notes to *The Waste Land*], and places himself at the mercy of the Lord.

The persona who narrates the sexual encounter between typist and young man is the mythological and androgynous figure Tiresias:

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
And walked among the lowest of the dead.) (l 243-6)

Like Tiresias who encompasses all, Eliot’s purpose is to avow, rather than disavow, a common humanity with typist and clerk. Their forced intercourse is the ‘objective correlative’ of a psychic state where true emotional links [L,H,K] cannot be realised. Tiresias’ blindness suggests that such links must be created from within and discerned with an inner vision. In parallel, the links between what appear initially as the disparate and discontinuous elements of *The Waste Land*, emerge at a deeper level through the free association of image and symbol, and in ‘the music’ of the poetry (Eliot 1957).

Part IV, *Death by Water*, is short but rich in associations, and seems to suggest a possibility for redemption in renunciation of the existing and worldly self, and an attitude of humility in the face of death; a death by water not fire. Both part IV and V were written in Lausanne.

The fifth and final section, *What the Thunder Said*, has been described by Stephen Spender as 'visionary poetry written out of intense suffering and transforms the poet into seer.' (Spender 1975, p. 112) In the barren aridity of the wasteland all existence longs for water, 'But there is no water' (l 358). Thunder can be heard but it is 'dry sterile thunder without rain' (l 342). Then, miraculously, a flash of lightning, and 'a damp gust / Bringing rain' (l 393-4). The thunder is heard again, but no longer sterile, it 'speaks' three times. The persona/poet interprets the voice of the thunder as the injunctions: 'Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata'; Sanskrit words translated by Eliot in his notes to the poem as: 'Give, Sympathise, Control'.

The moral injunctions of the thunder suggest the presence of a benign paternal authority, but outside the sphere of human relationship. The apparent movement in *The Waste Land* is away from the limitations and failure of human love towards the possibility of spiritual redemption.

Following the moments of truth communicated by the thunder, the final stanza offers a series of loosely, or freely, associated lines in several languages, bound together in an incantatory rhythm. There is explicit acknowledgment that the poem represents an attempt to maintain integration of the self in the face of threatened or partial disintegration: 'These fragments have I shored against my ruins' (l 430), but nevertheless 'Hieronymo's mad againe' (l 431). The poem ends in the repetition 'Shantih shantih shantih' (l 433), another Sanskrit word which Eliot's notes identify as the formal end to an Upanishad; and translate as: 'The Peace which passeth understanding.'

Trosman has suggested that the symptoms of Eliot's breakdown; depression with exhaustion, indecisiveness, hypochondriasis, and fear of psychosis; were manifestations of a temporary disintegration of ego functioning in a narcissistically vulnerable personality. He identifies the death of Eliot's father as of 'paramount importance in terms of Eliot's psychological stability' (Trosman 1974, p. 712), and the sense of estrangement and alienation Eliot experienced following the failure of his mother's visit, occurring within the context of the failure of his marriage, as the significant

precipitant for his decompensation. Employing the concept of the self-object, Trosman formulates that following a 'failure in response from need-satisfying and narcissistically cathected self-objects, he found himself empty, fragmented, and lacking in a sense of self-cohesion.' (1974, p. 717) It seems, as Trosman suggests, that Eliot found Vittoz a suitable figure for idealisation and that their co-operative engagement in the therapeutic endeavour contributed to his self-stabilisation and regaining a sense of self cohesion. Trosman points out that because Vittoz could not provide Eliot with insight into the nature of his disorder, the treatment remained essentially supportive and limited, although the writing of *The Waste Land* may have constituted 'a form of partial self-analytic work' (1974, p. 717).

While the treatment with Vittoz appeared to aim for self stabilisation, and might be considered as essentially palliative, an examination of *The Waste Land* itself, and of Eliot's creative process at the time of writing, suggests that much more was taking place within his mind than the restoration of defences and the regaining of self-control.

*What the Thunder Said* was written in Lausanne during the treatment with Vittoz, and Eliot told Virginia Woolf that he wrote this final section of the poem in a trance. In a later interview he commented, 'I wasn't even bothering whether I understood what I was saying' (Ackroyd 1984, p. 116). Eliot was surely reflecting upon this experience when, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, he makes an analogy between mystical experience and some of the ways poetry is written:

'I know, for instance, that some forms of ill-health, debility or anaemia, may (if other circumstances are favourable) produce an efflux of poetry in a way approaching the condition of automatic writing... . What one writes in this way ...gives me the impression... of having undergone a long incubation, though we do not know until the shell breaks what kind of egg we have been sitting on. To me it seems that at these moments, which are characterised by the sudden lifting of the burden of anxiety and fear which presses upon our daily life so steadily that we are unaware of it, what happens is something *negative*: that is to say, not 'inspiration' as we commonly think of it, but the breaking down of strong habitual barriers - which tend to re-form very quickly.' (Eliot 1933, p. 144) ['ill-health, debility, or anaemia,' readily translate as 'aboulie'.]

'Anxiety and fear' may be considered as passive registers, or signals, of emotional experience. *What the Thunder Said* was able to hatch, more or less fully formed after long incubation, as a result of the 'breaking down of strong habitual barriers', or defences, allowing the transformation of

emotional experience to an active register; using Bion's terms there was experience in the domain L,H,K. The process of psychic fragmentation taking place within Eliot appears to have been a necessary precondition for this experience to be realised, and the supportive nature of Vittoz's treatment appears to have contained anxiety to a point where a creative synthesis could take place. Eliot said that, as a result of the treatment, he felt calmer than he had for a long time, likening this calmness to that he had known as a child (Ackroyd 1984, p. 116). The poem itself reflects this process of the formation of emotional links and understanding, the recognition of loss, and the cathartic experience of grief: 'By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept' (l 182). Significantly, Pound did not find it necessary to suggest major changes to *What the Thunder Said*.

While Vittoz acted as a benign paternal transference figure with whom Eliot was able to identify, the transference can also be conceptualised in terms of a maternal holding experience. The trust Eliot felt towards Vittoz relieved fragmentation anxiety, and allowed a transitional space of relatedness within which he could contain the cathartic upwelling and creative synthesis of 'unconscious' elements. This dimension of Eliot's experience is suggested in the arrival of life-giving rain in the wasteland. The paternal voice of the thunder announces or brings the rain, but the engendering of new life in the earth also suggests the maternal function. There is a creative union, restoring at least a partial vitality to the wasteland.

### ***Beyond 'Memory and desire'***

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

*(Little Gidding – Four Quartets)*

Eliot noted that the 'strong habitual barriers' within his mind tended to reform quickly, however the experience of breakdown at the time of *The Waste Land* was profound, precluding a complete restoration of old and habitual defences, and the analytic work of the poem was insufficient to achieve a new integration. Eliot's self, like London Bridge (*The Waste Land*, l 426) was to remain in danger of collapse for some years. 'I am worn out, I cannot go on', he wrote to John Quinn in 1923 (Eliot V. 1971, p. xxvii). *The*

*Hollow Men* (1925), Eliot's next major poem, is perhaps the fullest expression of his ongoing sense of impotence and paralysis:

Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the Shadow

The shadow; the dark side of the self, is directly implicated in the state of paralysis. *The Hollow Men* was written following a second visit by Eliot's mother to England in 1924, perhaps in response to a renewed experience of inner emptiness and guilt. The poem concludes, 'This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper'; suggesting the turning inward or exhaustion of potentially explosive infantile rage in the face of an experience of intolerable helplessness, and a turning away from the mother/other. The world of the poem is one of the complete failure of relationship, but it is also a world of the suspension of passionate or instinctual energy, where there are no 'lost / Violent souls,' but only 'hollow men'.

The content of the poem is stark and shattering, but the recognition of truth is a precondition for change, and a tenuous hope is communicated. The poetry itself serves to affirm the reality of the experience, while the incantatory rhythms, reminiscent of the liturgy, and the fragments of the Lord's prayer in part V, point the direction Eliot was moving in his attempt to be reconciled with the emptiness and the shadows within: in 1927 he was baptised and confirmed in the Church of England.

Eliot's religious conversion can be interpreted as part of his attempt to shore up the 'ruin' of his self through renunciation of the uncertain possibilities of human love in favour of the redemption and security offered in a relationship with the spiritual. Trosman (1977, p.303) speculates that in response to his fears of a 'psychotic merger' with his wife and a 'return to the hypochondriacal fragmentation characteristic of his illness at the time of the composition of *The Waste Land*' Eliot, 'turned more and more to a system of beliefs which would make intelligible his inner turmoil and provide the sense of unity he so sorely lacked'. This movement, and the accompanying repudiation of sexuality, referred to by Gordon as 'Eliot's vow of celibacy' (Gordon 1998, p. 312) found fullest expression in his 'conversion' poem, *Ash Wednesday* (1930).

Part I opens with insistence at having arrived at a point to obviate hope:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Because I do not hope  
Because I do not hope to turn

The usual objects of worldly pursuit, ‘this man’s gift and that man’s scope,’ are renounced, and the repudiation of sexual desire is implicit. As Chouinard (1971) has pointed out, the ‘anima’ representation in *Ash Wednesday* has become that of the Virgin Mary, the ‘silent sister’.

In part II Eliot writes of, ‘The greater torment / Of love satisfied’, than the ‘torment / Of love unsatisfied’, and thus, at the end of part II, comes to the point of renunciation of human love, and acceptance of division and disunity. If unity is possible it is so only in spiritual love, and the poem ends in part VI with a plea for such unity.

Even among these rocks,  
Our peace in His will  
And even among these rocks  
Sister, mother  
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,  
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

Eliot was unwilling to ‘cease from exploration’, and so in the end unable to avoid psychic pain. Like the treatment with Vittoz, Eliot’s religious conversion can be conceptualised in its defensive and self stabilising aspects, and at the same time as providing a framework which helped him contain and realise his emotional experience. The system of belief that he now embraced, by conferring meaning and value to suffering, helped render suffering bearable. Implicit in the final lines of *Ash Wednesday* is a hope, that through the realisation of the pain of separation, separation might ultimately be transcended. The poem suggests the possibility that Eliot’s religious conversion fulfilled a transitional function to that end.

Charlotte Eliot had died in 1929, leaving her son again guilty and anguished as a consequence of their incomplete reconciliation (Ackroyd 1984, p.178). Vivien Eliot had become increasingly incapacitated in her physical and psychological health, showing a disposition towards paranoia, manifest as pathological jealousy, and probably frank psychosis. The couple’s

relationship was increasingly estranged, and in 1933 Eliot left his wife. Perhaps because of his guilt he did not forewarn her of his intention, and for many years she continued to believe that he would finally return to her. Vivien was eventually committed to a psychiatric hospital for involuntary treatment.

Eliot acted as a fire warden in London during World War II, and his response to the blitz found expression in *Little Gidding*, the last of *Four Quartets*. After the war he took up residence with John Hayward, a man of forceful personality, but also a cripple and confined to a wheelchair. Ackroyd (1984, p.278) comments that the essential feature of the life which Eliot constructed for himself was that it 'contained as few surprises as possible.' In an anecdote from this period W.H. Auden recalled asking Eliot why he liked playing the card game patience so much. 'Well, I suppose it's the nearest thing to being dead', Eliot is said to have replied (Spender 1975, p.240). However Gordon's recent (1998) biography makes clear just how much was taking place beneath the apparently smooth surface of Eliot's life of waiting. In particular she reveals the full importance of Eliot's ongoing relationship over many years with an American woman, Emily Hale, the 'hyacinth girl' of *The Waste Land* (l 36); an embodiment of the possibility of ideal but unrealised romantic love. Their relationship went back to 1912, and it is clear that Emily Hale spent much of her life waiting for Eliot. When Vivien died in 1947, she hoped that he was finally free to marry her and certainly Eliot too had considered this possibility; in the end he could not (Gordon 1998, p.411).

### ***Poetry and Self Analysis***

The evidence suggests that Eliot's supportive treatment with Vittoz, while limited in scope, facilitated the creative movement within the self manifest in *The Waste Land*. While Vittoz did not encourage insight, he could not preclude it. In the light of Eliot's comments in *The Music of Poetry*, that 'There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of' (Eliot 1957, p. 31), and 'the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist' (1957, p.30), it seems likely that Eliot was able to return to, and gain insight into, what had been written 'in a trance' without conscious understanding.

Eliot's breakdown and the writing of *The Waste Land* represented a turning point in his life. Through the loss and rupture of stabilising relationships

Eliot was thrown back upon himself, and upon his capacity for self examination. Movement from a state of relatively stable psychic integration to one of unintegration [in Bion's notation movement D → PS (Bion 1984)], is the precondition for the emergence of a new state of integration [PS → D2]. Eliot's journey of exploration after *The Waste Land* can be interpreted in terms of his need to confront the state of emotional isolation and inner emptiness depicted in *The Hollow Men*, and the slow struggle for a new emotional integration within his self.

Although Eliot's attitude to psychoanalytic thought was ambivalent (Gordon 1998, p.200, 479), he possessed a clear conception of the existence within himself of powerful unconscious process. Ackroyd (1984, p.20) documents that after his mother's death, Eliot taught contemporary literature at Harvard, and details how Eliot, 'told his students there that D.H. Lawrence had, in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, written with more acumen about "mother love" than any psychologist.' Ackroyd summarises Lawrence's argument, 'that the idealized love of a mother for her son can nourish the intellectual and spiritual development of the child at the expense of his sensuality and independence.' Eliot's poetry after *The Hollow Men* manifests his concern with establishing a spiritual and intellectual foundation for life, and his need for a stable 'system of beliefs' (Trosman 1977, p. 303) on which he could depend. However alongside this, and linked to the 'music' of the poetry, a latent movement can be discerned culminating in *Four Quartets*, with their elaboration of a truly independent philosophy, and their expression of a new found sensuality. Poetry was a vital part of Eliot's self-analytic work in the service of restoring the balance between his intellectual and spiritual life, and his sensuality and independence of mind.

*Four Quartets*, Eliot's last major poetical work and last innovation of form, explores philosophical and spiritual concerns, at times of considerable abstraction, while retaining a powerful capacity to emotionally engage the reader. The work addresses universal concerns which transcend individual particulars, apparently seeking freedom from the tyranny of the personal self and of time.

This is the use of memory:

For liberation – not less of love but expanding  
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation  
From future as well as past.

*(Little Gidding)*

The poet reaches into his self, and in finding, or creating, a still centre of acceptance there, reconciliation becomes possible. 'I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope' (*East Coker*), but hope is implicit in the act of waiting. Such are the paradoxes that must be tolerated if meaning is to be apprehended: 'Only through time time is conquered' (*Burnt Norton*).

In these complex and subtle poems meaning is inherent in form, shape, and music, as much as any specific content. Their form reflects the possibilities for psychological integration that they seek to explore. Ackroyd has commented of *Burnt Norton* that, 'the only "truth" to be discovered is the formal unity of the poem itself.' (Ackroyd 1984, p. 230) Alongside and within the philosophical abstractions are images and passages of striking sensuality which convey a quickening of life; an apparent inner freedom born of acceptance. As the tyranny of the personal self has lessened, the attitude of renunciation seems correspondingly lessened. The poet's energies are again more directly engaged in the spheres of ordinary human relationship and activity.

### ***The Music of Poetry***

Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness

*(Burnt Norton-Four Quartets)*

Renunciation was not to have the final word. In 1957, at the age of sixty-eight, T.S. Eliot married for the second time. His wife, Valerie Fletcher, was thirty. Eight years earlier she had obtained the post of his personal secretary, and the formal security of their work relationship allowed a gradual intimacy to develop (Ackroyd 1984). The marriage was the second turning point, transforming and rejuvenating Eliot; even his physical health improved. 'I'm the luckiest man in the world' (Ackroyd 1984, p. 321), he declared with uncharacteristic openness.

During the remaining eight years of his life the couple were inseparable. Eliot rejoiced in the new found happiness and held on to life tenaciously in the face of chronic physical illness. In an interview after his death Valerie

Eliot stated: 'He obviously needed to have a happy marriage. He couldn't die until he had had it. There was... a little boy in him that had never been released.' (Ackroyd 1984, p. 320) As Edel (1982) has suggested, the security of his second marriage allowed Eliot to come to terms with 'time past' and 'time future'. His last published poem, *A Dedication to my Wife*, was placed initially in front of his last play *The Elder Statesman*, with a final version contained in the *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*. It finds a new voice of freedom and rebirth in 'time present':

To whom I owe the leaping delight  
That quickens my senses in our wakingtime  
And the rhythm that governs the repose of our sleepingtime,  
    The breathing in unison

Of lovers whose bodies smell of each other  
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech  
And babble the same speech without need of meaning.

That the 'lovers' of the poem are also mother and infant seems inescapable. To enter into the merged relationship with the other of the poem, the will to individual definition and the assertion of meaning in words must be relinquished. In this new communication, akin to the babbling of infant with mother, meaning is reciprocity and rhythm more than content. The poem suggests that the acceptance and mirroring Eliot experienced in his relationship with Valerie Fletcher offered him a direct and alive satisfaction of deep unmet infant needs. Apart from this dedicatory poem Eliot apparently wrote no further significant poetry after his second marriage.

That Eliot should have chosen poetry as a means of self expression can be understood in terms of his identification with his mother's ideals and ambitions, but it also seems that the 'music of poetry' was the symbolic means by which Eliot represented and attempted to recapture a sensual merger that was felt to be lost. Wright (1991), following Winnicott, has provided a model for the emergence of consciousness as a consequence of the inevitable development of a space between mother and infant, a transitional space which is necessary if the symbolic function of language is to develop. In the suspension of this space carnal knowledge of objects becomes visual knowledge and the possibility of the symbolic function of naming is initially created through the agency of the mother. So too in the mirror of the mother's gaze the self as subjective object can be apprehended and named. Thus 'the word is the reward for abstinence' (Wright 1991, p.

135), and ‘we could guess that the creative word is in direct descent from the symbiotic mother who closely adapted to her child’s needs; as though the child, in its use of language, has tried to re-create that lost sense of oneness with the mother.’ (1991, p. 139) Wright emphasises the importance of the good enough adaptation of the mother, and the inevitable subsequent loss or absence of this symbiosis, in facilitating the ordinary acquisition of creative language. But what about the extraordinary acquisition of creative language? Perhaps for Eliot the ‘symbiotic mother’ was too quickly lost, and through the mother’s idealised investment in language, words prematurely became the signifiers, and sanctioned means, by which the child could cross the gulf that had opened in transitional space.

Ackroyd describes Eliot as a ‘solitary, curious child peering at the beauty of small things’ (1984, p. 23), and Eliot’s own childhood memories convey a quality of separateness and loss. Ackroyd documents what might be regarded as a screen memory: Eliot recalled growing up living next to a girls’ school. Because of the high wall that separated the school he could hear the sound of the girls’ voices, but he could not see them. When he thought they had left he would sometimes venture through a door in the wall and wander through the school, until one day he arrived too soon and found a group of girls staring at him through a window. He fled (1984, p. 22).

Eliot’s poetry is riven with a sense of abstinence and gaze across a space or distance; a space which it seems can only be traversed with language, and we begin to approach the carnal and sensual through the music of that language. Often it is the music of Eliot’s poetry, like the distant sound of the girls’ voices, that provides the link between separate and apparently disparate elements or fragments. Ultimately the very sound and rhythms of the lines carry an essence of meaning, seeming to capture a deeper wish; to leave the realm of communication with words across the space between the self and other, and return to the realm of the felt oneness of sensual merger; where the boundary between self and other might be, for a moment, obliterated.

Even in *The Hollow Men* where the content of the poem suggests nothing but despair, the longed for union is still felt in the music of the lines. Only in Eliot’s last poem, *A Dedication to my Wife*, could the wish to ‘babble the same speech without need of meaning’ be known and expressed in the manifest content of the poem, as well as finding latent expression in the music of the poetry. Eliot had arrived at the beginning.

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