

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

TOWARD A DIVINISED POETICS:
GOD, SELF, AND *POIESIS* IN W. B. YEATS, DAVID JONES, AND T. S. ELIOT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
WILLIAM DAVID SOUD
ST. CATHERINE'S COLLEGE

HILARY TERM 2013

I was stretched, therefore, between two poles: the contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history; in other words, between transcendence and becoming. I did not manage to bring these extremes into a unity, but I did not want to give either of them up.

—Czesław Miłosz

ABSTRACT

Toward a Divinised Poetics: God, Self, and *Poiesis* in W. B. Yeats, David Jones, and T. S. Eliot

William David Soud
St. Catherine's College

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Hilary Term 2013

This thesis examines the traces of theological and broader religious discourses in selected works of three major twentieth-century poets. Each of the texts examined in this thesis encodes within its poetics a distinct, theologically derived conception of the ontological status of the self in relation to the Absolute. Yeats primarily envisions the relation as one of essential identity, Jones regards it as defined by alterity, and Eliot depicts it as dialectical and paradoxical.

Critics have underestimated the impact on Yeats's late work of his final and most sustained engagement with Indic traditions, which issued from his friendship and collaboration with Shri Purohit Swami. Though Yeats projected Theosophical notions on the Indic texts and traditions he studied with Purohit, he successfully incorporated principles of Classical Yoga and Tantra into his later poetry. Much of Yeats's late poetics reflects his struggle to situate the individuated self ontologically in light of traditions that devalue that self in favor of an impersonal, cosmic subjectivity.

David Jones's *The Anathemata* encodes a religious position opposed to that of Yeats. For Jones, a devout Roman Catholic committed to the bodily, God is Wholly Other. The self is fallen and circumscribed, and must connect with the divine chiefly through the mediation of the sacraments. In *The Anathemata*, the poet functions as a kind of lay priest attempting sacramentally to recuperate sacred signs. Because, according to Jones's exoteric theology, the self must love God through fellow creatures, *The Anathemata* is not only circular, forming a verbal *templum* around the Cross; it is also built of massive, rich elaborations of creaturely detail, including highly embroidered and historicized voices and discourses.

Critics have long noted the influence of Christian mystical texts on Eliot's *Four Quartets*, but some have also detected a countercurrent within the later three *Quartets*, one that resists the timeless even as the poem valorizes transcending time. This tension, central to *Four Quartets*, reflects Eliot's engagement with the dialectical theology of Karl Barth. Eliot's deployment of paradox and negation does not merely echo the apophatic theology of the mystical texts that figure in the poem; it also reflects the discursive strategies of Barth's theology. The self in *Four Quartets* is dialectical and paradoxical: suspended between time and eternity, it can transcend its own finitude only by embracing it.

Acknowledgements

A project such as a doctoral thesis is never simply the work of one person. There are many people without whom this text would never have taken shape.

Above all, I would like to thank Rohini Ralby, not only my wife but also a scholar and practitioner of the contemplative way. Her unstinting love, support, and counsel encouraged me first to undertake this project and then made it possible for me to complete it. I cannot thank her enough. This thesis is dedicated to her.

My stepsons Ian and Aaron Ralby, who earned their doctorates well ahead of me and then encouraged me to pursue my own, also have a huge share in this work. Knowing me, and knowing what it means to complete a doctoral thesis, they were always ready with their love, advice, and affirmation from first to last. Also, as family, I want to thank Jim Condron and Stacey Lambrow, and my friends in Baltimore.

My supervisor, Rebecca Beasley, as gracious as she was exacting through the whole process, made the work seem easier than, in retrospect, it actually was. Her critical eye, as well as her ability to keep me on track whenever I became uncertain or distracted by secondary questions, helped me complete this thesis with focus and dispatch.

Other scholars, at Oxford and elsewhere, also offered assistance in various ways. Gavin Flood was unfailingly generous with his knowledge of both Indic traditions and twentieth-century poetry; he, his colleagues, and my fellow students at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies formed a marvellous scholarly community. Rowan Williams, Richard Conrad, O.P., Paul Fiddes, Jon Stallworthy, David Moody, Jason Harding, John Kelly, Charles Robinson, Alexis Sanderson, Doug Mao, Valentine Cunningham, and Michael Whitworth, among others, all took time to share their thoughts on my work.

The Fellows, administration, and staff of St. Catherine's College did much to make my sojourn in Oxford a good one. Their support, not only through a College Arts Scholarship but also through their inclusiveness and warmth, made St. Catz a genuinely human place. Special thanks go to my tutor, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, and to Richard Parish, for having shared so much in the way of good ideas and good wine.

My fellow students have been a remarkably supportive group of friends, colleagues, and teammates. Special thanks, however, go to Stephen Ross, Ed Sugden, James Anderson, Zohar Atkins, James Flewellyn, and Henry Little.

Finally, my deep gratitude goes to Ron Bush and Margaret Mills Harper, who took the time to examine this thesis and give me guidance, encouragement, and support going forward.

I have indeed been very lucky.

Contents

General Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Divine Self in the Late Poems of W. B. Yeats	25
Chapter Two: The Divine Other and David Jones's <i>The Anathemata</i>	145
Chapter Three: The Dialectical Poetics of <i>Four Quartets</i>	202
General Conclusion	282
Bibliography	289

General Introduction

In a series of lectures delivered for the Canadian Broadcasting Company in 1974, George Steiner argued that ‘the political and philosophic history of the West during the past 150 years can be understood as a series of attempts—more or less conscious, more or less systematic, more or less violent—to fill the central emptiness left by the erosion of theology’. Steiner identified movements ranging from Stalinism to Freudianism to structural anthropology as forms of ‘*substitute theology*’ engendered by an entrenched ‘nostalgia for the absolute’.¹ The lectures present a compelling if somewhat reductive argument, rooted largely in Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. But Steiner’s construction of twentieth-century intellectual history, like all such models, reveals as much in its lacunae as in its assertions. Even as it critiques as ‘substitute theology’ theories that have undergirded a good deal of literary criticism over the past decades, it overlooks the extent to which actual theologies of various kinds shaped the literature such criticism has examined.

It is easy to overlook the formidable range and influence of religious thought in the twentieth century. Many of the era’s major religious thinkers were public intellectuals. The Protestant theologians Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich appeared on the cover of *Time* and the Jewish theologian Martin Buber on that of *Saturday Review*; Niebuhr advised presidents, and Jacques Maritain served as a principal formulator of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a broader sense, non-Western religious traditions, often misapprehended and distorted in translation, engaged European and American writers and readers throughout the century. Yet literary criticism is only now emerging from a period in which the

¹ George Steiner, *Nostalgia for the Absolute* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2004), 2-5.

impact of religion and theology on the literature of the era, especially that which falls under the problematic heading of modernism, has been largely neglected. With few exceptions—perhaps the most prominent being Northrop Frye’s attempt to graft the emerging discipline of comparative religion onto literary criticism—since the advent of New Criticism, with its formalist insistence on viewing texts as self-contained verbal artifacts, the intersection of religion with twentieth-century literature has been explored more by theologians than by literary critics, and mostly for theological ends.

Critical approaches that overlook the religious dimensions of literary texts neglect the foundational importance to a writer’s worldview of religious belief. The question of what it might mean that a poem involving theological discourse or addressing religious issues was composed by a poet of explicit religious commitment, or even by a poet who considered religion a vital issue in the abstract, cuts to the heart of how we choose to read such a text. Simply put, a poet’s religious convictions determine his fundamental ontological orientation: his conceptions of the nature of the human self and its situation, of the ends and goals of life, and even of the efficacy of language are likely to follow the trajectory of his religious beliefs. Twentieth-century literature, written in a period characterised simultaneously by widespread religious questioning, theological ferment, and cross-cultural engagement, displays this centrality in a distinct and acute way.

This thesis starts from the premises that the religious and theological currents of the early twentieth century shaped not merely the content but, more interestingly, the formal and discursive strategies of major poems of the period, and that this interplay between religion and twentieth-century poetry merits more critical attention. In short, our complex geographies of twentieth-century literature have left a blank spot on the map. Recent scholarship has begun to fill in this region; in particular, the

work on the links of literary modernism with the occult and mystical enthusiasms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been expertly undertaken by such critics as Alex Owen in *The Place of Enchantment*, Timothy Materer in *Modernist Alchemy*, Leon Surette in *The Birth of Modernism*, and Sanford Schwartz in *The Matrix of Modernism*. In its discussion of the late poetry of W. B. Yeats, this thesis touches on their work. But T. S. Eliot and David Jones—two major poets for whom, through much of their careers, religious belief was paramount and theology the highest intellectual discipline—fall largely outside the boundaries of such surveys. Fortunately, there is a fairly rich corpus of criticism on religious aspects of Eliot's and Jones's work. For all three poets, however, gaps remain. In this thesis, Yeats's later poems, especially those written during and after his collaborative relationship with Shri Purohit Swami; David Jones's *The Anthemata*; and Eliot's *Four Quartets* will serve as case studies in distinct modes of religious poetry—works whose poetics are largely determined by their theological deliberations.

Some context is necessary. The intersection of religion and poetics in the first half of the twentieth century reflected broader trends in high and popular culture, both of which expressed the intellectual and spiritual insecurities of the time. If, to take Steiner's phrase, the twentieth century was characterised by a nostalgia for the absolute, that yearning mostly took the form of attempts to preserve a sense of the sacred in the face of forces perceived as eroding it. Most of the religious currents and controversies of the early twentieth century arose, directly or indirectly, from this issue.

Of the forces converging to create this sense of desacralisation, three stand out: advances in the sciences, liberated from their former housing within natural theology; Nietzschean critique; and the development of psychology as a systematic

discipline. Through the agency of these trends, by the turn of the century the assortment of religious responses to the anxiety of desacralisation inhabited, consciously or unconsciously, the dialectic of Being and Becoming.

A Refuge for Being

Within the dialectic of Being and Becoming, the sacred is almost universally associated, or even equated, with the former. As the scholar of religions Mircea Eliade frames it, ‘for primitives as for the man of all pre-modern societies, the *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*’. It follows that any hierophany is the ‘revelation of an absolute reality’, such that ‘the manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world’. The elimination of the sacred therefore ontologically uproots the world, and with it the self. For Eliade, ‘the *completely* profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit’. In the aftermath of that discovery, ‘modern nonreligious man assumes a tragic existence’.² A desacralised cosmos is, in effect, stripped of its connexion to Being and wholly given over to Becoming; it is no longer a coherent cosmos but an endless flux. The resulting sense of ontological rootlessness, at once terrifying and potentially liberating, informs much twentieth-century philosophical and theological thought.

The great prophet of the desacralised universe was, of course, Nietzsche. The recognition of the death of God is the realisation that humanity has desacralised the world. Nietzsche might have declared himself a disciple of Dionysus, but his great merit as a thinker lies precisely in his fearless confrontation with the loss of the sacred, a development he saw as fraught with catastrophe. Locating its origins in

² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1957; repr., Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Inc., 1987), 11, 21, 203.

Cartesian dualism, Hillis Miller describes the Nietzschean predicament: ‘Man has killed God by separating his subjectivity from everything but itself. The ego has put everything in doubt, and has defined all outside itself as the object of its thinking power....When God and the creation become objects of consciousness, man becomes a nihilist’. Sanford Schwartz links the crisis of value with the rise of scientific worldviews, which ‘replaced [a] higher world with a mechanistic cosmos utterly indifferent to traditional moral and spiritual sentiments’ and ‘left man stranded in a universe devoid of transcendent value’. In his central evocation of the death of God, Nietzsche has his madman ask, ‘How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?’³

For Nietzsche, only the strongest can resacralise the cosmos, by effectively divinising themselves as their own supreme sources of value, and embracing the flux as the variegated expression of the Will to Power. Though this postulates, as Schwartz terms it, an ‘inversion of Platonism’ and thus a rejection of Being in favour of Becoming, there is arguably more than a dash of religion in it nonetheless, in that the Nietzschean transvaluation of values can be seen as an attempt to wrench the sacred into the realm of Becoming. As Erich Heller observes, Nietzsche is ‘one of the most radically religious natures that the nineteenth century brought forth, but is endowed with an intellect which guards, with the aggressive jealousy of a watchdog, all the approaches to the temple’.⁴

But the privileging of Becoming over Being was not limited to Nietzsche; Bergson’s *élan vital* can be read as a domesticated version of the Will to Power, and

³ J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 1966), 3; Sanford Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 39; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Random House, 1974), 181.

⁴ Schwartz, *Matrix*, 12; Erich Heller, *The Artist’s Journey into the Interior*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (1959; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 189.

James's stream of consciousness locates the perceiving subject within rather than outside the flux of phenomena. While many twentieth-century writers drew on Nietzschean and Bergsonian thought to illuminate the flux of thought and experience, some, including Eliot, Jones, and at times Yeats, attempted to recover or affirm a sense of the sacred by recuperating the principle of Being. Much of their poetry reflects a sense of guardianship over that principle.

In a larger sense, the loss of the sacred as the ontological ground of the cosmos leaves humanity more vulnerable to what Eliade termed 'the terror of history': the experience of purely profane time as teleologically unmoored and subject to chaos. In 1919, in light of the fears evoked by the Great War, Paul Valéry wrote, 'We civilizations now know that we are mortal....And now we see that the abyss of history is large enough for every one. We feel that civilization is as fragile as life'. The reassertion of Original Sin, from Baudelaire through Hulme and Eliot, reflects a similar anxiety: if human perfectibility is a false teleology, then, as Miller states, 'History is a labyrinth in which each individual is lost'.⁵ A turn to the sacred poses a different problem, in that positing any Absolute reality tends to relativise the reality of history, calling into question one's temporal commitments. Yeats, Jones, and Eliot all confront this dilemma in their poetry. When Yeats, in a Neoplatonic moment, said, 'We should not attribute a very high degree of reality to the Great War', he meant it. His remark reflects an altogether different sensibility from that of Freud, who asserted

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask, (1954; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 161; Paul Valéry, 'Letters from France I: The Spiritual Crisis', *The Athenaeum* no. 4641 (April 11, 1919), 182.

as early as 1915 that ‘Death will no longer be denied; we are forced to believe in him’.⁶

The privileging of Becoming also corresponded with the burgeoning discipline of psychology’s challenge to traditional notions of individual subjectivity. As Alex Owen observes, ‘The researches of the 1880s and 1890s had the effect of postulating a new and unstable subjectivity that bore only a passing resemblance to the dominant Enlightenment concept of the unified rational subject’. This ‘fissile subject’, as Jean-Michel Rabaté terms it, strives to maintain an illusory internal coherence when in fact it is constantly formed and reformed by internal and external forces over which the rational intellect has little, if any, control.⁷ The Freudian model in particular transferred the locus of power and mystery from the sacred to the subconscious.

To recuperate the sacred, to posit a Ground of Being, is to re-anchor the self ontologically. In its more extreme forms, however, this rooting of the self in a divine ground also poses the paradoxical possibility—or even goal—of dissolving individual subjectivity. Asceticism, especially in forms based in scriptural tradition and inclined toward the mystical, can have as its goal ‘the intensification of subjectivity at the expense of individuality’, in that, while it affirms an absolute subject, it may not locate that subjectivity in individuated consciousness.⁸ If God is the absolute subject, then the individuated consciousness is necessarily an object—to some extent an obstacle blocking access to Being—and must be in some fashion overcome. This

⁶ Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1948; repr., New York: Norton, 1999), 282; James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats & Modernism* (1988; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 185.

⁷ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 119; Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1913: The Cradle of Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 141.

⁸ Gavin Flood, ‘Towards a Comparative History of Inwardness’ (lecture, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford University, 11 October 2012).

ascetic inclination appears most markedly in the work of Eliot, where it effectively spiritualises his poetics of impersonality, but there are strains of it in the work of Jones, and even in the more ecstatic late poems of Yeats, who was keenly aware of the paradox of spiritual liberation through self-negation.

The various religious and theological currents discussed below—the mystical revival, Theosophy, liberal Protestantism, Catholic Modernism, and Neo-Scholasticism—all developed partly as forms of engagement with desacralisation, sometimes participating in the process themselves. They also played pivotal, often overlapping roles in the development of twentieth-century literature, especially in that confluence of trends that so often goes under the name of modernism.

The Mystical Revival

In his 1911 essay ‘Whither the New Art?’, Wassily Kandinsky characteristically linked the worlds of art and religion, asserting that ‘a general interest in abstraction is being reborn both in the superficial form of the movement towards the spiritual and in the forms of occultism, spiritualism, monism, the “new” Christianity, Theosophy and religion in its broadest sense’.⁹ That essay came at the end of a decade in which mysticism, variously conceived, had featured in a series of influential publications. In 1901, the Jesuit Augustin Poulain had published *Des Graces d’oraison Traité de théologie mystique*, a treatise on contemplative prayer and mysticism that would go through nine editions in five languages by the start of the Great War. The following year came William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In 1908, after years of painstaking work, Friedrich von Hügel published *The Mystical Element in Religion*. Evelyn Underhill, for whom von Hügel served as a

⁹ John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 86-7.

spiritual director, produced her seminal *Mysticism* in the same year as Kandinsky's article. The internationalism of these texts, as well as their enormous popularity, speaks to the breadth and depth of interest in mysticism at the time.

The 'revival of mysticism', as Holbrook Jackson termed it in 1913, more commonly known as the mystical revival, described 'a range of spiritual alternatives to religious orthodoxy that sprang up in the 1880s and 1890s and gained momentum and prominence as the old century gave way to the new'. The trend had emerged over the entire course of the previous century. Wayne Proudfoot contends that it began in the wake of Schleiermacher's 1799 *On Religion: Speeches to Its Culture Despisers* as a 'protective strategy' designed to 'seal off a guarded domain for religious experience amid modernity'.¹⁰ While that position disregards the strain of mysticism running through English culture from such early figures as Julian of Norwich through many Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and divines, the Cambridge Platonists, William Law, and various Protestant sects, it does go some way toward explaining mysticism's move from the margin toward the centre in the nineteenth century. In seeking to preserve an inviolable space for experience of the sacred, many more recent adherents of mysticism, however they conceived it, sought to fend off the perceived hegemony of a desacralised worldview. Embedded in Bernard McGinn's definition of mysticism as 'the inner and hidden realization of spirituality through a transforming consciousness of God's immediate presence' is the sense of mysticism as both interior and reserved.¹¹

Transcendentalism, that American amalgam of German Idealism, Indic spirituality, and European mysticism, certainly played a pivotal role in the revival.

¹⁰ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 20; Eric Leigh Schmidt, 'The Making of Modern Mysticism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 2 (June 2003), 274.

¹¹ Bernard McGinn, 'Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal', *Spiritus* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2008), p. 44.

Eric Leigh Schmidt marks the date of May 20, 1838, when Bronson Alcott first convened a meeting of the Transcendental Club to discuss mysticism, as a watershed. Schmidt also notes the influence of Robert Alfred Vaughan's 1856 book *Hours with the Mystics*, marking that in the 1858 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the entry 'mystic' is replaced with 'mysticism', in the universalist sense of an exalted spiritual practice common to diverse traditions. By 1902, William James would refer to an 'everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition'.¹²

A crucial ingredient in both Transcendentalism and the mystical revival as a whole was the pervasive influence on Western thought and literature of translations from India that began to appear in the late eighteenth century, perhaps most influentially Max Müller's 1870s series, *Sacred Books of the East*. In the early twentieth century, Sir John Woodroffe's *Tantrik Texts* series would exercise a similar, if lesser, fascination. One need only consider Schopenhauer's fondness for the Upanishads, which he knew only through a translation twice removed from the original, or of the quotations and allusions to Indic texts in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, or even of Nietzsche's sharp dismissals of Buddhism, to see the extent to which Indic traditions had become part of the discourse of religion and philosophy. To be sure, many such understandings were orientalist distortions of traditions that pose serious problems of commensurability for Western thinkers. But the salient fact is that many nineteenth- and twentieth-century enthusiasts or adherents of both Western and non-Western mysticism sought to make it an arena in which direct encounter with the sacred would restore the threatened hierarchy of Being and Becoming, and hence a sense of ontological and teleological security.

¹² Schmidt, 'The Making of Modern Mysticism', 282-287.

Yet the inwardness of mysticism could not shield it from the criticisms of sceptical psychologists. The mystical revival unfolded in what has also been called ‘the golden age of hysteria’, and many researchers were inclined to dismiss claims of mystical consciousness out of hand. In France, where the Catholic Church in particular frowned upon popular expressions of mysticism, such researchers as Jean-Martin Charcot, Albert Houtin, and Pierre Janet categorised mystical experience as the pathological expression of a dissociative consciousness. In his introductory lectures on psychoanalysis, Freud refused to dignify mysticism with a definition, folding it in with such occult phenomena as séances, which he regarded as having the ‘secret motive’ of supporting religion against ‘the advance of scientific thought’.¹³ His break with Jung was driven partly by the latter’s interest in mysticism and hermetism.

Yeats, Jones, and Eliot all affirmed the possibility of mystical experience and practice, but to different degrees and in very different ways. Though Eliot pursued a deep interest in mysticism throughout his life, he regarded mystical consciousness as ‘a gift of grace’, asserting that ‘you will never become a mystic unless you have the gift’. He therefore remained dismissive of what he called ‘the warm fog which passes for mysticism nowadays’, in which people of ‘vague thinking and mild feeling’ seek out ‘a swooning ecstasy of pantheistic confusion’.¹⁴ For much of his life, Yeats folded his mystical inclinations in with his occult pursuits, but in his final decade he mostly abandoned his earlier fascination with magic in favour of pursuing the study and

¹³ C. J. T. Talar, ed., *Modernists and Mystics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2009), 10-11; Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1933; repr., New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989), 42.

¹⁴ T. S. Eliot, ‘Thinking in Verse: A Survey of Early Seventeenth-Century Poetry’, *The Listener* 3, no. 61 (March 12, 1930), 443; T. S. Eliot, ‘The Mystic and Politician as Poet: Vaughan, Traherne, Marvell, Milton’, *The Listener* 3, no. 64 (April 2, 1930), 590; T. S. Eliot, ‘The Silurist’, *The Dial* 83, no. 3 (September 1927), 263.

translation of Indic texts and traditions. Jones, the most exoterically inclined of the three, saw mysticism as reserved for very few extraordinary souls—though some critics regard him as having suffered from the strain of attempting and failing to achieve a mystical vision.

Theosophy

The mystical revival, universalist aspirations, fascination with Indic traditions, and occult enthusiasms converged in Theosophy, a term most likely coined early in the nineteenth century by the erstwhile occultist-universalist Fabre d'Olivet, but famously appropriated by Helena Pavlova Blavatsky, co-founder and head of the Theosophical Society from 1875 until her death in 1891.¹⁵ The remarkable influence of the Theosophical Society on early twentieth-century art and literature has scarcely begun to be examined. Associated with it, either as members of the Society or one of its offshoots, or as occasional lecturers or visitors, are Yeats, Pound, Hulme, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich, and Scriabin, among others.

Blavatsky, the product of a Russian family that claimed aristocratic ancestry, so mythologised and embroidered her life story that it is difficult to ascertain much before her arrival in the West in the 1870s. After immersing herself in the spiritualism that had taken hold in the United States, she founded the Theosophical Society with Henry Steel Olcott in New York in 1875. Though Blavatsky was a charismatic charlatan, she had a remarkable power of synthesis, and her major contribution to the culture of the period was her construction of a mystical-universalist system that did much to infuse a reverence for Indic traditions into Western popular culture. Her major books, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), and *The Key to*

¹⁵ Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 21.

Theosophy (1889), became source material for countless aspiring occultists and mystics. *Isis Unveiled*, ‘an unruly amalgam of Western occultism, Buddhist and Hindu teachings, and more than a dash of anti-Christian polemic’, became an instant point of reference. As John Golding describes them, ‘her books offer a short cut to a vast panorama of occult thought and religion. Indeed, to artists who saw themselves as being in a period of acute transition the tenets of Theosophy must have seemed marvelously suggestive and adaptable’.¹⁶

The Theosophical Society is a study in textual fecundity. It not only drew a large membership but also generated a considerable number of publications, under both Blavatsky and such successors and associates as Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, Rudolf Steiner, A. R. Orage, and G. R. S. Mead. Many of its internal discussions and debates played out in the pages of its main journals, *Lucifer* and *The Path*, and in such offshoot periodicals as Orage’s *New Age* and Mead’s *The Quest*. The latter two were surprisingly ecumenical, often publishing avant-garde literary work. In particular, G. R. S. Mead’s *The Quest*, the journal of the Quest Society, which was formed after Mead’s break with Besant and Leadbeater’s Theosophical Society, promoted the philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson.¹⁷ Mead knew Yeats, who introduced him to Pound in London around 1911. Pound’s essay ‘Psychology and the Troubadours’ originated as a Quest Society lecture, and was first published in the same issue of *The Quest* as Yeats’s poem ‘The Mountain Tomb’.¹⁸ Pound also published regularly in Orage’s *New Age* from 1912 through 1920. In a particularly

¹⁶ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 29; Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, 15.

¹⁷ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 49.

¹⁸ Longenbach, *Stone Cottage*, 21-2.

striking convocation, Orage, Underhill, Pound, Yeats, Hulme, and Jessie Weston regularly attended Quest Society gatherings at Kensington Town Hall.¹⁹

Theosophy thus rested at the nexus of occultism, mysticism, and the avant-garde. The central principles of its syncretic philosophy would exercise a lasting influence over Yeats as well as Mondrian, Malevich, and Kandinsky. Mondrian told a friend that he got ‘everything’ from Theosophy.²⁰ Kandinsky’s *On the Spiritual in Art*, one of the most influential artist statements of the century, is so thoroughly marinated in Theosophical ideas that, as Hilton Kramer has noted, many of its passages ‘are barely intelligible without recourse to the ideas of Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner’.²¹ Such was the potency of the Theosophical Society’s programme that decades after his 1890 departure from the group, Yeats would project its principles erroneously onto the Indic texts he studied with Shri Purohit Swami.

Critique and Crisis in Christian Thought

In its deliberate subversion of Christianity, Theosophy certainly appealed to Protestants who felt that the ascendant liberalism of their churches exerted a desacralising influence of its own. Though it is often traced to Schleiermacher, liberal Protestantism came into its own with a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collection of theologians who based their approaches on Kantian critique. The foremost among these were Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack. Following Kant, these theologians asserted the limits of human knowledge and affirmed the moral imperative as the surest sign of a Supreme Being and divine order, of which humanity is part and to which it is accountable. ‘Ritschlianism’, according to Paul Tillich, ‘was

¹⁹ Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, 34.

²⁰ Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, 15.

²¹ Hilton Kramer, *The Triumph of Modernism: The Art World, 1987-2005* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 8.

a withdrawal from the ontological to the ethical', for which the purpose of Christianity was 'to make morality possible'. Such a theology, in removing religion from the realm of Being, effectively removed direct experience of the sacred. As a result, it 'aroused the wrath of all those for whom the mystical element in religion is decisive'.²²

The lightning rod for that reaction was liberal Protestantism's most famous exponent, Adolf von Harnack. Harnack was primarily a church historian rather than a systematic theologian; his hugely popular book *What Is Christianity?*, translated into English within a year of its publication in 1900, set about answering its titular question using 'the methods of historical science, and the experience of life gained by studying the actual course of history'.²³ Harnack's historically determined vision of the faith, in which Jesus is presented as a 'spiritual personality' for whom, '[r]ightly understood, the name of Son means nothing but the knowledge of God', grounded Ritschlian ethical Christianity in a foundation of textual and historical scholarship.²⁴ For Harnack, the true gospel, preached by Jesus, bore little resemblance to the superstructure of Hellenised dogma that developed around it over centuries. True Christianity 'is a practical affair, and is concerned with the power to live a blessed and holy life'; it is essentially an ethical doctrine, taught by someone whom Harnack seems to regard as a great religious teacher but not as the Word made flesh. As Harnack frames it, Christianity 'teaches us to live our lives aright' and is therefore primarily a path of moral self-realisation:

²² Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl E Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 512-14.

²³ Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 7.

²⁴ Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 14, 138.

But if with a steady will we affirm the forces and the standards which on the summits of our inner life shine out as our highest good, nay, as our real self; if we are earnest and courageous enough to accept them as the great Reality and direct our lives by them, and if then we look at the course of mankind's history, follow its upward development, and search, in strenuous and patient service, for the communion of minds in it... we shall become certain of God, of the God whom Jesus Christ called his Father, and who is also our Father.²⁵

The key elements here—the surety of an innate and reliable moral sense, the vision of history as an ‘upward development’, the subtle resistance to according Jesus divine status—were hallmarks of liberal Protestantism. Harnack’s vision appealed to Christians who, ‘while they posited that the infallibility of the Bible, and miracles, and the traditional dogmas, must be sacrificed on the altar of science, yet wanted to retain reverence for the person of Christ together with the essence of His religion—“morality touched by emotion”’.²⁶

In America, liberal Protestantism found its fullest expression in Unitarianism, the denomination in which T. S. Eliot was raised. Charles William Eliot, distant relation of the poet and president of Harvard, epitomised Unitarian liberalism when he proposed ‘a new ideal of God’ encompassing ‘the Jewish Jehovah, the Christian Universal father, the modern physicist’s omnipresent and exhaustless Energy, and the biological conception of a Vital Force’.²⁷ Such a theology not only seemed to incorporate scientific and philosophical trends; it also ‘had the considerable advantage of being able, tacitly, to appeal to the common feeling that real progress was being made on all sides by human society’.²⁸

²⁵ Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 157, 322.

²⁶ Alec R. Ridler, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church: Its Origins & Outcome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 110-1.

²⁷ Barry Spurr, ‘Anglo-Catholic in Religion’: *T.S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010), 5.

²⁸ S. W. Sykes, ‘Theology’, in *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain, Volume 2: 1918-1945*, ed. C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 146.

Such liberal Protestantism was partly a reaction against the more strident aspects of Calvinist theology, especially the seemingly fatalistic and inhuman doctrines of total depravity and double predestination. But it did not lack for critics, most of whom regarded its confidence in human progress and perfectibility as delusory, and its immanentist sense of God as an attempted domestication of the divine. Hulme's assertion of Original Sin certainly militated against the liberal mindset. The most effective critics of liberal Protestantism, however, were Kierkegaard, who anticipated it but whose works were only translated into German in the 1910s and English in the 1930s, and Karl Barth, who shook the foundations of the liberal edifice with the 1922 edition of his *The Epistle to the Romans*, a prophetic rebuke disguised as a piece of biblical exegesis. Both, but especially Barth, exerted considerable influence over Eliot's thought just before and during the Second World War.

In his essay 'The Disconsolate Chimera', Stan Smith notes that, insofar as he can determine, Eliot only used the term 'modernist' once in print. In his introduction to a 1930 edition of Baudelaire's *Journaux intimes*, the poet refers to Baudelaire's 'recognition of the reality of sin' as a belief 'which separates him from the modernist Protestantism of Byron and Shelley'. Smith takes Eliot's usage here of 'modernist' to indicate a 'generic transhistorical sensibility'; in fact, it is theological.²⁹ And it is not Eliot's first published use of the term. Two years earlier, in the *Criterion*, he had invoked the word more acidly:

Modernism—and admitting that French "Modernism" and English "Modernism" are quite different—is a mental blight which can afflict the whole of the intelligence of the time, whether within or without the Church. Where you find clear thinking, you usually find that the thinker is either a

²⁹ Stan Smith, 'The Disconsolate Chimera: T. S. Eliot and the Fixation of Modernism', in *Rethinking Modernism*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 181.

Christian (if he is a European) or an atheist; where you find muddy thinking you usually find that the thinker is something between the two, and such a person is in essentials a Modernist.³⁰

Eliot here links his disdain for liberal Protestantism with a conflict that, in the first decade of the century, had agitated the Catholic Church. This controversy involved the clash of a rigidly conservative ecclesiastical hierarchy with a collection of progressive scholars, theologians, and priests who came to be known as Modernists.

In his seminal book *Christianity at the Crossroads* (1909), the English Jesuit George Tyrrell defined a Modernist as ‘a churchman of any sort who believes in the possibility of a synthesis between the essential truth of his religion and the essential truth of modernity’, especially ‘that the Catholic Christian Idea contains, within itself, the power continually to revise its categories, and to shape its embodiment to its growth’.³¹ If the definition is broad, it reflects the breadth of Modernism itself, which was less a coherent movement than a loose aggregate of thinkers who had arrived by various paths at a shared conviction that the Catholic Church must be willing to let its doctrines evolve to accommodate advances in science, philosophy, and historical and textual scholarship. In this sense, Modernism stood for religious experience, even mystical experience, as opposed to the highly intellectual Neo-Scholasticism that had come to dominate Catholic theological discourse.

Perhaps the most famous of the Modernists was Alfred Loisy, a biblical scholar who also suffered excommunication, and whose 1902 book *L’Évangile et L’Église* was described by Tyrrell as ‘the classical exposition of Catholic Modernism’. For Loisy, biblical and historical scholarship demanded adjustments in Catholic doctrine, but that problem was merely symptomatic of the Catholic Church’s

³⁰ T. S. Eliot, ‘A Commentary’, *Criterion* 8.31 (December 1928) 1888.

³¹ George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (1909; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963), 26, 21.

refusal to regard the Christian faith as organic and evolving. In 1885, Loisy wrote a dialogue in which a young scholar—surely a projection of Loisy—interrogates the Church:

It is not your formulas that you must translate for us into a speech intelligible to the men of our age; it is rather your ideas themselves, your absolute affirmations, your theory of the universe, the conception you have of your own history, that you must renew, rectify and reconstruct.³²

The passage rejects the principle that the *depositum fidei*, the expression of the faith in scripture and established doctrine, is fixed and unalterable.

While this sort of rhetoric was tolerated under the relatively laissez-faire papacy of Leo XIII, the reactionary Pius X deemed it heretical. In 1907, with the papal bull *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, a document bristling with such vituperative phrases as ‘chairs of pestilence’ and ‘synthesis of all heresies’, the papal establishment declared war on Modernism, which it regarded as a conspiracy. Rather like Eliot, the *Pascendi* appears to conflate Modernism with liberal Protestantism, especially in relation to the idea of the historical Jesus: ‘In the person of Christ, they say, science and history encounter nothing that is not human’. For Pius, Modernism ‘leads to atheism and the annihilation of all religion’.³³ George Tyrrell, along with Loisy and others, was excommunicated, and died in 1910; another Modernist and former Jesuit, Henri Bremond, was censured for administering Tyrrell last rites. Many regarded Tyrrell’s death as the symbolic end of Modernism.

Significantly, some Modernists saw their situation vis-à-vis Church authority as similar to the suppression of mystical Quietism in the seventeenth century—‘the beginning of a definitive narrowing and suffocating of Catholicism as a living

³² Bernard Reardon, *Roman Catholic Modernism* (London: A. & C. Black, 1970), 18.

³³ A. L. Lilley and George Tyrrell, trans., *The Programme of Modernism: A Reply to the Encyclical of Pius X, ‘Pascendi Domini Gregis’* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908), 222, 225, 214, 161, 218.

religious tradition'.³⁴ One Modernist who took this view was Baron Friedrich von Hügel, author of the influential *The Mystical Element in Religion*. Von Hügel imported the Modernist sense of a vital, contemplative Catholicism into the larger discourse of mysticism. He would serve as a spiritual director to Evelyn Underhill, and figure as the representative of a purely Christian mysticism in Yeats's 1932 poem 'Vacillation'.

Roman Catholic Modernism, though suppressed in the early twentieth century, would bear tremendous fruit in later Catholic thought, especially in the *nouvelle théologie* of Henri de Lubac, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Jean Daniélou, Étienne Gilson, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, and Hans Urs von Balthasar—a virtual roll of honor for later twentieth-century Catholic theology. That belated fruition required a rapprochement with what had by the early twentieth century become the dominant strain in Catholic thought: Neo-scholasticism, a revival of the systematic thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Neo-scholasticism gained prominence in the middle nineteenth century as 'an anti-modern intellectual framework' to buffer Catholic doctrine from the intrusions of secular thought.³⁵ With his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, Pope Leo XIII established Neo-scholasticism as the official intellectual stance of the Catholic Church; in *Pascendi*, Pius X proclaimed that 'scholastic philosophy be made the basis of the sacred sciences' as the foremost remedy to the heresies of Modernism.³⁶

But Neo-scholasticism proved a more accommodating tradition than Pius envisioned. After the collapse of Modernism, some Neo-scholastics took up the challenge of adapting Catholic doctrine to the realities of the twentieth century,

³⁴ Talar, *Modernists and Mystics*, 4.

³⁵ Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 18.

³⁶ Lilley and Tyrrell, *The Programme of Modernism*, 228.

eventually coming to terms with the *nouvelle théologie*. Such Neo-scholastic philosophers as Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain became public intellectuals; Maritain in particular developed both a Thomist approach to aesthetics and a vision of Christian humanism that insisted on the centrality of spirit to the human. Maritain's aesthetics, packaged concisely in his 1920 book *Art et Scolastique (Art and Scholasticism)*, became a decisive influence on the artistic sensibility of David Jones, while his Catholic humanism, argued in *Humanisme intégral* (translated in 1938 as *True Humanism*), became a touchstone of Eliot's subsequent deliberations on Christianity and culture. Though Neo-scholasticism's influence would wane after the Second Vatican Council, from the end of the First World War through the 1950s the thought of Gilson, Maritain, and others gained extraordinary sophistication, range, and influence.

Theology and Difficulty

One of the challenges of a critical approach addressing the religious and theological aspects of twentieth-century texts is the inherent difficulty these regions of discourse pose for many contemporary readers. It is a truism that until well into the twentieth century most readers of English and American literature could reasonably be expected to be familiar with the diction and cadences of the Authorised Version of the Bible, and at least some fundamental points of Christian doctrine. It has been decades since poets and critics could safely assume such a knowledge base in their potential readership. Compounding this problem are the inherent difficulties posed by both the incompatible languages and discourses of different religious traditions and the theological predicament, especially acute in mystical theology, of using language to communicate things often considered beyond signification. The former problem,

that of incommensurability, is inescapable in critical examination of Yeats's engagement with Indic thought; one cannot discuss the poet's apprehension of Indic traditions without using an array of Sanskrit terms for which there are no precise English linguistic or conceptual equivalents. The latter problem, that of linguistic insufficiency, leads theologians and poets to resort to discursive strategies intended to use language against itself.

A useful hermeneutic for such texts is provided by George Steiner in his essay 'On Difficulty', in which he identifies four categories of textual difficulty:

Contingent difficulties aim to be looked up; *modal* difficulties challenge the inevitable parochialism of honest empathy; *tactical* difficulties endeavor to deepen our apprehension by dislocating and goading to new life the supine energies of word and grammar ... *ontological* difficulties [are] an inspired movement toward darkness ... express[ing] their sense of the inauthentic situation of man in an environment of eroded speech.³⁷

While any poem might present one or more forms of difficulty, theological poems tend toward modal difficulty—that of empathising with what Denis Donoghue has called 'a form of feeling' shaped by religious deliberation and conviction.³⁸ At their highest pitch, religious texts may confront readers with ontological difficulty, which results from a breakdown in our contracts with and through language; in a theological context, this occurs when a text forces upon us the incapacity of words to convey what needs to be said.

The poems treated in this thesis display the full range of Steiner's forms of difficulty. Each of the texts presents the modal difficulty of empathising with the particular set of religious convictions and deliberations that inform it. Readers of Yeats's late verse must negotiate with contingent difficulties arising from the poems'

³⁷ George Steiner, 'On Difficulty', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36, no. 3, (Spring 1978), 273-4.

³⁸ Denis Donoghue, *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 254.

often arcane and idiosyncratic allusions. With the possible exceptions of Pound's *Cantos* and James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, no long poems in English from the past century pose such a challenging combination of modal, contingent, and tactical difficulties as Jones's *The Anathemata*. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, while offering significantly fewer contingent and tactical difficulties than much of his earlier poetry, both addresses and presents the problem of ontological difficulty.

Three Poets as Case Studies

Yeats, Jones, and Eliot can serve as case studies in the response of twentieth-century poets to the religious currents and controversies of their times. Yeats's final and most productive immersion in Indic traditions, Jones's Catholic sacramental poetics, and Eliot's engagement with mystical and dialectical theology map a continuum of possible theological stances. Each poet's religious deliberations shaped his poetry's presentation of the ontological status of the self in relation to the Absolute and the phenomenal, the eternal and the temporal.

The case of Yeats is the most complex, because it involves a poet at the height of his powers attempting to construct a comprehensive, syncretic vision uniting Western and Indic philosophical, mystical, and ritual traditions. At the heart of Yeats's interest in Indic thought lay his fascination with the possibility of an ontological identity between the self and the Absolute. This belief in a divine innermost self, variously elaborated by the traditions of Classical Yoga, Vedānta, and Tantric Hinduism and further complicated for Yeats by his lingering attachment to Theosophical doctrines, places him at one extreme of the continuum this thesis explores.

David Jones stands far removed from Yeats on that continuum. For Jones, a devout Catholic of a rather concrete cast, God is Wholly Other, and the human self, comprised of both soul and body, must approach the divine through the exoteric means of the Catholic sacraments. This emphasis on the self as a fallen, circumscribed being, dependent on the sanctifying grace of the sacraments, informs *The Anthemata*, which Jones considered his masterpiece. In its structure as well as its discourse, *The Anthemata* rejects any scheme of human deification, even of spiritual inwardness, in favour of a poetics of the creaturely, the physical, and the ritual.

Eliot's *Four Quartets* occupies a paradoxical middle ground between Yeats's Indic poems and Jones's *The Anthemata*. The poetics of the *Quartets* reflects the tension between a mainly Anglo-Catholic mystical sensibility and an anti-mystical, Calvinist sense of the depth and corrosiveness of human sin. The poem both affirms and interrogates the experience of mystical consciousness through a poetics incorporating the parallel discursive strategies of the Christian mystics and the Reformed theologian Karl Barth. The self of *Four Quartets* is paradoxically suspended; alienated from God in its fallen condition yet open to moments of grace, it can transcend its finitude only by embracing it.

Yeats, Jones, and Eliot were afflicted with the 'nostalgia for the absolute' that Steiner anatomised in his 1974 lectures. All three poets ultimately refused the seductions of 'substitute theology', seeking instead to sustain or restore a sense of the sacred through religious traditions; their crucial differences lay in where they chose to locate the sacred in relation to the self. Those divergent choices reverberate unmistakably in the patterns of the resulting poetry.

Chapter One

The Whirlwinds at the Threshold: The Divine Self in the Late Poems of W. B. Yeats

Yeats and the Attractions of Tradition

Yeats famously ends *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*, the first part of his *Autobiographies*, with the plaintive conclusion, ‘My own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens’. That sentiment finds expression years later in the final lines of a working draft of *At the Hawk’s Well*: ‘Accursed the life of man—between passion and emptiness what he longs for never comes. All his days are a preparation for what never comes.’ Though often submerged beneath the imperious authority of Yeats’s more hieratic voice, that sense of waiting and seeking for some transformative vision, some opening of ‘invisible gates’, runs throughout his work.¹ In a 1935 letter to Sturge Moore, George Russell touched on what he saw as the driving force behind Yeats’s lifelong search for a definitive revelation: ‘It was I think to get rid of the sceptical element in himself so that he might have a whole faith that he adventured into magic and spiritualism hoping for the clear fact or experience, or sign, which would enable him to have an untroubled faith’.² As Virginia Moore has framed the issue, the question of Yeats’s religious beliefs is ‘the problem lying at the center of his life’.³

¹ W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 106; Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 219; Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 254.

² R. F. Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, vol. 2 of *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 523-4.

³ Virginia Moore, *The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats’ Search for Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 1.

But Yeats resisted conformity to any creed. He criticised T. S. Eliot for submitting to orthodox Christianity rather than allowing his own creative mind authority over his experience. For Yeats, Eliot could only have found in Anglo-Catholicism ‘a convenient symbolism for some older or newer thought’. Eliot had also, in Yeats’s mind, inherited the arid idealism of F. H. Bradley, whom Yeats described as having ‘hated the common heart; an arrogant, sapless man’.⁴ This aversion to received doctrines was partly rooted in his father’s somewhat Romantic aestheticism, which mandated that artist or poet ‘be free of dogma and formula’. Yeats never completely abandoned the resolve of Los in Blake’s *Jerusalem*: ‘I must Create a System or be enslav’d by another mans’.⁵

For Yeats, spirituality was about experience, particularly the experience of higher consciousness linked to an immortal or divine essence within the self. In ‘A General Introduction for my Work’, he makes explicit the common denominator underlying his spiritual aspirations:

[M]y Christ, a legitimate deduction from the Creed of St. Patrick as I think, is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake’s “Imagination,” what the Upanishads have named “Self”: nor is this unity distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but imminent [sic], different from man to man and age to age....⁶

Here, in his final decade, Yeats ties his conception of Unity of Being to a syncretic notion of a wholly realised, even divinised personhood. As he insisted in 1933, there is ‘something in man, which lying deeper than intellect, is not affected by the flux of

⁴ Yeats, preface to *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, trans. Shree Purohit Swami and W. B. Yeats (1937; repr. New Delhi: Rupa, 2003), 10; Yeats, *A Vision*, 2nd edition (1937; repr., London: Macmillan, 1974), 219n.

⁵ Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, 233; William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 153.

⁶ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 518.

history'.⁷ That ontological core, a self impervious to time and trauma, lies at the heart of the poet's religious aspirations.

Though he played the spiritual *bricoleur* through much of his life, indulging his taste for esoteric ritual and adorning his work with symbols collected from a range of hermetic and mystical sources, Yeats always sought a master narrative built upon the immortality of the self. Late in his career—long after his tutelage under such occult figures as MacGregor Mathers and Madame Blavatsky ended, and even after the first formulation of his 'system' in *A Vision A*—he actually suggested that he had found such a narrative: upon encountering Shri Purohit Swami in 1931.⁸ Yeats's subsequent deliberations about the self, the Absolute, and their relation to history—themes that inform many of Yeats's late poems—owe more to his studies with the Swami than Yeats criticism has yet recognised.

Among the currents directing Yeats toward his late immersion in Indic traditions was his increasing reverence for tradition in a broad sense—aristocratic, poetic, philosophical, spiritual. R. F. Foster locates this shift in the decades-long influence of Lady Gregory, and her keen sense of her own Anglo-Irish class as 'above the people in means and education'.⁹ The phrase is revealing less for its realistic acknowledgement of 'means and education' than for its classing of everyone else as 'the people'. Yeats's own letters and published works mount a slow crescendo of class-minded traditionalism from before the Great War through some of his final works. As early as 1913, in his commentary on *Poems Written in Discouragement*, he asserted the prerogatives of 'a few educated men & the remnants of an old traditional

⁷ Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 472-3.

⁸ In keeping with critical convention, in the running text of this thesis I will refer to the 1925 edition of *A Vision* as *A Vision A*, and the the 1937 edition as *A Vision B*.

⁹ Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, *The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 194.

culture among the poor’ against the philistinism of the middle class.¹⁰ That same year he wrote in his introduction to Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gītānjali* of seeing in the British Museum a fourteenth-generation Japanese connoisseur of prints—a memory which, connected with the storied Tagores, prompted him to say, ‘In the East you know how to keep a family illustrious’.¹¹ The drumbeat continued in the aesthetic pronouncements of his ‘General Introduction to My Work’, where his sense of a venerable tradition underscored his contempt for much modern poetry: ‘[A]ll that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice or salt....Talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage. I am a crowd, I am a lonely man, I am nothing. Ancient salt is best packing’.¹²

Coole Park, that modest but iconic manor house, stood in the background of this evolution, remaining a refuge for Yeats until Lady Gregory’s death in 1932. The poems written to commemorate her death and his sojourns at Coole reverberate with paeans to ‘traditional sanctity and loveliness’, and what he had earlier termed ‘the glory of escutcheoned doors’.¹³ The ideal of ‘pride established in humility’ takes a decidedly aristocratic cast:

Beloved books that famous hands have bound,
Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere;
Great rooms where travelled men and children found
Content or joy; a last inheritor
Where none has reigned that lacked a name and fame
Or out of folly into folly came.

A spot whereon the builders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families,

¹⁰ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 501.

¹¹ Yeats, introduction to *Gītānjali* by Rabindranath Tagore, Scribner Poetry ed. (New York: Scribner, 1997), 9.

¹² Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 522.

¹³ W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 1st Scribner Paperback Poetry ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 245, 201.

And every bride's ambition satisfied.¹⁴

Such a country manor, fallen from its status as the storehouse and emblem of an aristocratic lineage, serves as the backdrop for Yeats's 1938 play *Purgatory*, in which a woman's decision to take a husband beneath her station sets in motion a cycle of intergenerational violence akin to that of the House of Atreus. Pound was accurate when he wrote into *Canto LXXIV* 'William who dreamed of nobility'.¹⁵

The pride Yeats increasingly took in tradition may also have grounded him in a less obvious sense. The lure of a spiritual lineage, an inherited system that, transmitted to Yeats, might provide a definitive confirmation of and context for his spiritual aspirations and experiences, reasserted itself in his later years. The Indic traditions Yeats studied with Purohit supplied this lack; they were not only culturally exotic and spiritually esoteric but ancient and venerated as well, and Purohit himself could claim to inherit a living wisdom lineage extending back to a mythologised past. As Richard Ellmann has argued, Yeats partly gravitated toward Hinduism because he believed 'that the most ancient wisdom is probably the truest'.¹⁶

This religious dimension to Yeats's sense of tradition, tied to his nostalgic vision of an enchanted and mystical Ireland, sometimes leads him to sound nearly Wordsworthian in lamenting the modern loss of the sacred:

A man of that unbroken day could have all the subtlety of Shelley, and yet use not one image unknown among the common people, and speak no thought that was not a deduction from the common thought. Unless the discovery of legendary knowledge and the returning belief in miracle, or what we needs must call so, can bring once more a new belief in the sanctity of common ploughland, and new wonders that reward no difficult ecclesiastical routine but the common, wayward, spirited man, we may never see again a Shelley and a Dickens in the one body, but be broken to the end.¹⁷

¹⁴ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 243, 244.

¹⁵ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, rev. coll. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 433.

¹⁶ Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (London: Faber, 1969), 185.

¹⁷ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 296.

Yeats here frames in the persons of Shelley and Dickens a dichotomy that runs throughout his work: the idealistic or spiritual man, his eyes fixed on a higher unity, and the earthly, passionate man, his gaze ranging over the multiplicity of the phenomenal world. For Yeats, Unity of Being at least partly means healing the breach between these two realms of human experience. His sense of a 'broken' relation between humanity and the sacred is inseparable from his nostalgia for a prelapsarian engagement with life in which 'every gesture, every incident, all the most commonplace utensils and acts...[are] irradiated with spiritual meaning'. In *Wheels and Butterflies*, the poet spells out his ideal: 'the earth becomes once more, not in rhetorical metaphor, but in reality, sacred'.¹⁸

These trends in Yeats's thought aside, one cannot discount the impact on his thought of old age and illness. Yeats voiced as much in a 1916 letter to his sister Lily: 'As I grow old I become more conservative & I do not know whether that is because my thoughts are deeper or my blood more chill...'.¹⁹ Yeats had reason to think in terms of growing old; in the years before and including his relationship with Purohit he faced not only the general deterioration of age but also more than one bout of near-fatal illness.

As early as 1922, what Yeats would later call 'bodily decrepitude' had already begun to take its toll: he was blind in one eye and beginning to lose his hearing, and grew more circumspect about wading into controversies or taking on grand projects. He wrote to Herbert Grierson in 1923, 'I am writing nothing but curses upon old age which distress my wife who says I am not old enough to justify them. I am resisting Wordsworthian calm'. In October 1924 he was diagnosed with severe hypertension

¹⁸ Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 68; W. B. Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 369.

¹⁹ Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 28.

and ordered to rest.²⁰ If ‘Youth and Age’, written that year, is any indication, it seems that even his Nobel Prize made him feel, at least sometimes, that he was winding down his poetic career and his earthly life:

Much did I rage when young,
Being by the world oppressed,
But now with flattering tongue
It speeds the parting guest.²¹

The voice in the poem looks back wryly on impassioned but frustrated rebellion, only to accept, bitterly but passively, the dismissal of a world whose honors are disingenuous valedictions, whose attention has turned elsewhere. In characterising himself rather ambiguously as a ‘parting guest’, Yeats suggests that he was never at home in the world, and his eye is on the door. Three years later he had to be evacuated to Cannes by his wife to recover slowly from a lung infection. December 1928 saw him nearly die in Rapallo from Malta fever, and he remained bedridden for four months. The diagnosis of heart disease would arrive after another round of grave illness in 1935. Without question, mortality weighed heavily on Yeats’s mind as 1931 approached. In an interview at the time, he said, ‘If you don’t express yourself you walk after you’re dead. The great thing is to go empty to your grave’.²² That inner imperative to leave nothing unsaid, and therefore no depth within himself unplumbed, sharpened the fundamentally religious temperament that had led him to search from the start of his career for what George Russell called ‘an untroubled faith’.

As Margaret Mills Harper has noted, Yeats had ‘a passionate relationship with belief’, but his convictions resist ‘a dialectic that students have often brought to class:

²⁰ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 265; Ellmann, *The Man and the Masks*, 245; Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 243, 277.

²¹ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 211.

²² Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 353-4; Ellmann, *The Man and the Masks*, 261; Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 513-14, 440.

does he believe in something or doesn't he?'²³ Yeats's religious convictions are best cast as what Paul Tillich called 'ultimate concern'; in Tillich's theology, a consuming need to settle the question of God's existence is itself a kind of faith.²⁴ As early as 1892 Yeats wrote to John O'Leary that 'the mystical life is the centre of all that I do & all that I think & all that I write'.²⁵ At that point, the word 'mystical' covered a great deal of territory for Yeats, from religious faith to spiritualism, but the 'ultimate concern' is clear enough.

From early in his career he had sought not to overturn religion but to give it a form he could accept—and a form that might have a revivifying effect on the people of Ireland. In *Autobiographies*, he recalls an 1887 dinner at William Morris's in which he found himself growing vehement on the subject: 'They attacked religion, I said, or some such words, and yet there must be a change of heart and only religion could make it'.²⁶ Roman Catholicism, at least in the form Yeats saw it as having taken, would not suffice. In a draft passage later softened for publication, he asserts, 'I have not found my tradition in the Catholic Church, for in Ireland to a man of my descent the Catholic Church with its Guido Renyi [sic] and its manuals does not now seem very traditional'.²⁷ The remark is less interesting for Yeats's rejection of Roman Catholicism than for its acceptance of at least a notional religious tradition that might suit him. The 'system' presented in *A Vision*—that grand hermetic scheme—is itself

²³ Margaret Mills Harper, 'Yeats's Religion', *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 13 (1995), ed. Richard J. Finneran (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 49-50.

²⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-1963), 1:11-12. Tillich defines 'ultimate concern' as that which 'excludes all other concerns from ultimate significance; it makes them preliminary.' Hence, the faithful are those for whom God 'is a matter of infinite passion and interest...making us its object whenever we try to make it our object'.

²⁵ W. B. Yeats, *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 211.

²⁶ Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 148.

²⁷ Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 79.

quasi-religious, especially in its revised, post-Purohit form. But *A Vision* is both an elaborate Borgesian fiction (the myths of origin involving Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne are nothing if not literary jokes) and an *essai* in the sense of Montaigne: as late as October 1938, Yeats would write to Ethel Mannin that it contained his ‘public philosophy’, because his ‘private philosophy’ remained something he could only ‘half understand’.²⁸ Once he had mapped the ‘system’ in *A Vision A*, the poet would devote himself to reading canonical philosophers he had hitherto largely avoided. By the time he met Purohit, he had already begun educating himself in traditions he had never systematically studied.

The Central Dialectic: Plotinus v. Nietzsche

Whether pursuing initiatory hermeticism with MacGregor Mathers or meditation with Purohit, Yeats was drawn to ‘reach across the distance between the divine and human’.²⁹ To use the terminology of Evelyn Underhill, whose book *Mysticism* has remained influential since its publication in 1911, the ambitions of the aspiring mage conflicted with the yearnings of a mystic:

[M]uch that is really magic is loosely and popularly described as mysticism. They represent as a matter of fact the opposite poles of the same thing: the transcendental consciousness of humanity. Between them lie the great religions....The fundamental difference between the two is this: magic wants to get, mysticism wants to give....In mysticism the will is united with the emotions in an impassioned desire to transcend the sense-world, in order that the self may be joined by love to the one eternal and ultimate Object of love...In magic, the will unites with the intellect in an impassioned desire for supersensible knowledge. This is the intellectual, aggressive, and scientific temperament trying to extend its field of consciousness.³⁰

Underhill’s description of mysticism is reductive—certainly not all mystics or mystical traditions speak so fervently of love—but her demarcation is a useful

²⁸ Yeats, *Letters*, 916.

²⁹ Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 472-3; Harper, ‘Yeats’s Religion’, 54.

³⁰ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (1911; repr., Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 70-1.

heuristic device. If, as George Russell claimed, Yeats ‘made a mistake in supposing that symbolism was mysticism’,³¹ symbols were for Yeats essentially magical phenomena, tied to the individual acquisition and expression of power. Purohit’s arrival offered something different: access to centuries-old traditions of predominantly mystical practice, a path to the opposite pole of transcendental consciousness.

Elsewhere in *Mysticism*, Underhill defines her subject as ‘the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else’. The theologian Hans Küng offers a more accessible definition: ‘Mysticism in the real sense is a deliberate striving for direct inner experience of God’s reality’.³² More than once, Yeats’s hunger for such experiences was satisfied in ways he seemed not to expect. Most famously, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* recounts a spontaneous experience of exaltation in a London coffee-shop:

Perhaps I am sitting in some crowded restaurant, the open book beside me, or closed, my excitement having over-brimmed the page. I look at the strangers near as if I had known them all my life, and it seems strange that I cannot speak to them: everything fills me with affection, I have no longer any fears or any needs; I do not even remember that this happy mood must come to an end. It seems as if the vehicle had suddenly grown pure and far extended and so luminous that the images from *Anima Mundi*, embodied there and drunk with that sweetness, would, like a country drunkard who has thrown a wisp into his own thatch, burn up time.³³

That experience, which he associates with ‘ceas[ing] to hate’,³⁴ would find its way years later into ‘Vacillation’. Bruce Wilson cites another incident, captured in *Autobiographies*, as the recovery of what Yeats would call ‘radical innocence’:

‘Yeats tells us of feeling “an emotion never experienced before,” upon crossing a

³¹ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 49.

³² Underhill, *Mysticism*, 72; Hans Küng, *Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 326.

³³ W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies* (1959; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1998), 364-5.

³⁴ Yeats, *Mythologies*, 366.

small stream near Inchy Wood. It is the emotion Yeats senses that “the devout Christian feels” when “he surrenders his will to the will of God”. Such spontaneous upwellings of transcendent joy or humility reflect what Underhill would call the fundamentally mystical yearning “I want to be” rather than the mage’s “I want to know”.³⁵

But Yeats was reluctant to commit himself conclusively to either orientation. For him, poetry is at least in one sense a mode of knowledge and mastery, fundamentally acquisitive. In a distinction echoing that of Underhill, Denis Donoghue describes Yeats as an ‘erotic’ as opposed to a ‘sacramental’ poet, in that he asserts the primacy of the poetic ego over the objects of its attention.³⁶ But even in his poetry Yeats often remains suspended, sometimes painfully, between knowing and being. That tension forms the core of several great poems, but finds its most succinct expression in ‘The Choice’:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

When all that story’s finished, what’s the news?
In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day’s vanity, the night’s remorse.³⁷

Yeats here uses ‘intellect’ in a broad, rather Neoplatonic sense: it embodies not just learning and discernment, but the full scope of spiritual insight an individual can achieve, and it is by nature divine. The first quatrain states the dilemma baldly—but the choice of the word ‘refuse’, pointedly enjambed, suggests a heroic renunciation of

³⁵ Bruce M. Wilson, “‘From Mirror After Mirror’: Yeats and Eastern Thought”, *Comparative Literature* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1982), 32; Underhill, *Mysticism*, 151.

³⁶ Denis Donoghue, *Yeats*, Fontana Modern Masters Series (1971; repr., Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1982), 32.

³⁷ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 246-7.

renunciation itself, tilting the balance in favour of work over life. The second quatrain suggests that Yeats has chosen to make such a refusal, and wonders whether he should regret it, tying him as it does to the earthly miseries of money, vanity, and remorse. The word ‘toil’ recalls not only the ‘labour’ of poetry Yeats equivocally defends in ‘Adam’s Curse’; it connects with a passage in *The Death of Synge* in which the poet frames the dilemma in religious terms:

Am I going against my nature in my constant attempt to fill my life with work? Is my mind as rich in idle days? Is not perhaps the poet’s labour a mere rejection? If he seek purity—the ridding of his life of all but poetry—will not inspiration come? Can one reach God by toil? He gives himself to the pure in heart. He asks nothing but attention.³⁸

Both God and poetry require self-surrender. The question for Yeats is twofold: does he want to surrender his creative will at all, and if so, to what? A passage in the poet’s diary from 1930 captures, perhaps more revealingly than Yeats’s poetic persona would allow, the spiritual dilemma that informed both life and art in his later years:

I am always, in all that I do, driven to a moment which is the realization of myself as unique and free, or to a moment which is the surrender to God of all that I am....Could those two impulses, one as much a part of truth as the other, be reconciled, or if one or the other could prevail, all life would cease.³⁹

If a skeleton key exists to the poetry Yeats wrote in the last decade of his life, that passage is it. He is torn between defiant, heroic assertion of his individual will and complete surrender to the Absolute. For, as Underhill puts it, mysticism ‘implies, indeed, the abolition of individuality; of that hard separateness, that “I, Me, Mine” that makes of man a finite isolated thing. It is essentially a movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual viewpoint and surrender itself to ultimate Reality’.⁴⁰

³⁸ Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 522.

³⁹ Yeats, *Explorations*, 305.

⁴⁰ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 71.

But Yeats draws his poetic energy from this suspension between extremes. And by dramatising that tension in poems like ‘The Choice’, he seeks to perpetuate it rather than resolve it. The poem effectively crystallises the dilemma into a changeless, timeless form; the choice can then be deferred indefinitely. George Russell had diagnosed this tendency in his friend long before. In 1888, he submitted to *Lucifer*, a journal of the Theosophical Society, an open letter interpreted by Foster as referring to the young Yeats, who had just persuaded Madame Blavatsky to form an Esoteric Section for the advanced study of occult phenomena—a move to which Russell was opposed. The letter speaks of a young man ‘whose intellect is of the keenest’ and who aspires to mystical experience, but who loses his way when ‘he commits the fatal fault of forgetting he has a soul...Mystic Union with the Higher Self becomes more and more phantasmal. He recognises its necessity, but postpones the ordeal’.⁴¹

The choice could also be framed as involving two positions less diametrically opposed: those of artist and saint. George Yeats certainly had this in mind when she said to her husband after George Russell’s death, ‘AE was the nearest to a saint you or I will ever meet. You are a better poet, but no saint. I suppose one has to choose’.⁴² Much earlier, in *The Cutting of an Agate*, Yeats had already formulated that dialectic as ‘The Two Kinds of Asceticism’:

The imaginative writer differs from the saint in that he identifies himself—to the neglect of his own soul, alas!—with the soul of the world, and frees himself from all that is impermanent in that soul, an ascetic not of women and wine, but of the newspapers. Those things that are permanent in the soul of the world, the great passions that trouble all and have but a brief recurring life of flower and seed in any man, are indeed renounced by the saint, who seeks not an eternal art, but his own eternity....The poet must not seek for what is still and fixed, for that has no life for him; and if he did, his style would become cold and monotonous.⁴³

⁴¹ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 52.

⁴² Yeats, *Letters*, 838.

⁴³ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 286-7.

The rejection in this passage of ‘what is still and fixed’ is fraught with spiritual implications. The principle of stillness is central to nearly every mystical tradition; a hard-won interior stillness—of thought, of emotion, of desire—opens one to the experience of divinity. In this sense, Yeats’s attachment to the drama of ‘the great passions that trouble all’ suspends him between most mysticism and what Underhill called vitalism—the celebration of flux rather than stillness.

That choice is dramatised most explicitly in ‘Vacillation’. In a useful if somewhat reductive schematic, it can be seen as represented on one hand by Plotinus and on the other by Nietzsche, perhaps the two greatest influences on Yeats’s thought before his encounter with Purohit. Plotinus was the first to arrive, having formed part of Yeats’s early readings in Theosophy,⁴⁴ and remained the most decisive, as someone to champion or to reject. Brian Arkins asserts that ‘Yeats’s knowledge of and involvement with the Platonic tradition was something that began early...but reached its culmination only in the 1920s and 30s, the last two decades of his life’. Certainly, Yeats reached for his metaphysics as far back as Heraclitus, and he asserted that the *Timaeus* ‘seems to me the root of most mystical thought’, but as late as 1934 he told Virginia Woolf that wisdom was ‘[a]ll in Plotinus’.⁴⁵ Yeats’s ideas that the Absolute can be represented as a perfect sphere that falls into antinomies in the manifested universe, that the soul takes the form of conflicting elements striving toward harmony, that matter has no inherent substance, and that the soul must migrate through a series of existences can all be linked to Neoplatonism.

⁴⁴ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 50. Much of what appears Plotinian in Yeats’s thought may well reflect what he absorbed more broadly during his tenure in the Theosophical Society.

⁴⁵ Brian Arkins, ‘Yeats: Platonist, Gnostic, or What?’, *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 7 (1989), ed. Richard J. Finneran (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1990), 4, 5; Julie Kane, ‘Varieties of Mystical Experience in the Writings of Virginia Woolf’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 346.

The thought of Plotinus, though unmistakably Platonic in its argument, resembles aspects of some Indic philosophy enough that for centuries scholars have speculated on what sort of cross-pollination may have taken place in Hellenistic or even Hellenic times.⁴⁶ Plotinus's notions of the One and its essential unity with the essential self of every being, which must return to its source, parallel the Upanishadic cosmology in which every individual's true, innermost Self is the impersonal ground of all Being—Brahman—and liberation is the recognition and infinite experience of that essential unity. Of the One, Plotinus claims, 'He is what He is, the first self, transcendently the Self.' Elsewhere he says, '[T]he source of all things is not all things; and yet it is all things in a transcendental sense...seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has overflowed, and its exuberance has produced the new.' And liberation is to be found by turning inward: 'Seeking Him, seek nothing of Him outside; within is to be sought what follows upon Him, Himself do not attempt.' This effort will culminate in 'becoming external to all other things and self-enclosed; beholding a marvelous beauty...acquiring identity with the divine...poised above whatsoever within the Intellectual is less than the Supreme'.⁴⁷ Affinities with Indic traditions abound.

Plotinus poses a fundamentally mystical vision of the cosmos, but he can be read as differing from most Eastern mystical traditions on one point that proved

⁴⁶ Jean Sedlar, in *India and the Greek World: A Study in the Transmission of Culture* (Totowa, NJ: Roman & Littlefield, 1980), lists several scholars who have speculated on such a link, from Sir William Jones in the 18th century to, among others, Marilla Falk in the 20th (xx-xxi). Radhakrishnan, in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, 2nd ed. (repr.; London: Oxford University Press, 1989), offers the possibility but stops short of asserting a definite connexion (149). Plotinus was reportedly aware of Indic thought: Porphyry describes him as enlisting in Gordian's expeditionary army at the age of thirty-eight so he could 'investigate the Persian methods and the system adopted under the Indians', in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (Burdett, New York: Larson, 1992), 2.

⁴⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 690, 436, 692, 410.

especially convenient for Yeats: in *Enneads* 5.7, he seems to suggest that souls returning to their home in the Intelligible world retain their individuality. Arkins notes how Yeats embraces this reading in a passage from his introduction to *The Words upon the Window-pane*:

[Plotinus] was the first to establish as sole source the timeless individuality or daimon instead of the Platonic Idea, to prefer Socrates to his thought. This timeless individuality contains archetypes of all possible existences whether of man or brute, and as it traverses its circle of allotted lives, now one, now another, prevails...Some other existence may take the place of Socrates, yet Socrates can never cease to exist.⁴⁸

One can imagine, after that rather convoluted exposition, that whatever eternal existence Socrates retains through the daimon is scarcely one of conscious, individual immortality. In any case, Yeats is being selective here, for Plotinus equivocates on the issue of individual immortality. In *Enneads* 5.7 he asserts, ‘If Socrates, Socrates’ soul, is eternal, then the Authentic Socrates—to adopt the term—must be there; that is to say, the individual soul has an existence in the Supreme as well as in this world’. But in *Enneads* 4.9, Plotinus addresses the question more directly and reaches the conclusion that ‘the very existence of many souls makes certain that there is first one from which the many rise’.⁴⁹ To return to that source, then, would seem to mean relinquishing individual identity. What may seem here a rather insignificant exegetical issue has important implications for Yeats’s later engagement with Indic mysticism; it reveals how, for Yeats, any form of transcendence that entailed the surrender of his individuality was hard to accept.

The appeal of Nietzsche lay in his posing a view diametrically opposed to Plotinus’s transcendentalism: not withdrawing from the turmoil of individual existence into a purely spiritual consciousness, but embracing the flux of

⁴⁸ Arkins, ‘Yeats: Platonist’, 7. The passage is in *Explorations*, 368.

⁴⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 483, 420.

manifestation and exercising the prerogatives of a liberated individual will. Where Plotinus is focused on the timeless bliss of Being, Nietzsche advocates immersion in the tumultuous joys of Becoming. Donoghue goes so far as to argue that ‘the crucial figure in Yeats’s poetic life, if any single figure may be named, is Nietzsche’.⁵⁰ The qualifying clause hews closest to the truth, but there is no question that, for Yeats, Nietzsche’s will to power gradually supplanted the mage’s will to know as the antithesis of self-surrender. This shift was more about a field of operations than underlying principles. After all, it was Eliphas Levi who declared, ‘Would you govern yourself and others? Learn how to will....Strength cannot prove itself except by conquest’.⁵¹ For Yeats, Nietzsche inherited the place vacated by MacGregor Mathers.

Yeats seems to have first encountered Nietzsche in 1902, when John Quinn sent the poet his own copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and new copies of *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Case of Wagner*. Yeats immersed himself in the philosopher’s work for months. His enthusiasm likely played a role in his search for what he called ‘masculinity’ in his verse, and for his attempt to ‘lay hands upon some dynamic and substantialising force as distinguished from the eastern quiescent and supersensualizing state of the soul—a movement downward upon life, not upwards out of life’.⁵² As with so many other sources, he dragged a net through Nietzsche’s thought for any ideas amenable to his own worldview. Among his catches, however modified, are the Eternal Return, the rejection of ‘slave morality’ and remorse, the cultivation of joy in the face of mortality, and even ‘the assassination of the old soul

⁵⁰ Donoghue, *Yeats*, 48.

⁵¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 156-7.

⁵² Donoghue, *Yeats*, 54; Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 336; Donoghue, *Yeats*, 55.

concept'.⁵³ Echoes of Nietzsche can be heard in a number of Yeats's poems as well as *A Vision A*, and critics have made much of how prominent a part 'tragic joy' plays in several of his later works. But the Nietzschean elements in *A Vision A* would be largely revised out of *A Vision B*, and some of Yeats's most prominent poetic references to joy and gaiety can be read as modifying or even opposing the Nietzschean *weltanschauung*. As much as Yeats clearly relished sounding like Zarathustra, he refused to give up the dynamic tension between self-assertion and self-surrender. His encounter with Purohit, and his resulting pursuit of Vedāntic, Yogic, and Tantric wisdom, proved a vital supplement, at times even a counterweight, to Nietzsche's thought.

Earlier Encounters with Indic Traditions

Indic traditions had intrigued Yeats long before he met Purohit. His first encounter, which was also his first brush with Theosophy, seems to have occurred in 1884 when one of his Pollexfen aunts sent him a copy of A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. As P. S. Sri has observed, Yeats was likely intrigued by Sinnett's account of the foundational myth of the Theosophical Society: that Madame Blavatsky was instructed in transcendent wisdom by the astral projections of Himalayan sages.⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, along with his fellows in the fledgling Dublin Hermetic Society, Yeats was writing and sharing papers on 'the Vedas, and the Upanishads, and the Neoplatonists, and on modern mystics and spiritualists'.⁵⁵ Decades later, in his Preface to Purohit's translation of several Upanishads, he would write, 'For some

⁵³ Laurence Lampert, 'Yeats's Nietzschean Dialogue', in *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 11, ed. Richard J. Finneran (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 133.

⁵⁴ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 45; P. S. Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', *Yeats Annual* no. 11, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 62.

⁵⁵ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 46.

forty years my friend George Russell (A.E.) has quoted me passages from some Upanishad, and for those forty years I have said to myself—some day I will find out if he knows what he is talking about'. Yeats goes on to lament how he could not previously find a readable translation.⁵⁶

In 1886, Indic traditions arrived in Dublin in the person of Mohini Chatterjee, a Brahmin representing the Theosophical Society.⁵⁷ Sri quotes Yeats's 1900 essay 'The Way of Wisdom' on how entrancing Chatterjee proved to be:

Alcibiades fled from Socrates lest he might do nothing but listen to him all his life, and certainly there were few among us who did not think that to listen to this man who threw the enchantment of power about silent and gentle things, and at last to think as he did, was the one thing worth doing....⁵⁸

That charm never entirely wore off. Decades later, Yeats would try to contact Chatterjee, who had since become a prosperous lawyer, saying that the Brahmin 'gave me indeed my first philosophical exposition of life'. That exposition was Chatterjee's idiosyncratic take on one of the most esteemed and influential Indic *darśanas* or schools, Advaita Vedānta, repackaged in a lecture titled 'On the Higher Aspect of Theosophic Studies'.⁵⁹

Like other schools of Vedānta, Advaita Vedānta is rooted above all in the Upanishads, which are also called the Vedānta (the term means 'the end of the Vedas', and some of the earliest and most important Upanishads are included as parts of the Vedas). 'Advaita', which means 'not two', establishes that Advaita Vedānta is a non-dualist philosophy: it postulates as its central principle that only Brahman, the changeless Absolute ground of all existence, wholly exists; and that the changing phenomenal universe is illusory, because it does not participate in the supreme reality

⁵⁶ Yeats, preface to *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, 7-8.

⁵⁷ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 48.

⁵⁸ Sri, 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', 62.

⁵⁹ Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 536; Shalini Sikka, *W. B. Yeats and the Upanishads* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 8.

of Brahman. But because, in an Absolute sense, all that exists is Brahman, the true Self and innermost ground of every being (known as Ātman) is in fact the Absolute. *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, in one of many such Upanishadic passages, makes the core doctrine clear: ‘This *Brahman* is without an earlier and without a later, without an inside, without an outside. This *Brahman* is the self, the all-perceiving. This is the teaching.’ In another of the earliest and most important Upanishads, the *Chāndogya Upanishad*, a signal credo of Advaita Vedānta appears: *tat tvam asi*, translatable as ‘That art thou’ or ‘Thou art that’. The full verse reads, ‘That which is the subtle essence (the root of all) this whole world has for its self. That is the true. That is the self. That art thou....’⁶⁰ *Tat tvam asi* means that there is only one Self, that the innermost ground and essential nature of the individual is identical with the ground of all Being.

According to Advaita Vedānta, the only thing that separates us from the pure consciousness and bliss of the Self, of Brahman, is ignorance (*avidyā*), which binds us to the illusions of multiplicity and individual selfhood. In this alienated condition, brought about by *māyā*, the illusory power that veils us, we endure many incarnations. As *Katha Upanishad* establishes, ‘There is nothing of variety here. Whoever perceives anything like variety here, goes from death to death’.⁶¹ By practicing discernment (*viveka*), the unceasing discrimination between the real and the illusory, we can gain the saving knowledge and experience of our true identity as the Self, and liberate ourselves from the suffering of phenomenal existence.

Doubtless, Mohini Chatterjee expounded at length on these matters, drawing on the triple canon of Advaita Vedānta: the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtras*, and the

⁶⁰ Radhakrishnan, S., ed. and trans., *The Principal Upaniṣads*, 6th impression (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 1998), 208, 458.

⁶¹ Radhakrishnan, *Upaniṣads*, 634.

Bhagavad Gītā. But, as Sri points out, Chatterjee apparently distorted Advaita doctrine to suit either his own preferences, his sense of his audience, or both. In Advaita, as in such other non-dualist Indic systems, the principle that the manifested universe is illusory can be easily mistaken. As Śankara, the most revered philosopher-saint of Advaita Vedānta, asserts in his commentaries, ‘illusory’ is not the same as ‘having no reality’. The phenomenal universe does exist in a relative sense, as a ‘superimposition’ on the Absolute; it is very real to those who, out of ignorance, believe it to be real, and hence to all bound souls.⁶² But, if Yeats is to be believed, Chatterjee failed to observe that important distinction, instead asserting that the phenomenal universe is wholly unreal. As Sri points out, this distortion led to conclusions diametrically opposed to those of Advaita Vedānta—most prominently that action in the world is born of ignorance and therefore not to be pursued. Yeats emerged from his audiences with Chatterjee feeling that ‘all action and all words that lead to action were a little vulgar, a little trivial’.⁶³ Given that much of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a central text in Vedānta, is an exhortation to *karma yoga*, or action without attachment rather than inaction, such a quietist perspective contradicts a core teaching of Advaita Vedānta.

Sri’s critique of Chatterjee goes further still, in that he sees in the Brahmin’s use of Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* to support his arguments a misguided attempt to yoke Vedānta with aestheticism. He quotes Yeats as noting how Chatterjee ‘spent

⁶² Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, 2nd Indian ed. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981), 286, 284. ‘When Śankara says that the world of thought and matter is not real, he does not mean that it is non-existent. The apparent world is and is not. In the state of ignorance (our everyday consciousness) it is experienced, and it exists as it appears. In the state of illumination it is not experienced, and it ceases to exist’.

⁶³ Sri, ‘Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee’, 66.

more than half a day proving by many subtle and elaborate arguments that “art for art’s sake” was the only sinless doctrine of art....⁶⁴ Whether Chatterjee was infatuated with Pater’s writing or thought he was appealing to the aestheticism of Yeats and his friends, he clearly finessed the principles of Advaita Vedānta.

Nonetheless, much of what he presented to the young, impressionable Yeats remained with the poet. Not only did Vedāntic ideas find their way into such early poems as ‘The Indian upon God’ and ‘The Indian to His Love’; they likely impacted Yeats’s lifelong belief in reincarnation, and his notion of *Anima Mundi*. Many years later, his rekindled interest in Indic traditions would give rise to the poem bearing his onetime instructor’s name.

Yeats had a different sort of connexion with Rabindranath Tagore, whom he met in 1911. He revered the extent to which Tagore was ‘absorbed in God’, and even described himself as having ‘had to close [Tagore’s book] lest some stranger would see how much it moved me.’⁶⁵ What impressed Yeats about Tagore was that, at least to the degree Yeats understood him, he did not practise an intensely ascetic spirituality. To Yeats, Tagore’s impassioned lyrics, steeped in the Vaishnavite tradition of *bhakti*, or selfless devotion to a personal deity, opened onto a kind of extravertive, Whitmanesque, world-embracing mysticism. He writes of Tagore’s poems:

[A]s the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension....The traveller in the red-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover,

⁶⁴ Sri, ‘Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee’, 67.

⁶⁵ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 470; Yeats, introduction to *Gītānjali* by Rabindranath Tagore, Scribner Poetry ed. (1912; repr., New York: Scribner, 1997), 10.

the servant or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty house, are images of the heart turning to God.⁶⁶

Tagore is the ecstatic, life-affirming antithesis of a sterile and world-denying Christianity. In his introduction to Tagore's *Gītānjali*, Yeats dismisses a formidable trio of Christian saints and mystics: Bernard of Clairvaux, 'covering his eyes that they may not dwell upon the beauty of the lakes of Switzerland', Thomas á Kempis, and John of the Cross, who will not cry with Tagore and Yeats, 'I love this life'. He even connects Tagore with Nietzsche's position 'that we must not believe in the moral or intellectual beauty which does not sooner or later impress itself upon physical things'.⁶⁷ Yeats seems to have seen in Tagore's poetry a mode of transcendence that allowed him to embrace rather than restrain his passions.

But Tagore's star rose and fell rather quickly in Yeats's spiritual firmament. The Indian poet may have become, thanks in part to Yeats's tireless promotion, the first non-Westerner to win the Nobel Prize for literature, but his spirituality had a less lasting effect than Chatterjee's. Advaita Vedānta, with its emphasis on discernment and liberating knowledge, appeals more to the intellect than to any other faculty, and thus to Yeats's thirst for esoteric wisdom; Tagore's *bhakti* sensibility may in the end have seemed too plain, too ordinary in its devotions, for Yeats, who hungered not merely for transcendence but for secret knowledge, drama, and power.

Those three qualities saturate *A Vision A*, which marks Yeats's first attempt to articulate his own 'system' of esoteric wisdom. Discussing the full breadth of its deliberations or its sources, especially the degree to which George Yeats shaped her husband's 'system', is beyond the scope of this thesis, but given that *A Vision A* was partly transformed into *A Vision B* during the years Yeats studied with Purohit, some

⁶⁶ Yeats, introduction to *Gītānjali*, 10-11.

⁶⁷ Yeats, introduction to *Gītānjali*, 11-12, 9.

important aspects of the system, and of Yeats's spiritual orientation at the time of *A Vision A*, are worth considering here. The evolution of *A Vision B* will be discussed later in this chapter.

The tension between Plotinus and Nietzsche shapes much of *A Vision A*. Though the book's fundamental scheme of emanation is recognizably Platonic, much in the 'system' is Nietzschean, not least the sense of an Eternal Return as souls are recycled through the 28 phases of existence. But the core notion of being reincarnated on a wheel of successive lives, governed by dualities and attachments, is at least as Indic as it is Nietzschean. What sets the scheme in *A Vision A* apart from Indic tradition is that Yeats seems disinclined to envision an escape from the round of deaths and births. Though in an aside on Plotinus he asserts that 'in the system Good and Evil are eliminated before the Soul can be united to Reality', he defines that Reality in Nietzschean terms, not as a changeless Absolute but as 'the stream of phenomena that drowns us'.⁶⁸ At no point in 'The Gates of Pluto' does he discuss a permanent liberation from the Great Wheel. Even more significantly, Yeats voices a personal reluctance to transcend phenomenal existence at all. In the introduction, he writes of reflecting on the rise and fall of civilisations and the cycles of history: 'I murmured, as I have countless times, "I have been part of it always and there is maybe no escape, forgetting and returning life after life like an insect in the roots of the grass". But murmured it without terror, in exultation almost'.⁶⁹

The Nietzschean rhetoric continues in Yeats's description of Unity of Being, which he of course makes attainable for himself:

He who attains Unity of Being is some man, who, while struggling with his fate and his destiny until every energy of his being has been roused, is content

⁶⁸ W. B. Yeats, *A Critical Edition of Yeats's "A Vision" (1925)*, ed. George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood (London: Macmillan, 1978), 176.

⁶⁹ Yeats, *A Vision* (1925), xiii.

that he should so struggle with no final conquest. For him fate and freedom are not to be distinguished; he is no longer bitter, he may even love tragedy....⁷⁰

Here we see one of the first inklings of Yeats's notion of 'tragic joy', framed, for now, in Nietzschean terms: the rousing of will and energy, the intoxication of facing mortality without hope or fear. It echoes *Twilight of the Idols*: 'The courage and freedom of affect in the face of a powerful enemy, in the face of a sublime hardship, in the face of a horrible problem—this *victorious* state is what the tragic artist selects, what he glorifies'.⁷¹ But the phrase 'struggle with no final conquest' suggests also the unresolved dilemma of Yeats's spiritual direction, the definitive choice between self-assertion and self-surrender that he remains reluctant to make in his 1930 journal. Once more, his attachment is not to conquest, but to conflict, and hence to drama. It becomes clear why Yeats regarded the performance of *Hamlet* as 'my supreme religious event... a passionate preparation of sanctity'. Shakespeare's play dramatises its hero's agonising choice between 'suffer[ing] / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' and 'tak[ing] arms against a sea of troubles'⁷²—in effect, between seeking transcendence of all attachment or wading into worldly action and forgoing transcendence. That Hamlet, like Ārjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, ultimately finds that non-attachment and earthly action are not mutually exclusive seems to have escaped Yeats at this point in his career.

Underneath the Nietzschean rhetoric, however, lies a fundamentally religious impulse, and it is this powerful current in Yeats's character that will eventually turn

⁷⁰ Yeats, *A Vision* (1925), 28.

⁷¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 204-5.

⁷² Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 413; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), 3.1.56-8.

him partly away from Nietzsche, in substance if not always in style. Yeats's quest for Unity of Being is inseparable from his search for a wholly satisfying belief system, a quest made more difficult by his need to put any and all convictions to the test of direct personal experience. Though Bloom defines Unity of Being as a kind of poetic integrity—'to write in perfect tune with the tension of his own lyre'—Yeats clearly regarded it as all-encompassing.⁷³ He inherited the concept from his father, and touched on it in a 1914 letter to him: 'I think with you that the poet seeks truth, not abstract truth, but a kind of vision of reality which satisfies the whole being. It will not be true for one thing unless it satisfies his desires, his most profound desires'.⁷⁴ But in the years before meeting Purohit, despite his own deepening conservatism and reverence for tradition, Yeats remained distrustful of religious commitment. In January 1929, Yeats wrote in his journal after a debate with Ezra Pound over scepticism and belief:

Some Church father said, 'We can never think nor know anything of the Gospel'; some Arian, 'I know God as He is known to Himself'. The Church father had like Ezra a transcendent object of thought; his arose out of self-surrender, Ezra's out of search for complete undisturbed self-possession. In Eliot, and perhaps in [Wyndham] Lewis, bred in the same skepticism, there is a tendency to exchange search for submission.⁷⁵

Here we see a slightly earlier, indirect expression of Yeats's conflict between self-assertion and self-surrender, but the telling final use of 'submission' instead of 'self-surrender' suggests a disdain for converts—not least Eliot, who less than two years earlier had been accepted into the Church of England. The shift to 'surrender' in the journal entry of a year later, especially in relation to himself, suggests a greater

⁷³ Bloom, *Yeats*, Oxford University Press paperback edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 58. Bloom's definition of Unity of Being echoes Yeats's recollection of his father's definition in *Autobiographies*, 190: 'a comparison to a musical instrument so strung that if we touch a string all the strings murmur faintly'.

⁷⁴ Yeats, *Letters*, 588.

⁷⁵ Ellmann, *Identity*, 239.

openness to conversion, or at least a tempering in his thought on the spiritual status of the individual will. In the 1929 entry, Yeats also wrestles with the fundamental question of belief: ‘I agree with Ezra in his dislike of the word belief. Belief implies an unknown object, a covenant attested with a name or signed with blood, and being more emotional than intellectual may pride itself on lack of proof.’⁷⁶ The image of ‘a covenant attested...or signed with blood’ reveals the stakes of belief as Yeats saw them—an abdication of personal liberty that might prove Faustian. With the last phrase, he positions himself as both intellectually and spiritually rigorous, opposed to a Kierkegaardian leap of faith not only because it is absurd but because its very absurdity is cause for vanity. Again, for Yeats, seeing is believing, and in his mind the search for experiential evidence is a matter not only of rigor but of humility.

The Encounter with Purohit

In April 1931, Sturge Moore introduced Yeats to Shri Purohit Swami. At first, the poet’s enthusiasm for meeting an Indian holy man was dampened by his unwillingness to embark on another project; though he encouraged the Swami to write down his life story, for weeks he sought someone else to collaborate with Purohit in that endeavour, pleading that he was too ‘tied’ at the time.⁷⁷ Once he began reading Purohit’s manuscript, however, he was enthralled by its testimony. In February 1932, after reading the first third of a draft of *An Indian Monk*, he pronounced the book ‘a masterpiece. A book the like of which does not exist, written with the greatest possible simplicity...a sort of cinema film to the glory of God’. As he read further, his fascination deepened; a month later, he claimed to be

⁷⁶ Ellmann, *Identity*, 239.

⁷⁷ Ursula Bridge, ed., *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901-1937* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1953), 169.

‘overwhelmed’, and that Purohit’s autobiography ‘seems to me one of the great books of the world, a book that must affect every thought men have about the East’.⁷⁸

In Purohit, a practitioner rather than a theorist of mysticism, Yeats saw an opportunity to publish authoritative testimony about, and possibly to gain for himself, personal experience of a transcendent reality. Shortly after his first encounter with the Swami, he would write to Sturge Moore, ‘Europe has ideas and believes none of them because we lack spiritual experience. He has that’. While trying to convince George Russell to collaborate with Purohit, he reiterates the point:

In Europe we have ideas in plenty but little experience to give them reality. He has lived with his idea under the open heavens & amidst the most ancient beliefs of mankind. Once the experience is recorded in all its simplicity & detail, his ideas will be full of meaning, until this is done what is it but one idea the more?⁷⁹

In a later letter to Sturge Moore, those relatively impersonal advices give way to a confession of Yeats’s personal stake in the Swami’s writing:

Some day if I meet the monk again I would like to question him on matters of religious practice, chiefly to get from him definitions or descriptions of meditation, contemplation etc. In European mysticism contemplation, as distinct from meditation, is beyond the discursive mind. Meditation, itself is of course quite distinct from mere thinking or imagining. I would like to know what happens in the most concrete detail as the life of contemplation or meditation grows richer. I have perhaps just enough experience to ask such questions.⁸⁰

Yeats’s distinction between meditation and contemplation in the Christian (which he equates with European) tradition is consistent with patristic and Scholastic writings,

⁷⁸ Yeats to George Yeats, 8 February 1932 and 10 March 1932, *Unpublished Letters (1904-1939)*, *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Electronic Edition*, IntelLex Past Masters English Letters Database, http://pm.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=yachts_c/yachts_c.04.xml (accessed 8 January 2011).

⁷⁹ Bridge, *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore*, 170; Yeats to George Russell, 29 October 1931, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 8 January 2011).

⁸⁰ Yeats to Sturge Moore, 8 February 1932, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 8 January 2011).

and reflects his study of Christian spirituality.⁸¹ Clearly, his readings had focused not on systematic theology but on contemplative practice and mystical experience. But having already judged Christian orthodoxy unsuitable, Yeats was ready to revisit ‘in the most concrete detail’ the Indic traditions he had explored earlier in his career.

Those earlier explorations had largely unfolded under the aegis of the Theosophical Society, where both Mohini Chatterjee and Madame Blavatsky had presented Indic spiritual traditions as reflecting a universal wisdom. Yeats’s dismissal from that organisation in 1890 may not have left him bitter at the time (he said that he ‘may join them again later on’), but by 1931 he was clearly pleased to trump the Theosophical Society with his prize card, Purohit. His remarks about Theosophists in his letters at the time voice impatience with their complex and abstract speculations. In March of 1932 he wrote to Olivia Shakespear that the Swami could testify to ‘the reality of which the theosophists have dreamed. How they will hate its homely precisions!’⁸² In 1935, after nearly three years of study with Purohit, Yeats assured Frank Pearce Sturm that there was ‘no theosophy’ in either *An Indian Monk* or *The Holy Mountain*, and he referred in a letter to Gwyneth Foden to ‘the vulgarisation of mystical philosophy by the theosophists’.⁸³

Purohit’s ‘homely precisions’ proved irresistible to Yeats, on an aesthetic as well as a conceptual level. Yeats had spent years stripping his poetry of its late Romantic foliage, and the unpretentious simplicity of Purohit’s manner may, in its

⁸¹ Edward O’Shea’s *A Descriptive Catalog of W. B. Yeats’s Library* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985) includes several texts by and about St. Teresa of Avila and Jakob Boehme, St. John of the Cross’s *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Friedrich von Hugel’s *The Mystical Element of Religion*, Brother Lawrence’s *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Maeterlinck’s *Ruysbroeck and the Mystics*, and Rev. Arthur Devine’s *A Manual of Mystical Theology*.

⁸² Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 103; Yeats, *Letters*, 794.

⁸³ Yeats to Frank Pearce Sturm, 7 January 1935; Yeats to Gwyneth Foden, 28 July 1935, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

freedom from Theosophical and occult abstruseness, have affirmed Yeats's agenda of self-simplification, of what he had twenty years earlier called 'wither[ing] into the truth'.⁸⁴ It also offered the sort of spiritually charged vision of life that he had sought to establish in Ireland by tapping the cistern of national myth and primitive faith. Purohit personified for Yeats 'a completed model of the life he sought in Ireland'.⁸⁵

As their relationship developed, the poet increasingly adopted the discourse of the convert. In addition to writing introductions for and then promoting first Purohit's and then his master Shri Hamsa's books, Yeats commenced a course of study with the Swami, and their examination of Hindu doctrines and source texts led the poet to feel that he might have found the 'vision of reality which satisfies the whole being' he had mentioned to his father eighteen years before. Virginia Moore puts the matter succinctly: 'In changing self-knowledge to Self-knowledge, would he gain freedom?'⁸⁶ In his introduction to *An Indian Monk*, completed in August of 1932,⁸⁷ Yeats proclaims that the book 'seems to me something I have waited for since I was seventeen years old....When Shri Purohit Swami...fitted everything into an ancient discipline, a philosophy that satisfied the intellect, I found all I wanted'.⁸⁸ The remark suggests that Yeats believed he had found in Indic traditions not only a viable tradition of mystical practice but also an ideal matrix of concepts and images for his poetry. By 1933, he was saying that his introduction to Shri Hamsa's *The Holy Mountain* 'has grown to have great importance in my scheme of things', and

⁸⁴ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 94.

⁸⁵ Shankar Mokashi-Punakar, 'Shri Purohit Swami and W. B. Yeats', in *The Image of India in Western Creative Writing*, ed. Naik, M. K., S. K. Desai and S. T. Kallapur (Madras: Karnatak University and Macmillan, 1971), 129.

⁸⁶ Moore, *Unicorn*, 350.

⁸⁷ Yeats informs Purohit that he has completed the introduction in a letter dated August 1932, W. B. Yeats Collection, University of Delaware Library, Newark, DE, MS 126 SAFE.

⁸⁸ Yeats, introduction to *An Indian Monk: His Life & Adventures* by Shri Purohit Swami, (1932; repr., New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2003), xiv.

expressing his hope that '[t]wo such books will shift for those, who move others, the foundation of their thought, but it will take years'.⁸⁹ The full extent of Yeats's personal commitment to Hindu philosophy and practice is unknowable, but in an interview with Kathleen Raine, Dermott MacManus, a friend of both Yeats and his wife who visited their home at Riversdale often during this period, stated that 'when Yeats at last made his full discovery of the tradition of Indian thought, he no longer concerned himself with spiritualism, mediumship, magic, or any of his former interests in such matters', and that both W. B. and George Yeats gave up spiritualism because it was 'incompatible with the...teachings of Hinduism'.⁹⁰ MacManus was himself an initiate in a Śaivite temple, so his testimony here may be biased, but it conforms to Yeats's own rhetoric at the time.⁹¹

While Yeats would never convert definitively to one received tradition, the start of his studies with Purohit coincided with a turn away from the poet's youthful Romanticism, best personified by Shelley. In 1900, Yeats had written 'The Philosophy of Shelley', a 35-page essay that affirmed the status of *Prometheus Unbound* as 'a sacred book', and of Shelley as a mystic who sought to achieve 'reformation of society...divine order...regeneration of the hearts of men'.⁹² At Coole during the winter of 1931-2, Yeats read *Prometheus Unbound* a third time; by July

⁸⁹ Yeats, *Letters*, 815, 823.

⁹⁰ Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 468; Kathleen Raine, *Yeats the Initiate* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986), 333; Bruce M. Wilson, 'From Mirror After Mirror: Yeats and Eastern Thought', *Comparative Literature* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1982), 45.

⁹¹ Raine, *Yeats the Initiate*, 334. In a handful of letters written after his meeting with Purohit Yeats still refers to experiences with mediums and séances. The references, however, generally take the form of responses to questions from correspondents rather than accounts of Yeats's own pursuit of occult research.

⁹² Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 65, 69.

1932 he had completed his essay ‘Prometheus Unbound’, and in only seven pages consigned Shelley to the list of influences he had repudiated.⁹³

In ‘Prometheus Unbound’, Shelley is summarily stripped of his spiritual laurels: ‘Shelley was not a mystic, his system of thought was constructed by his logical faculty to satisfy desire, not a symbolical revelation received after the suspension of all desire’. What Yeats had once praised, the poetry of ‘infinite desire’,⁹⁴ he now rejects as spiritually bankrupt and even pernicious, for he has come to value ‘the suspension of all desire’ as the gateway to transcendent reality. He describes a desirous, image-driven form of meditation he pursued ‘[w]hen a young man’, a practice that magnified the anxieties and hatreds of the meditator, so that ‘he might become obsessed with images, voices, that had, it seemed, for their sole object to guard his purpose or to express its contrary and threaten it’—linking the dangers of that practice by implication with Shelley’s ‘compulsion [to imagine] whatever seemed dark, destructive, indefinite’.⁹⁵ As Bloom has noted, Yeats recognises that Shelley’s desires are ultimately ‘unappeasable and apocalyptic’.⁹⁶

From there, Yeats casts a disparaging eye on Shelley’s Manichaeian attachment to antinomies. His criticism of *Prometheus Unbound* singles out the character Demogorgon: ‘Demogorgon made his plot incoherent, its interpretation impossible; it was thrust there by that something which again and again forced [Shelley] to balance the object of desire conceived as miraculous and superhuman, with nightmare’. What critics have failed to note here is how Yeats applies foundational principles of the Indic philosophy he was studying with Purohit at the time: that the fallen human condition of *avidyā*, ignorance, is characterised by

⁹³ Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 424.

⁹⁴ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 421, 94.

⁹⁵ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 422, 421.

⁹⁶ Bloom, *Yeats*, 60.

bondage to antinomies; that the true prison-house of language is the ego-self, constructed by the impure intellect's relentless dichotomising; and that true wisdom, and liberation, arrive only when one transcends all antinomies, including those of subject-object and good-evil. Shelley's fixation on antinomies leads to 'the pursuit of a beauty that, seeming at once absolute and external, requires, to strike a balance, hatred as absolute'. Consumed with binary oppositions, the Romantic poet was not an oracular genius but a case study in spiritual sickness, whose influence was largely malign: 'When in middle life I looked back...and when I thought of the tumultuous and often tragic lives of friends or acquaintances, I attributed to his direct or indirect influence their Jacobin frenzies, their brown demons'.⁹⁷ That Yeats should so forcefully criticise a poetic sensibility he regards as founded on antinomies suggests that, in light of his studies with Purohit, he was re-evaluating the necessity, and even the appropriateness, of drawing his poetic energy from such conflicting forces. In effect, the essay is a veiled self-indictment.

In that light, 'Prometheus Unbound' addresses indirectly a concern that haunted Yeats in his final years: the problem of hate, particularly his own. The word occurs often, and often forcefully, in his letters of the period; he uses it freely as a verb, but also nominalises it as a kind of bondage. In a 1935 letter to Ethel Mannin, he writes, 'I have been always a propagandist though I have kept it out of my poems & it will embitter your soul with hatred as it has mine'. Elsewhere, he refers to hatred as 'a kind of "passive suffering"', contrasting it with indignation, which is 'a kind of joy'. He expresses a wish to cure himself of unconscious, reflexive emotional antinomies, to live 'without automatic love & hate'.⁹⁸ This desire to rid himself of hate had found notable expression long before, in *Anima Mundi's* passage about the

⁹⁷ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 420, 425, 424-5.

⁹⁸ Yeats, *Letters*, 831, 876, 864.

experience of transcendent joy that formed the basis for part IV of ‘Vacillation’, written in the first year of Yeats’s study with Purohit. In the passage from *Anima Mundi*, Yeats goes on to assert that ‘latterly I seem to understand that I enter upon [that happiness] the moment I cease to hate. I think the common condition of our life is hatred....’⁹⁹ That he saw in Indic traditions a way to free himself from hatred, and from ‘the common condition of our life’, is evident in another letter to Ethel Mannin:

I want to plunge myself into impersonal poetry, to get rid of the bitterness, irritation & hatred, my work in Ireland has brought into my soul. I want to make the last song, sweet & exultant, a sort of European Geeta, or rather my Geeta not doctrine but song.¹⁰⁰

The resolution to pursue ‘impersonal poetry’ militates against the dynamic self-assertion of the poetic ego that characterises so much of Yeats’s verse, and the fact that he collates his liberation from ‘bitterness, irritation & hatred’ with achieving a ‘sweet & exultant’ poetry like that of the *Bhagavad Gītā* indicates that his immersion in Hindu texts encouraged him to seek new poetic territory, where he could fuse his Indic spiritual explorations with his verse in a way that would rise above the Manichaeian antinomies that both energised and confined Shelley. The passage suggests a desire to move from a poetics of bondage, of ‘complexities of mire or blood’, to a poetics of transcendence.¹⁰¹

Taken together, Yeats’s resounding affirmation of the transforming truth of Purohit’s teachings, his seeming withdrawal from occult research, his repudiation of Shelleyan Romanticism, and his disdain for theosophy and its ‘vulgar’ complexities would seem to suggest a wholesale revaluation of his ideas in light of this last encounter with Indic thought. Clearly, he was tempted to see in Indic traditions a worldview that resolved and transcended the Plotinian-Nietzschean dialectic that had

⁹⁹ Yeats, *Mythologies*, 365.

¹⁰⁰ Yeats, *Letters*, 836.

¹⁰¹ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 248.

framed so much of his prior thinking. The reality is more ambiguous. Yeats embraced a number of Indic principles as he understood them, but he understood them imperfectly, and could not reconcile some foundational principles of Yogic and Tantric thought with his own, Theosophically driven conceptions of self, soul, and eternity.

Yeats's Studies with Purohit

Any assessment of how Yeats's studies with Purohit affected his late poetry requires a thorough examination of the substance of the teachings. That would be relatively simple if Purohit had operated strictly within one Indic *darśana*, but his teachings were eclectic. Aside from the foundational text of the principal Upanishads, to which every orthodox strain of Hindu philosophy points as part of its origin, at the very least Purohit and Yeats read across the traditions of Vedānta, classical Yoga, Tantra, and Bhakta (usually linked with Vaishnavism). Yeats's letters and other writings from the time offer an extensive list: the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali, the *Bhakti Sūtras* of Narada, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the autobiography of Bahinabai, and, much later, the *Avadhūta Gītā*. Of these texts, Yeats collaborated with Purohit on translations of the Upanishads and the *Yoga Sūtras*, and provided introductions for those books. Purohit's translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* was completed without Yeats's assistance.

Yeats's letters indicate varying degrees of interest in these texts. The *Bhakti Sūtras* and the *Avadhūta Gītā* received little comment, apart from a rather dry observation that the latter was 'monotonous to a European mind'.¹⁰² The autobiography of Bahinabai led only to a relatively brief exchange on the meaning of

¹⁰² Yeats to Shri Purohit Swami, 1 June 1937, William Butler Yeats Collection, University of Delaware Library, Newark, DE.

one short passage. Even the *Bhagavad Gītā* was given relatively short shrift, as Yeats found the Upanishads ‘far wilder and more profound than the Bhagavad Gītā’.¹⁰³ The two texts that Yeats dwelled on far more than any others were the Upanishads and the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali. In each case, his abiding interests remained the same: the nature of the Self and of liberation, the potential for some synthesis of Indic and Western philosophies, and most prominently the nature and process of *samādhi*, or meditative absorption.

Several critics have already done significant work on Yeats’s appropriation of principles, images, and rhetorical tropes from the Upanishads; much of the foundational Vedānta he learned with Mohini Chatterjee in 1886 came from these most important of esoteric Indian source texts, and there is no further need to elaborate those principles here.¹⁰⁴ Certainly the Upanishads had considerable impact on Yeats’s late thought; he mentions them no fewer than six times in his 1937 ‘General Introduction to My Work’. Of particular interest, however, is the set of questions that Yeats pursued as he annotated his edition of Robert Ernest Hume’s translation, early in his studies with Purohit and therefore revealing of the preconceptions, largely Theosophical, that the poet brought to his reading.

Yeats was certainly annotating his edition of Hume’s Upanishads in early 1932. An inscription on the volume’s flyleaf indicates that he received the book

¹⁰³ Yeats to Margot Ruddock, April 1936, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

¹⁰⁴ See especially H. Bachchan, *W. B. Yeats and Occultism* (1965; repr., New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1974); A. Davenport, ‘W. B. Yeats and the Upanishads’ in *Review of English Studies* 3, no. 9 (January 1952), 55-62; P. S. Sri, ‘The Influence of Vedānta on Yeats’s “Supernatural Songs”’ in *Yeats Annual* no. 16 (2005), 113-129; Shalini Sikka, *W. B. Yeats and the Upanishads* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). Sikka’s work makes some excellent points, but is also compromised by its occasional disregard for the chronology of Yeats’s writing relative to the period of his renewed and deepened Indic studies.

around Christmas of 1931.¹⁰⁵ In a textual note dated ‘23.1.32’, he underlines the following sentences by Hume: ‘The final unity could not and would not then, be found outside of self, but in it. In truth the self is the unity they had been looking for all along’.¹⁰⁶ The resonance of that brief passage with Yeats’s notion of Unity of Being is unmistakable. But Yeats’s subsequent annotations reveal major points of confusion and argument about the nature of the Self as conceived in these texts. Hume’s introductory essay explains the Upanishadic principle that the Self is pure subject:

Thus that world-ground, that unity of being which was being searched for realistically outside of the self, and which, as it was being approached, seemed to recede back into the illusory and into the unknowable, is none other than the self, which had eluded cognition for the reason that, as the subject of consciousness, it could not become an object.¹⁰⁷

Yeats’s marginal note reads, ‘but it is’.¹⁰⁸ It is a revealing assertion. By insisting on regarding the Self as an object, he is in fact rejecting the central tenet of Upanishadic Hinduism: that Ātman is Brahman, that the self is in reality the Self, the pure subject which is the ground of all being.

Yeats compounds this fundamental difference by insisting on a ‘real self’ distinct from both the individual self and the supreme Self. O’Shea cites several marginal notes that display the poet’s deliberations on this point, some of which try to link the Upanishads with Buddhism as Yeats understood it. On page 50 of Hume, Yeats writes, ‘Only the real self knows the Real Self. How am I to find my real self. By becoming it answers Buddha’. A page later, where Hume writes, ‘individuality

¹⁰⁵ O’Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 282-3.

¹⁰⁶ Sikka, *W. B. Yeats and the Upanishads*, 262.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Ernest Hume, trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford India Paperback ed. (1877; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 43.

¹⁰⁸ O’Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 282-3.

and self consciousness must be lost ere one reach that infinite Real', Yeats comments, 'Yes, but not consciousness of the real self'. On page 72, Yeats writes a longer note:

Not a word is said in this essay about the relation of Buddha to the Upanishads. His teaching bridges the gap between the undivided self (the Ego) and the Real Self. He shows us how to become what we really are, i.e. by a true transformation of our being. For a true understanding of Buddhism we must get to the essence of the Upanishads; and vice versa.

Finally, on page 110, Yeats asks plainly the question that has troubled him about the Hindu principle of liberation: 'Who then does the person become?'¹⁰⁹ Taken together, his notes reveal a reluctance to accept that liberation would mean relinquishing his individuality completely. Instead, he attempts to locate between the individual self and the Self a kind of happy medium called the 'real self'—presumably a purified personality that would allow him to attain emancipation without surrendering his individual will. No such entity exists in the Upanishads.

Such a self does, however, exist in the discourse of the Theosophical Society. In fact, the pages of *The Path*, one of the Society's most important journals, are full of debates and elaborations on the nature of the transmigratory self. The question caused considerable confusion. In a May 1890 article titled 'Misleading Terms', N. and Alexander Fullerton write, 'The word *Ego*, too, is...confusing. Thus we read of a *Personal Ego*, an *Immortal Ego*, a *Reincarnating Ego*, and the like, till the word is so altered and qualified that one's conception of what *an Ego* or *the Ego* really is, is extremely vague and misty'.¹¹⁰ Blavatsky is clearly responding to this confusion when she takes pains to clarify the Theosophical map of the self in *The Key to Theosophy*. In that book—half apology, half catechism, with a glossary attached—she

¹⁰⁹ O'Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 282-3.

¹¹⁰ N. & Alexander Fullerton, 'Misleading Terms', *The Path* 5, no. 8 (May 1890), http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/path/v05n02p50_misleading-terms.htm (accessed 15 September 2011).

affirms ‘the existence of two *Egos* in man, the moral or *personal*, and the higher, the divine or *impersonal*, calling the former “personality,” and the latter “individuality”’. According to Blavatsky, ‘the Individuality is our imperishable *Ego* which reincarnates and clothes itself *in a new Personality* at every new birth’, remaining ‘a poor pilgrim on his way to regain that which he has lost’. This higher *Ego*, then, is not the same as the *Ātman*, which according to Blavatsky is ‘no individual property of any man, but is the Divine essence which has no body, no form, which is imponderable, invisible and indivisible’.¹¹¹

These deliberations advance the notion of a pure, eternal, and exalted ‘real self’—what Blavatsky calls the ‘real man’—occupying a middling state between illusion-bound individuality and the supreme Self of the Upanishads.¹¹² Yeats imported this concept into his reading of Indic scriptures. But from the standpoint of Upanishadic thought, positing such a ‘real self’ means trying to transcend separateness and keep it, too—a desire that shadowed Yeats’s engagement with Indic traditions from first to last. His refusal to accept the complete relinquishment of the individual self reflected the perception of Indian spirituality Yeats carried forward from his days as a Theosophist.

Yeats’s attempt to link Buddhism with Upanishadic Hinduism poses a separate problem. Though the older Upanishads certainly predated and influenced Buddhism—S. Dasgupta describes them as ‘the melting pot in which all later philosophic ideas were still in a state of fusion’¹¹³—Yeats knew little of Buddhism;

¹¹¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (New York: W. Q. Judge, 1890), 328, 359, 181, 101.

¹¹² Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 100.

¹¹³ S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, 1st Indian ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 42.

he read few books on the subject, and apparently no primary texts.¹¹⁴ Though he found what little he read of Zen compelling and did use the Buddha as a multivalent symbol, as his studies in Hinduism deepened Yeats developed an ambivalence about Buddhism that at times veered into distaste. Just as he scorned the world-denying, even world-fearing aspect of Christianity as he saw it, he rejected what he called the ‘Buddhistic hatred of life’. For Yeats, ‘Buddha represented too great an emphasis on the spirit and a negation of the body, something that could not qualify as Unity of Being’.¹¹⁵ After Purohit’s return to India in 1936, Yeats sought further Hindu instruction by attempting to contact Hari Prasad Shastri, translator of the *Avadhūta Gītā*, at the centre for Hindu studies Shastri had established in London.¹¹⁶ Given that ample opportunities to study Buddhism existed at the time, Yeats’s decision is telling.

But one of the most revered Hindu texts on spiritual practice has strong affinities with Buddhism, and served as a key reading in Yeats’s studies with Purohit: the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali. Critics have not yet studied in adequate depth the impact on Yeats’s late work of the *Yoga Sūtras*, despite the poet’s multiple references to its importance in his thought.¹¹⁷ In a 1934 letter to Frank Pearce Sturm, the poet states

¹¹⁴ O’Shea lists Yeats as having possessed D. T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (London: Luzac, 1927) and *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938), as well as Arthur Berriedale Keith’s *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923). Yeats certainly derived some of his understanding of early Buddhist thought from S. Radhakrishnan’s two-volume study, *Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923-1927), which he annotated on relevant pages. To these books we can add whatever texts he encountered through the Theosophical Society. This list does not approach the depth of Yeats’s studies in Hinduism, or of his readings in Christianity.

¹¹⁵ Yeats, preface to *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, 9; Sikka, *W. B. Yeats and the Upanishads*, 116.

¹¹⁶ Raine, *Yeats the Initiate*, 332.

¹¹⁷ This gap reflects not only lack of study but questionable scholarship. The most extensive extant discussion of Yeats and the *Yoga Sūtras* is in Naresh Guha, *W. B. Yeats: An Indian Approach* (Calcutta: Jadavpur University, 1968). Guha’s treatment of the topic is riddled with exegetical and even factual inaccuracies.

that his introduction to *The Holy Mountain* ‘is largely founded on study of Patañjali’.¹¹⁸ Further letters indicate that, after *The Ten Principal Upanishads* was completed in April 1936, Purohit consulted Yeats about his translation of the *Yoga Sūtras*, eventually published by Faber as *Patañjali’s Path to Yoga*, and that Yeats wrote his introduction to that book in autumn of the following year.¹¹⁹ The record shows that Yeats and Purohit regarded the *Yoga Sūtras* as a crucial text, and that Yeats derived much of his understanding of meditative practice from his sustained engagement with Patañjali. In opening his introduction to *The Holy Mountain* with the assertion, ‘I know nothing but the novels of Balzac and the aphorisms of Patañjali’, he was not merely recounting much of his recent reading; that ‘lying sentence’ was a public affirmation of the prominence the *Yoga Sūtras* held in his mind at the time.¹²⁰

The Philosophy of the Yoga Sūtras

Like many Indic philosophical texts, the *Yoga Sūtras* have an uncertain origin. Much of the difficulty of dating the text involves disagreement over the identity of its author: the Patañjali of the *Yoga Sūtras* may or may not have been the same Patañjali who, in the 2nd century BCE, wrote an important commentary on the grammatical work of Pāṇini.¹²¹ As Ian Whicher establishes in his excellent study *The Integrity of*

¹¹⁸ Yeats to Frank Pearce Sturm, 10 April 1934, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

¹¹⁹ Yeats, *Letters*, 852, 854, 898; Yeats to Edith Heald, 14 November 1937, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

¹²⁰ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain* by Bhagwan Shri Hamsa (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 11.

¹²¹ The confusion over authorship surfaced at Faber. T. S. Eliot, in a rather comical internal Faber document on *The Holy Mountain* (it opens with the sentence, ‘Uncle William is looney as ever’), confuses the Patañjali of the *Yoga Sūtras* with a Patañjali who wrote a commentary on ‘the Sankhya Bashya Karika’—a curious attribution given that no such text can be linked to any Patañjali. The most famous Bhashya

the Yoga Darśana, recent scholarship has tended to date the text to the second or third centuries CE, establishing effectively if not conclusively that there were in fact two Patañjalis who lived and wrote centuries apart.¹²² The importance of the text lies not in its authorship, however, but in its status as the foundational scripture of one of the six orthodox *darśanas* of what is now called Hinduism. The *Yoga Sūtras* present a systematisation and formalisation of practices that, based on archeological evidence, may date back over 4,000 years.¹²³

Yoga, a term much misunderstood in current usage, fundamentally refers to a range of rigorous spiritual practices, and arguably to the goal of such practice. Judging from its usage in the *Rig-Veda*, the word itself derives its spiritual implications from its more practical meaning of ‘yoking’ or ‘harnessing’, either in the sense of achieving union with the Absolute or, more likely, disciplining the mind and senses.¹²⁴ Whicher offers a general definition of what Yoga came to mean: ‘Within the fold of Hinduism, all authentic forms of Yoga can be conceived as ways to an unchanging “center” of Being, the transcendent Reality of spirit or authentic identity (*ātman*, *puruṣa*), which may be defined variously depending on the particular school of Yoga one is examining.’¹²⁵

(commentary) on the *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* was written by Gaudapāda; the earlier Patañjali, as noted above, wrote a famous Bhāshya on the grammar of Pāṇini. Eliot’s seeming confusion is all the more interesting in that he studied the *Yoga Sūtras* at Harvard with James Haughton Woods and had mentioned ‘the mazes of Patañjali’ only a year earlier in *After Strange Gods*. The full text of the Faber document cited can be found in Ronald Schuchard, ‘T. S. Eliot at Fabers: Book Reports, Blurbs, Young Poets’, *Areté* 23 (Summer-Autumn 2007), 73.

¹²² Ian Whicher, *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana*, 1st Indian edition (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2000), 42.

¹²³ Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), xx.

¹²⁴ S. Dasgupta, *History*, 226; Whicher, *Integrity*, 8.

¹²⁵ Whicher, *Integrity*, 28.

Of the different forms of Yoga, Patañjali's Rāja Yoga, also known as classical Yoga, became the most widely recognised, not least because the *Yoga Sūtras* is a decidedly non-sectarian text. As Bryant explains, 'it can be and has been appropriated and reconfigured by followers of different schools and traditions throughout Indian religious history'.¹²⁶

Though the *Yoga Sūtras* can accommodate such adaptations, as a system that encompasses metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of mind, it has remarkable rigor.¹²⁷ But that rigor is made difficult to comprehend by the elliptical nature of the *sūtra* form itself. *Sūtras* (*sūtra* meaning 'thread' in Sanskrit) are the products of oral wisdom traditions, and thus are extremely condensed. As Dasgupta explains, *sūtras* 'served only to hold before the reader the lost threads of memory of elaborate disquisitions with which he was already thoroughly acquainted...It is indeed difficult to guess from the sutras the extent of their significance, or how far the discussions which they gave rise to in later days were originally intended by them'.¹²⁸ Like other, similar Eastern texts, the *Yoga Sūtras* thus engendered a series of commentaries, some of which achieved a canonical status nearly equaling that of the *sūtras* themselves. The most prominent commentaries on the *Yoga Sūtras* include those by Vyasa (4th-5th centuries CE) and Vācaspati Miśra (9th century CE).¹²⁹ Add the difficulty of translation from Sanskrit to English, and the fact that slight variances in diction can lead to major distortions of meaning, and the problematic nature of Purohit's project, and of Yeats's comprehension of Yoga, becomes clear.

¹²⁶ Bryant, *Yoga Sūtras*, xviii.

¹²⁷ The author is deeply indebted to Ms. Rohini Ralby for her expertise in the philosophies of Yoga and Kashmir Śaivism, and to Dr. Gavin Flood for his help with particular points of translation and exegesis of the *Yoga Sūtras*.

¹²⁸ Dasgupta, *History*, 62.

¹²⁹ Bryant, *Yoga Sūtras*, xxxix-xli

Unlike Advaita Vedānta, Rāja Yoga is regarded as dualist, in that it divides all existence between *puruṣa* (the transcendent Self, referred to by Patañjali as *draṣṭri*, the Seer or Witness, which exists alongside the manifested cosmos but remains unaffected by it) and *prakṛti* (the source of all manifestation, and that manifestation itself—in other words, all that is not the Self). As *sūtra* 2.21 establishes, *prakṛti* exists to serve as the means by which the *puruṣa* can come to know itself.¹³⁰ *Prakṛti* is composed entirely of three constituent qualitative elements, or *gunas*: *sattva*, lucidity or calm; *rajas*, passion or agitation; and *tamas*, darkness or inertia, which combine in infinite permutations, much as the three primary colours combine to produce an infinite range of hues.¹³¹ Significantly, *citta*—the entire substance and content of particularised consciousness, or mind—is considered *prakṛti*. The mind is comprised of three essential parts: *manas* (the collector of sense data), *buddhi* (the discerning intellect) and *ahamkāra* (literally the ‘I-maker’, or sense of egoity). Mind and body are thus vehicles of the *puruṣa*, enlivened by its power.

The empirical self, the individual, is bound by its essential ignorance (*avidyā*) of its true nature as the *puruṣa*. In a kind of daisy-chain of delusion, *avidyā* becomes the first of the five *kleśas* (afflictions), the rest of which then unfold in a series as *asmitā* (loss of subject in object, in which the *buddhi* mistakenly sees itself as the Self and adopts the sense of I-ness), *rāga* (attraction), *dveṣa* (repulsion) and *abhiniveśa* (desire to live, or fear of death). The mistaken sense of self is the source of human bondage and suffering, for, as Feuerstein notes, Patañjali’s dualism is not Cartesian. Mind is matter: ‘Were it not for the illuminating power of the Self, the psycho-mental

¹³⁰ Swami Hariharānanda, *The Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali*, trans. P. M. Mukerjee (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 185-6. The translation reads: ‘To Serve As Objective Field To Purusa Is The Essence Or Nature Of The Knowable’. Vyasa, as translated in this text, interprets the *sūtra* to mean that the purpose of *prakṛti* is ‘experience and liberation’ of the *puruṣa*.

¹³¹ Bryant, *Yoga Sūtras*, 17.

complex would forever lack any sign of conscious activity'. *Buddhi* is, as Whicher puts it, 'masquerading' as the Self, when in fact it is a temporary vehicle of that Self. In this fallen condition, every action generates karma, which further binds the individual to a limited and painful existence.¹³² The goal, then, is to bring the individuated consciousness into a condition that will allow it first to reflect, and then to merge into, the effulgence of the true Self, leading to the state of *kaivalya*, or aloneness, in which the *puruṣa* dispenses with *prakṛti* and dwells eternally in its own pure illumination.

The *Yoga Sūtras* develop in detail from this foundation, which is explained at various points in the text, and go on to establish the means of achieving *kaivalya*. Patañjali's exposition takes the form of four sections: the first details the nature of *samādhi*, or one-pointed absorption; the second lays out the course of *sādhana*, or praxis; the third establishes the *siddhis*, or extraordinary powers, that a yogin will acquire along the path but to which he must not attach himself; and the fourth discusses the final approach to and nature of *kaivalya*. The distinctions are not so clearly defined—there is some overlap among parts of the text—but the scheme holds overall.

The means of achieving *kaivalya* are distilled in *sūtra* 1.2, which forms a definition of Yoga and a thesis for Patañjali's system: *yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhah*. Most translations are fairly consistent in their renderings of this *sūtra*, varying mainly in their translation of *citta*. I. K. Taimni's 'Yoga is the inhibition of the modifications of the mind' is a representative, and reasonably accurate, translation. Purohit's 'Yoga is controlling the activities of mind (*citta*)', followed by a comment that defines *citta* as 'mind as a whole, mind-stuff', is certainly adequate, though the choice of

¹³² Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga-Sūtra of Patañjali* (Folkestone, UK: Dawson, 1979), 13; Whicher, *Integrity*, 68.

‘controlling’ does not necessarily suggest the complete restraint of *nirodha*.¹³³ This *sūtra* locates Yoga in a discourse common to many mystical traditions: that of stillness. Only by stilling the mind (or more accurately the medium of consciousness) can one gain the clarity to re-cognise one’s true nature as the *puruṣa*. As a result, ‘yoga is overwhelmingly about cultivating or maximizing *sattva*’.¹³⁴ This process requires a thorough understanding of the nature and workings of the mind—hence Yoga’s integrity as a psychological system as well as a soteriological programme—and a complete commitment to the practice of *viveka* (discernment) and *vairāgya* (non-attachment). The second part of the *Yoga Sūtras* details Yogic practice, which has eight limbs. The five outer limbs—those that precede the more important interior practices—are the *yamas* (abstentions), *niyamas* (observances), *āsana* (posture), *prāṇāyāma* (control of vital energy) and *pratyāhāra* (turning inward of the senses).¹³⁵ After mastery of the outer limbs comes practice of the inner limbs: *dhāraṇa* (concentration), *dhyāna* (meditation) and *samādhi* (absorption).¹³⁶

¹³³ I. K. Taimni, *The Science of Yoga*, 2nd Quest Books ed. (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1968), 6; Shree Purohit Swami, *Patanjali’s Path to Yoga* (1938; repr., New Delhi: Rupa, 2003), 10.

¹³⁴ Bryant, *Yoga Sūtras*, 18.

¹³⁵ For clarity’s sake, I have drawn the translations here from various sources. ‘Abstentions’ and ‘observances’ come from Bryant (*Yoga Sūtras*, 488); ‘posture’ comes from Hariharānanda (*Yoga Philosophy*, 207); ‘control of vital energy’ is my own (*prāṇa* generally has a more comprehensive meaning than the word ‘breath’ conveys); ‘turning inward of the senses’ is my own. According to John Grimes, in *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), *pratyāhāra* literally translates ‘gathering toward oneself’ (246), and this sense is modified in Patañjali to mean a withdrawing and turning inward of the senses.

¹³⁶ The terms used here are customary in translations of Patañjali. Significantly, Purohit does not translate the Sanskrit terms at all in his rendering of 2.29, though he elsewhere translates *samādhi* as ‘illumination’ and *dhyāna* as ‘meditation’ (*Patanjali’s Path*, 10, 20). The word *dhyāna* found its way into Chinese as Chan and Japanese as Zen.

Yeats's Reading of the *Yoga Sūtras*

By his account, Yeats had encountered the *Yoga Sūtras* before meeting Purohit, possibly first through his participation in the Theosophical Society. In his introduction to Purohit's translation he refers to having purchased 'some years ago' the Harvard edition translated and edited by 'James Horton [sic] Woods', considered 'impeccable...even by a famous poet and student of Samskrit, who used it as a dictionary'. The poet in question is unmistakably T. S. Eliot, with whom Yeats had collaborated in the process of having Purohit's earlier works edited and published at Faber. Yeats's dismissal of Woods's translation (of the *Yoga Sūtras* and the seminal commentaries of Vyasa and Vācaspati Miśra) as filled with 'scholar's cant' is clearly designed to promote the relative simplicity of Purohit's translation, but it also suggests that Yeats had previously given up on trying to understand the text.¹³⁷ Purohit's instruction offered another approach to the philosophy and techniques of classical Yoga, unmediated by Western scholarship.

Any relationship of teacher and student can involve simple misunderstanding, selective acceptance of ideas, or deliberate distortion of important principles. Though we cannot know the full extent of Purohit and Yeats's deliberations about the *Yoga Sūtras*, much can be inferred from extant documents—their correspondence, Yeats's other correspondence and personal writings, and most importantly Yeats's essays and poems of the period. First, Yeats remained silent on the prescriptive aspects of Yogic psychology and practice, dwelling instead on some of the more abstract and descriptive aspects of the text and resorting to other sources for his discussions of actual praxis. Second, his understanding of those aspects of Yoga he discussed at greatest length was strikingly, even inexplicably, confused. Third, he comprehended

¹³⁷ Yeats, introduction to *Patanjali's Path to Yoga* (1938; repr., New Delhi: Rupa, 2003), 1.

some foundational principles of Yoga well enough to articulate them accurately in his prose and incorporate them into poems he wrote at the time.

If Yeats's correspondence and published writings serve to indicate, his expressed desire to understand 'matters of spiritual practice' seems to have been more that of a researcher than an aspirant. Though 'Prometheus Unbound' critiques his own earlier meditative practices and suggests that he has outgrown them in favour of a more Yogic 'suspension of all desire', the letters and essays connected to his studies with Purohit primarily explore questions of praxis from a documentary point of view; there is a whiff of the folklorist about his approach to Purohit's and his master Sri Hamsa's works.¹³⁸ An early letter to Lady Gregory, likely calculated to win her approval, describes Purohit's conversation as 'the most perfect folklore in the world', and years later he professes to Edith Heald his conviction that Purohit and Shri Hamsa's books convey 'an experience not described elsewhere... things of the first importance', and that he feels a responsibility to 'get that experience recorded without interference from me or from my time'.¹³⁹

This sense of himself as a documentarian may lie behind his failure to address such crucial aspects of Patañjali's thought as the five outer limbs of Yogic praxis. Instead, Yeats focuses his attention on the inner limbs. This apparent fixation on advanced practice has major implications for Yeats's understanding of Yoga, not least because Patañjali establishes a progression from outer to inner stillness for a reason. The *yamas* and *niyamas* may be behavioral injunctions, but they are not conventionally normative; their purpose is to begin the process of cultivating non-attachment and stilling one's consciousness. Significantly, *sūtra* 2.30 establishes that

¹³⁸ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 421.

¹³⁹ Yeats to Augusta Gregory, 18 Apr. 1932, *Uncollected Letters* (accessed 8 January 2011); Yeats, *Letters*, 896.

one of the prescribed observances is *brahmacarya*, which can be translated as ‘chastity’ or as ‘continence’.¹⁴⁰ The point is not to practise a socio-ethical value of sexual self-restraint, but to still the appetitive passions, which are powerful agitators of consciousness. There can be no real progress in Patañjali’s system of Yoga without a foundational sense of self-control.

Given the sexual indulgence that characterised Yeats’s later years—his liaisons with Ethel Mannin, Margot Ruddock, and Edith Heald come to mind—the behavioral injunctions of Patañjali, or of Vedānta, do not seem to have had an impact on the poet’s sense of spiritual practice. His essay ‘The Mandukya Upanishad’, first published in the July 1935 issue of the *Criterion*, asserts his view that the passions are not to be quieted by inward practice but through a kind of inevitable depletion: ‘To seek God too soon is not less sinful than to seek God too late; we must love, man, woman, or child, we must exhaust ambition, intellect, desire, dedicating all things as they pass, or we come to God with empty hands’.¹⁴¹ There may be an echo here of the traditional four phases of life in Hindu thought—student, householder, retiree, ascetic—but the passage equivocates. On the one hand, all our actions must be consecrated to God (dedicated as they pass)—a principle most prominently articulated in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.¹⁴² But Yeats also suggests that one should only ‘seek God’ after having exhausted desire rather than actively stilled it.

¹⁴⁰ Translators differ on how to render this term. It translates directly as ‘path that leads to Brahman’ (Grimes, *Dictionary*, 95) but usually implies sexual restraint, though depending on context that restraint can be a vow of chastity or simple continence. Bryant translates *brahmacarya* as ‘celibacy’ (*Yoga Sūtras*, 488), while Hariharānanda and Mukerjee choose ‘continence’ (*Yoga Philosophy*, 208).

¹⁴¹ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 483.

¹⁴² *Bhagavad Gītā* 3.9: ‘Save work done as and for a sacrifice this world is in bondage to work’. S. Radhakrishnan, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā*, 20th impression (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2004).

Neither Vedānta nor Classical Yoga offers any such latitude—but Theosophy does. Blavatsky herself, in *The Key to Theosophy*, asserts that the ‘real man’ can only attain liberation ‘by passing individually and personally, i.e., physically and spiritually, through every experience and feeling that exists in the manifold and differentiated Universe ... every experience on the human planes’. R. F. Foster’s reference to ‘an allowance for human passions...expressed by Patañjali’s Yogic discipline’ thus confuses the altogether more austere teachings of Patañjali with Yeats’s self-serving Theosophical take on the soul’s journey to liberation.¹⁴³

Though Yeats remained largely silent on the five outer limbs of Yoga, he had a great deal to say about the inner limbs, most importantly *samādhi*. From the first, the nature and process of *samādhi* appear to have interested him the most. O’Shea reproduces the notes scribbled in Yeats’s copy of the Woods translation:

Inside back cover: P. 75 TURIYA etc.

P72, at par. 35: supernatural senses on the tongue etc.

P75, a sketch added in margin to illustrate generally ‘the locus of the fourth turiya’. Passage illustrated begins ‘In the middle of this [lotus] is the circle of the sun...’

P76, top margin, referring to pars. 1 and 38: the sense of personality from Tamas and from Rajas is Light. Inserted, a sheet of paper with three sets of page and par. Numbers: 19/6 [sources of valid ideas and misconceptions and predicate relations and sleep and memory] 80/42 [‘Of these balanced states...’] 96/50 [‘The subliminal impression produced by this...is hostile’].¹⁴⁴

These notes not only indicate Yeats’s chief area of interest; they foreshadow his later confusion about *samādhi*.

The comment on ‘TURIYA’ establishes Yeats’s interest in the traditional Hindu doctrine of four states of consciousness, as established in the Upanishads and generally acknowledged: the waking state (*jāgrat* or *viśva*), the dream state (*taijas* or *svapna*), deep sleep (*prājñā* or *susupti*), and the boundless, non-dual consciousness

¹⁴³ Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 183-4; Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 538.

¹⁴⁴ O’Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, 202.

that forms the substrate of the other three (*turīya*). The note on ‘supernatural senses’ refers to Vyasa’s comment on *sūtra* 1.35, which includes a reference to ‘one who attends fixedly...to the tip of the tongue, the consciousness of supernormal taste’.¹⁴⁵ The marginal sketch refers to Vācaspati Miśra’s comment on *sūtra* 1.36, which Woods translates, ‘Or an undistressed [and] luminous [sense-activity] when arisen brings the central-organ into a relation of stability’.¹⁴⁶ Vācaspati’s gloss addresses meditation on the Heart:

Luminous in the form of [casting] radiance <<upon the Lotus of the Heart>>...In the middle of this [lotus] is the circle of the sun [and] the letter A [and] the locus of the waking-state. Above it is the circle of the moon [and] the letter U [and] the locus of sleep. Above this is the circle of fire [and] the letter M [and] the locus of deep-sleep. Above which is the highest...the locus of the fourth [*turiya*] state....¹⁴⁷

The correlation of the four states of consciousness with the letters of the sacred syllable AUM and the silence within and around them forms the core of the *Māndūkya Upanishad*—the Upanishad on which Yeats wrote an essay for the *Criterion*.

The notes on the inserted sheet indicate other aspects of Yeats’s interest in Yoga. *Sūtra* 1.6, translated in Woods as ‘Sources-of-valid-ideas and misconceptions and predicate-relations and sleep and memory’,¹⁴⁸ lists the five varieties of *vyrttis*, or

¹⁴⁵ James Haughton Woods, *The Yoga System of Patañjali* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1914), 72.

¹⁴⁶ Woods, *Yoga System*, 74. A typically abstract rendering from Woods.

Hariharānanda and Mukerjee render the same *sūtra*, ‘Or By Perception Which Is Free From Sorrow And Is Radiant (Stability Of Mind Can Also Be Produced)’ (*Yoga Philosophy*, 82), and an even more direct and austere version comes from the translation of Rāma Prasāda: ‘Or, the state of painless lucidity’ in Rāma Prasāda, *Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras* (1912; repr. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2002), 62.

¹⁴⁷ Woods, *Yoga System*, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Woods, *Yoga System*, 19. Taimni’s more readable, and no less accurate, translation of the same *sūtra* offers the list as ‘right knowledge, wrong knowledge, fancy, sleep, and memory’ (*Science of Yoga*, 14).

modifications of consciousness.¹⁴⁹ The second note refers to *sūtra* 1.42, which is part of Patañjali's explanation of the nature and process of *samādhi*: 'Of these [balanced-states] the state-balanced with deliberation is confused by reason of predicate relations between words and intended-objects and ideas'.¹⁵⁰ The *sūtra* is the first in a sequence that discusses the stages of *samprājñata samādhi*, or *samādhi* with a seed—that is, an object of concentration. Patañjali presents a sixfold hierarchy of forms of *samādhi*: *savitarka*, *nirvitarka*, *savicara*, *nirvicara*, *ānanda*, and *asmitā*. In his comment on *sūtra* 1.17, Vyasa elucidates the basic sequence. *Vitarka samādhi* is absorption in an external, physical seed; *vicara samādhi* is absorption in a subtler, metaphysical seed; *ānanda* is absorption in the bliss of cognition itself; and *asmitā* is absorption in the cogniser, pure I-sense.¹⁵¹ In *sūtras* 1.42-44 Patañjali further subdivides the first two stages. *Savitarka samādhi* means one-pointed concentration on an external object, but involves discursive thought; *nirvitarka samādhi* sustains that focus but transcends discursive thought, so the concentration is deeper and more complete.¹⁵² The same transition occurs at a subtler level in *savicara* and *nirvicara samādhi*. In following this process, called *samyama*, '[w]hat the Yogi really does is to sink deeper and deeper into his own consciousness'.¹⁵³ Yeats's final note refers to *sūtra* 1.50, which Woods translates, 'The subliminal-impression produced by this

¹⁴⁹ Bryant translates *vṛttis* as 'states of mind' in this *sūtra* (*Yoga Sūtras*, 27). Note how Patañjali's *vṛttis* do not equate with the traditional Hindu states of consciousness—a fact that makes Bryant's translation problematic.

¹⁵⁰ Woods, *Yoga System*, 80. Again, Taimni gains readability without compromising exactness: '*Savitarka samādhi* is that in which knowledge based only on words, real knowledge and ordinary knowledge based on sense perception or reasoning are present in a mixed state and the mind alternates between them' (*Science of Yoga*, 101)

¹⁵¹ Hariharānanda, *Yoga Philosophy*, 41-2.

¹⁵² By way of illustration, what athletes and performers have called 'the zone', Patañjali would term *nirvitarka samādhi*: a state of complete concentration in which no self-consciousness or discursive thought impedes the performance of an action.

¹⁵³ Taimni, *Science of Yoga*, 113.

[super-reflective balanced-state] is hostile to other subliminal-impressions'.¹⁵⁴

'Subliminal-impressions' is Woods's translation of *samskāras*, or imprints in the mind made by its experience; the subtle substance of mind is literally impressed by what it contemplates, and those impressions linger, deepening with repetition or sustained attention. The *sūtra* refers to the *samskāras* of purity and luminosity left by the experience of *nirvicara samādhi*, which obstruct other, undesirable *samskāras* that manifest as *vṛttis* and agitate consciousness.

Yeats's interest in these *sūtras* and their connexions to other Indic texts shaped his writings on *Māndūkya Upanishad* and the books of Purohit and Hamsa. Questions about the nature of *samādhi* and the states of consciousness form the main thread of philosophical inquiry in his 1933 letters to Purohit. In a letter of 27 August 1933, he asks, 'Can you tell me if the preparation (life & method of concentration) that produces conscious Samadhi defers [sic] from that which produces unconscious Samadhi or dreamless sleep? This point is important to me. I am deep in my essay upon your Masters Travels that is why I care to know.' Purohit's response, if it took the form of a letter, appears to have been lost, but Yeats pursues the point further the next week:

I think we are speaking of different things. By unconscious Samadhi I mean Prajna (Mandukya Upanishad) which seems to be interpreted sometimes as "he who completely knows" sometimes as "he who is nearly ignorant" but which according to the translator Dr E. Ruer is used in the Upanishads in the first sense. The Upanishad says the man in this state "has become one"—his "nature is like bliss". Later on I find the p[h]rase "Prajna (the perfectly wise) who abides in deep sleep". Sir Arthur Keith speaks of dreamless sleep as a state in which the soul "enters the purest light" & says this in the older Upanishads only three states of the soul were known (1) waking, (2) dreaming, 3 dreamless sleep. Later a fourth state was added called Turiya, which is a waking state... However you need not trouble the matter for the moment. I have finished my essay & will send it when I can....¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Woods, *Yoga System*, 90.

¹⁵⁵ Yeats to Shri Purohit Swami, 2 September 1933, University of Delaware Library. The University of Delaware dates this letter to 1935, but given the thread of

Yeats's confusion here arises partly from his own ignorance of the subject (*turīya* is hardly just 'a waking state') and partly from an inconsistency in the Upanishads themselves. In *Māndūkya Upanishad*, *prājñā*, the state of deep sleep, is described as '[having] become one, who is verily, a mass of cognition, who is full of bliss and who enjoys (experiences) bliss'.¹⁵⁶ The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* describes deep sleep in similar terms and at greater length, though partly as a rhetorical strategy to establish the eternal wakefulness of the true Self.¹⁵⁷ But a central narrative passage in *Chāndogya Upanishad* pointedly contradicts this view. In the story, which relates how Prajāpati, the Lord of Creation, instructed Indra and a demon in the nature of the Self, Indra determines that someone in deep sleep is 'one who has gone to annihilation', and finds 'no good in this'; Prajāpati affirms Indra's judgement.¹⁵⁸ Yeats did arrive at what he considered a satisfactory position on the issue. In a subsequent letter, he concludes, 'I think we both mean the same thing about "dreamless sleep." The sleeper has no wisdom but he is lost in the abyss of wisdom'.¹⁵⁹

The importance of this exchange becomes evident in Yeats's essay 'The Mandukya Upanishad' and his introduction to *The Holy Mountain*. In both texts, he explains the process of meditation by mistakenly conflating the Upanishadic states of consciousness with Patañjali's stages of *samādhi*. The result does not hold together:

correspondence and the difficulty of Yeats's handwriting, I confidently date this letter to 1933.

¹⁵⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, 696. Purohit's own translation reads as follows: 'In deep sleep man feels no desire, creates no dream...Because of his union with the Self and his unbroken knowledge of it, he is filled with joy, he knows his joy; his mind is illuminated' (*The Ten Principal Upanishads*, 60).

¹⁵⁷ Radhakrishnan, *Upaniṣads*, 261-8.

¹⁵⁸ Radhakrishnan, *Upaniṣads*, 508. Purohit's translation reads, 'Sleeping without dream man does not know that he is Self, neither does he know any creatures. He is lost. I see no good in this' (*The Ten Principal Upanishads*, 115).

¹⁵⁹ Yeats to Shri Purohit Swami, 27 Sep. 1933, University of Delaware Library.

In Patañjali and his commentators there is a detailed analysis of the stages of concentration that would be Hegelian did they include the Self in their dialectic. The first is the fixing of attention upon some place or object, the navel, the tip of the tongue. Any object will serve so long as it belongs to oneself and is an immediate perception, not something inferred or heard of; or one may fix attention upon the form of some God, for a God is but the Self. But one cannot fix attention without some stream of thought, so if the object be the tongue, one thinks of the tongue as symbol or function....The taste, colour and sound so perceived attains supernormal perfection as fact and idea draw together. Should one choose a God as the theme of meditation, the majesty of his face, or the beauty of his ear-rings, may, as trance deepens, express all majesty, all beauty. The second stage is this identity between idea and fact, between thought and sense; an identity that recalls the descriptions of dreams in the Upanishads. The third stage is *Sushupti*, a complete disappearance of all but this identity. Nothing exists but that ravening tongue, or that majesty, that beauty; the man has disappeared as the sculptor in his statue, the musician in his music....In the fourth stage the ascetic enters one or more of these stages at will and retains his complete memory when he returns; this is *Turiya*, but as yet only in the form called *Savikalpa*; full *Turiya* or seedless *Samadhi* comes when all these states are as a single timeless act, and that act is pure or unimpeded personality, all existence brought into the words: "I am". It resembles that last Greek number, a multiple of all numbers, because there is nothing outside it, nothing to make a new beginning. It is not only seedless but objectless because objects are lost in complete light.¹⁶⁰

The passage is rife with difficulties. Yeats begins his account with a mistaken notion of the proper starting point for meditation: Patañjali indicates that *vitarka samādhi* can take any external object as its seed, not merely a part of one's own person or a sacred image. Further, Yeats's use of the word 'thought' is ambiguous. If he is using it loosely to mean 'attention', then his evident understanding is consistent with Yogic philosophy. If, however, by 'thought' he means discursive thought, then his assertion that 'one cannot fix attention without some stream of thought' reveals a failure to understand that *nirvitarka* and *nirvicara samādhi*, to say nothing of *ānanda* and *asmitā*, by definition consist of fixed attention free of discursive thought. After two initial stages—one of selecting a seed object and another that recalls *vicara* in its seeming abstraction but still involves a union of 'thought and sense'—Yeats then makes the inexplicable leap to a third stage he calls *Sushupti*, by which he appears to

¹⁶⁰ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 27-9.

mean not deep sleep but something like the non-discursive absorption of *vicara samādhi*. At this point, he has shifted his discourse from the spiritual disciplines of Patañjali to the cosmology of the Upanishads—from stages of deliberate, skilled activity to natural states of consciousness—as if the latter were just like the former. His process approximates *vitarka-vicara-Sushupti-Turiya*—an egregious category fault, untenable in any Indic tradition. Significantly, however, his description of *turīya* consciousness as ‘objectless’ is accurate, as *turīya* is the pure subjectivity of the Self.

Yeats’s confusion over the process of meditation arises partly from his commitment to the erroneous notion that *susupti* is not merely dreamless sleep but ‘unconscious Samādhi’, an exalted state of consciousness ‘attained through the sacrifice of the physical senses, and through meditation upon a divine personality’. There is nothing in the personal writings of Purohit or Shri Hamsa to endorse this definition, but neither did they correct it when given the opportunity to review proofs of Yeats’s essays, so he may have learned it from Purohit. That he believes his understanding is grounded in Patañjali is clear from a passage in which, mentioning ‘*Turiya*’ and ‘*Sushupti*’, he claims, ‘The philosophy and technique of both these states are described in the *Yoga-Sūtras* or aphorisms of Patañjali...’¹⁶¹ But Patañjali says no such thing, and neither do his commentators. In fact, *sūtra* 1.6, which Yeats noted in his copy of Woods, establishes that sleep of any kind is a *vṛtti*, an obstacle to liberation.

¹⁶¹ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 16, 26. Significantly, Yeats had read Hume’s detailed discussion of the issue of deep sleep in his introductory essay to *The Thirteen Principle Upanishads*. Hume concludes that, though some passages in the Upanishads suggest that deep sleep is a kind of union with Brahman, it is not the conscious union of *turīya*. Of deep sleep, Hume says, ‘But even that condition of profound sleep...seems too near the unreality of the illusory egohood which is conscious of falsely apparent objects and subjects’ (49).

In any case, the idea of *susupti* that Yeats advances has no basis anywhere in Indic philosophy. Though the state of *susupti* has inspired centuries of debate among the exponents of Advaita Vedānta, at issue are the differing positions of the two most important figures in that tradition: Gaudapāda, who emphasises the ignorance of the soul in *susupti*, and his student Śankara, who affirms deep sleep as a kind of natural and transitory participation in the bliss of non-duality, common to all sentient beings.¹⁶² In no known tradition of Indic philosophy is *susupti* defined as other than deep sleep, and nowhere is it treated as a spiritual attainment. On the face of it, deep sleep hardly qualifies as a spiritual achievement; if that were the case, anyone who enjoyed a good nap would be at the threshold of liberation.

If Yeats is to be believed, however, Purohit taught otherwise. In his introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, Yeats asserts that Purohit ‘claims that his master gained at that mountain lake, *Turiya*, whereas he himself had but gained upon Mount Girnar a dreamless sleep, *Sushupti*’—a statement fraught with contradiction, in that it describes ‘*Sushupti*’ as merely ‘dreamless sleep’ yet also as something ‘gained’ through spiritual discipline.¹⁶³ Interestingly, the passage would make sense in Vedāntic terms if it claimed that Purohit had gained *savikalpa samādhi* (*samādhi* with mental constructs) and Hamsa *nirvikalpa samādhi* (*samādhi* beyond all mental constructs), but Yeats clearly cannot or will not distinguish between natural states of consciousness and levels of *samādhi* achieved through practice.

The manner in which he later tries to make that distinction reveals his determination to impose Theosophical ideas on Yogic and Vedāntic teachings. It is

¹⁶² Arvind Sharma, *Sleep as a State of Consciousness in Advaita Vedānta* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 76.

¹⁶³ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 26.

here that Yeats crosses the line from a fair understanding of the spirit if not the letter of Yoga into a series of increasingly extravagant and self-indulgent speculations:

The ascetic seeking *Savikalpa-Samadhi* identifies it with *Satva*, but calls *Sushupti*, which he identifies with *Tamas*, the *Samadhi* of a fool, because in that state he is ignorant, and because he is liable to fall back upon it, as though sinking into lethargy, but he who thinks *Sushupti* the supreme self-surrender, must, I am persuaded, identify *Sushupti* with *Satva*, the waking life of sense with *Tamas*. *Savikalpa-Samadhi* is, as it were, ringed with the activities of life, *Sushupti* ringed with dreams, and both rings are *Rajas*, while *Savikalpa-Samadhi* and *Sushupti* are alternatively light and darkness. Neither is in itself the final deliverance or return into the Source... The Vedant philosophers, unlike Buddha, direct our attention to bright or intelligible perfection, but seek timeless perfection, seedless *Samadhi*, beyond it in the isolated Soul, that is yet in all souls.¹⁶⁴

The relativism Yeats introduces here has no basis in Vedāntic or Yogic thought, and the qualifying clause ‘I am persuaded’ indicates that Yeats is fully aware that he is embarking on his own train of speculation. The Theosophical complexities he has dismissed in his private letters now reassert themselves in his increasingly occult speculations:

Those who have attained “seedless” *Samadhi*, are said to be physically immortal; they do not die, but make themselves invisible. The story-tellers describe them dissolving their bodies while they seem to bathe, or leaving, like Christ, an empty tomb: at will, they pass into the Source. An ascetic who has rid himself of passion may, though unfitted for *Turiya*, seek, like many Greeks, wisdom through those self-luminous and coherent dreams that seem to surround, like a ring of foam, the dark pool of dreamless sleep. If devoted to some God, or to some other image of the Universal Self, he may pass that ring, obtain *Sushupti* in its highest form, the dreamless sleep of the soul in God. When he returns to waking life, he is still an instrument of that other Will... After death indeed, he attains liberation, becoming one of those spirits that have no life but to obey that Self, who creates all things in dreamless sleep...¹⁶⁵

The idea of *susupti* Yeats conjures here may not be found in Indic traditions, but it does appear in the pages of *The Path*, a journal of the Theosophical Society. In the journal’s first issue, Murdhna Joti describes ‘*Sushupti*, which is the dreamless

¹⁶⁴ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 33.

¹⁶⁵ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 31-2.

state in which the mystic's highest consciousness...hunts for and seizes any knowledge he may be in need of', and claims that *susupti* ends when the mystic desires to bring whatever he has sought 'back to normal consciousness'.¹⁶⁶ An 1888 article by Eusebio Urban asserts that the translation of *susupti* as 'dreamless sleep' is 'inadequate, for, while it is dreamless, it is also a state in which even criminals commune through the higher nature with spiritual beings and enter into the spiritual plane'.¹⁶⁷ Given that those articles appeared during Yeats's tenure in the Society, he almost surely read them, or at least participated in discussions they reflected or inspired.

This tendency to arrogate and modify principles of Hinduism becomes more explicit in a passage linking the dominant images of *The Holy Mountain* to the system Yeats has articulated in *A Vision*: 'I find my imagination setting in one line *Turiya*—full moon, mirror like bright water, Mount Meru; and in the other *Sushupti*, moonless night, "dazzling darkness"—Mount Girnar'.¹⁶⁸ In linking his notions of conscious and unconscious *samādhi* with the full moon of pure subjectivity and the dark moon of pure objectivity, Yeats has co-opted Hindu tradition in order to legitimise his own hermetic system. Yeats may have felt that he had outgrown the desirous Romanticism of Shelley, but neither the 'homely precisions' of Purohit nor the austere disciplines of Patañjali could subdue the poet's appetite for extravagant visions.

Whatever distortions and confusions governed Yeats's prose accounts of Indic traditions, he exercised far more discipline in his poetry. His fundamental grasp of

¹⁶⁶ Murdhna Joti, 'Seership', *The Path* 1, no. 1 (April 1886), http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/path/v01n01p14_seership_murdhna-joti.htm (accessed 9 September 2011).

¹⁶⁷ Eusebio Urban, 'The Three Planes of Human Life', *The Path* 3, no. 5 (August 1888), http://theosociety.org/pasadena/path/v03n05p147_the-three-planes-of-human-life.htm (accessed 9 September 2011).

¹⁶⁸ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 40.

citta-vṛtti-nirodhah as the core principle of Yoga found its way into his writing. The reference in ‘Prometheus Unbound’ to ‘the suspension of all desire’ as the superior mode of meditation likely reflects the study of Patañjali Yeats was undertaking at the time he wrote the essay, and Yoga remained part of the philosophical foundation of his late work. The third stanza of ‘Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient’, written in 1934,¹⁶⁹ is suffused with Yogic as well as other Indic principles:

Then my delivered soul herself shall learn
 A darker knowledge and in hatred turn
 From every thought of God mankind has had.
 Thought is a garment and the soul’s a bride
 That cannot in that trash and tinsel hide:
 Hatred of God may bring the soul to God.¹⁷⁰

Though the metaphor of the soul as a bride extends across a number of traditions, the discourse that surrounds that image reflects Yeats’s engagement with the *Yoga Sūtras*. The assertion that ‘thought is a garment’—that, regardless of its sophistication or its virtue, thought is a *vṛtti* that must be stilled so that the light of pure consciousness can illuminate one’s existence, reflects Patañjali’s core principle of *citta-vṛtti-nirodhah*. Kathleen Raine’s contention that ‘trash and tinsel’ refers to dogma and ceremony misses the point; Ribh is rejecting all thought-constructs, or *vikalpas*, as obstacles to the experience of divinity.¹⁷¹ Even more telling is the final line. Yeats likely derived the notion of hatred as a form of ‘significant relationship with God’ from his wife’s automatic writing, but the notion that hatred of God can serve as a means to salvation is central to Hindu tradition.¹⁷² Two of Hindu

¹⁶⁹ A. Norman Jeffares, ed., *Yeats’s Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 618-20n. Yeats sent the completed suite of poems to the *London Mercury* in October 1934 (Yeats to Sir John Squire, c.3 October 1934, *Unpublished Letters*, accessed 8 January 2011).

¹⁷⁰ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 286.

¹⁷¹ Raine, *Yeats the Initiate*, 357.

¹⁷² A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 430.

scripture's most famous characters—Ravana in the *Ramāyāna* and Hiranya in the *Bhagavata Purana*—achieve liberation because their consuming hatred of God is a kind of one-pointed concentration on the divine, an ironic form of Yoga.

The *Yoga Sūtras* continued to command Yeats's attention well after his initial study with Purohit. In 1938, he used the principle of *samādhi* as the basis for one of his finest late lyrics, 'Long-legged Fly'.

'Long-legged Fly' and Yoga

In January 1938, Yeats finished reviewing proofs of *Patañjali's Path to Yoga*. By early March, he had received Purohit's corrections to his introduction and forwarded them to Faber.¹⁷³ On 11 April he included in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley a near-final draft of 'Long-legged Fly'. Yoga had been much in Yeats's mind, and the poem's form and content suggest Yogic theory and practice. Yeats had clearly been searching for an aquatic metaphor for the experience of *samādhi* in relation to ordinary consciousness; he had even field-tested one in the form of a turtle in a garden pool at Wellesley's estate, only to find it unsatisfactory.¹⁷⁴ In the event, he struck upon a waterbug, almost certainly the fairly common bug known as the water strider. It is a fitting metaphor for an awareness whose agility is founded on depth and stillness; it also reflects Patañjali's principle that the *buddhi*, the subtlest of the vehicles, functions at the surface of the bottomless consciousness of the *puruṣa*.

'Long-legged Fly' is one of Yeats's finest achievements. It fuses East and West, philosophy and lyricism, with remarkable economy and fluidity. One need only compare it to 'The Statues', written later the same year, to appreciate its seamless

¹⁷³ Yeats to Richard de la Mare, 7 February 1938 and early March 1938, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

¹⁷⁴ Jon Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision in Yeats's 'Last Poems'* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 115.

effectiveness. The later poem is disjointed, abstract, and so crammed with sweeping speculations and pronouncements that it scarcely holds together against the centrifugal force of its allusions; ‘Long-legged Fly’ reads effortlessly, its deliberations resonant but unostentatious. The poem projects authority not through esoteric allusions but through concrete diction, imperative voice, and assertive trochees. Its distilled, austere form and diction suggest the practice of one-pointed concentration that the *Yoga Sūtras* propound.

In each of the poem’s three stanzas, an elliptical adverbial clause frames a dramatic situation, followed by a direct instruction that both envelops the reader in the drama and affirms the importance of the contemplative stillness essential to Caesar, Helen, and Michael Angelo. Yeats closes each stanza by narrowing the reader’s field of vision to one body part and its activity: the eyes of Caesar, the feet of Helen, the hand of Michael Angelo. That distillation both resists abstraction and focuses the reader’s attention in a manner that both recalls Yeats’s description of Yogic concentration on one body part of a deity and mimics the one-pointed absorption of the three figures.

Apart from acknowledging gender in the case of Helen, the poem’s refrain remains constant: ‘Like a long-legged fly upon a stream, / His mind moves upon silence’.¹⁷⁵ Rather than placed at the end of the stanzas, it is suspended in the space between them; by ending in the word ‘silence’, the refrain invokes what it names and asserts that silence as the ground of all discursive thought. As Denis Donoghue points out, the refrain ‘holds the mind to what is permanent, while everything else changes’.¹⁷⁶ This evocation of interior stillness suggests that individual greatness is inseparable from the achievement, by discipline or destiny, of a kind of *samādhi*. The

¹⁷⁵ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 339.

¹⁷⁶ Donoghue, *Yeats*, 128.

mind, brought to the condition of *citta-vṛitti-nirodhah*, no longer arrogates to itself the sense of I-ness, and therefore no longer makes decisions driven by ignorance and delusion. Rather, it fulfils its true function as an interface between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, allowing the wisdom and power of the Self to determine a course of worldly action. In a famous analogy, Patañjali compares such a quieted and purified *buddhi* to a colourless crystal that takes the colour of what it rests on; such an intellect is capable of complete absorption in, and comprehension of, whatever it contemplates.¹⁷⁷

The iconic triad of Caesar, Helen of Troy, and Michael Angelo has inspired varying readings. Jon Stallworthy sees them as personifying ‘the heroic trinity of warrior, lover (in this case beloved) and artist; three facets of Yeats’s ideal man’. Bloom regards them as embodying in their ‘creative trance’ three kinds of power: ‘historical power’, ‘the power of beauty’ and ‘the power of art over fecund nature’. Both readings are viable, but A. E. Dyson comes nearer the mark, arguing that ‘Caesar is here presented as the saviour of civilisation, Helen as the destroyer of civilisation, and Michael Angelo as the creator of civilisation’.¹⁷⁸ A simple change of word brings his reading more in line with the Hindu traditions in which Yeats was immersed at the time. Caesar, about to defend the empire, is the preserver of civilisation; Helen, growing into her seductiveness, is the destroyer of civilisation; and Michael Angelo, enshrining the genius of the Renaissance in his depiction of the biblical creation on the Sistine ceiling, is the creator of civilisation. The three of them respectively perform the divine functions associated with Vishnu, Śiva, and Brahma.

¹⁷⁷ Taimni, in *The Science of Yoga* (95-6), provides a good translation of this passage, which is *sūtra* 1.41: ‘In the case of one whose *Citta-Vṛttis* have been almost annihilated, fusion or entire absorption in one another of the cognizer, cognition and cognized is brought about as in the case of a transparent jewel (resting on a colored surface)’. This condition is *samādhi*.

¹⁷⁸ Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 119; Bloom, Yeats, 450; Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 119.

Significantly, Yeats also depicts his three protagonists in a sequence that captures the progression from contemplation into action. Caesar is depicted as entirely passive, listening inwardly for the direction of the Self. His one-pointed absorption is captured in the phrase, 'His eyes fixed upon nothing'; as Dennis Haskell points out, being fixed upon nothing is 'the opposite of not being fixed on anything'.¹⁷⁹ The stillness and receptivity of his intellect will allow him not so much to calculate as to intuit how to fight the approaching battle. Helen, 'part woman, three parts a child', inhabits a liminal space between both childhood and womanhood and contemplation and action. Her private exercise of practicing 'a tinker shuffle' is hardly regal, but it anticipates the seductive powers she will possess in maturity. She has already drifted apart, outside the social order, into a 'lonely place' from which she will cause devastation. Michael Angelo, painting the Sistine ceiling, generates out of his inner stillness images that illuminate and define a civilisation. Yeats had already, in 'An Acre of Grass', described Michael Angelo as possessing a mind 'that can pierce the clouds'.¹⁸⁰ In 'Long-legged Fly', he links that mental acuity to the condition, and the practice, of *samādhi*.

But Yeats the occultist shadows the poem as well. Significantly, 'Long-legged Fly' does not depict Caesar, Helen and Michael Angelo as liberated beings, but rather as what might be called in Hindu tradition karmic instruments, destined to perform acts that have enormous repercussions. However they may achieve *samādhi*, the point is the power it gives them. It is surely no coincidence that Yeats should both reject the principle of relinquishing all individuality to find liberation and frame *samādhi* as a source of world-transforming spiritual energies. Even as late as 1938, after years of

¹⁷⁹ Dennis Haskell, "'Long-legged Fly" and Yeats's Concept of Mind', in *Yeats Annual* no. 10, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 254-5.

¹⁸⁰ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 302.

studying Indic texts, Yeats was unwilling to divorce spiritual attainment from the acquisition of personal power.

The very mutedness of that attraction to occult powers is crucial to the poem's brilliance; its Yogic deliberations seem almost to resolve the tension between swordsman and saint. 'Long-legged Fly' represents a confluence of Yeats's aesthetic and spiritual convictions near the close of his career: a commitment, however inconstantly maintained, to direct and vigorous verse; an abiding interest in the Yogic practice of stilling one's consciousness; an attempt to synthesise, aesthetically if not philosophically, images and principles of East and West; and a belief, largely Hindu in its final form, of an innermost Self identical with the Absolute. Perhaps more than any other poem, it reflects his engagement with the philosophy of classical Yoga.

But Yoga and Vedānta, both essentially paths of renunciation, could not in themselves satisfy Yeats's conditions for Unity of Being. To that end, he incorporated into his late thought elements of a more world-embracing strain of Hinduism: Tantrism. In Tantrism, at least as he envisioned it, Yeats found a branch of Indic philosophy that affirmed the phenomenal universe as divine and the passions as a means to liberation.

The Appeal of Tantra

Tantric Hinduism embraces a range of traditions that claim to propel aspirants toward a liberating experiential recognition of their essential divinity. The word *tantra* itself merely means 'ritual framework', but Tantric traditions regard their texts as 'an additional and more specialised revelation... which offers a more powerful

soteriology' than the Vedic tradition.¹⁸¹ David Gordon White offers a general definition:

Tantra is that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways.¹⁸²

Tantric Hinduism appears to have originated in a form of asceticism often linked to cremation grounds and steeped in transgressive rituals designed to appease fearsome deities. Around the ninth century BCE, the emphasis of some rituals shifted to what David Gordon White describes as 'a type of erotico-mystical practice involving a female horde collectively known as the Yoginīs, led by the terrible male Śiva-Bhairava, together with his consort, the Goddess'. The male participants in the ritual would offer their essence in the form of sexual emissions to the Yoginīs, who would, if properly appeased, appear as ravishing women and endow their worshippers with magical powers.¹⁸³ In much of its literature, Tantrism positioned itself as superseding the Vedic revelation; one of its transgressions of Vedic tradition was its deliberate erasure of caste boundaries by making initiation into Tantric cults theoretically available to anyone.

Over time, Tantrism engaged in a kind of rapprochement with brahmanical culture. In describing this shift, Sanderson accords with tradition in describing two streams of Tantrism: the Tantrism of the right and the Tantrism of the left. Where the former largely accords with Vedic tradition, the latter challenges it, often through

¹⁸¹ David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16; Alexis Sanderson, 'Saivism and the Tantric Traditions', in *The World's Religions*, ed. S. Sutherland, L. Houlden, P. Clarke and F. Hardy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 660.

¹⁸² David Gordon White, ed., *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.

¹⁸³ White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 8-10.

transgressive rituals designed partly to eliminate any attachment to brahmanical notions of purity and impurity. As a result of the ‘domestication’ of the Tantrism of the right, the vast majority of Tantric practitioners have been householders, and for them Tantrism simply involves a set of prescriptions, mostly involving non-sexualised rituals, and other meditative practices that set them apart from ordinary Hindus, and which, it is believed, assure them of a swifter journey to liberation.¹⁸⁴

But Tantrism also translated into a different form of esoterism, a mostly interior mystical discipline ‘for the salvation of the spiritually motivated individual prepared to transcend the security of his exoteric identity’.¹⁸⁵ By the 10th century, the Kashmir Śaiva sage Ābhinavagupta had advanced his influential doctrine that outward ritual was not essential for an elite of spiritual initiates pursuing a rigorous interior practice leading to recognition of their identity with God. This non-dualist Tantra contrasts with Yoga and Vedānta in that it regards the phenomenal world as ‘nothing but the spontaneous self-projection of an all-encompassing divine consciousness’; it follows that worldly experiences, rightly construed, can serve as gateways to the experience of the self’s identity with God. Sir John Woodroffe’s 1917 rendering of the *Kulārṇava Tantra* describes the process as ‘the reverse path where the natural turn outwards, *pravṛtti*, is turned inward, *nivṛtti*, to the source of all and everything in creation is looked upon and used as the means for the return to the One Consciousness that bases all and governs all’.¹⁸⁶ The goal is to ‘open awareness to a

¹⁸⁴ Alexis Sanderson, *Meaning in Tantric Ritual* (New Delhi: Tantra Foundation, 2006), 18; Alexis Sanderson, ‘Swami Lakshman Joo and His Place in the Kashmirian Śaiva Tradition’, in *Samvidullāsaḥ*, ed. Bettina Baumer and Sarla Kumar (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2007), 115.

¹⁸⁵ Sanderson, *Meaning*, 37.

¹⁸⁶ Sanderson, *Meaning*, 16; Arthur Avalon and M. P. Pandit, ed., *Kulārṇava Tantra* (1917; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 30. ‘Arthur Avalon’ was a pseudonym of Woodroffe. His edition of the *Kulārṇava Tantra* was rather a series of exegetical essays than a translation.

sense of pure subject’, so that the ‘indexical’ I of the practitioner is dissolved and absorbed into the infinite, blissful subjectivity of Śiva.¹⁸⁷ One surrenders the individuated self in order to recognise one’s true nature as the universal Self, and the phenomenal universe as an emanation of that Self.

Kashmir Śaivism, like other non-dual Tantric traditions, thus alters the renunciante spirit of Yoga and Vedānta, reorienting it so that the pleasures and pains of phenomenal existence are not seen as agitations or distractions but rather as expressions of divinity that can be traced to their ontological ground. Any number of occasions can serve as means to access such divinised experience. One tenth-century Kashmir Śaiva text, the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*, contains 128 *dhāranas* (methods of concentration) based on occasions provided by everyday experience, imaginative projection, or inward reflection; only two of the *dhāranas* involve sex.

The more philosophical Tantrism of Ābhinavagupta and his successors even sublimated the goddess worship that figures so prominently in Tantric Hinduism. Various forms of the Goddess play a crucial role in Tantra because the phenomenal universe is seen as the manifestation of God’s generative power, seen in Hindu traditions as feminine (the usual pair of deities are forms of Śiva, the eternally still Godhead, and Śakti, its world-generating activity), and partly because the feminine inhabits the ‘realm of the excluded’ in brahmanical tradition.¹⁸⁸ Though these goddesses bring salvation, they and their masculine counterparts are often depicted as terrifying, violent, and destructive. This is ‘the non-dual Absolute appearing inimical at first to the ego-consciousness’, which must be obliterated by the liberating

¹⁸⁷ Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 151.

¹⁸⁸ Kathleen Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: An Indian Soul in a European Body?* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 117-18, 159.

recognition that there is no separateness, that in reality all is Śiva.¹⁸⁹ In light of this understanding of the Goddess as the divine energy of manifestation, sexual intercourse becomes not a ritual invocation of power but an analogue of the bliss of union between Śiva and Śakti, and therefore of liberation from the bondage of individuated existence.

This nuanced understanding of the history, contexts, and practices of Tantrism is a relatively recent scholarly development, and it has not yet been reflected in critical discussions of Yeats's engagement with Tantric thought. Margaret Mills Harper has described Tantrism as 'a marginal and radical offshoot of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism...in its emphasis on sensuality and eroticism as a pathway to emancipation and rebirth', when more recent research has made clear that Tantrism has been 'the predominant religious paradigm, for over a millennium, of the great majority of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent'.¹⁹⁰ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford fails to cite a single scholarly source on Tantrism, and her assertions that Tantric practitioners believe in 'reaching Nirvana by exhausting rather than denying the passions', and that in 'Tantric sex' the man refrains from ejaculation because 'the goal of losing self in union with the Godhead is not abandoned but postponed' are simply inaccurate.¹⁹¹ Further, it is important to recognise that Tantrism as Yeats encountered it was mostly of the type reserved for a spiritual elite, stripped of much of its ritual superstructure and geared toward the achievement of liberating gnosis.

Yeats's knowledge of Tantrism came from multiple sources. Among them were the books of Woodroffe, who transmitted Tantric Hinduism to the West through

¹⁸⁹ Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe*, 158-61. Taylor also notes that the violent and mortuary imagery surrounding such deities and rituals arises partly from Tantrism's origins among the cremation-ground ascetics.

¹⁹⁰ Harper, 'Yeats's Religion', 62; White, p. *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 3.

¹⁹¹ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 252-3.

his own authorship and his series of translations, *Tantrik Texts*. According to Naresh Guha, Yeats owned most of Woodroffe's books, and Edward O'Shea's catalog of Yeats's library indicates that at the very least the poet read Woodroffe's lengthy introduction to the first (1913) edition of *The Great Liberation*, his groundbreaking translation of the *Mahānirvāna Tantra*, as well as Woodroffe's preface and Shriyukta Baradā Kānta Majumdār's extensive introduction to *Principles of Tantra* (1914).¹⁹²

Woodroffe's introduction to *The Great Liberation*, later published separately as *Introduction to Tantra Śāstra*, presents a broad if somewhat sanitised overview of Tantrism, mostly from the standpoint of Kashmir Shaivism. Woodroffe's preference for this elite, philosophical form of Tantrism is evident in his description of the cremation ground—originally the site of transgressive rituals—as an interior space: 'The interior cremation ground is the place where the kamik [desirous] body is consumed in the fire of knowledge'.¹⁹³ Such depictions of an ancient, esoteric wisdom tradition surely appealed to Yeats. Though Woodroffe's introduction discusses more transgressive aspects of Tantrism, it sublimates them considerably.

Majumdār's essay, however, occupies a more ambiguous position between the transgressive and the domesticated forms of Tantrism. After over a hundred pages of detailed historical and doctrinal exposition, it culminates in a discussion of the more

¹⁹² O'Shea, in *Descriptive Catalog*, lists only three of Woodroffe's books, all under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon: *Hymns to the Goddess* (Item 943), *Principles of Tantra* (Item 162) and *The Great Liberation* (Item 2105). The pages of the latter two were apparently not cut after their introductions and prefaces. Interestingly, Majumdār's introduction to *Principles of Tantra* was cut for reading even though it begins the second volume of the text, suggesting a specific interest in its content on the part of Yeats (O'Shea, *Descriptive Catalog*, p. 24). Naresh Guha recounts asking Yeats's widow in 1962 whether the poet had read Woodroffe's books on Tantra; according to Guha, 'Mrs. Yeats silently pointed to a complete set of these books neatly arranged on a shelf, and readily supplied the information that the poet did acquire the books as soon as they were published in London'. Guha documents this conversation in *W. B. Yeats: An Indian Approach*, 144n.

¹⁹³ Sir John Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*, 7th ed. (1952; repr., Pondicherry: Ganesh & Company, 1980), 134.

transgressive aspects of Tantric practice, couched in less restrained terms than those of Woodroffe. Majumdār devotes five pages to translating passages from the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra* on how one can cultivate *rasa*—he accurately translates it as ‘taste, relish, sentiment, juice, etc.’—so that pleasure or other intense feeling can be used to propel one toward liberation. For Majumdār, ‘both eating and sexual union are Divine acts, which have nothing impure in them. Impurity is the progeny of Ajñāna (absence of knowledge)’. One legitimate spiritual goal, then, is to become ‘experienced in the feeling of Rasa’—and ‘[t]he culture of the Rasa of sexual love consists in the worship of woman’.¹⁹⁴ Despite Majumdār’s insistence that sexual pleasure is, like all else, inherently divine, and that only the ignorant regard pleasure as an end in itself rather than a means to spiritual liberation, it is easy to see how such texts could be construed as exhortations to self-indulgence.

Though Yeats also apparently studied Tantrism with Purohit, no definitive trace survives of the content of that instruction.¹⁹⁵ But Tantric tradition and practice were clearly important to Purohit. He incorporates Tantric principles into *An Indian Monk*, one chapter of which is titled ‘The Kundalini’. *Kundalinī* is a Tantric name for both the Goddess and the liberating spiritual energy within each human being, which is envisioned as coiled like a snake at the base of the spine, dormant until awakened. Spiritual awakening, or *śaktipāt* (the descent of power), usually occasioned through initiation by a guru, is said to arouse the *kundalinī*, which then ascends through the channels of the subtle body, eventually effecting liberation.

One of Woodroffe’s most popular books, *The Serpent Power*, is largely a study of *kundalinī*. In his introduction to *The Great Liberation*, he invokes *kundalinī*

¹⁹⁴ Shrīyukta Baradâ Kânta Majumdār, introduction to *Principles of Tantra: The Tantratattva of Shrīyukta Śhiva Chandra Vidyârnavā Bhattâchâryya Mahodaya*. (London: Luzac & Co., 1916), 2:cxxx-cxxxix.

¹⁹⁵ Raine, *Yeats the Initiate*, 334.

in describing Tantric yoga as superior to other yogas: ‘The union of Śiva and Śakti in the higher sādhana is different in form, being the union of the Kundalinī-Śakti of the Mūlādhārā [the base of the spine] with the Bindu [point] which is upon the Sahasrāra [the crown of the head]’.¹⁹⁶ Later he describes how the *kundalinī* awakens and ascends through the six *chakras*, or centers of divine energy, to fully awaken the consciousness of the Tantric practitioner to its identity with Śiva.¹⁹⁷

In *An Indian Monk*, Purohit describes the symptoms, many physical, of his own *kundalinī* awakening:

I wept and wept. I could not longer bear the pangs of separation from the Divine Master, and slept very little. The flesh was an agony; the senses, coals of fire; with bones shattered to pieces, blood boiling, and tears that never ceased, my whole frame received electric shocks difficult to sustain. I refused to speak. My legs refused to carry my weight; hunger became a torment; the fire of the mystic Kundalini, the serpentine fire, was mounting within me.¹⁹⁸

Purohit’s tutelage of Yeats was doubtless coloured by the Tantric dimension of his experiences and convictions, and such passages as this would have contributed not only to Yeats’s early promotion of the Swami as having authentic spiritual experience but also his own understanding of Hindu spiritual practice.¹⁹⁹

But there is also a strong magical component to Tantrism. Its focus on divine energies easily translates into the direction of those powers to egocentric ends.

Traditionally, *tantrikas* (practitioners of Tantrism) could pursue one of two goals: liberation or worldly rewards. Those who sought the latter were called *sādhakas*, or ‘masterers’; their especially demanding, highly ritualised practice was meant to gain them personal control over divine energies for the purpose of self-aggrandisement.

¹⁹⁶ Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*, 129.

¹⁹⁷ Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*, 140-3.

¹⁹⁸ Shri Purohit Swami, *An Indian Monk: His Life & Adventures* (1932; New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2003), 105-6.

¹⁹⁹ It makes for interesting speculation to consider whether, on reading this passage, Yeats would have recalled his traumatic experience of physical manifestations during the 1888 séance he describes in *Autobiographies*, 103-5.

Sādhakas might use the *śakti*, the divine energy, to seduce women, destroy enemies, or develop superhuman powers.²⁰⁰ The emphasis in various strains of Tantrism on such devices as mantras, sacred diagrams, and visualisation of or even possession by deities recalls the Western occultist techniques of visualisation, symbolism, and mediumship that had fascinated Yeats for much of his life.

Mantra in particular clearly intrigued Yeats; his essay on the *Māndūkya Upanishad*, which elaborates the symbolism and spiritual potency of the mystic syllable AUM, attests to his interest in Indic theologies of the Word. This interest was also nothing new. Not only did it connect with Yeats's sense of poetic craft; it had an occult component that contributed to his sense of Nietzsche's power as a 'strong enchanter'.²⁰¹ But though the *Māndūkya Upanishad* presents an early exposition of the sacred cosmology of sound, no other Indic tradition spiritualises language and sound nearly as much as Tantrism:

[F]oremost among the characteristic features of Tantrism, in all its forms and tendencies, is the material related to speech and its powers....[W]hile from Vedic times speech had a divine quality and a central role, the same is even more true in Tantrism, of which all the speculations about the Word are based upon the identity established between the latter and the divine energy, and energy which, in its innermost nature, is speech and is acting through speech; thereby everything related to articulate sound and language is endowed with an exceptional position and power.²⁰²

In his book *The Garland of Letters*, Woodroffe details some of the extraordinarily arcane and difficult doctrines of the Word as developed in Kashmir Shaivism. *Śabda*, or sound, is in fact the stuff of the universe: from the 'transcendental quiescent condition', pulsations of divine energy manifest the cosmos as a play of vibrations in which 'Śabda-brahman reproduces itself gradually and partially as countless finite

²⁰⁰ Sanderson, *Meaning*, 24. It is worth noting that, in a broader sense, the word *sādhaka* can refer to any spiritual aspirant, even renunciates.

²⁰¹ Yeats, *Letters*, 379.

²⁰² André Padoux, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*, trans. Jacques Gontier, 1st Indian ed. (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992), 49.

centres of varied finite experiences'. Creation is a process of divine self-limitation and self-veiling through the *Mātrikā-śakti*, the divine power of letters, and the human body is a shrunken divinity, a microcosm. As the building blocks of the universe, the letters 'are denoted by the Garland of severed heads which the naked Mother Kālī, dark like a threatening rain-cloud, wears as She stands amidst bones and carrion, beasts and birds, in the burning ground, on the white corpse-like (Śavarūpa) body of Śiva'. This is classic Tantric imagery. Kali—'so called because She devours Kāla (Time)'—is the destructive but liberating face of the Goddess, the power by which the manifest is reabsorbed into the unmanifest, and therefore emblematic of liberation through destruction of the egoic self. She stands on the inert body of Śiva, the Absolute, the unmanifest ground of all being.²⁰³ Such images of liberating violence—the obliteration of all separateness—are reflected in the apocalyptic imagery of some of Yeats's later poems.

In a more immediate sense, Yeats would have seen in Tantrism a system embracing what he calls 'an alliance between body and soul our theology rejects'.²⁰⁴ What he had once admired in Blake—the conviction that 'Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses'²⁰⁵—he now found affirmed not merely in Swedenborg and Boehme but in an ancient and exotic mystical tradition. In Tantrism's integration of the sacred and the profane, the divine and the phenomenal, Yeats may well have seen the Unity of Being he describes in *A Vision B* as 'concrete, sensuous, bodily'.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Sir John Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters: Studies in the Mantra-Śāstra*, 6th ed. (1922; Madras: Ganesh & Company, 1974), 40, 225, 237.

²⁰⁴ Cullingford, *Gender*, 253.

²⁰⁵ Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 34.

²⁰⁶ W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 214.

In that sense, Tantrism offered Yeats a way beyond the dialectic of Plotinus and Nietzsche. The former devalued earthly existence in single-minded pursuit of transcendence; the latter denied transcendence while attempting to revalorise earthly existence. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the early Nietzsche recalls Yoga and Vedānta when he refers to artists as achieving ‘release from the ego and the silencing of the individual will and desire’ in order to access ‘the only truly existent and eternal self resting at the basis of things’. Further, his notion of ‘the *mystery doctrine of tragedy*: the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the prime cause of evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the bonds of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness’ echoes, largely by way of Schopenhauer, principles found in the Upanishads. But the early Nietzsche’s insistence that such union is not transcendence but immersion in the ‘indestructibly powerful and pleasurable’ experience of ‘life at bottom’ does not suggest deification, and in such later writings as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche is, if anything, even more insistent that one ‘remain true to the earth’.²⁰⁷ Nietzsche may have proclaimed the dire consequences of the death of God, but he was not interested in a resurrection.

Other, more striking resonances between Tantrism and Nietzsche may well have made an impression on Yeats. Perhaps the most intriguing is Tantrism’s notion of the three kinds of human being. Yeats would have encountered this doctrine in Woodroffe’s introduction to *The Great Liberation*. There, Woodroffe details the Tantric hierarchy: ‘paśu-bhāva (animal), vīra-bhāva (heroic), and divya-bhāva (deva-like or divine)’. The *paśu* is the bound soul, inert and ignorant, confined on all sides by such self-limitations as pity, delusion, fear, shame, disgust, custom, and caste.²⁰⁸ This is Nietzsche’s herd animal, ‘the servile type, and especially the populace-

²⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 969, 972, 1002, 984, 81.

²⁰⁸ Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*, 59.

mishmash’; the Sanskrit *paśu*, fittingly, means ‘domesticated animal’, or even ‘animal victim of sacrifice’—in Tantric terms, all those who have not been initiated into the transformative mysteries of the Tantras.²⁰⁹

In stark contrast to the *paśu* stands the *vīra*, the heroic *tantrika*, who courts extravagant risks in summoning and uniting with the *Yoginīs*. In the relatively domesticated rendering of Woodroffe’s *Kulārṇava Tantra*, the *vīra* is described as ‘the man heroic who can struggle and fight the nether forces of Ignorance in the battle for the Divine’.²¹⁰ In the relevant sexual rites described by White, the female partners of the *vīras*—according to no less an authority than Ābhinavagupta, preferably not the *vīras*’ wives—are assimilated to the *Yoginīs*.²¹¹ With the exchange of sexual emissions that characterises these rituals comes an infusion of divine energy and liberating gnosis. As one Tantra frames it, ‘the mortal (male) practitioner who receives this gnosis (jñāna) shall obtain enjoyment (bhukti), liberation (mukti), and supernatural power (siddhi) and become the beloved of the Yoginīs’.²¹² In heroically casting aside Vedic tradition, the *vīra* engages in something like a Nietzschean transvaluation of values, but with a difference: where the Nietzschean Superman bodies forth his own values while remaining faithful to the earth, the *vīra* enacts the esoteric, and in some cases transgressive, values of Tantrism in pursuit of deification. The great ambition of the *vīra* is to become a *divya*, a divinised, or nearly divinised, being. In a Tantric context, the *vīra* is analogous to what Zarathustra would call an ‘ascending soul’, who sees that ‘man is a bridge and not a goal’. The *vīra* may have

²⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 321; White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 24-5.

²¹⁰ Woodroffe, *Kulārṇava Tantra*, 31.

²¹¹ Sanderson, *Meaning*, 83; White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 17.

²¹² White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 164.

been in Yeats's mind when he wrote to Purohit in 1933 of the 'heroic few' who achieve liberation in the course of a human life.²¹³

The *vīra*, like the Superman, transcends the limitations of the herd. In his introduction to *The Tantra of the Great Liberation*, however, Woodroffe is equivocal about what that transcendence entails. He takes pains to emphasise the more interior, philosophical Tantrism of Kashmir Shaivism:

A well-known saying in Tantra describes the true "hero" (*vīra*) to be, not he who is of great physical strength and prowess, the great eater and drinker, or man of powerful sexual energy, but he who has controlled his senses, is a truth-seeker, ever engaged in worship, and who has sacrificed lust and all other passions.²¹⁴

Elsewhere, however, Woodroffe establishes that, according to the Tantras, men of the *vīra* class are exempt from Vedic strictures such as faithfulness to one's wife. He also discusses the *pañcatattva*, the widely known and systematically transgressive Tantric ritual involving five brahmanical impurities: wine, meat, fish, parched grain, and unsanctioned coition. Woodroffe goes on to explain the purpose of the rite in terms of the Tantric principle that one can achieve liberation through the very things that ordinarily fetter the soul: 'Śiva then desires to employ these very poisons in order to eradicate the poison in the human system. Poison is the antidote for poison'. In *Kulārṇava Tantra* he clarifies, in keeping with the more philosophical strain of Tantrism, that in sexual rituals 'the woman to be waited upon is none other than the inner Shakti that is lying asleep in the ordinary animal man' who has not experienced initiation and *kundalinī* awakening. In his introduction to the second volume of *Principles of Tantra*, Majumdār goes further, asserting that 'every mouthful of food, every sexual relation, and every act is an oblation of the hero, who by these practical

²¹³ Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 232, 220; Yeats to Purohit, 22 May 1933, University of Delaware Library.

²¹⁴ Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*, 116. Interestingly, Yeats uses the phrase 'great eater' to describe Balzac in his introduction to *The Holy Mountain* (34).

means spiritualizes his nature'.²¹⁵ The *vīra* thus realises the ideal Yeats espouses in *Wheels and Butterflies*: 'the earth becomes once more, not in rhetorical metaphor, but in reality, sacred'.²¹⁶

Yeats positions his only published discussion of Tantrism near the end of his essay 'The Mandukya Upanishad':

An Indian devotee may recognize that he approaches the Self through a transfiguration of sexual desire; he repeats thousands of times a day words of adoration, calls before his eyes a thousand times the divine image. He is not always solitary, there is another method, that of the Tantric philosophy, where a man and woman, when in sexual union, transfigure each other's images into the masculine and feminine characters of God, but the man must not finish, vitality must not pass beyond his body, beyond his being.²¹⁷

Here we see Yeats drawing on a somewhat domesticated version of Tantric sexual ritual, one that trades in the mystical allegories of Ābhinavagupta but also recalls the physicality of the more transgressive rites of the Tantrism of the left. The formal stratagem of placing this rather cryptic description of Tantrism, couched in revelatory terms ('there is another method'), as the last passage before the essay's general conclusion privileges Tantrism over the meditational and devotional practices previously described. The structure of the essay implies a hierarchy in which Tantric practice, presented by Yeats as predominantly sexual, appears as the most esoteric and accomplished of spiritual disciplines. That strategy recalls Majumdār's introduction to *Principles of Tantra*, which also culminates with a discussion of sex and alcohol as means of spiritual practice.

As Cullingford has argued, Yeats's interest in the Tantric spiritualisation of sex may have been connected with his ongoing concern over sexual impotence. In reading Woodroffe, the poet would likely have noted that the Sanskrit *vīra* is cognate

²¹⁵ Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*, 120; Woodroffe, *Kulārṇava Tantra*, 52; Majumdār, introduction to *Principles of Tantra*, 2:cxxxii.

²¹⁶ Yeats, *Explorations*, 369.

²¹⁷ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 484.

with ‘virile’, and, as White affirms, in the sexualised ritual Tantrism of the left, the gnosis gained by the *vīra* is ‘in no small part carnal’.²¹⁸ In this light, Tantric practice may have seemed to Yeats the metaphysical analogue of the Steinach operation he underwent physically in 1934; given his interests at the time, it is not out of the question that he partly intended the Steinach procedure to enable him to pursue Tantric sexual practices. The extent to which the poet engaged in such practices is impossible to ascertain, but his letters suggest that he regarded at least some sexual relations in a spiritual light. He referred to his trysts with Ethel Mannin as ‘beatitudes’.²¹⁹ In a 1937 letter to Dorothy Wellesley, he wrote, ‘In my own life I never felt so acutely the presence of a spiritual other & that is accompanied by intensified sexual desire’.²²⁰ Cullingford astutely notes that the refrain in the sexual ballad ‘The Three Bushes’ uses words attributed by Shri Hamsa to his guru-deity, Dattātreya: ‘O my child, O my dear’.²²¹

Whether or not Tantrism informed Yeats’s late sexuality, a sense, partly Tantric, of the phenomenal world as both essentially divine and as the means to liberation would pervade the poet’s thought in his final years. Yeats appreciated Tantrism’s determination, in the words of Madeleine Biardeau, ‘not to sacrifice this world to deliverance, but to reintegrate it somehow in the perspective of salvation’. As the poet himself put it in a 1937 letter, ‘We must not reject what should be our pleasure to make luminous—that rejection at most creates an illusionary peace’.²²² It is a small step from Blake’s sense of the divine body as ‘a portion of Soul’ to

²¹⁸ Cullingford, *Gender*, 253; White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 24.

²¹⁹ Yeats to Ethel Mannin, 29 Dec. 1934; 8 Jan. 1935, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

²²⁰ Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, 4 May 1937, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

²²¹ Cullingford, *Gender*, 257.

²²² Padoux, *Vāc*, 41; Yeats, letter to W. J. Turner, 21 Feb 1937, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

Zarathustra's description of Self: 'Behind thy thoughts and feelings, my brother, there is a mighty lord, an unknown sage—it is called Self; it dwelleth in thy body, it is thy body'.²²³ And it is an equally small step from Nietzsche's bodily Self to the divinised *tantrika*, to whom body and universe are revealed as divine through the liberating gnosis gained from Tantric practice.

In the divinised universe of Tantrism, the oppositions between Being and Becoming, contemplation and action, renunciation and pleasure, saint and swordsman, are overcome—leading not, as Yeats had feared, to the death of the creative will, but rather to an infusion of energy. Just as Yeats had written in 1903 that 'Nietzsche completes Blake', he may well have found that Tantrism completed Nietzsche.²²⁴ That very affinity has obscured the degree to which Tantrism influenced some of Yeats's late writings.

Toward *A Vision B*

Yeats's attempt to articulate a conclusive experience or understanding of the Absolute is complicated by a combination of imperious assertion and humble qualification—what Ellman has described as the 'backspin' of Yeats's more sweeping utterances.²²⁵ Further obscuring the issue is Yeats's general avoidance of the words 'believe' and 'God', which ensures that his convictions will resist any obvious categorisation.²²⁶ But his late work insists that we interrogate his notion of the Absolute, not least in the context of the poet's drive to recover a sense of the sacred. Given the process of desacralisation confronted by Yeats and other twentieth-century

²²³ Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 33.

²²⁴ Yeats, *Letters*, 379.

²²⁵ Richard Ellmann, *Identity*, 4.

²²⁶ Ellmann, *Identity*, xviii.

poets, Hillis Miller argues that the only conception of the Absolute available to Yeats was a kind of pantheism:

There can be for many writers no return to the traditional conception of God as the highest existence, creator of all other existences, transcending his creation as well as dwelling within it. If there is to be a God in the new world it must be a presence within things and not beyond them. The new poets have at the farthest limit of their experience caught a glimpse of a fugitive presence, something shared by all things in the fact that they are. This presence flows everywhere, like the light which makes things visible, and yet can never be seen as a thing in itself.²²⁷

Miller echoes a number of theologians, most prominently Paul Tillich, in his characterisation of an indwelling ground of being, ‘something shared by all things in the fact that they are’—a principle that certainly applies in the work of a number of twentieth-century poets. But Miller’s vision of a ‘fugitive’ divinity does not address the issue foremost in Yeats’s mind, which is seeking not glimpses of the divine but a sustained vision encompassing the Absolute, the individual self, and the unfolding of history.

Too many critics have failed to recognise how much Yeats’s late engagement with this question owes to Vedānta, Yoga, and Tantra. Some regard his later philosophising as nearly nihilistic,²²⁸ while others have made Procrustean attempts to locate Yeats within religious traditions that do not accommodate his ideas.²²⁹ Though Yeats got a good deal of Indic thought wrong, he got many of its fundamental aspects largely right, and a clear understanding of those principles elucidates the idea of the

²²⁷ Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 10.

²²⁸ Larry Brunner, in *Tragic Victory: The Doctrine of Subjective Salvation in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, (New York: Whitston, 1987), regards Yeats as seeing ‘the hardened cold facts of misery and defeat... as ultimate reality’ (6). Harold Bloom, in *Yeats*, sees Yeats’s late idea of the Absolute as leading to ‘inhumanity’ (211).

²²⁹ Most significantly, Virginia Moore, in *The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats’s Search for Reality*, has tried to position Yeats as a slightly heterodox Christian, while both Bloom, in *Yeats*, and Joseph Hassett, in *Yeats and the Poetics of Hate* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986) have advanced the reductive case that Yeats was essentially a Gnostic.

Absolute laid out in the poet's late work. In resolving to 'leave my myths and images to explain themselves as the years go by and one poem lights up another',²³⁰ Yeats invites readers to distill his ideas from the recurring images and rhetorical motifs of his works. In the case of his late religious deliberations, that approach holds true. In his revisions of *A Vision*, Yeats began to evolve a coherent, largely Indic understanding of the Absolute and its relation to the self and to history—one which would find its fullest poetic expression in 'Vacillation', 'Supernatural Songs', 'The Gyres', and 'Lapis Lazuli'.

A number of critics have discussed the system set forth in *A Vision B*, not least in its differences from the old dispensation of *A Vision A*, and examining that system in detail would lie beyond the scope of this thesis. Yeats himself problematised such readings by equivocating about the legitimacy of his system. As Cormack points out, the text contains its own self-critique in 'The Phases of the Moon', in which Michael Robartes confirms that Yeats's intellectual schematising is only a misguided search for 'what he shall never find'.²³¹ Yeats's introduction to *A Vision B* famously reduces the system to 'stylistic arrangements of experience', and in his 'General Introduction To My Work' he refers to *A Vision* as offering in 'its harsh geometry an incomplete interpretation'. Privately, he confessed to a difference between the 'public philosophy' of *A Vision* and a 'private philosophy' he only partly understood.²³²

But some of the most substantive revisions Yeats made in his system reveal him working out a broader conception of the Absolute. Further, those revisions appear to have been completed during the period of Yeats's study with Purohit. Though

²³⁰ Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 142.

²³¹ Cormack, Alistair, *Yeats and Joyce: Cyclical History and the Reprobate Tradition* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 135; Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 59.

²³² Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 25; Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 518; Yeats, *Letters*, 916.

Yeats had begun reworking the text shortly after the 1925 publication of the first edition, it did not go to press until 1937, and, despite some earlier remarks, he appears not to have been fully satisfied with his revisions until at least 1934, a year of intense engagement with Purohit and Indic philosophy.²³³

Yeats's commitment to arriving at a satisfactory conception of the Absolute is evident in his 1930 diary, which predates his encounter with Purohit but shows him wrestling with religious questions to which Indic traditions would later provide appealing answers. These questions will haunt much of Yeats's late work. Foremost among them is that of the many and the one, the tension between 'two conceptions, that of reality as a congeries of beings, that of reality as a single being', which 'alternate in our emotion and in history, and must always remain something that human reason...cannot reconcile'. This passage immediately follows another questioning whether the 'spaceless, timeless beings' in his congeries should in fact be considered, as Burke and Coleridge would argue, 'God's abstract or separate thoughts'. Later, he refers to the implication that a reality solely of the many does not provide for the sense of 'one ever-victorious Providence', but rather 'Providences that may be defeated'. This question raises, in turn, the issue of free will: Yeats, following his loosely Heraclitean vision of interdependent gyres, sees the individual as 'incarnating...to assert his own freedom dying into the freedom of God and then coming to birth again....The ultimate reality must be all movement, all thought, all perception extinguished, two freedoms unthinkably, unimaginably absorbed in one another'. This position allows him to reconcile a notion of the Absolute with his conviction that, at least in the phenomenal universe, 'consciousness is conflict'.

²³³ Yeats to Frank Pearce Sturm, 7 March 1934, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011). Yeats writes, 'The new version of "The Vision" is finished. You will find it practically a new book'.

Drawing on Berkeley's idea that while humanity merely perceives, God creates in the act of perceiving, Yeats arrives at the explicitly theological element in *A Vision B*: 'I substitute for God the Thirteenth Cone, the Thirteenth Cone therefore creates our perceptions—all the visible world—as held in common by our wheel'.²³⁴

The Thirteenth Cone is, of course, the Absolute of Yeats's system, and arguably the point at which that scheme crosses the somewhat murky boundary between occultism and religion. Already in *A Vision A*, Yeats had established a 'Reality' linked to the '13th, 14th, and 15th cycles [which] are described as Spheres', and asserted his Reality against Plotinus's One: 'In Plotinus the One is the Good, whereas in the system Good and Evil are eliminated before the Soul can be united to Reality, being that stream of phenomena that drowns us'.²³⁵ But this description reflects a Nietzschean sense that, if there is any Absolute, it is simply the totality of endlessly changing phenomena. By *A Vision B*, Ellmann rather drily notes, 'God had forced his way ineluctably into Yeats's mind....disturb[ing] the plot' of *A Vision*'s cosmic round. Moore argues as much when she suggests that Yeats did not finish revising *A Vision* until after Purohit returned to India in 1936, when the poet could 'marshal his conclusions' and 'lift philosophy to something resembling religion'.²³⁶ In his revised principle of the Thirteenth Cone, Yeats would move still further away from Nietzsche, toward a largely Indic cosmology relating the Absolute and the individuated self.

²³⁴ Yeats, *Explorations*, 305, 309, 306-7, 331, 320.

²³⁵ Yeats, *A Vision* (1925), 176.

²³⁶ Ellmann, *The Man and the Masks*, 286-7; Moore, *Unicorn*, 362.

The Absolute and the Phenomenal in *A Vision B*

In *A Vision B*, the Thirteenth Cone very nearly upstages the Great Wheel, for the reason that Yeats's renewed engagement with Indic philosophy has led him to postulate something absent from *A Vision A*: liberation. Though in *A Vision A* Yeats asserts that 'after many cycles a man also inhabits the Thirteenth Cycle', he never clearly defines the Thirteenth Cycle's function; neither does he elaborate any possibility of final emancipation from the Great Wheel, which so resembles *samsāra*, the wheel of birth and death, in Hindu cosmology.²³⁷ In establishing the Thirteenth Cone as a realm of absolute freedom, Yeats has introduced soteriology into his system:

It is that cycle which may deliver us from the twelve cycles of time and space. The cone which intersects ours is a cone in so far as we think of it as the antithesis to our thesis, but if the time has come for our deliverance it is the phaseless sphere, sometimes called the Thirteenth Sphere, for every lesser cycle contains within itself a sphere that is, as it were, the reflection or messenger of the final deliverance. Within it live all souls that have been set free and every *Daimon* and *Ghostly Self*....²³⁸

However arcane the system it inhabits, this passage trades in the discourse of salvation. Yeats not only posits liberation from the round of reincarnations; he frames that emancipation as 'deliverance', a pointedly biblical term that suggests the operations of divine grace, not merely individual effort. This position is entirely consistent with Hindu traditions, in which divine grace (*anugraha*) draws the aspirant toward God. In *Katha Upanishad*, grace is even given pre-eminence, as the Self reveals itself to those it chooses.²³⁹

²³⁷ Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 220.

²³⁸ Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 210-11.

²³⁹ Radhakrishnan, *Upanishads*, 619. 'He is to be attained only by the one whom the (self) chooses. To such a one the self reveals his own nature'. Purohit translates this passage as 'He comes to the man he loves; he takes that body for his own' (*Upanishads*, 31). Also worth noting is the core principle of Tantric Śaivism that no

But Yeats goes further in his elaboration of the Thirteenth Cone. In defining the Absolute and establishing the possibility of final liberation, he must also address one of the most problematic and paradoxical aspects of any essentially mystical system: the relation between Absolute and phenomenal, which Miller calls ‘the vertical antinomy’.²⁴⁰ He does this in terms that echo Indic traditions:

The *Thirteenth Cone* is a sphere because sufficient to itself; but as seen by man it is a cone. It becomes even conscious of itself as so seen, like some great dancer, the perfect flower of modern culture, dancing the primitive dance and conscious of his or her own life and of the dance....I only speak of the *Thirteenth Cone* as a sphere and yet I might say that the gyre or cone of the *Principles* is in reality a sphere, though to man, bound to birth and death, it can never seem so, and that it is the antinomies that force us to find it a cone.²⁴¹

In defining the relation between Absolute and phenomenal, Yeats has resorted to his favoured image of a dancer; but here, especially linked to the Indic phrase ‘birth and death’, the image correlates precisely with one of the most widely recognised Tantric motifs: the Śiva Nataraja, in which Śiva, the Absolute, dances the universe into and out of manifestation, the demon of ignorance trampled beneath his feet. In the title essay of his 1918 collection *The Dance of Shiva*—a book that Yeats, who was acquainted with Coomaraswamy, may well have known—Ananda Coomaraswamy explicates the iconography of the Śiva Nataraja, describing it as ‘the clearest image of the activity of God which any art or religion can boast of’.²⁴² The relation between Absolute and phenomenal is actually identity; the Absolute only seems opposed to the phenomenal because the bound soul, trapped within antinomies, cannot see the unity

individual can save himself, that salvation is only accomplished by Śiva—this is noted by Alexis Sanderson in *Meaning*, 25.

²⁴⁰ Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 91.

²⁴¹ Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 240.

²⁴² Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*, 8th Indian ed. (1918; repr., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003), 84. Also, the British Museum held more than one Śiva Nataraja sculpture in its collections in the 1920s and 1930s.

of existence. Purohit emphasises this point by closing his translation of the Upanishads with *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, possibly because he wanted to end his book with that Upanishad's famous final lines: 'This is perfect. That is perfect. Perfect comes from perfect. Take perfect from perfect; the remainder is perfect'.²⁴³ Though it varies slightly in different traditions, this tenet of inviolable perfection is central to Indic philosophy. Non-dualist Hindu traditions insist that, from the perspective of the Absolute (which, for Yeats, is that phaseless Sphere beyond and including all antinomies), everything is perfect; imperfection is a delusion of the ignorant, who remain trapped in a fallen existence that is only real to those who cannot see the essential unity. This principle is evident in the *tat tvam asi* of Vedānta.

But the passage reveals a sensibility more Tantric than Vedāntic. Kashmir Śaivism, the Tantric tradition explored most intently by Woodroffe, defines Ultimate Reality as 'non-relational consciousness', without any duality, which must divide itself into subject and object to body forth the universe as a means of self-knowledge: '*Prakāśa* is the Eternal Light without which nothing can appear. It is Śiva. *Vimarśa* is Śakti, the *svabhāva* [nature or attribute] of Śiva. It is, so to speak, the mirror in which Śiva realises his own grandeur, power and beauty'.²⁴⁴ Liberation in Kashmir Śaivism, in which one realises one's identity with Śiva and therefore with the universe, is in fact Śiva's becoming conscious of his own nature.²⁴⁵ In an elaborate play of divine

²⁴³ Purohit and Yeats, *Upanishads*, 159.

²⁴⁴ Jaideva Singh, ed. and trans., *Śiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), xix.

²⁴⁵ Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, 57. Singh translates Ksemaraja's commentary on the *Śiva Sūtras* 1.14 as follows: 'Whatever is perceptible whether inwardly or outwardly, all that appears to this *Yogi* like his own body, i.e. identical with himself and not as something different from him. This is so because of his great accomplishment (of identity with the Universal consciousness). His feeling is "I am this", just as the feeling of *Sadaśiva* with regard to the entire universe is "I am this"'.

self-discovery, each individual enacts, over many lives, the drama of the dancer ‘becom[ing] even conscious of itself as so seen’.

Critics have ranged vastly in their conclusions about *A Vision*’s incarnation of the Yeatsian Absolute, and those who do not examine its connexions with Indic philosophy have found it most problematic. Neil Mann, one of the most astute exegetes of *A Vision*, verges on a non-dualistic, Tantric reading: ‘In some sense we live permanently both in our own cycle and in the Thirteenth, but are largely unconscious of the latter until our final initiation comes....[T]his final liberation is intrinsic within each lesser form’.²⁴⁶ Other critics tend to operate dualistically, often in a Platonic sense. Ellmann divides Yeats’s cosmos between ‘Zodiacal illusion (the world of the gyres)’ and ‘spherical reality’.²⁴⁷ Shamsul Islam frames a similar dualism in Buddhist terminology; citing the gap between ‘the spheres of reality and the gyres of illusory appearance’, he sees the Thirteenth Sphere as ‘nirvana’.²⁴⁸ James Olney frames it in pre-Socratic terms: ‘As Yeats sees it...there is a world of accident and a world of essence, one of becoming and one of being, a realm of Heraclitean process and seeming and a realm of Parmenidean stasis and truth’. Bloom sees a similar disconnect between ‘the experiential world and the world of Giant Forms (to use Blake’s phrase) from which experience has fallen away’, and concludes that the Absolute of *A Vision* is ‘what Martin Buber grimly calls the “composite God” of the historicists and Gnostics, the god of process, a dehumanizing divinity’. Miller goes even further, reading Yeats’s system as a sort of sadistic scheme in which attempts at

²⁴⁶ Neil Mann, ‘*A Vision: Ideas of God and Man*’, *Yeats Annual* no. 8, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 164.

²⁴⁷ Ellmann, *Identity*, 167.

²⁴⁸ Shamsul Islam, ‘The Influence of Eastern Philosophy on Yeats’s Later Poetry’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 19, no. 4 (October 1973), 285. The term nirvana is not specific to Buddhism, but Islam clearly uses it in a Buddhist sense.

liberation are largely frustrated and the Thirteenth Cone is ‘the time of total freedom and therefore of totally destructive violence’.²⁴⁹

Where Yeats’s Tantric inclinations complicate his grand synthesis the most is his discussion of salvation. Rather than positing a liberating epiphany, or a specific spiritual practice that might lead to an escape from the Great Wheel, he takes the Tantric principle that the phenomenal universe is the means to liberation to an extreme. The system offers no direct path out of the Great Wheel, only a passionate commitment to completing the circuit as quickly as one can. This is another incarnation of Yeats’s belief, Theosophical rather than Indic, that passions are to be exhausted, not mastered or channeled and transcended. In *Wheels and Butterflies* he offers this consolation:

[E]scape may be for individuals alone who know how to exhaust their possible lives, to set, as it were, the hands of the clock racing. Perhaps we shall learn to accept even innumerable lives with happy humility (‘I have been always an insect in the roots of the grass’) and, putting aside calculating scruples, be ever ready to wager all upon the dice.²⁵⁰

The passage says perhaps less about Yeats’s soteriology than his ambivalence about liberation. It reiterates his Dedication in *A Vision A*: ‘I murmured, as I have countless times, “I have been part of it always and there is maybe no escape, forgetting and returning life after life like an insect in the roots of the grass.” But murmured it without terror, in exultation almost’. The last image is even more direct, echoing a passage in ‘If I Were Four-and-Twenty’ questioning whether he would ever want to surrender his individual will to any entity, ‘loving as I do the gaming table of nature, where many are ruined but none is judged, and where all is fortuitous, unforeseen’.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ James Olney, *The Rhizome and the Flower* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 129; Bloom, *Yeats*, 263, 220; Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 117.

²⁵⁰ Yeats, *Explorations*, 398.

²⁵¹ Yeats, *A Vision* (1925), xiii; Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 148.

This ambivalence may account for the least mystical aspect of *A Vision*'s Absolute: that the Thirteenth Sphere is at once a phaseless unity, beyond all antinomies, and a 'congeries of beings', inhabited by daimons and liberated souls. Yeats may intend a paradox here; Plotinus attempts the same in *Enneads* 6.8, where he asserts that we must 'put otherness away' in our return to the Supreme, then uses the metaphor of 'a choir, singing set in due order about the conductor'.²⁵² But, as Komesu notes, Yeats's rendering is incoherent: '[W]hat are we to make of the Sphere which is "neither one nor many" and yet inhabited by the "teaching spirits"?'²⁵³ For all his non-dualist rhetoric, Yeats is determined to retain an individual existence beyond the Great Wheel. The tension between 'the realisation of myself as unique and free' and 'the surrender to God of all that I am' remains unresolved, as Yeats's unity in multiplicity turns out to contain multitudes.²⁵⁴ Though Indic cosmologies often present colourful hierarchies of spirits and supernatural way-stations between lives, such elaborations do not figure prominently in Purohit's and Hamsa's books, or in the texts Yeats is known to have studied with Purohit. The most obvious resolution for

²⁵² Plotinus, *Enneads*, 706.

²⁵³ Okifumi Komesu, *The Double Perspective of Yeats's Aesthetic* (Gerrards Cross, UK: Colin Smythe, 1984), 96.

²⁵⁴ Yeats, *Explorations*, 305. Yeats's vision of liberation is not without analogues in Hinduism; it actually follows the dualist Tantric tradition of Śaiva Siddhanta, which asserts that liberated souls retain their individuality (Sanderson, *Meaning*, 17). A more parallel scheme of individual immortality is found in the Samkhya model of the cosmos that forms the basis of the *Yoga Sūtras*. Patañjali's *puruṣa* is not the Vedāntic *Brahman*; in Samkhya, each *puruṣa* retains its own existence in complete freedom and bliss. In that respect, the *puruṣa* corresponds to Yeats's daimon, that 'timeless individuality...[that] contains archetypes of all possible existences' (*Explorations*, 368). Though other sources present themselves for the basic principle of the daimon, the concept as presented in *A Vision B* may well reflect Yeats's close study of Patañjali in the course of his revisions. Yeats's Thirteenth Sphere can be read as a congeries of *puruṣas*. But even these readings fail to resolve the contradiction posed by Yeats's definition of the Sphere as a unitary 'it', possessed of a single consciousness, and his declaration that 'some other existence may take the place of Socrates, yet Socrates can never cease to exist' (*Explorations*, 369).

Yeats's predicament would be to affirm the existence of a purely unitary Godhead beyond the Thirteenth Sphere, but he declines to do so.

A Vision B may offer a largely Tantric vision of the universe, where the Absolute and the phenomenal are one and the phenomenal offers a way to liberation, but it does not resolve Yeats's philosophical dilemma. He waits for a unifying symbol, but 'nothing comes'. He places his faith in the Thirteenth Cone, 'which is in every man and called by every man his freedom', but he will not answer the defining question: 'Shall we follow the image of Heracles that walks through the darkness bow in hand, or mount to that other Heracles, man, not image, he that has for his bride Hebe, "The daughter of Zeus the mighty and Hera shod with gold"?'²⁵⁵ The choice that question presents, between transcendent bliss and earthly drama, is disingenuous, because neither option requires us to surrender our individuality. But Yeats had absorbed too much Indic philosophy not to recognise his own evasion. In his late poems, the drama of his ambivalence is played out against the backdrop of a largely Indic vision of the soul, the flux of history, and the transcendent stillness of the Absolute.

'Vacillation'

The suite of lyrics titled 'Vacillation' were written between November 1931 and January 1932—a few months after Yeats met Purohit, and, toward the end of their composition, while he was first reading the manuscript of *An Indian Monk*.²⁵⁶ Jeffares

²⁵⁵ Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 301-302.

²⁵⁶ The development of the poem, especially in relation to his initial engagement with Purohit's work, is evident in Yeats's letters. Purohit writes to Yeats on 9 June 1931 that he is planning to begin writing his autobiography the following week (University of Delaware Library). A 29 October 1931 letter to George Russell indicates that Yeats was aware of some details from Purohit's manuscript that month (*Unpublished Letters*, accessed 8 January 2011). He writes Olivia Shakespear on 15 December that

suggests that the central poem, IV, was written first, and sections V-VII last.²⁵⁷ According to Rosenthal, the vacillation in question occurs between a state of exaltation and ‘spiritual heaviness’, but this reading is partial at best, given that the sequence deals explicitly with the tension between self-assertion and self-surrender that Yeats had addressed a year earlier in his diary.²⁵⁸ Though a considerable body of sound criticism has accumulated around ‘Vacillation’, one section in particular reflects Yeats’s evolving notion of the Absolute: lyric VI. Originally titled ‘Conquerors’, it begins to assemble a matrix of images and utterances that Yeats will develop to its climax in ‘Lapis Lazuli’, defining in the process his late vision of the divinised self and its relation to eternity and temporality.²⁵⁹

The poem’s form of three rhymed quintains, in which four tetrameter lines are followed by the trimetric ‘Let all things pass away’, suggests a musical lightheartedness behind the serious proposition of the refrain.²⁶⁰ In developing its argument, the poem becomes increasingly abstract, culminating in a declarative final stanza that announces the real end of poetry and therefore of all human artifice.

The first stanza presents ‘the great lord of Chou’. As Jeffares notes, this can only be Chou Gong (or Zhou Gong), known in literature as the Duke of Zhou, who at the turn of the first millennium BCE extended the Zhou Dynasty’s reach over what

he has ‘begun a longish poem called “Wisdom”’—the working title of ‘Vacillation’. Part VII of the finished poem appears in draft form in a letter to Shakespear on 3 January 1932; a quick note with a revision of that lyric’s last line the next day (*Letters*, 788-90). On 5 January he writes to his wife that ‘three of four sections of “Wisdom”’ have been finished, and on 10 January he writes her that four sections are complete. On 24 January he writes his wife, ‘I have finished my group of poems which I now call “Vacillation”—there are seven poems....’ On 8 February, he writes her, ‘I have just had the first 3rd of that Indian Monks autobiography—a masterpiece’ (*Unpublished Letters*, accessed 8 January 2011).

²⁵⁷ Jeffares, *Yeats’s Poems*, 602n.

²⁵⁸ M. L. Rosenthal, *Running to Paradise: Yeats’s Poetic Art* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 312.

²⁵⁹ Ellmann identifies all the lyrics’ working titles in *Identity*, 272-3.

²⁶⁰ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 251-2.

would become China. The Duke of Zhou is a touchstone of Chinese culture, the embodiment of both military leadership and enlightened conduct. Significantly, he is also credited with having completed the interpretation of the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*—transformation and oracular wisdom being essential to the poem’s import.²⁶¹ The stanza begins cinematically, with a panoramic image of a river plain ‘spread out below’ the mountain on which the lord of Chou has evidently been meditating. We know this because, in ‘casting off the mountain snow’, he must first have been still enough to let it accumulate on him—just as we know, thanks to a stylistic compression reminiscent of Chinese literati painting, that he is high up the mountain because the snow is falling amid the ‘odor of new-mown hay’ drifting up from the plain below. That compression heightens the metaphorical import of the snow, which represents at once both the austerity of the lord’s meditative practice and the numbing, deadening effect of the ignorance he must throw off. The suddenness of the enjambed ‘Cried’, followed by the energetic ‘casting off’, implies an epiphany: the lord has withdrawn from the world to a cold mountain height, where he has achieved a spiritual awakening. In ‘casting off’ not only snow but also ignorance, he is freeing himself from all attachment to the temporary entities of the phenomenal world. He is free to regard his accomplishments, whether they have already been achieved or are yet to come, in a spirit of serene non-attachment.

The second stanza begins cinematically as well, with a metonymic close-up of wagon wheels that invites not only a visual but also an auditory response from the reader. But the scene quickly slides into indeterminacy, its two images forming an impersonal montage without a clear protagonist. The ‘conqueror’ of line three is

²⁶¹ Jeffares, *Yeats’s Poems*, 603n; John Keay, *China: A History* (London: HarperPress, 2009), 55-7; Richard John Lynn, ed. and trans., *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the ‘I Ching’ as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 4.

scarcely the wagoneer of line one, for a conqueror's chariot would be drawn by horses, not 'white asses'. Rather, the 'white asses' recall Deborah and Barak's song in Judges 5.10: 'Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way' (AV). Instead of a conqueror, we have a later traveler, reminiscent of the Israelites once held captive in Babylon. Both Babylon and Nineveh, capitals of the Asiatic empires that served as precursors to that of Persia, passed into oblivion. As Jeffares notes, Yeats had already given Babylon a symbolic function in *A Vision*, which describes the city as embodying a rigid, fatalistic objectivity—the 'mathematical Babylonian starlight' that prefigured the objectified masses of the modern era.²⁶² Instead of the awakened lord of Chou, the scene offers 'some conqueror', a generic figure, one of countless empire-builders whirled through the gyres of history. His cry to his 'battle-weary men' is not a spontaneous outburst of enlightened consciousness but the voice of resignation, a sense of acceptance achieved only by exhausting the will to power.

In the final stanza, these two paths converge in a common wisdom, voiced either from above history, on the lord of Chou's mountain, or amid its flux, on the plain of the anonymous conqueror. That duality recalls the tree in 'Vacillation' II, a symbol of antinomies. The tree springs from 'man's blood-sodden heart'—a visceral image that recalls the 'complexities of mire or blood' in 'Byzantium', four pages prior in *The Winding Stair*.²⁶³ That image of a fallen, embodied existence stands in contrast to the 'simplicity of fire' referred to in 'Vacillation' VII, which sheds all complexities because it consumes and transcends all antinomies, and hence all manifestation of 'night and day' or 'gaudy moon'. The rhetorical question in the penultimate line sets up the final iteration of the refrain as the sum of all wisdom:

²⁶² Jeffares, *Yeats's Poems*, 585n; Yeats, *A Vision* (1925), 213.

²⁶³ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 248.

‘Let all things pass away’. The ‘meaning of all song’, all utterance, all manifestation, is that all things—all objects—must be renounced, one way or another. In Yeatsian terms, the subjective enlightenment of the lord of Chou allows him to transcend history even as he makes it; the objective resignation of the faceless conqueror leaves him no happier for his capitulation.

Several key ingredients of ‘Meru’, ‘The Gyres’, and ‘Lapis Lazuli’ appear here in seed form: sage, mountain, snow, empires, blood, and the achievement of transcendent wisdom that frees one from attachment to the productions of time. Yeats’s late understanding of the divine self, the Absolute, and the flux of history here finds its first expression. The self can either transcend history or immerse itself in it, but the two choices ultimately converge; at some point the self must shed all attachment to the manifested universe. All roads lead back to the divine matrix from which all phenomena emerge, and into which they vanish.

‘Meru’

The *Supernatural Songs*, written from late 1933 to early 1935, reflect Yeats’s deepening study of Hindu texts with Purohit.²⁶⁴ Yeats was writing his introduction to *The Holy Mountain* during the same period, and that essay and *Supernatural Songs* draw from the same pool of images that first appeared in ‘Vacillation’ VI. Cullingford rightly recognises in this sequence a ‘heretical revolt’ by Yeats, in which he attempts ‘to wrest the high ground from the supporters of orthodoxy by invading, appropriating, and hybridizing rather than simply opposing their theological discourse’, but she fails to see the full extent of the Indic principles at the core of

²⁶⁴ Jeffares, *Yeats’s Poems*, 618-20n.

Yeats's heresy.²⁶⁵ Moore goes so far as to claim that the poetic suite expounds 'Yeats's all-but-final religious position. It shows that Yeats thinks, "give him India" rather than Egypt, Greece, Rome'.²⁶⁶ Certainly the sequence displays a number of Indic, and especially Tantric, elements: the mystical sexual unions of 'Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillinn', 'Ribh Denounces Patrick', 'Ribh in Ecstasy' and 'What Magic Drum'; the Yogic deliberations of 'Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient'; the evocations of the Absolute in 'There' and 'A Needle's Eye'. But the poem that most explicitly expresses Yeats's sense of an Indic wisdom lineage is the sonnet that ends the sequence, and which gave *Supernatural Songs* its working title: 'Meru'.

'Meru' was the first of the poems written—Jeffares believes it might have been drafted as early as August 1933—and it clearly set the tone for the entire sequence, though Yeats placed it last, as a culminating judgement on the illusory constructs of civilisation.²⁶⁷ As a Shakespearean sonnet—further, one that divides conceptually into a Petrarchan octave and sestet—it ironically exemplifies the intellectual artifice it ultimately dismisses; by invoking Tantrism's liberating forces within a traditional, distinctively Western form, the poem implies its own dissolution. And it is the West's notion of civilisation that the poem singles out as transient, mainly because Yeats regards India as grounded in a deeper understanding of the processes of life. He makes this explicit in his introduction to *The Holy Mountain*: 'Preoccupied with the seeds of action, discoverable by those who have rejected all

²⁶⁵ Cullingford, *Gender*, 248.

²⁶⁶ Moore, *Unicorn*, 358.

²⁶⁷ Jeffares, *Yeats's Poems*, 620n.

that is not themselves, [the Indian] left to Europe the study and creation of civilisation'. India, he says, is 'indifferent to history'.²⁶⁸

Such an India is, of course, an Orientalist fantasy; it is the holy mountain writ large. But critics failing to appreciate Yeats's commitment to that ideal have had difficulty reading the poem as something other than a bleak or even nihilistic annunciation. Rosenthal refers to 'Meru' as having 'a depressive cast hardly related to the rest of "Supernatural Songs"', and for Terence Brown it presents 'a terrifying negation' with its 'chilling' sestet. Miller sees the poem as revealing that 'the final consequence of Yeats's sense of history is the worst of all...the eternal return'.²⁶⁹ But, as Nietzschean as the poem's apocalyptic rhetoric might sound, by 1934 Yeats had already left behind the notion of the Eternal Return. The substrate of 'Meru' is the principle of liberation, which Yeats had studied with Purohit and written into what would become *A Vision B*.

Mt. Meru itself is an archetype, an *axis mundi*: it embodies the stillness at the center of the turning cosmic wheel, and its sublime altitudes link earth and heaven. Yeats's addition of Everest heightens the sense that these sacred mountains form spaces in which Miller's 'vertical antinomy' can be resolved; it also provides a familiar geographic reference point for readers. But Meru dominates, and no adequate reading of the poem can be constructed without a sense of the symbolic potency of that mountain. As Whitaker notes, Yeats had been aware of Meru as a sacred peak at least since his involvement with the Theosophical Society, where Mme. Blavatsky had taught him that Meru was a 'symbol of Heaven, mythically located at the North

²⁶⁸ Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 39.

²⁶⁹ Rosenthal, *Running*, 327; Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 354; Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 103.

Pole, and corresponding to the seventh occult principle or pure Soul'.²⁷⁰ More recently, Yeats would have encountered it in Woodroffe. Woodroffe's 1913 introduction to *Tantra of the Great Liberation* begins with a section titled 'Mount Kailāsa'. Kailāsa, in Kashmir, is the earthly analogue to Meru; figuring as it does in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cosmologies, it is the most sacrosanct mountain in Asia. Woodroffe's leap from Kailāsa to Meru conveys its symbolic import:

And in the regions beyond [Kailāsa] rises Mount Meru, centre of the world-lotus. Its heights, peopled with spirits, are hung with clusters of stars as with wreaths of Mālati flowers. In short, it is written: 'He who thinks of Himācala [another name for Meru], though he should not behold him, is greater than he who performs all worship in Kāśi (Benares). In a hundred ages of the Devas I could not tell thee of the glories of Himācala. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himācala'.²⁷¹

Woodroffe depicts Kailāsa as the earthly manifestation of the transcendent Meru.

Kailāsa is also the titular peak of *The Holy Mountain*, to which Purohit's master Shri Hamsa travels in the pilgrimage the book recounts. In his introduction, Yeats equates the two peaks—'Mount Kailas, the legendary Meru'—and refers to Meru's prominence in the *Mahābhārata* and the poetry of Kālidāsa, calling it 'the dwelling place of the gods'. More pointedly, he presents it as the place where Hindu ascetics strive toward liberation: '[I]f to Brahma's question—"Who are you?" He can answer "Yourself", [he may] pass out of those three penitential circles, that of common men, that of gifted men, that of the Gods, and find some cavern upon Meru, and so pass out of all life'.²⁷²

The reference to 'pass[ing] out of all life' illuminates a phrase in the poem that is easily misread: 'man's life is thought'. If the object is to pass out of all life, and man's life is thought, then, as in 'Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient', one

²⁷⁰ Thomas R. Whitaker, *Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 116.

²⁷¹ Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*, 2.

²⁷² Yeats, introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, 17-20, 37.

must transcend all thought. This is the *citta-vṛtti-nirodhah* of Patañjali, and the *Jñānam Bandhah*—‘limited knowledge is bondage’—of the Tantric *Śiva Sūtras*. Bloom is therefore wide of the mark in reading this poem as ‘Yeats’s finest tribute to the ravening mind’.²⁷³ As the subtlest vehicle of the Self, the intellect can advance us toward liberation, but, in Tantric terms, it is capable only of *jñānam*, or vitiated knowledge; the immediate, experiential knowledge of non-duality, *pauruṣam jñānam*, transcends the ravening mind.²⁷⁴ Given this understanding of ‘thought’, the poem reveals itself as an exuberantly apocalyptic affirmation of higher consciousness, its violent, jagged octave coming to a metrical and spiritual resolution in the sestet about Meru’s hermits.

In the octave, the poetic centre barely holds; the cascade of enjambments, staggered caesuras, and metrically strained lines evokes a sense of agitation and disorder, of the precariousness of ‘[c]ivilisation’.²⁷⁵ The depiction of civilisation as ‘hooped together, brought/ Under a rule, under the semblance of peace/ By manifold illusion’ does not merely indict humanity’s intrinsic destructiveness; it presents fallen existence in Indic terms. Civilisation is ‘hooped together’ like a barrel, a temporary container of forces that will find their way out, or like a wheel reminiscent of *samsāra*, the round of birth and death. More importantly, it is ‘brought under a rule... a semblance... By manifold illusion’. The illusion in question is *māyā*, that which veils reality in both Vedānta and Tantrism.²⁷⁶ Significantly, the root of *māyā*, *ma-*, means ‘to measure’—in the case of *māyā*, to make the infinite seem limited and

²⁷³ Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, 16; Bloom, *Yeats*, 417.

²⁷⁴ Sanderson, *Meaning*, 44.

²⁷⁵ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 289.

²⁷⁶ Vedānta presents *māyā* as an ambiguous force that creates the illusion of the phenomenal universe; in Kashmir Shaivism, *māyā-śakti* is the self-veiling power of God, through which he conceals himself from himself in creation, so that the drama of self-recognition can be played out.

measurable—lending a double sense to the word ‘rule’.²⁷⁷ Yeats’s use of ‘manifold’, suggesting the unity of that which is folded into multiple surfaces, evokes the Upanishadic and Tantric principle that all difference is illusion. The phrase recalls the ‘mirror-scaléd serpent [of] multiplicity’ in ‘Ribh Denounces Patrick’.²⁷⁸

Man’s activity in this world of illusory civilisations is twofold: ‘terror’ and ‘[r]avening, raging, uprooting’. The terror is that of the abyss, within and without—the fear that the only Absolute is absolute nonexistence, which would render existence tragic or absurd. But ‘despite his terror’, man must act out the search for reality, and it is this quest that leads him to destroy all he has built. Jefferson Holdridge points out that, for Yeats, violence takes two forms: it can lead to an experience of either the ‘positive’ sublime of transcendence or the ‘negative’ sublime of ‘catastrophe...blind hatred...cynical nihilism’.²⁷⁹ The violence here, affirmed in its constancy by the repetition of ‘Ravening’, the consonance of the r’s across lines 4-7, and the exasperated ‘century after century’, at first seems negative, since it leads to ‘the desolation of reality’. But it is worth remembering that Tantrism is replete with images of ravening and desolating deities—Bhairava, the aspect of Śiva known as ‘the Terrible One’, is only one example—who destroy or devour all obstacles to liberation.²⁸⁰ Coomaraswamy describes Śiva in this way:

Shiva is a destroyer and loves the burning ground. But what does He destroy? Not merely the heavens and earth at the close of a world-cycle, but the fetters that bind each separate soul. Where and what is the burning ground? It is not the place where our earthly bodies are cremated, but the hearts of His lovers,

²⁷⁷ Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, xxiv.

²⁷⁸ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 285.

²⁷⁹ Jefferson Holdridge, ‘Heart’s Victim and Its Torturer: Yeats and the Poetry of Violence’, *Irish University Review* 27, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1997), 112, 124.

²⁸⁰ In *The Doctrine of Vibration* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987) Mark Dyczkowski describes one image of Bhairava as carrying the skull of Brahma, the creator, and notes that Bhairava’s ‘furious drunkenness and body aflame with the fire of cosmic destruction has served for centuries as an archetype of the liberated state for numerous Śaiva cults’ (7-8).

laid waste and desolate. The place where the ego is destroyed signifies the state where illusion and deeds are burnt away....²⁸¹

The desolation of which the poem speaks is in fact the destruction of all that is temporary and must be forsaken; for Yeats, it is the ‘desolation of Kailās’ where the spiritual hero may ‘meet his God’.²⁸² When the speaker says his farewells to Egypt, Greece and Rome—Stallworthy rightly notes the ‘exultant’ rhythm of the line—he may be turning his back on the West in favour of India, but ultimately he is departing from ignorance and the time-bound suffering it engenders.²⁸³ The lord of Chou’s ‘Let all things pass away’ is here recast in Tantric terms.

The sestet opens with ‘Hermits’, a pointed contrast to the ‘Civilisation’ of the poem’s first line. The cavern recalls that mentioned in Yeats’s introduction to *The Holy Mountain*. Yeats probably derived the image from Hamsa’s account of staying three days in a cave with a Hindu saint during his ascent of Kailāsa, an ordeal that involved ascending above the snowline in conditions that recall ‘winter’s dreadful blast’.²⁸⁴ But the cave also recalls the Upanishads’ discourse about the cave of the heart, in which the Self can be found.²⁸⁵ The hermits ‘know’, in an indisputable sense, what is real and what is merely transitory, and the serenity of their wisdom is conveyed in the poem’s shift to metrically even lines with softer consonants.

The mellifluous closing couplet recalls the lone and level sands of ‘Ozymandias’. But where Shelley was out to demonstrate that art is long and tyranny short, Yeats’s hermits would leave both art and tyranny behind. History, then, is a

²⁸¹ Coomaraswamy, *Dance of Shiva*, 89.

²⁸² Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 475.

²⁸³ Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 36.

²⁸⁴ Yeats could not resist offering his own rendering of the episode in his introduction to *The Holy Mountain* (23-5), even though Hamsa recounts it later in the book.

²⁸⁵ Purohit and Yeats, *Upanishads*, 30: ‘The wise, meditating on God, concentrating their thought, discovering in the mouth of the cavern, deeper in the cavern, that Self, that Ancient Self, difficult to imagine, more difficult to understand, pass beyond joy and sorrow’.

drama played out simultaneously on cosmic and personal levels, in which the lives of empires and individuals serve as lessons in transience and delusion, and the path to transcendence is one of liberating spiritual destruction. This yoking of liberation and destruction would find further expression in ‘The Gyres’ and reach its greatest subtlety in ‘Lapis Lazuli’.

‘The Gyres’

New Poems opens with ‘The Gyres’ and ‘Lapis Lazuli’; the two works form a diptych of parallel visions with starkly different tonal palettes. ‘The Gyres’, which was actually written shortly after ‘Lapis Lazuli’, conjures once more the verbal agitation of the octave in ‘Meru’, but its resolution is not so serene.²⁸⁶ It is as if Yeats is already anticipating the inflammatory posturing of *On the Boiler*, with its unleashing of ‘the brutality, the ill breeding, the barbarism of truth’.²⁸⁷ He gazes down on his time from the contemptuous height of his class consciousness, pronouncing judgement on his age in an imperious *ottava rima*. But for all its arrogance the poem packs little real punch. Its vitriol is diluted by weak verbs and windy diction (‘Irrational streams of blood are staining earth’ is one of Yeats’s more memorably bad lines).²⁸⁸

But the violence depicted in the poem demands a response—and one does emerge. The second stanza’s first line calls to mind the nightmare riding upon sleep in ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’, but here the phrase ‘ride on top’ carries a note of sexual violation that may recall Tantric images of the Goddess in her terrible and

²⁸⁶ Jeffares, in *Yeats’s Poems*, dates the poem to between July 1936 and January 1937 (621n).

²⁸⁷ Yeats, *Letters*, 903.

²⁸⁸ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 293.

devouring aspect, often depicted as dancing on or sexually mounting an inert Śiva.²⁸⁹ Yeats scorns not only the coarsening of culture he sees around him, but also his own fetishisation of both classical and occult traditions, ‘painted forms or boxes of make-up / In ancient tombs’.

The rhetorical question, ‘What matter?’ echoes Thomas Common’s translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: not only the ‘What matter about their mockery!’ of ‘The Stillest Hour’ but also the ‘What doth it now matter about kings!’ in ‘Talk with Kings’.²⁹⁰ It also recalls a passage in Stephen MacKenna’s translation of Plotinus: ‘[W]hat does it matter when they are devoured only to return in some new form?’²⁹¹ As in ‘The Stillest Hour’, the clause changes from question to exclamation; in ‘The Gyres’, the word ‘matter’ can be read as shifting from verb to noun. In the spirit of ‘Vacillation’ and ‘Meru’, a civilisation is dismissed as mere matter, phenomenal, fated to pass until its time comes round again. And the poem returns to ‘Meru’ in its resolution as well: ‘Out of Cavern comes a voice / And all it knows is that one word “Rejoice.”’²⁹²

Critics have stumbled, sometimes badly, over this imperative to rejoice. Hassett takes it to suggest a delight in destruction, while Brown sees the entire poem as ‘a species of tragic nihilism....crudely dismissive of human suffering’. Both Brown and Donoghue see in the poem’s affirmation of ‘tragic joy’ the lineaments of

²⁸⁹ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 207.

²⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 161, 273.

²⁹¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 194. The passage figures also in ‘Lapis Lazuli’, the other half of this poetic diptych.

²⁹² Jeffares, in *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, devotes nearly three pages to the images of ‘Rocky Face’ and ‘Cavern’. Noting possible allusions to Shelley’s Ahasuerus and Spengler’s image of the Cavern as ‘the prime symbol of the coming Culture’, he nonetheless concludes that the image likely ‘came back into Yeats’s mind as he read of the Indian sages and their pursuit of detached wisdom’ (435-438).

Nietzsche.²⁹³ But this reading fails to do justice to the poem's complexity. The 'Rejoice' of 'The Gyres' invokes not only Nietzsche's Dionysian intoxication, but also something altogether more transcendent. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley written about the time 'The Gyres' was composed, Yeats provides a glimpse of what he means in the poem:

You say that we must not hate. You are right but we may, & sometimes must, be indignant & speak it. Hate is a kind of 'passive suffering' but indignation is a kind of joy. [...] We that are joyous need not be afraid to denounce. A Dutch mystic has said 'I must rejoyce, I must rejoyce without ceasing, though the whole world shudder at my joy'. Joy is the salvation of the soul. You say we must love. Yes but love is not pity. It does not desire to change its object. It is a form of the eternal contemplation of what is.²⁹⁴

The primary source for Yeats's 'Rejoice' is not Nietzsche but John of Ruysbroeck. If not elsewhere, Yeats would likely have encountered this line in French, as the epigraph to Joris-Karl Huysmans' *À Rebours*: '*Il faut que je me réjouisse au-dessus du temps..., quoique le monde ait horreur de ma joie, et que sa grossièreté ne sache pas ce que je veux dire*'.²⁹⁵ In his letter to Wellesley, Yeats omits the phrase '*que sa grossièreté*', which translates 'in its rudeness' or 'in its coarseness'. The poem's juxtaposition of rejoicing and coarseness certainly recalls the Dutch mystic's exclamation. Yeats's yoking of Nietzsche, Plotinus, and Ruysbroeck suggests a desire to achieve a unifying vision that injects divinity into the Nietzschean worldview. The voice from Cavern recalls the Tantric wisdom of Meru's hermits with one resounding, all-inclusive word of affirmation; to a liberated soul, conscious that all is God, there is nothing but bliss. The *Śiva Sūtras* refer to 'the Yogi in whom the rapturous experience of I-consciousness which is full of the consciousness of non-difference shines through

²⁹³ Hassett, *Poetics of Hate*, 148; Brown, *Life*, 360-1; Donoghue, *Yeats*, 116.

²⁹⁴ Yeats, *Letters*, 876.

²⁹⁵ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours*, ed. Mark Fumaroli (1884; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 1977), epigraph. A complete English translation of *À Rebours* did not appear until 1926, though Yeats was certainly familiar with the novel from his younger years.

the cancellation of the universe (as something separate from consciousness)'.²⁹⁶ That transcendent bliss is a crucial but often neglected aspect of the gaiety in 'Lapis Lazuli'.

'Lapis Lazuli'

When Yeats finished writing 'Lapis Lazuli' in July 1936, he knew it was an important work—he declared it 'almost the best I have made of recent years'—and critics have generally shared his estimation.²⁹⁷ C. A. Patrides calls it '[Yeats's] most brilliant articulation in poetry of ideas he set forth in prose on a number of occasions', and Stallworthy deems it 'perhaps the most eloquent statement of the ultimate prophetic vision of the Last Poems'. Whitaker affirms this sense of the poem's finality: 'That living philosophical stone is the end of Yeats's Great Work, insofar as it had an end'.²⁹⁸ 'Lapis Lazuli' is not only the fullest expression of Yeats's late understanding of the Absolute and its relation to the self and history; it is his defense of poetry, and hence of his life's work. As the second panel of the diptych that opens *New Poems*, it balances the *sturm und drang* of 'The Gyres' with a tempered, delicately constructed presentation of Yeats's mature philosophy.

In the year or so leading up to the composition of 'Lapis Lazuli', Yeats had resolved to withdraw from politics and focus on self-transformation. His abortive flirtation with the Blueshirts, along with his increasing physical frailty, may have hastened that decision, but the contemplative bent of his studies with Purohit surely played a role as well. After dropping a tentative plan to visit India, he resolved to

²⁹⁶ Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, 47.

²⁹⁷ Yeats, *Letters*, 859.

²⁹⁸ C. A. Patrides, 'Gaiety Transfiguring All That Dread: The Case of Yeats', in *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies*, no. 5, ed. Richard J. Finneran (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 117-131; Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 38; Whitaker, *Swan and Shadow*, 278.

spend the winter of that year in Mallorca with the Swami, ‘that we would go to some warm place for two months & that while there I would put his translation of the Upanishads into good English. [...] I am tired of my little personal poetry’.²⁹⁹ That sense of weariness with the poetry of personality (or what Yeats would call character), coupled with what he perceived as the revitalising effects of the Steinach operation he had undergone in 1934, had led him to seek another radical self-transformation. He wanted his work with Purohit to leave him ‘reborn in imagination’. Just before departing for Mallorca, he wrote to Dorothy Wellesley, ‘My public life I will pare down to almost nothing. My imagination is on fire again’.³⁰⁰ It was at this point that he explained his new ambitions to Ethel Mannin:

I am about to cut myself adrift, as far as I can, from all external circumstance. ...I want to plunge myself into impersonal poetry, to get rid of the bitterness, irritation and hatred my work in Ireland has brought into my soul, I want to make a last song, sweet and exultant, a sort of European Geeta, or rather my Geeta and not doctrine but song.³⁰¹

In these letters, Yeats sounds less like a documenter of Hindu traditions than a spiritual aspirant aiming to liberate himself from the bondage of history—his own and Ireland’s—and write poetry integrating the spiritualities of India and the West.

But though Yeats may have wanted to purge himself of the residue of history, history was not through with him. The trip to Mallorca produced a complete translation of the *Upanishads* and progress on what would become *Patañjali’s Path to Yoga*, but otherwise it was a disaster. Not only did Yeats fall gravely ill; some of his indiscretions came home to roost in the forms of an obsessively disordered Margot Ruddock and an obsessively vindictive Gwyneth Foden. By mid-May,

²⁹⁹ Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, 8 July 1935, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

³⁰⁰ Yeats, *Letters*, 839, 843.

³⁰¹ Yeats, *Letters*, 836.

Purohit had returned to India, and Yeats was left to face his doubts and his doubters alone.

One challenge came from Ethel Mannin, who asked Yeats to lend public support to the cause of Carl von Ossietzky, imprisoned by the Nazis for having published state secrets. When he declined, she wrote him a second time, with some recrimination.³⁰² Yeats gave an impassioned response:

Do not try to make a politician of me, even in Ireland I shall never I think be that again—as my sense of reality deepens, and I think it does with age, my horror at the cruelty of governments grows greater, and if I did what you want I would seem to hold one form of government more responsible than any other and that would betray my convictions. Communist, Fascist, Nationalist, clerical, anti-clerical are all responsible according to the number of their victims. I have not been silent; I have used the only vehicle I possess—verse.... This will seem little to you with your strong practical sense for it takes fifty years for a poet's weapons to influence the issue.... Forgive me my dear and do not cast me out of your affection. I am not callous, every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe, 'the ceremony of innocence is drowned'.³⁰³

The poet was now being forced to vindicate the choices he had been so eager to make before his trip to Mallorca.

Yeats had turned seventy in June 1935, and on the occasion Harry Clifton had given him a Qianlong 'mountain' of lapis lazuli, depicting a bearded man followed by a beardless companion and, at a greater distance, a servant carrying an indistinct object. At the time, Yeats had clearly thought the gift auspicious. He described it as 'a mountain with a little temple among trees half way up, & a path leading to it & on the path an ascetic with his pupil. The ascetic, pupil and little temple prophesying perhaps the Swami & myself at Mallorca'.³⁰⁴ The stone's iconography of pine trees,

³⁰² Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 542.

³⁰³ Yeats, *Letters*, 850-1. A letter of 23 May 1936 reveals that Yeats declined a similar request from Dermot MacManus. *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

³⁰⁴ William O'Donnell, 'The Art of Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli"', *The Massachusetts Review* 23, no. 2 (1982), 353; Yeats to Gwyneth Foden, 6 July 1935, *Unpublished Letters* (accessed 9 January 2011).

cranes, and mountain retreats suggests that the men are Taoist immortals, liberated beings living in complete harmony with the Absolute, and Yeats's own spiritualisation of the artwork indicates his frame of mind as he looked forward to his working retreat in Mallorca. He had the leisure to reflect on the divergence of East and West: 'Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry'.³⁰⁵ Yeats's studies in Indic traditions had convinced him that tragedy is not the true human condition, but rather a product of the mind, a precipitate of Western culture. This new understanding marks a shift in his sense of the self's relation to history and to the Absolute—the precise dynamic he addresses in 'Lapis Lazuli'.

But the subsequent year saw Europe lurch toward tragedy on a massive scale. The crisis of European fascism was coming to a head, and war with Germany seemed increasingly likely. By mid-July 1936, Spain had collapsed into civil war. The 'irrational streams of blood' were already flowing. Yeats, who had once declared that one 'should not attribute a very high degree of reality to the Great War', now set himself to measure that unreality against the 'gaiety' of the divinised self.³⁰⁶

'Lapis Lazuli' consists of four movements arranged in five strophes. In the first strophe, he lays out the challenge from those who would have him set aside his pen and immerse himself in the agons of history. The second movement drafts Shakespeare into service, addressing the question of tragedy on a personal level. In the third strophe the poem spirals upward to a kind of aerial perspective on history, demonstrating that its grand tragedies are essentially no different from those of individuals. The two-strophe final movement goes beyond history entirely, to the

³⁰⁵ Yeats, *Letters*, 837.

³⁰⁶ Ellman, *The Man and the Masks*, 282.

Asian sages on their mountain, who look down on ‘all the tragic scene’ from the serenity of their liberation. Ellmann sees this process as ‘justify[ing] gaiety first in terms of the West and then of the East’, but it would be more accurate to say that the poem journeys from a crisis in the West to a resolution in the East.³⁰⁷

In ‘Lapis Lazuli’, poetic form seamlessly follows sense. Though seeded with declarative trochees, its four-beat accentual lines follow a relaxed, flexible pattern, as do its rhymes; this is not the grand *ottava rima* of ‘The Gyres’. The poem is intricately constructed, but it does not foreground poetic control. Rather, its form reflects its underlying theme of reconciled and transcended antinomies, of tensions that build but then dissolve rather than explode.

The opening strophe presents the challenge from Yeats’s accusers, ‘hysterical women’ who, enthralled by crisis, advance a utilitarian argument against the arts, and hence against all human activity that would resist the pressure of history. They recall the ‘hysterical woman’ of ‘J. M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time’, who ‘will make unmeasured accusations and believe impossible things, because of some logical deduction from a solitary thought which has turned a portion of her mind to stone’. As William O’Donnell points out, the women also arise from an incident Yeats documented in 1908, in which an acquaintance of Yeats insisted that ‘to paint pictures or to write poetry in this age was to fiddle while Rome was burning’.³⁰⁸ The arts, metonymically recast as ‘palette and fiddle-bow’, stand alongside poetry in opposition to ‘Aeroplane and Zeppelin’, modern agents of mechanised destruction, perversely transcendent in their ability to strike from the heavens. The strophe’s final evocation of ‘King Billy’ suggests, not for the last time in the poem, that for Yeats the gyres of history are reiterating past violence.

³⁰⁷ Ellmann, *Identity*, 185.

³⁰⁸ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 314; O’Donnell, ‘Art’, 364.

The second movement's opening line, with its imperious 'All', announces itself as a rejoinder to the hysterical women of the first strophe. The speaker takes on an impersonal authority, the first-person singular having vanished from the poem until its final strophe. The phrase 'tragic play'—with the obvious pun on 'play'—suggests that the upheavals of personal and collective history are not wholly real. This notion that all the world's a stage hardly began with Shakespeare; as it appears in 'Lapis Lazuli', the metaphor most recalls Stephen MacKenna's translation of Plotinus:

Still more, what does it matter when they are devoured only to return in some new form? It comes to no more than the murder of one of the personages in a play; the actor alters his make-up and enters in a new role. The actor, of course, was not really killed....[T]his is enough to tell us that all human intentions are but play....Murders, death in all its guises, the reduction and sacking of cities, all must be to us just such a spectacle as the changing scenes of a play; all is but the varied incident of a plot, costume on and off, acted grief and lament. For on earth, in all the succession of life, it is not the Soul within but the Shadow outside of the authentic man, that grieves and complains and acts out the plot on this world stage which men have dotted with stages of their own constructing.³⁰⁹

Plotinus insists, as do Tantra and Vedānta, that the Absolute is the only true actor, and suffering exists only insofar as individuals, in their ignorance, believe that they have separate existences of their own. As *Katha Upanishad* affirms, 'He who thinks that He kills, he who thinks that He is killed, is ignorant. He does not kill nor is He killed'.³¹⁰ Tantric texts make use of the theatrical metaphor as well. In his commentary on the *Śiva Sūtras*, the 10th-century sage Ksemarāja quotes another Tantric text, the *Stavacintāmani*: 'O Śiva, you have produced a three-world drama which has in its interior Māyā as the source of all the existents. You have presented the introductory portion of the drama. Where is the creative artist other than yourself who can bring about its conclusion?' In this version of the universe as divine drama,

³⁰⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 194.

³¹⁰ Purohit and Yeats, *Upanishads*, 31.

individual existents are merely characters, and liberation comes when the actors, hitherto lost in their roles, realise that ‘one’s individuality is an act staged by a transpersonal Absolute’. The *Śiva Sūtras* frame the metaphor thus: ‘Such a one who has realized his essential spiritual nature is a Self that is only an actor (on the world stage)’.³¹¹ Yeats would have encountered the metaphor in a Tantric context through Majumdar’s introduction to *Principles of Tantra*:

The knowledge acquired through the five senses is phenomenal: it is not true knowledge; it is knowledge as it seems, not knowledge as it is. It is the knowledge of actors as they appear on the stage, and not of the individuals who are dressed as actors in the green room.³¹²

In ‘Lapis Lazuli’, the theatrical metaphor takes on this Neoplatonic and Indic cast.

The strophe’s opening sentence, which unfolds across seven lines, reads like a walking tour of human possibilities: the indicatives ‘there’ and ‘that’ create the sense that Yeats is simply picking people out of a crowd, that everyone embodies one or another Shakespearean type, though performances vary. The assertion that ‘worthy’ actors ‘do not break up their lines to weep’ suggests the Indic principle that a saving knowledge of the Self does not mean automatic release from worldly existence. Even a *jīvanmukta*, one liberated while in the body, must still exhaust whatever karma remains, outwardly playing a necessary role while inwardly resting in the timeless bliss of divinity. The enlightened soul is the consummate actor, seamlessly inhabiting a role but never identifying with it, and therefore never being overcome by it.

The subsequent celebration of gaiety in the midst of tragedy may seem to invite a purely Nietzschean reading, but, as with ‘The Gyres,’ too many critics seem to have forgotten that appropriating Nietzsche’s discourse and wholly subscribing to his philosophy are two different things. Though there is an unmistakable echo of

³¹¹ Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, 153; Sanderson, *Meaning*, 17; Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, 152.

³¹² Majumdar, introduction to *Principles of Tantra*, ii:lii.

Nietzsche's 'gayety of artistic creation bidding defiance to all calamity' as well as Yeats's own 'creative joy of acceptance of what life brings', Yeats's final position here—and it becomes increasingly clear as the poem progresses—is not precisely Nietzschean.³¹³ For a wholly Nietzschean reading to obtain, no transcendent divinity can enter the poem, and there can be no liberation from temporality. Nietzsche regards the 'blissful ecstasy' of the tragic as a 'collapse of the *principium individuationis*', which offers 'an insight into the nature of the *Dionysian*'. But this 'collapse' is just that—a movement downward into a Heraclitean flux, not upward into divine consciousness. Though in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche refers to 'the annihilation of the veil of Māyā, Oneness as the soul of the race', and to 'the only existent and eternal self resting at the basis of things', his Dionysian is unconscious vital energy, indiscriminate and destructive if unchannelled by the Apollonian.³¹⁴ As Evelyn Underhill notes, Nietzsche was a vitalist, not a mystic, and though Yeats claimed later in life that he was 'not a mystic' but 'a practical man', to suggest that he was a vitalist in the Nietzschean sense is to ignore the bulk of his thought and work, his lifelong appeals to mystical sources, his professed late commitment to Indic traditions.³¹⁵

Like Nietzsche, Yeats had much to say about tragedy, but few critics have cited one of his most definitive pronouncements: 'Because Immortality is gone we can no longer write those tragedies which have always seemed to me alone legitimate—those that are a joy to the man who dies'. Whatever defiant gaiety may arise from the summoning forth of all a tragic hero's energies, the character's true joy arises from his knowledge that death will not be the end of him. In *Explorations*,

³¹³ Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 997; Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 322.

³¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 955, 960, 972.

³¹⁵ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 27-9; Yeats, *Letters*, 921.

Yeats recalls a scene from Shakespeare in which a soldier about to face the gallows says of his impending death, ‘What has that to do with me?’ By way of context, the poet goes on to recall Mohini Chatterjee saying that he responded to anyone who denied the immortality of the soul with the question, ‘What have you to do with that?’³¹⁶ Viewed, as it must be, in a Vedāntic light, Chatterjee’s rhetorical question asserts that immortality is certain but it belongs to the supreme Self, not the individuated self, which is temporary. Though Yeats saw the belief in immortality fading from the world stage, he held to it himself, going so far as to declare to Dorothy Wellesley that the immortality of the soul had been ‘proved beyond a doubt’. As Stallworthy rightly affirms, ‘Armed with this belief in an afterlife he came to the conviction that one must live in joy and—like the ancient heroes—laugh into the face of death’.³¹⁷

Critics who fail to appreciate the force of this conviction, and of the Neoplatonic and Indic underpinnings of the poem, tend to regard ‘Lapis Lazuli’ as verging on nihilism. Samuel Hynes argues that Yeats was ‘excited by war’ and ‘had to see war as necessary’ to fulfil his tragic sense of life. Bloom refers to all but the final two strophes as ‘[i]nhumane nonsense’, and Jahan Ramazani regards ‘Lapis Lazuli’ as ‘affirming death and destruction’, largely because Ramazani wants to resist ‘turn[ing] the sublime into mysticism’—though mysticism is precisely what Yeats builds into the poem. Miller sees in it a perverse theology, in which a cruel God demands the eternal return of history’s tragic performance, and the only satisfaction

³¹⁶ Yeats, *Explorations*, 332-3, 296.

³¹⁷ Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 463; Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 35.

for humanity is ‘the ecstatic liberation of defeat’.³¹⁸ With this reading, Miller is, ironically, the closest to the poem’s Indic sensibility. When he argues that Yeats’s God is like ‘some rich king who must see himself mirrored in what he creates’, he is actually offering a distorted version of Tantric cosmology, in which the phenomenal universe is the great game of God’s self-discovery; and what to Miller is a horror—the realisation that ‘some other life...is making use of his body and soul to incarnate itself’—is in Tantra, Yoga, and Vedānta the saving knowledge that opens a way to liberation.³¹⁹ While ‘Lapis Lazuli’ can be accused of anti-humanism, then, it is not inhumane. In his invocation of Shakespearean tragedy, Yeats points to an inviolable gaiety that is, in Tantric terms, the birthright of every human being, because it is every human being’s essential nature. It is possible, even appropriate, to ‘rejoice in the midst of tragedy’ because, in truth, ‘nothing can injure us’.³²⁰

Yeats does not choose Hamlet and Lear simply because they are two of Shakespeare’s best-known tragic heroes; his remarks on both plays display his spiritualised sense of Shakespearean tragedy. *Hamlet* he recognised not as an unmitigated catastrophe but as ‘a passionate preparation of sanctity’.³²¹ Bloom may think that ‘the gaiety of Lear is, of course, non-existent’, but what matters here is not Bloom’s view of Lear but Yeats’s, insofar as we can ascertain it. Years earlier, in the voice of Michael Robartes, that purveyor of ‘the wisdom of the east’, the poet had pronounced a judgement anticipating the one in ‘Lapis Lazuli’: ‘There is Lear, his head still wet with the thunder-storm, and he laughs because you thought yourself an existence who are but a shadow, and him a shadow who is an eternal god’. The Lear

³¹⁸ Samuel Hynes, ‘Yeats’s Wars’, *The Sewanee Review* 97, no. 1 (1989), 54; Bloom, *Yeats*, 438; R. Jahan Ramazani, ‘Yeats: Tragic Joy and the Sublime’, *PMLA* 104, no. 2 (March 1989), 163; Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 103, 81.

³¹⁹ Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 103, 100.

³²⁰ Yeats, *Letters*, 838.

³²¹ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 413.

of *Rosa Alchemica*, like other great literary characters, is an accessible face of one of the divinities that ‘are always making and unmaking humanity, which is indeed but the trembling of their lips’.³²² In ‘Lapis Lazuli’, he represents the invulnerable bliss of the eternal Self, who makes and unmakes the histories of individuated selves.

The remainder of the second strophe dramatises the awakening to transcendent wisdom, and marks off the limits of tragedy as a product of bound consciousness. The shock of self-realisation comes in two deliberately disjointed and elliptical lines, appropriate to a knowledge beyond verbalisation. ‘All men have aimed at, found and lost’ must be read sequentially; it recapitulates in concentrated form what Yeats elsewhere calls ‘the sudden enlargement of their vision, their ecstasy at the approach of death’ that characterises Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. Ellmann’s assertion that the phrase ‘found and lost’ refers to the moment of death as ‘fus[ing] them to their chosen image of themselves’ is not far off, but does not convey the exaltation of ‘Heaven blazing into the head’. Stallworthy notes the theatrical overtones of that phrase, as well as the sense that ‘black out’ conveys of abandoning ‘earthly concerns’. But perhaps the most telling is Yeats’s own remark that in ‘the meeting of spirit and sense, yet there is no meeting but only the change upon the instant, and it is by the perception of a change like the sudden “blacking out” of the lights of the stage, that passion creates its most violent sensations’.³²³ When spirit and sense meet in the extreme—in a moment of spiritual revelation akin to Purohit’s *kundalinī* awakening—consciousness is violently transformed. But tragedy itself remains a delusion. ‘It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce’ because, from the

³²² Bloom, *Yeats*, 439; Yeats, *Letters*, 859; Yeats, *Mythologies*, 275.

³²³ Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 522-3; Ellmann, *Identity*, 186; Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 49; Ellmann, *The Man and the Masks*, 297.

perspective of the Absolute, it cannot take on any greater reality. The upheavals of time-bound existence do not become more real as they increase in scale.

The third strophe expands the sensibility of the second to history. Individual dramas give way to the grand cycles of history, but the essential gaiety of existence remains, a substrate of which all but a few of history's participants remain unaware, even as they embody it. The Ruysbroeckian 'Rejoice' of 'The Gyres' now reverberates down the millennia. 'All things fall and are built again, / And all that build them again are gay', whether they realise it or not. Yeats is not finished with Shakespeare yet, though; the image of old civilisations and their wisdom going 'to rack' echoes Prospero's 'cloud-capp'd towers' speech from *The Tempest*.³²⁴ Much like Yeats, Prospero renounces magic for contemplation, and shortly before breaking his staff and throwing his grimoire overboard he reflects on how all human endeavours 'leave not a rack behind'. From the perspective of liberated consciousness, the 'little lives' of those who languish in ignorance of their own divinity are indeed 'such stuff / As dreams are made on', and history is the overarching dream from which everyone eventually awakens. In the light of liberating gnosis, what had seemed tragedy reveals itself to be romance.

From that last allusion to Shakespeare, the poem's attention migrates eastward to Greece. The litany of grand historical cycles pauses to conjure one individual, Callimachus, whom Yeats sees as having brought to ancient Greek sculpture 'a momentary dip into ebbing Asia'. In this case, 'Asia' refers to the 'vague immensities' of Persia.³²⁵ The poem's final movement depicts a different Asia

³²⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode, The Arden Shakespeare (New York: Routledge, 1990), 4.1.148-58.

³²⁵ Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), 270; Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 337.

altogether: one in which the West's tragic predicament is resolved, or rather dissolved, in the liberated consciousness of the Eastern sage.

Yeats appears to have written the last two strophes of 'Lapis Lazuli' first, with relatively little difficulty; he knew from the start where the poem would end.³²⁶ The Qianlong mountain may not provide Hindu images, but Yeats's limited reading in Buddhism, particularly D. T. Suzuki's early books on Zen, may be folded in here. In any case, his image of the sage was a bit nebulous—'something Asiatic', he wrote.³²⁷ Yeats provides a narrative, making the third figure 'a serving-man' and converting what he once called a temple into a 'half-way house'. The changes relax the scene, emphasising that the arduous work of self-realisation is done, and the gaiety of liberation prevails. Here culminates the cluster of images with which Yeats has depicted his idea of the Absolute and its relation to self and history—holy mountain, sages, empires rising and falling below—and what surprises is the passage's delicacy. The sages of 'Lapis Lazuli' are far beyond the tortured fascination with power and violence of 'The Magi'. These divinised beings are not old but 'ancient', of indeterminate age, for time no longer affects them. Though exalted beyond suffering, they still feel compassion for those bound by their own ignorance to the ordeals of history; hence the call for 'mournful melodies'. The sages' musical instrument affirms the wisdom of art in the face of the hysterical women's dismissal of 'palette and fiddle-bow'.³²⁸ The incantatory repetition of 'eyes' suggests not only transcendent vision but the intertwined virtues of Yoga and Vedānta: non-attachment and discernment. But the essence of the scene is the landscape. The Chinese artist has incorporated the stone's irregularities into his artwork:

³²⁶ O'Donnell, 'Art', 357.

³²⁷ Yeats, *Explorations*, 295.

³²⁸ Stallworthy, *Vision and Revision*, 54.

Every discolouration of the stone,
 Every accidental crack or dent
 Seems a water-course or avalanche
 Or lofty slope where it still snows³²⁹

The sculpture itself is emblematic of a Tantric vision of the cosmos. What seem flaws to those with a bound, limited consciousness reveal themselves to the liberated as perfect parts of a divine whole. Yeats presents, once more, the Tantric vision of a universe that is in truth God, or, alternatively, the Upanishadic affirmation of the unity of all existence: ‘This is perfect. That is perfect. Perfect comes from perfect. Take perfect from perfect; the remainder is perfect’.³³⁰ As Whitaker notes, ‘In these stony lineaments we can no longer distinguish time’s ruins from eternity’s mansions’.³³¹

‘Lapis Lazuli’ culminates Yeats’s late deliberations on self, God, and temporality, and in doing so presents a theodicy magnificently integrating Plotinus, Nietzsche, and Indic traditions. In this poem, the Absolute and the phenomenal are one reality, but only a soul liberated by true self-knowledge can escape the bondage of antinomies and hence the traumas of history. Liberation is the universal human destiny, achieved after many lifetimes; until we reach it, we are caught in the ‘mere complexities of mire or blood’ that perpetuate the round of human misery.³³² The poet’s task, then, is not merely to serve as an abstract and brief chronicle of the time but to remind others of what transcends and sustains time. The general human task is to achieve and inhabit direct consciousness of that reality. Such an exalted awareness, according to Tantric tradition, involves what Sanderson terms ‘a divinisation of the senses’ that precipitates ‘a shift from the appetitive to the aesthetic mode of

³²⁹ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 295.

³³⁰ Purohit and Yeats, *Upanishads*, 159.

³³¹ Whitaker, *Swan and Shadow*, 278.

³³² Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 248.

awareness'. For the Tantrically inclined Yeats, it is this liberating gnosis that completes Nietzsche, eternally justifying the universe as a divine '*esthetic phenomenon*'.³³³

Conclusion

But if 'Lapis Lazuli' presents what was in fact Yeats's final form of belief, he lacked the courage of his convictions. Though he would write in 'Man and the Echo' that there is 'no work as great / As that which cleans man's dirty slate', his last poetic use of the word 'rejoice' takes the form of a question:

O rocky voice
Shall we in that great night rejoice?
What do we know but that we face
One another in this place?³³⁴

Simple doubt, then, entered his deliberations. More importantly, he remained unresolved about the dilemma of poet and saint. Miller, despite his seeming failure to account for Yeats's Indic inclinations, puts his finger on the issue: 'Each civilization, like each man, is driven by a tragic desire to be the whole without ceasing to be itself'.³³⁵ The desire is tragic because it attempts to evade an ineluctable choice. Yeats knew well that he could not commit himself to the relinquishment of individuated selfhood that, in the Indic traditions he studied, is a precondition for being the whole. Foster fittingly ends his biography of Yeats with the poet's plea for clemency, standing as he does self-accused of this vacillation:

When life puts away her conjuring tricks one by one, those that deceive us longest may well be the wine-cup and the sensual kiss, for our Chambers of Commerce and of Commons have not the divine architecture of the body, nor has their frenzy been ripened by the sun. The poet, because he may not stand

³³³ Sanderson, *Meaning*, 87; Nietzsche, *Philosophy*, 974.

³³⁴ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 345-6.

³³⁵ Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 96.

within the sacred house but lives amid the whirlwinds that beset its threshold,
 may find his pardon.³³⁶

Though Yeats, insofar as his final poems reveal, lingered at that threshold to the end, he serves as a compelling study in the attempt to resacralise human existence by divinising the self. In pursuing this line of thought, Yeats came to embody a particular form of the spiritual predicament of the twentieth-century artist. To seek direct experience of the sacred through a mysticism of the divine self, especially in traditions that delegitimise individual subjectivity, is to wager one's personal creativity, to say nothing of one's hold on objective reality, at the table of esoteric wisdom. Other poets veered away from such deliberations, seeking the sacred not in inward mystical aspiration but in outward religious sacrament and liturgy. Of these, David Jones is the prime example; his exoteric poetics, grounded in Roman Catholic sacramental theology, stand in stark opposition to the syncretist, esoteric lyricism of Yeats.

³³⁶ Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, 659. The passage is from *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

Chapter Two

A Poetics of the Creaturely: The Divine Other in David Jones's *The Anthemata*

David Jones's poetry presents an explicitly spiritual response to modernity, one that emerges from a deep sense of both religious conviction and historical trauma. 'No one', wrote Peter Levi of Jones, 'has illuminated so searchingly what it was to suffer the modern history of mankind'.¹ As bold as that claim may be, the course taken by Jones in seeking to overcome what Mircea Eliade has called 'the terror of history' led to a rich theological poetics that found its fullest expression with the 1952 publication of *The Anthemata*, the long poem Jones considered his masterpiece.²

The Anthemata is famously challenging to read: to cite George Steiner's terminology, it presents not only contingent but modal difficulties, in that its densely allusive language calls for a good deal of readerly spadework, and its explicitly Catholic form and tone require an openness to what Denis Donoghue has, in another context, called a 'form of feeling' not easily accessed by the critical approaches that dominate current scholarship.³ On a contingent level, much of *The Anthemata*'s formidable detail is driven by historical, anthropological, and mythopoeic considerations; Jones provides extensive footnotes to elucidate that content. Modally, the poem is saturated with Catholic dogma and devotion.

It is perhaps for this reason that much Jones scholarship has drifted toward one end or another of a reductive dichotomy. Some critics privilege the contingent aspects

¹ Levi, 'History and Reality in David Jones', *Agenda* 11, no. 4 – 12, no. 1 (Autumn-Winter 1973-4), 56.

² Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 46 (1954; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 161.

³ Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 254.

of the text and examine it solely as an exercise in the mythical method. Elizabeth Ward has gone so far as to claim that *The Anathemata* is ‘not primarily a Catholic or even a Christian poem’, and Oswyn Murray has concurred, asserting that ‘David Jones’s theory of history is not Catholic at all, not even Christian in its implications’.⁴ This tendency is perhaps partly an overcorrection for what some identify, particularly in the work of Thomas Dilworth, as ‘the impression... that Jones writes primarily as an apologist for Christianity, for Welsh culture, or for any of the other cultural, political, and anthropological visions that he draws on so freely’.⁵

Jones is partly to blame for this divide; in his preface to *The Anathemata* he pointedly says that to read the poem solely as inhabiting ‘some theological scheme’ would result in ‘a serious misinterpretation of the nature of the problems in question’.⁶ In another context, he takes pains to assert that the Catholic content of the poem reflects not his own convictions but the history of British culture.⁷ But, given the form as well as the content of the work, Jones’s admonition must be read as a ‘both-and’ rather than an ‘either-or’. Jones had broad historical and cultural concerns, and he was certainly no apologist—he expressed mistrust of ‘apologists’ in his letters—but to frame *The Anathemata* as anything other than a deeply Catholic poem is to do violence to the work.⁸ A robust criticism must attempt a ‘phenomenological

⁴ Elizabeth Ward, *David Jones: Mythmaker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 126; Oswyn Murray, “‘It was a dark and stormy night’: David Jones and History”, in *David Jones: Artist and Poet*, ed. Paul Hills (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997), 9.

⁵ Kathleen Henderson Staudt, *At the Turn of a Civilization: David Jones and Modern Poetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 28.

⁶ David Jones, *The Anathemata*, 18. The statement, like many of Jones’s remarks on his own work, is both modest and nuanced. The ‘problems in question’ are not the same thing as the form in which the question is presented.

⁷ David Jones, *Dai Greatcoat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in His Letters*, ed. René Hague, Faber Finds ed. (1980; repr., London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2008), 156.

⁸ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 222.

articulation of the ontology' of *The Anathemata*.⁹ This necessitates meeting the text on the ground of its explicitly and carefully articulated belief system.

Jones's commitment to Roman Catholicism was absolute. He wrote, 'It is incumbent upon all Christians to believe, and it is a central dogma of the Catholic Church, that the Redemption of the World was accomplished once for all at a certain date in time and a specified site, that is, on Calvary'.¹⁰ This conviction is the precise center of Jones's understanding of existence. Such a fundamental premise necessarily shapes one's sense of history, and one's view of the essential nature of the self and its position relative to time and eternity. For Jones, history must be seen as theophany.

This teleological orientation positions Jones against what he called 'our essentially positivist, desacramentalized civilization'.¹¹ After opening his introduction to *Epoch and Artist* with a passage from the philosopher Edward Caird scorning the notion of sacredness as 'superstition', Jones comments that Caird's logical positivism is 'comic as well as frightening'.¹² Jones's stance here is of course nothing new in poetry—one need only think of Wordsworth's and Blake's fulminations against dehumanising rationalism—but he avoided a Romantic mode of recovering the sense of the sacred every bit as scrupulously as he avoided a purely secular humanism. He was alert to the risk that Romanticism might, as Charles Altieri has put it, 'locate the power of imagination in the poet, and not in some larger, participatory space'.¹³

Whereas Yeats courted that risk extravagantly, even in his final years, Jones rejected

⁹ William Spanos, 'Modern Literary Criticism and the Spatialization of Time', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29, no. 1 (Autumn, 1970), 88.

¹⁰ David Jones, *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings*, ed. Harman Grisewood (New York: Chilmark Press, 1959), 167.

¹¹ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 224.

¹² Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 14.

¹³ Charles Altieri, 'What Pound and Stevens Share: The Break from Epistemic Views of Value in Modernist Poetry' (lecture, American Literature Research Seminar, Oxford University, 3 November 2011).

esoteric and mystical approaches in favour of the exoteric space of the Catholic liturgy.

The mystical aspects of *Four Quartets* and the Indic deliberations of some of Yeats's late poems require both poets to confront the temptation toward what Jacques Maritain called 'angelism': an attempt, intellectual or spiritual, to abstract oneself from the contingencies of the natural order in a 'lust for pure spirituality'.¹⁴ Jones's exoteric poetics refuses angelism; rather than seeking transcendence, it attends to the creaturely and privileges the sacred words and gestures of the Catholic sacraments, especially the supreme sacrament of the Eucharist. This orientation binds the poet not only to a sacralised order of signs and symbols but also to the materiality of language itself. For Eliot, a healing of the breach between the Word and words comes either from the free gift of grace or from a contemplative practice that goes beyond discursive thought, 'an occupation for the saint'.¹⁵ For Jones, it is a matter of outward ritual, in which the field of signs is sanctified and energised.

This sacramental sense of how language may be revived and redeemed locates poetic utterance within a scheme of fall and redemption. As Thomas Whitaker frames it, 'For David Jones sign-making is an aesthetic action that requires an assumption of transcendent harmony, leads us toward a vision of that harmony, and also heightens our awareness of the disharmonies of our fallen experience'. The effects of the Fall include a diminished sense of self which is inseparable from a degraded language, and 'the erosion of poetic discourse' by the materialism and secularism of his age is for Jones an affliction for which sacramental art can effect a

¹⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther—Descartes—Rousseau* (1928; repr., London: Sheed & Ward, 1941), 54, 79.

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1950), 136.

kind of redemption.¹⁶ Jones wrote, ‘It must be understood that “art” as such is “heaven”, it has outflanked “the fall”—it is analogous not to faith but to charity’.¹⁷ In analogising art to charity, Jones gives it an efficaciousness beyond the largely interior experience of faith; as an act of love, it exercises a transforming power. Jones makes the nature of that power explicit in discussing how the liturgical hymn *Vexilla Regis* translates a martial symbol, along with the often brutal history attending it, into an emblem of Christ’s triumph: ‘It is the sort of thing that poets are for; to redeem is part of their job’.¹⁸

For Jones, such redemption is required for a culture that no longer sees history as theophany, and within which the poet searches in vain for something like Whitman’s ‘handkerchief of the Lord’.¹⁹ In the poem ‘A, a, a, Domine Deus’, Jones uses the words of Jeremiah as the type of his own lamentation:

I have felt for His Wounds
 in nozzles and containers.
 I have wondered for the automatic devices.
 I have tested the inane patterns
 without prejudice.
 I have been on my guard
 not to condemn the unfamiliar.
 For it is easy to miss Him
 at the turn of a civilisation.²⁰

The juxtaposition of Christ’s wounds with the aesthetically as well as spiritually lifeless accoutrements of twentieth-century civilisation is at once absurd and deeply

¹⁶ Thomas Whitaker, ‘*Homo Faber, Homo Sapiens*’, in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, ed. John Matthias (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1989), 472; Kathleen Henderson Staudt, ‘Incarnation Reconsidered: The Poem as Sacramental Act in *The Jones, Anathematathemata* of David Jones’, *Contemporary Literature* 26, no. 1 (Spring, 1985), 15.

¹⁷ David Jones, *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings*, ed. Harman Grisewood, Faber Finds ed. (1978; repr., Faber and Faber Limited, 2009), 164.

¹⁸ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 261.

¹⁹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett, Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 33.

²⁰ David Jones, *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (1974; repr., London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1995), 9.

sad, an index of the estrangement the speaker feels from a desacralised environment. The fallen self, an eternal soul diminished by Original Sin and alienated from the ground of its being, participates in the desacralisation and objectification of that environment.

The Anthemata, Jones's grand project of resacralisation, is certainly, as Neil Corcoran has noted, 'a poem about its own possibility'.²¹ Jones's own explication of the poem's title—'the blessed things that have taken on what is cursed and the profane things that are somehow redeemed...[t]hings lifted up, or in whatever manner made over to the gods'—is simply a twofold definition of the sacred, and the poem's project is redemptive, in that it seeks to purify the language of the tribe by recovering its sacred dimension.²² In Jones's vision of a world where souls are redeemed by the sanctifying grace of a God who is Wholly Other, the sacrament of art may, within the order of signs, effect a lesser grace of its own. If it cannot achieve a linguistic, which is to say cultural, redemption, it can at least enshrine the sacred *signa* within a verbal *templum*. The poetics through which *The Anthemata* undertakes this project are inseparable from Jones's notion of the Absolute and its relation to the fallen self.

Intellectual Backgrounds

Around the time Private David Jones, 15th Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers, stumbled across a Catholic mass in an abandoned barn on the Western Front, Paul Tillich, a chaplain in the German army, was discovering the ordering and redeeming power of art through postcards and other reproductions he studied while enduring the

²¹ Neil Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds: A Study of the Anthemata of David Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), 1.

²² David Jones, *The Anthemata: Fragments of an Attempted Writing* (1952; repr., London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010), 29.

monotony and horror of the trenches.²³ The two complementary encounters—a young artist with the Eucharist, a future theologian with painting—exemplify the intersection of trauma, art, and religion that would shape a good deal of literature and theology in the decades that followed. Jones spent much of his time contemplating that juncture, and understanding the exoteric poetics of *The Anathemata* requires a reconnaissance of both the intellectual influences on Jones's thought and the emotional undercurrents of his beliefs.

'David never got out of the trenches', said Jones's friend Stanley Honeyman, a veteran of the Second World War who came to know the poet in his later years.²⁴ Like countless other survivors of the trenches, Jones suffered lasting emotional distress, and while the full extent to which his wartime experiences determined his long-term psychological difficulties is unknowable, they certainly played a crucial role.²⁵ His later symptoms, which in addition to two severe breakdowns included debilitating depression, insomnia, agoraphobia, panic attacks, and episodes of rage, are consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁶ In light of those problems, Jones's embrace of an exoteric, sacramental faith can be seen as an attempt to avoid a more interior mode of spirituality and thereby set a firewall between his constructed self and the otherwise ungovernable emotions underneath. The Lady of the Pool's wry observation in *The Anathemata*, 'What's under works up', here takes on a cruel

²³ Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, ed. John Dillenberger with Jane Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 12.

²⁴ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 147.

²⁵ Jonathan Miles and Derek Shiel, in *David Jones: The Maker Unmade* (1995; repr., Bridgend: Seren, 2003) assert the importance of Jones's 'unresolved attachment to his mother' as well (253).

²⁶ In conversation with Tanya Khazan, MD, PhD, 30 September 2011. Miles and Shiel, in *David Jones: The Maker Unmade*, chronicle a range of Jones's symptoms: 'wanting to "build a barrier of sandbags halfway up" his French windows', having a panic attack when left alone in a parking lot for a few minutes, 'rages "of impotence"', hurling books across the room when he was looking for things (270).

irony.²⁷ One psychiatrist specialising in the treatment of combat veterans has seen foremost in Jones—not least in his consuming fear of germs and obsessive rubbing of already clean drinking glasses—a case of obsessive-compulsive disorder, which can be comorbid with post-traumatic stress disorder. Given that obsessive-compulsive disorder consists of behavioral rituals adopted as ways to contain anxiety, Jones’s affinity for highly ritualistic religious practice takes on an added dimension.²⁸

Catholicism did not just provide Jones with a ritual framework by which to order his experience; it also gave him a theodicy. From Jones’s perspective, as Oswyn Murray suggests, ‘The fact is that in each generation the ordinary man suffers, and can make sense of his suffering only by understanding its sacramental meaning, its reality in history’.²⁹ Murray rightly asserts the importance of Jones’s wartime experience to his desire for a religious vision that would contextualise and redeem the suffering and wastage he experienced and witnessed. Though Murray’s description of ‘sacramental meaning’ as ‘reality in history’ is vague, it points to the sacralisation of time effected by the Christian mythos Jones chose to inhabit.

In seeking a religious vision that would make sense of history, Jones certainly flirted with what Stephen Spender described as the ‘nostalgic fallacy of vicarious living’: the notion that, because individual and communal character are both shaped by the social and cultural environment, ‘if the organic community were somehow restored, we would become different’.³⁰ After his conversion to Catholicism in 1921 and subsequent artistic and intellectual apprenticeship with the sculptor and engraver Eric Gill, Jones associated with the young Catholic intelligentsia of London, a circle

²⁷ Jones, *Anthemata*, 164.

²⁸ In conversation with Tanya Khazan, MD, PhD, 30 September 2011. The noted obsessive behaviors are mentioned in Miles and Shiel, *The Maker Unmade*, 264.

²⁹ Murray, ‘It was a dark and stormy night’, 7.

³⁰ Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London: Methuen, 1965), 240.

in which nostalgia for the ‘organic community’ of a lost Catholic culture was common credence. Above all, Jones shared a belief in Hilaire Belloc’s concept of ‘the Break’, the idea that the nineteenth century had seen Western civilisation take a ‘turn’ that changed ‘signs in general and the whole notion and concept of sign’. Jones’s conviction that he and his peers were fighting a rearguard action against ‘the technological, scientific advances which...were destructive of immemorial ways of life, of rooted cultures of all sorts’ expresses a more ecumenical, even humanistic, perspective than some of his associates would share, but the sense of an abandonment of the sacred is unmistakable. Early on, Jones was adopting the notion that language itself had been deracinated and corrupted by ‘the Break’, which became for him a ‘lesion’, a type of the Fall.³¹ Jones’s evocation of ‘the Break’ in his preface to *The Anthemata* signals the book’s redemptive poetic agenda.

One member of that Catholic intelligentsia in particular exerted a lasting influence on Jones: Christopher Dawson. Dawson’s vision of culture and history—of culture as inseparable from a vivifying and uniting religious tradition whose ‘terms of reference were common to all’, and of Western history as having entered an era devoid of that sustaining force—not only found an echo in the cultural pronouncements of Eliot, another like-minded patron and friend; it remained an intellectual touchstone for Jones.³² He referred to his friend as ‘Tiger Dawson’, and appreciated that, while many intellectuals ‘make you feel ignorant...Dawson made you realize that you knew more than you suspected’. More importantly, Jones felt a kinship with Dawson, ‘whose brain is the right *kind*...the *temper*...the *sort* of thing that a chap regards as *significant*...that is hard to come by’.³³

³¹ Jones, *Anthemata*, 15-16; Jones, *The Dying Gaul*, 46; Jones, *Anthemata*, 18.

³² Jones, *Anthemata*, 14.

³³ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat* 132, 119.

Dawson looms as a less obvious but more important influence on Jones's sense of history than Oswald Spengler, whose *The Decline of the West* Jones first read in 1942. Though Jones adopted some of Spengler's discourse, especially the difference between culture and civilisation, he criticised the prejudiced and reductive scheme the book sets forth. For Jones, Spengler was 'so right, and, as I think, also so wrong', and his 'male thought-world' did an injustice to the feminine aspect of culture as Jones saw it. For Jones, history is often 'a criminal dissipation of noble things', and Spengler's view of history is tenable 'if we confine ourselves to the natural order'; Spenglerian pessimism 'can only be attacked on other grounds, and those are metaphysical ones, that is to say, in the last resort, by the "optimism" of the Saints'.³⁴ As Staudt has observed, 'it is as poetic myth that Spengler's formulations enter Jones's work', and Dilworth has noted how Jones's choice of seasonal and diurnal metaphors implies a possibility of cultural renewal that defies the fatalism of Spengler's terminal analogy of human lifespans.³⁵ A moribund culture lacking significant depth and vitality can, like the waste land, conceivably be restored.

With Jones's critique of Spengler in mind, we should be careful not to read too much into what Elizabeth Ward calls Jones's 'Chelsea period', for Jones's intellectual scrupulousness was such that, apart from Catholic doctrine, he never wedded himself completely to any ideology. In his essay 'Notes on the 1930s', he acknowledges that he was 'in a somewhat peripheral position to the major "movements" of that time. Perhaps "complex" or "ambiguous" might be a better adjective'.³⁶ Though he believed that his London circle had 'civilized sensibilities', he was circumspect about

³⁴ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 115, 154, 159.

³⁵ Kathleen Henderson Staudt, 'The Decline of the West and the Optimism of the Saints: David Jones's Reading of Oswald Spengler', in Matthias, *Man and Poet*, 448; Thomas Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 181.

³⁶ Ward, *Mythmaker*, 42-3; Jones, *The Dying Gaul*, 41.

any absolutes outside religion. In a later letter to Harman Grisewood, one of that circle, Jones averred, ‘I do believe that the truth always lies “in between”, can only be caught sight of for a moment at an oblique angle—is never obvious....a simplification is a retrogression...a refusal to face the labyrinth’.³⁷ This cognizance of the complexity and elusiveness of truth bespeaks Jones’s abiding sense of the fallen condition of humanity.

What engaged Jones much more than historical speculation was aesthetics, and he worked out the core principles of his aesthetic philosophy at Ditchling, the Catholic artists’ and artisans’ colony founded in Sussex by Eric Gill and Hilary Pepler. It was there that Jones became a Dominican tertiary in 1922. For Jones, Ditchling was the definitive flowering of an aestheticism that, though not entirely free of decadence—he later described it as ‘an exasperated search for beauty’—was nonetheless directed toward the transcendent and grounded in communal values.³⁸ There, Jones encountered the theological aesthetics of Jacques Maritain, a defining influence on the poetics Jones would espouse in his later essays and inscribe into *The Anathemata*.

Jones’s understanding of Maritain’s enormously influential aesthetics came almost exclusively from one book: *Art et Scolastique (Art and Scholasticism)*, first published in 1920. The 1923 translation by Fr. John O’Connor, titled *The Philosophy of Art* and printed at St. Dominic’s Press in Ditchling, became an aesthetic bible of sorts to the Ditchling community. Jones later wrote, ‘It seemed to some of us at that period that important classifications made by Maritain...would have a correspondingly clarifying effect upon all subsequent discussion of the nature of Ars’.

³⁷ Jones, letter to Harman Grisewood, 3 June 1940, Harman Grisewood Papers, Georgetown University Library, Washington, DC.

³⁸ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 299.

The most important classification to Jones was that of ‘man as artist as distinct in category from man as moral being’.³⁹

In *Art and Scholasticism*, Maritain arrives at this position by starting, in Thomist fashion, from the Aristotelian distinction between Doing (*prakton*) and Making (*poieiton*), and inferring a consequent demarcation between Prudentia and Ars:

Art, which straightens out Making and not Doing, stands outside the human boundary; it has an end, rules, values, which are not those of man, but those of the work to be produced. For Art this work is everything, she owns but one law—the exigencies and the welfare of the work.⁴⁰

Because a work of art is answerable only to the integrity of its own form, Art ‘frees one from the human; it settles the *artifex*, artist or craftsman, in a world apart, fenced, bounded, detached’. The virtue of a work of art, then, rests on its formal qualities—*splendor formae*, in the terms of Aquinas—and its powers of signification. Formal integrity allows for ‘expression or manifestation, in a harmoniously proportioned work, of some principle of intelligibility which shines forth from it.... This it is too which gives art its value of *universality*’. The more rich in signification—though Maritain is quick to specify that such signification be ‘spontaneous and intuitively grasped’ as opposed to ‘hieroglyphic’—‘the vaster and the richer and the higher will be the possibility of joy and beauty’. In order to reach these heights, the artist must engage in a kind of kenotic relationship to the Muse: ‘the artist, so as not to break in pieces his art or his soul, must simply be, *qua* artist, what art wants him to be—a good workman’. This humility in the service of beauty, which is ‘a likeness of God, an absolute’, allows artists to ‘escape from the individuality in which matter encloses

³⁹ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 172; *The Dying Gaul*, 123.

⁴⁰ Jacques Maritain, *The Philosophy of Art, Being “Art et Scholastique” by Jacques Maritain, translated by the Rev. John O’Connor, S.T.P. with an introduction by Eric Gill O.S.D.* (Ditchling, Sussex: S. Dominic’s Press, 1923), 8.

them...[from] their sensual needs and their sentimental self'. Maritain sees this experience exemplified in medieval artists: 'The builders of the cathedrals set no sort of *thesis* before themselves. They were, according to the fine saying of Dulac, "men who did not know themselves"''.⁴¹

Jones pursued this last point, arguing that 'the artist must make things *sub specie aeternitatis*', with the caveat that 'only what is loved and known can be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*'. This implies that, in an age that lacks a coherent communal reservoir of symbols, the artist's task is to 'lift up valid signs'. In the preface to *The Anthemata*, Jones establishes that his poem is precisely such an undertaking; by a 'showing forth of our inheritance', he sets out to recover and revivify the *signa* of the West within the Catholic schema he loves.⁴²

This redemptive vision of poetry arises from Jones's fusion of Maritain's aesthetics with Catholic sacramental theology and a Dawsonian sense of cultural decline. In Maritain's assertion that art 'delivers one from the human' lurks the implication, later stated baldly by Jones, that art 'has outflanked "the fall"'. Maritain himself asserts that it is through the disinterested work of artists that the human race will in some fundamental way survive an era of godlessness.⁴³ It is thus the gratuitousness of art, its disinterested quality, that Jones contrasts so dramatically throughout his career with the spiritual deadness of things made purely for 'utility', and the dehumanising effect of valorising the purely 'utile' above the gratuitous.⁴⁴

Jones's most famous essay, 'Art and Sacrament', rehearses much of Maritain's aesthetics. But Jones goes beyond Maritain's notion of art. Where Maritain

⁴¹ Maritain, *Philosophy of Art*, 8, 86-7, 84, 53, 47, 97-8.

⁴² Jones, *Anthemata*, 24, 23, 10.

⁴³ Jones, *The Dying Gaul*, 164; Maritain, *Philosophy of Art*, 55.

⁴⁴ Jones asserts this distinction most explicitly in 'Religion and the Muses', *Epoch and Artist*, 97-106, and 'The Utile', *Epoch and Artist*, 180-85.

is careful to avoid blurring the boundaries between art and sacrament—‘to avoid that trivializing of human agency that occurs when theological judgements are invoked at the wrong level’, as Rowan Williams has observed—Jones expands the definition of sacrament beyond the confines of Catholic doctrine in order to formulate his own aesthetic.⁴⁵ For him, the ‘secret’ of the Eucharist is ‘the inner secret and nodal point of *all the arts*’.⁴⁶ In his assertion that all human sign-making is a fundamentally sacred activity, Jones invests all signification with a sacramental function; with this move, he makes possible the poetics of cultural redemption that inform *The Anathemata*.

From Sacramental Theology to Sacramental Poetics

Jones’s recollection of his pivotal wartime encounter with the Eucharist offers a window on the merging of sacrament and art in *The Anathemata*. By his account, the incident occurred when he returned to the front after recovering from a bullet wound he received in the Somme—the events that form the narrative basis of *In Parenthesis*. Jones stumbled across the ceremony in an abandoned barn while foraging for firewood. His description of the scene, the first mass he had ever encountered, is limned in the retrospective radiance one might expect from a devout convert, but its symbolic and aesthetic import remains telling:

But what I saw through the small gap in the wall was not the dim emptiness I had expected but the back of a sacerdos in a gilt-hued *planeta*, two points of flickering candlelight no doubt lent an extra sense of goldness to the vestment and a golden warmth seemed, by the same agency, to lend the white altar cloths and the white linen of the celebrant’s alb and amice and maniple. [...] I felt immediately that oneness between the Offerant and those toughs that clustered round him in the dim-lit byre—a thing I had never felt remotely as a Protestant at the Office of Holy Communion in spite of the insistence of Protestant theology on the ‘priesthood of the laity’.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London: Continuum, 2005), 10.

⁴⁶ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 190.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 249.

The passage, written just over a year before Jones's death, incorporates elements characteristic of *The Anathemata* and other, later poems: the Joycean affinity for incantatory repetitions and obscure, etymologically charged diction; the archaic sense of candlelit chiarascuro; the hymnic echo in such phrases as 'dim-lit byre'; the evocation of Arthurian legend through juxtaposition of martial prowess and pious humility; the conflation of the Paschal mystery celebrated in the Eucharist with imagery recalling the Nativity. It lends weight to Elizabeth Ward's assertion that both 'the sheer visual appeal' of the incident and its incongruity with the surrounding desolation imprinted on Jones the sense that Catholicism was 'a stable repository of absolute values, and the supreme guardian of the concept of tradition'.⁴⁸ But Ward's assessment, however insightful, ignores the numinous quality conveyed by the quiet but insistent rhythm and hieratic imagery of the passage. It is not the event itself but Jones's enshrinement of it in the narrative of memory that counts here, and he casts it as a theophany—a theophany of a particular, sacramentally mediated kind, consistent with Catholic dogma.

That sense of the sacraments as the means by which God communicates with humanity is inseparable from Jones's sense of God as Wholly Other, such that the Incarnation, 'the penetration of the timeless into time at some long past historic date', realised anew in every Eucharist, is the necessary bridge between the Absolute and the temporal, between the Word and words.⁴⁹ His yoking of the Catholic sacraments with the poetic act thus has enormous implications for how poetry works and what it can accomplish. Jones's careful insistence that the connexion is 'by analogy only' may keep him from straying into an aestheticist heresy, but it does not deny that the

⁴⁸ Ward, *Mythmaker*, 20.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 223.

vision of poem as sacrament invokes categories and forces that operate within the linguistic and cultural spheres much as the Catholic sacraments operate in the sphere of the sacred.⁵⁰ The poet is then a kind of lay priest, enacting verbal rituals that energise the sign-world and communicate a culturally salvific grace to readers. In pursuing this line of thought, Jones follows the sacramental theology of the Jesuit Maurice de la Taille, whom he called ‘my theologian’.⁵¹ According to de la Taille, the Eucharist does not only confer sanctifying grace but can ‘vivify mortal man’, a rhetorical intensification of the Roman Catechism’s description of the rite as ‘the celestial food of the soul, preserving and supporting spiritual life’.⁵² Jones translates this revitalising power of the sacraments into *The Anthemata*’s programme of cultural recollection and recuperation.

For Jones, as Rowan Williams observes, the Mass is ‘the place where the meaning of meaning is displayed’.⁵³ This is no exaggeration; Jones himself wrote that ‘the Mass *makes sense* of everything’, and said that ‘understanding the Mass is the work of a lifetime’.⁵⁴ His attachment to it was such that he deplored the ‘wholly unnecessary and indeed disastrous changes in the shape of the Roman liturgy’ that followed the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Changing the form of the Mass meant, for Jones, capitulating to the general depletion and abandonment of the signs that had once united and invigorated Western culture. The reforms of Vatican II had not yet happened when Jones wrote *The Anthemata*, but his response to them—‘like

⁵⁰ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 171.

⁵¹ Thomas Dilworth, *Reading David Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 170.

⁵² Maurice de la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), 36; *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. Rev. J. Donovan (Dublin: W. Folds and Son, 1829), 246-7.

⁵³ Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 76.

⁵⁴ Saunders Lewis, ‘Two Letters Introduced by Saunders Lewis’, *Agenda* 11, no. 4 – 12, no.1 (Winter/Spring 1973-4), 20; William Blissett, *The Long Conversation: A Memoir of David Jones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 50.

a man who has been robbed and beaten and left for dead, and won't pretend to like it'—indicates the extent to which he believed exoteric form was essential to meaning in spiritual matters.⁵⁵

In taking that position, Jones followed closely the Catholic doctrine that the duality of human nature necessitates a twofold communication with the Absolute. As Aquinas frames it, 'since man is composed of soul and body, each of these should be applied to the worship of God; the soul by an interior worship; the body by an outward worship'.⁵⁶ Following Aquinas, Jones insists that Christianity 'is committed to certain bodily manual acts. It is not a matter of *mental God-directed thoughts only*'. Put most bluntly, 'No artefacture no Christian religion'.⁵⁷ Jones thus sees Catholicism as the highest and most acute expression of human nature: 'as Catholics, we know...our inescapable commitments to signs or sacraments. Other men are, in fact, implicitly committed, but we are committed in the most explicit manner possible'.⁵⁸ To be Catholic and celebrate Mass is to come fully into one's humanity by participating ritually in the divine order. It is also to realise fully the incarnational nature of language.

Basil Bunting recognised how this orientation enters into *The Anthemata*: that the poem makes of the Mass, and the Eucharist in particular, 'a complex of symbols capable of ordering and interpreting pretty well the whole of the history of the world and the whole order of nature...I can say that because I am not a Catholic

⁵⁵ Blissett, *The Long Conversation*, 37-8, 71.

⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *The 'Summa Theologica' of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd edition (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1927), 8:151.

⁵⁷ René Hague, *A Commentary on 'The Anthemata' of David Jones* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 248; Jones, *Anthemata*, 31.

⁵⁸ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 177.

and am thoroughly out of sympathy with Catholicism'.⁵⁹ Bunting makes clear that he is speaking on aesthetic terms, primarily as a poet about a poet, much as Yeats was when he referred to Eliot as using Christianity as a set of symbols with which to order his poetry.⁶⁰ In doing so, Bunting fails to account for the fact that, for Jones, the Mass is never merely a complex of symbols but an enactment of the central, sacred truth of existence. To comprehend the poetics of *The Anathemata*, we must understand key aspects of that enactment.

The Roman Catechism, the most authoritative Catholic Catechism from the Council of Trent to the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, defines the sacraments and their place in the Christian economy of salvation in terms of signification: 'They are signs instituted by God, not invented by man, which we believe, with an unhesitating faith, to carry with them that sacred efficacy of which they are the signs'. As the Catechism notes, its definition is an extension of Augustine's: 'A Sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing'.⁶¹ Jones's analogical manner of thinking allows him to adopt a broad notion of sacrament, based on the recognition that human beings by nature deal in physical signs: 'man is unavoidably a sacramentalist and...his works are sacramental in nature', because they 'can only be described as having the nature of a sign'.⁶² He then elaborates his aesthetics using several core principles of Catholic sacramental theology: anamnesis, transubstantiation, efficacious signification, and instrumental causation. Jones explicitly incorporates the first three into his writings on art and poetry; the last he never mentions explicitly, but it holds vital and so far unexamined implications for his poetic project.

⁵⁹ Thomas Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 5-6.

⁶⁰ W. B. Yeats, preface to *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, 10.

⁶¹ *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 141, 138.

⁶² Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 155.

The principle of anamnesis, which holds that the Eucharist is a re-calling of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, Jones applies analogically to art. Poetry is, according to him, ‘to be diagnosed as “dangerous” because it evokes and recalls, is a kind of *anamnesis* of, i.e., is an effective recalling of, something loved’.⁶³ His notion of anamnesis owes much to the explanation offered by Gregory Dix: “re-calling or “re-presenting” before God an event in the past, so that it becomes *here and now operative by its effects*’.⁶⁴ The ‘operative’ nature of the Eucharistic anamnesis is inseparable from its saving power. Jones conjures this principle repeatedly in his writings on art. He clarifies his notion of sign using the discourse of anamnesis, not only adopting the word itself but noting that human beings unavoidably make gestures and artifacts ‘not merely with utile, but with significant, intent; that is to say a “re-presenting”, a “showing again under other forms”, an “effective recalling” of something was intended’.⁶⁵

As with other sacramental elements in Jones’s poetics, exactly how far he believes his analogy to go is open to question. Dilworth rather vaguely says that Jones’s artistic version of anamnesis is ‘a special kind of remembrance’; Corcoran goes further, arguing that Jones’s own anathemata, his own uplifted signs, ‘are intended to be evoked and re-presented with such an intensity of reverential remembrance that they become a living, incarnate reality and an embodiment of a dense recession of human values, attachments and significations’.⁶⁶ Corcoran is particularly apt in his assertion that artistic anamnesis has, for Jones, a vitalising cultural power parallel to the energising spiritual function of the Eucharist itself.

⁶³ Jones, *Anathemata*, 21.

⁶⁴ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), 161.

⁶⁵ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 155.

⁶⁶ Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 10; Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, 11.

In Catholic doctrine, the particular anamnesis enacted in the Eucharist is inseparable from transubstantiation, and Jones's deliberations on art as transubstantiation are both wide-ranging and incisive. It is vital to note that the pivotal moment of the Catholic Eucharist, the speaking of the words of consecration, is literally the act of 'making this thing other'.⁶⁷ As affirmed by the Roman Catechism, 'the words of the consecration effectuate what they signify', such that the substance of the Eucharistic species are transformed into the body and blood of Christ.⁶⁸ 'Substance' is used here in the Thomist sense of the abiding essence of a thing as distinct from its 'accidents', its temporary, sensible manifestations. Thus, the substance of the Eucharistic species is 'made other' into the substance of the risen, spiritual body of Christ while its accidents still appear as bread and wine. According to Aquinas, the sacrament operates this way partly because a direct vision of Christ would be blinding, as it was to Saul on the road to Tarsus; 'in the present state of life, we are unable to gaze on the Divine Truth in Itself'.⁶⁹ In this manner the Eucharist is a paradoxical theophany, because it both reveals Christ substantially and veils him accidentally, under the form of the Eucharistic species.⁷⁰ This paradoxical mode of revelation enters into *The Anathemata*, which Eucharistically reveals and veils its central concern: Christ rests at the heart of the poem, but not once is he ever mentioned by name.

De la Taille applies the principle of transubstantiation to the biblical narrative of the Paschal Mystery. He emphasises that Christ, by offering his body and blood symbolically at the Last Supper, initiates a transubstantiation that culminates on

⁶⁷ Jones, *Anathemata*, 49.

⁶⁸ *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 226.

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 152.

⁷⁰ Richard Conrad, O. P., 'Sacramental Theology', lecture no. 3 (Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 19 October 2011).

Calvary. For de la Taille, the Supper and the Crucifixion are not separate events but the two necessary and complementary halves of the same event. In the upper room, where Christ gathers with his disciples, he ‘puts himself SYMBOLICALLY in the state of Victim’, so that his ‘MYSTIC (symbolical and mystical are one and the same) immolation binds him to the effective and painful immolation of Calvary’. Once Christ performs the ritual of the Last Supper, ‘[h]e is no longer his own’, but has yoked himself to his destiny and, through the Supper, to a timeless ritual signification.⁷¹ This concept of a binding transubstantiation, not in terms of the Eucharistic species but more generally from material embodiment into eternal existence as sign, fascinated Jones, and is surely why he ends his seminal essay ‘Art and Sacrament’ with a definitive sentence from de la Taille: ‘He placed Himself in the order of signs’.⁷² René Hague, a close friend of Jones as well as one of the poet’s chief commentators, asserts that ‘the very scheme upon which *The Anathemata* is built is derived from de la Taille’s presentation of the Last Supper and Calvary’.⁷³

Jones has little difficulty translating the concept of transubstantiation into artistic terms. The artist ‘is, at bottom and always, an inveterate believer in “transubstantiations” of some sort. The sign must be the thing signified under forms of his particular art’. Furthering the sacramental analogy, he asserts that ‘[w]hat the artist lifts up must have a kind of transubstantiated actual-ness’.⁷⁴ The notion of art as a kind of transubstantiation had already been advanced in Jones’s lifetime, though in purely secular terms, through Clive Bell’s notion of ‘significant form’, which is (in terms that sound almost Thomist) ‘haunted by that Universal which informs every particular’, and in Roger Fry’s insistence that ‘an equivalence, not a likeness, of

⁷¹ Maurice de la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 10-11.

⁷² Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 179.

⁷³ René Hague, *A Commentary*, 4.

⁷⁴ Jones, *The Dying Gaul*, 138; Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 210.

nature' is the goal of painting.⁷⁵ Jones clearly had Bell's and Fry's ideas in mind in 1919, during his training at Westminster art school, where in discussions of 'post-Impressionist *theory*' he likened the doctrine of transubstantiation to the notion that 'a painting must be a *thing* and not an impression of something'. In 'Art and Sacrament', he frames this notion explicitly: 'For the painter may say to himself: "This is not a representation of a mountain, it is 'mountain' under the form of paint". Indeed, unless he says this consciously or unconsciously, he will not be a painter worth a candle....This also applies to the poet'.⁷⁶ The phrase 'under the form of' is classic Catholic Eucharistic theology, echoing similar phrases used by various catechisms, including the Penny Catechism, to describe transubstantiation.

The discourse of art as transubstantiation extended from the secular arguments of Bell and Fry to the explicitly Catholic formulations not only of Jones but of Eric Gill and even the later Maritain. In his 1954 book *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Maritain actually quotes Gill on the topic: 'What is a work of art? A word made flesh....Made flesh; a thing, a thing seen, a thing known, the immeasurable translated into terms of the measurable. From the highest to the lowest that is the substance of works of art'.⁷⁷ Jones echoes that pronouncement when he asserts in an essay on Gill that in the engravings of Gill himself, 'the Word is made stone'.⁷⁸ Transubstantiation even entered into Jones's more casual discussions of art. In a letter to Saunders Lewis he suggests that the 'substance' of a work of art can as easily be an interior experience as an outward object; describing a painting by Winifred

⁷⁵ Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison, *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd in association with the Open University, 1982), 68, 77, 90.

⁷⁶ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 232; Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 170.

⁷⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Bollingen Series 35 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), 68.

⁷⁸ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 299.

Nicholson, he says it presents ‘not the flowers but “her wonder”’. Perhaps we can say, by analogy, that she showed forth the “substance” rather than the “accidents”.⁷⁹

Critics have differed sharply over the full implications of Jones’s use of the analogy. Pointing out that Jones would never claim for art the sort of transformative power reserved in Catholic doctrine for the Eucharist, Jonathan Miles argues that ‘[t]he artwork as a system of signs encompasses a presence *in alio esse*, that is, with virtual as well as actual being, but this is to posit no more than the Protestant idea of the significant relation between bread and body; transubstantiation, which is in point of fact a magical effect, need not come into it’.⁸⁰ But Miles’s argument, though correct in suggesting that Jones would never elevate art to the level of the Eucharist itself, begs the question of why Jones would choose such a weighty analogy. Rowan Williams sees more in Jones’s use of the sacramental:

It’s not just a kind of Protestant, metaphorical thing or transfer of ‘qualities’: something like the whole active presence of the object is being re-presented by the artist....It is not that the sacramental is being reduced to the level of one discrete object ‘signifying’ another, but that the artistic work is being accorded a deeper metaphysical status.⁸¹

These two perceptions can conceivably be reconciled by looking further into the sacramental model Jones uses. In Catholic tradition, sacraments operate on three levels of signification: *sacramentum tantum*, *res et sacramentum* and *res tantum*. *Sacramentum tantum* is the outward sign, *res et sacramentum* the conjunction of the sign and the thing signified, and *res tantum* the spiritual reality to which the sacrament points.⁸² In the Eucharist, transubstantiation is the *res et sacramentum*, not the spiritual reality of the mystical union of Christ and the Church that the Eucharist

⁷⁹ Saunders Lewis, ‘Two Letters Introduced by Saunders Lewis’, 18.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Miles, *Backgrounds to David Jones: A Study in Sources and Drafts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), 21.

⁸¹ Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 62.

⁸² Paul Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1999), 15.

effects.⁸³ If we translate this triple signification into the terms of Winifred Nicholson's painting, the marked canvas is the *sacramentum tantum*, its actual embodiment of 'her wonder' is the *res et sacramentum*, and the shared experience of Nicholson's wonder, and of the common humanity underlying that experience, is the *res tantum*.

Transubstantiation takes place at the climax of the Mass, the Prayer of Consecration in the Eucharist. It is at this point that the Eucharist fully realises its function as the efficacious sign of the Church as the mystical body of Christ. The notion of an efficacious sign, a *signum efficax*, is central to Jones's notion of art in general and poetry in particular. The opening of *The Anthemata*, in which 'the holy and venerable hands lift up an efficacious sign', not only presents the Roman Mass in order to establish the Eucharistic frame of the poem; it also suggests the energising function, within the order of signs, that *The Anthemata* is intended to perform.⁸⁴ In the tightly knit theology of the Eucharist, the principle of efficacious signification is closely tied to that of anamnesis, which, as Dix explains, makes what it recalls 'here and now operative by its effects'.⁸⁵ As de la Taille puts it, 'it is distinctive of sacraments to accomplish what they signify, in fact to accomplish by signifying it'.⁸⁶

For Jones, this divinely ordained efficaciousness, which for Catholics only occurs in liturgy and scripture, has its analogue in signs that retain their constructive, binding, and sustaining force for a culture. In his preface to *The Anthemata*, he poses his central poetic question: 'When is a sign not a sign? When is what was valid no longer valid?' Citing Picasso as an example, he asserts that the motive of all art, but

⁸³ Richard Conrad, O.P., 'Sacramental Theology', lecture no. 4 (Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 2 November 2011).

⁸⁴ Jones, *Anthemata*, 49.

⁸⁵ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 161.

⁸⁶ De la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 28.

particularly modern art, must be ‘the desire to uncover a valid sign’. The problem, as Jones frames it here, is not simply that signs have changed, but that signification as it was practised for much of Western history may no longer be possible. This is why Jones says, ‘It may be that the kind of thing I have been trying to make is no longer makeable in the kind of way in which I have been trying to make it’.⁸⁷ Jones displays here a kind of nostalgia for a lost experience of symbols. In *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dix cites the theologian Adolf von Harnack’s observation that, in the early Christian era, symbols were understood not as mere representations but as somehow embodying what they signified, such that ‘The “symbol” *manifests* the secret reality’.⁸⁸ Jones’s notion of artistic transubstantiation attempts to recuperate this experience of a sacred, mysterious identity of signifier and signified. In anthropological terms, this means viewing art as a kind of sympathetic magic, not merely imitation or expression but invocation or conjuration.

The range and force of Jones’s sacramental analogies blur the boundary between the sacred and the profane, reflecting his conviction that all history is theophany. The mythopoeic aspect of *The Anthemata*, its profusion of pagan and pre-historical data as well as Christian iconography and theology, can be seen as advancing a more anthropological than religious theme, but the form and content of the work are radically Christ-centred; the Cross, that irruption of the Absolute into the temporal, is the supreme sign, the sign to which all other signs ultimately point, the source and end of all the meanings that inhabit the temporal world.

In this regard, it is crucial to recognise that Jones’s artistic thinking is not predominantly linear but lateral and typological. He avowed this explicitly in notes to himself on painting that he prepared for Dr. Crichton Miller in 1947: ‘Keep in mind

⁸⁷ Jones, *Anthemata*, 25, 27, 15.

⁸⁸ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 256.

that one human being is all human beings & that the idiosyncracies of any one example are relatively unimportant'. In his painted portraits, Jones 'felt compelled to have a mythological model' or archetype, of which he could make his subject a type.⁸⁹ On the anthropological level, this style of thought is crudely structuralist; on the religious level, it conforms to the typology that has shaped centuries of Christian scriptural exegesis and historical understanding. For Jones, the search for a valid sign can only end at the Eucharistic altar. That ineluctable destination determines what the form and content of *The Anathemata* reveal: Jones is not so much searching for valid signs as attempting to recover the efficaciousness of the signs for which he is nostalgic. If he can redeem the signs, then at least culturally he may help to redeem the time, or at least offer inspired resistance to its inexorable current.

Jones is, of course, acutely conscious of the gulf between the Word, 'God's uniquely complete self-communication', and the words a poet must use to restore the cultural efficaciousness of sacred signs. But Whitaker's observation that Jones understands 'that our signs are heuristic acts of some indeterminacy, historically conditioned, far from transparent, and open to elucidation only through other signs' misses the analogical mode of Jones's thought.⁹⁰ While Jones certainly knows this to be the fallen condition of language, his sacramental model of art intimates a higher form of signification, one that has an analogous efficaciousness to that of a consecration. This implication, which has not been fully pursued by Jones's critics, hinges on the idea of agency that informs the Mass.

In their power to fuse signifier and signified—rooted in the Old Testament principle that whatever God utters becomes reality—the words of institution, spoken

⁸⁹ Jones to Crichton Miller, October 1947, Georgetown University Library; Miles and Shiel, *The Maker Unmade*, 154.

⁹⁰ Richard Conrad, O.P., 'Sacramental Theology', lecture no 2 (Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 12 October 2011); Whitaker, '*Homo Faber, Homo Sapiens*', 466.

by the celebrant to effect the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic species, are divinised speech. The efficaciousness of the *signa* of the Mass thus makes possible a vision of the poet as priest that incorporates the precise dynamic of the Catholic priestly function. Kathleen Staudt has called attention to this dynamic in her discussion of Jones's sacramentalism: noting that '[t]here can be no separation, in a completed sacrament, between signifier, signified and transcendental referent', she affirms that 'the text, like a sacrament, enacts what it signifies', both describing and performing, 'making an offering'.⁹¹ But the phrase 'making an offering' is too vague to capture the sacralising and redeeming ambitions of *The Anthemata*.

Jones does not attempt a linguistic and cultural redemption through his own visionary powers; that sort of extravagant self-assertion might work for Shelley and Yeats, but Jones's sacramental vision requires a different kind of agency. In Catholic doctrine, a priest performs a sacrament *in persona Christi*—it is Christ who actually performs the rite through the person of the priest. In this sense, the efficaciousness of the sacraments arises not *ex opere operantis* (out of the doer), but *ex opere operato* (out of the work itself).⁹² Maurice de la Taille frames the concept in pragmatic terms—'Words like *this is my Body*, etc., *this is my Blood*, etc., cannot denote the Body and Blood of Christ unless they are placed on the lips of Christ. Otherwise, not *his* Body and Blood are designated, but mine, who am speaking'—but the liturgical implications are profound, for they require the actual presence of Christ.⁹³ This principle of instrumental efficient causality, in which the priest serves as a conduit for

⁹¹ Kathleen Henderson Staudt, 'The Text as Material and Sign: Poetry and Incarnation in William Blake, Arthur Rimbaud, and David Jones', *Modern Language Studies* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1984), 21-2.

⁹² Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery*, 12.

⁹³ De la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 24.

the sanctifying grace of Christ, obviously parallels longstanding notions of artistic inspiration ranging from the Muse to automatic writing.

Jones addresses the question of poetic agency in his Preface to *The Anathemata*, contrasting the ‘bardic’ role of a poet as impersonal custodian and singer of cultural signs—a position he associates with ‘an early and simple phase of a culture’—with the poet as distinct personality, giving verbal form to his or her individual experience within a later culture-phase.⁹⁴ Crucially, however, Jones’s understanding of the bardic role—which stands behind the epic and impersonal *Anathemata*—merges the roles of poet and priest in a sense charged by Catholic liturgical models. Just as ‘the whole Church exercises a ransoming power, a sacerdotal power...[as] the faithful auxiliary of the Sovereign Priest, and the efficient co-operator in the ransom of mankind: *conredemptrix et consacerdos*’, the poet enacts a redemptive power on the order of signs traditional to his culture—not by himself but acting in concert with, and as the representative of, the higher power of the tradition itself.⁹⁵ In his preface to *The Anathemata*, Jones says of the artist that ‘[r]ather than being a seer or endowed with the gift of prophecy he is something of a vicar whose job is legatine—a kind of *Servus Servorum* to deliver what has been delivered to him, who can neither add to nor take from the deposits’.⁹⁶ Jones attends punningly to etymology here; he is surely conscious that ‘legatine’ evokes imperial Rome as much as the Vatican, and that ‘deposits’ not only implies the Catholic Church’s *depositum fidei* of scripture and tradition but also trades in his favoured geological metaphors. In this sacramental model of poetic agency, a work of art is similar to a Eucharistic rite, which, in the words of Dix, ‘cannot be the act only of the christian individuals present

⁹⁴ Jones, *Anathemata*, 20-1.

⁹⁵ De la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 35-6.

⁹⁶ Jones, *Anathemata*, 35.

at it' and is therefore always the manifestation of a communal tradition.⁹⁷ Jones thus resists both a visionary Romanticism and an earthbound Classicism.

The final aesthetic implication of Jones's sacramental theology arises from the conviction that in the Mass, just as the signifier and signified fuse, the Absolute and the temporal are ritually linked. The principle of anamnesis does not imply repetition; what appears as repetition is actually a re-calling, a re-entry of the one sacrifice offered by Christ on the Cross, which endures as an 'eternal act'.⁹⁸ Jones would not only have encountered this central point of dogma in his instruction as a catechumen; he certainly read it in the work of de la Taille, who expounds on 'that one single oblation which once proceeded from Christ but is ever operative, as a universal cause in all particular and subordinate oblations'.⁹⁹ This conception dates back to the early Church, which evolved a belief in 'the indissoluble unity of the eucharist with the sacrifice of Christ himself', such that '[a]t each eucharist we are *there*'. The Eucharist is thus 'the contact of the church within time and with the single *eschaton*, the coming of the Kingdom of God beyond time'.¹⁰⁰ It follows the sacrificial pattern described by Mircea Eliade: '[E]very sacrifice repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it. All sacrifices are performed at the same mythical instant of the beginning; through the paradox of rite, profane time and duration are suspended'.¹⁰¹ In the same way that 're-entry' via the Eucharist into sacred time, participation in eternity, has a uniting and energising effect on the Church, a successful poem gathers in traditional signs and lifts them above profane discourse, suspending them in a complex and illuminating set of relations, a form that recharges them with meaning. *The Anathemata* is a

⁹⁷ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 269.

⁹⁸ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 251.

⁹⁹ De la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 244, 263, 266.

¹⁰¹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 35.

sacramental rite of preservation and renewal that a reader can ‘re-enter’ at will, shaped around a sacramental rite of sanctifying grace that is itself centred on the Cross.

The Otherness of God is central to this sacramental mode of thought. De la Taille describes the ‘bilateral agreement’ in which Christians offer a sacrifice both propitiatory and laetific, in which ‘[w]ithout the divine acceptance the human oblation is a sacrifice that has failed’.¹⁰² Built into this transactional model is an anxiety only resolved by complete belief in the efficaciousness of the sacraments—but at the same time a spiritual scaffolding that relieves the believer from at least some of the burden of ‘earning’ salvation. Jones certainly benefited psychologically and artistically from the sense of structure provided by a sacramental theology, but his commitment to an exoteric form of religion set him apart from the more inwardly inclined of his fellow writers and painters. Like the devoutly Catholic painter Georges Rouault, he thus operated at the border of the spiritualised region of modernism. For Jones, human beings may progress from image to likeness, and perhaps in the case of the great mystics to an experience of something approaching union, but never to the ontological identity that so fascinated Yeats when he studied Indic traditions. Toward mysticism, the most inward and demanding of spiritual orientations, Jones remained deeply ambivalent.

Jones and Mysticism

Jonathan Miles and Derek Shiel have argued that Jones’s attitude toward mysticism was not founded in his sacramental theology, but that his increasingly sacramental theology arose from his failure to achieve a sustained mystical vision.

¹⁰² De la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 8.

They even suggest that Jones's first breakdown was partly the collapse of a mystical quest, that in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the years of his greatest success as a painter, Jones had been 'groping toward mysticism', but 'with the mystical vision after which he appears to have been straining apparently beyond his grasp, he broke down'.¹⁰³ Some of Jones's remarks can be read as supporting this perspective. In 1943, referring to his paintings, he wrote that 'the 1932 group got nearest to what I had in mind—but a very long way from the goal. (I suppose that may partly explain my complete crash—I was conscious for some long time before it came that I was straining every nerve to do something more than I had power to do.)'¹⁰⁴ But that 'something' may simply have been a form of artistic transubstantiation that Jones felt he lacked either the talent or the skill to achieve.

Jones's extant comments on mysticism indicate a more measured opinion: he considered mystical aspirations spiritually dangerous for all but the extraordinarily graced or gifted, and doubted that he or anyone he knew could understand or achieve mystical experience. In a letter from 1927 he makes clear his commitment to exoteric religious practice: 'I loathe the word mystic—it might mean anything—anyway, I mean by it here that human being who is more *directly* in union with God than are most of us, for most of course, rightly and properly, have to be content with loving God *through* created things'. Yet Dilworth recalls that, though Jones always 'denied being a mystic', he said, 'I wish to God I were'.¹⁰⁵ Certainly his enthusiasm for the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and Friedrich von Hügel indicates serious interest in the topic.¹⁰⁶ Yet he decries what he sees as the dangerous abstraction of Meister Eckhart.

¹⁰³ Miles and Shiel, *The Maker Unmade*, 291, 264.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 124.

¹⁰⁵ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 45; Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 24.

¹⁰⁶ In a 1956 letter referring to von Hügel's *The Mystical Element in Religion*, Jones recalls having been 'quite addicted to von Hugel in the late '20s and early '30s'. See

Of Eckhart's assertion that the birth of Christ within the soul of the believer is more important than his physical birth, Jones says, 'Sounds all right, but the next step is to "demythologize" the story of the physical Incarnation, and say that what matters is that all chaps should be awfully good, which is, roughly speaking, more or less what the present notion of Xtianity boils down to'.¹⁰⁷ Jones's point that mystical theology, misunderstood, paradoxically opens the door to nineteenth-century liberal theology is intriguing, especially in light of the ambivalence toward mystical aspiration that haunts Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

Jones, like many readers, does not seem to have perceived that ambivalence. Though Jones liked *Four Quartets*, he felt that Eliot never wrote 'another poem as good as *The Waste Land*', which he acknowledged as a major influence on his own work.¹⁰⁸ Speaking of *Four Quartets*, Jones wrote that the difference between his and Eliot's conception of a spiritual 'centre' may arise from Jones's being an artist and thus 'terribly concerned with tangible, contactual "things"—not "concepts" really, except in so far as the concrete, creaturely material "thing" is a signum of the concept & that it must be that way now because we are creatures with bodies'. William Blissett recalls how Jones went beyond this pointedly exoteric observation in his assessment of Eliot's mystical inclinations: 'David confessed to being not at all mystical in any strict sense: he doesn't read or understand the mystics.... T. S. Eliot understood, or deeply felt that he ought to understand them. This with a laugh, as if he had said something naughty, as indeed he had'.¹⁰⁹ In his assumption that the mystical path is for a chosen few, Jones seems to accept the position of the Catholic Church on

Desmond Chute, *Inner Necessities: The Letters of David Jones to Desmond Chute* (Toronto: Anson-Cartwright Editions, 1984), 90. In 1940 he declared that Pseudo-Dionysius's *The Divine Names* was 'the cat's whiskers' (*Dai Greatcoat*, 104).

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 223.

¹⁰⁸ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 154, 188.

¹⁰⁹ Blissett, *The Long Conversation*, 39, 72.

lay mysticism as articulated by Bishop Bossuet during the Quietist controversy: the would-be mystic risks ‘a confused, general or indistinct faith or view of God’, and may even, in pursuit of mystical experiences, attempt to make ‘heaven out of earth and a homeland out of exile’.¹¹⁰ Where von Hügel regarded Bossuet as having contributed to a constriction of the spiritual life of the Catholic Church, Jones remained within the safer confines of a purely sacramental faith.

Jones’s belief that mysticism was beyond both him and Eliot reflects his exoteric emphasis on embodied existence, in which God must be approached ‘through created things’ rather than through an interior practice, and stands opposed to the inwardness and renunciatory spirit of *Four Quartets*. While Eliot’s later work tends toward the apophatic and hovers at the edge of silence, *The Anthemata* is cataphatic and cumulative, gathering in symbols, voices, and historical data. In its form as well as its attempt to cast history as theophany and recuperate the signs Jones valued, *The Anthemata* reflects its maker’s exoteric mode of religion.

The Form of *The Anthemata*

The Anthemata’s form has inspired a good deal of critical discussion, in that its eight titled sections do not neatly coincide with its thematic concerns. Briefly, each of *The Anthemata*’s sections advances a narrative of the prehistory and history of the British Isles, especially in relation to the Judeo-Christian, Roman, and Celtic traditions that have contributed to what Jones would call the cultural deposits of Britain. The narrative, however, is discontinuous, anecdotal, and often anachronistic; its intimately detailed episodes function metonymically to illuminate broad swaths of history and map Britain’s cultural inheritance. Throughout, the poem alludes to the

¹¹⁰ Richard Parish, *Catholic Particularity in Seventeenth-Century French Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 174-5.

cosmic salvation narrative, especially to its climax in the Paschal Mystery of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion.

The first section, ‘Rite and Fore-time’, opens by establishing a contemporary celebration of the Eucharist as the narrative frame for the poem before chronicling the prehistory of Britain from its geologic origins to the artifacts of its Bronze Age inhabitants. ‘Middle-sea and Lear-sea’, the next section, depicts the earliest voyages to Britain of Mediterranean sailors, initiating a theme that typologically invokes the journey of the Church and humanity toward salvation; the section also recalls the establishment of Rome, whose empire made possible the rapid diffusion of the Christian revelation. The voyage theme continues in ‘Angle-land’, in which a later crew sails along the coast of post-Roman Britain, which is characterised by a macaronic discourse assembled from the island’s various languages. In the next and shortest section, ‘Redriff’, Jones uses his maternal grandfather, Ebenezer Bradshaw, a shipbuilder in Rotherhithe, as an icon of artisanal integrity in his refusal to rush a job for an impatient customer. From Rotherhithe the poem goes to the Pool of London, the city’s historic port, where, in ‘The Lady of the Pool’, a long monologue by a lavender seller named Elen Monica reveals her to be something like the *genius loci* of London; though she seems a late medieval figure, her memories of past lovers date back to the Roman establishment of the city. ‘Keel, Ram, Stauros’, the next section, drives home the analogy between sea voyage and salvation narrative, investing a ship and its master with Christian metaphorical significance under the form of a monologue by a Greek sailor returning to Athens from Britain. ‘Mabinog’s Liturgy’, reportedly Jones’s favourite stretch of *The Anathemata*, recounts an early medieval Christmas, liturgically through a Mass attended by Queen Gwenhwyfar (Guinevere) and more colloquially in the form of a monologue by a witch—the two figures

serving as feminine counterparts to the magi and shepherds of the Nativity. The poem reaches its consummation with ‘Sherthursdaye and Venus Day’, which moves from the previous section’s celebration of the Nativity to an account of the Paschal Mystery, stripped of dramatic monologues and closing with the same Eucharist that opened *The Anthemata*. The entire poem has unfolded within a moment.

Such a précis is unavoidably reductive; it fails to convey the sheer profusion and intricacy of the poem’s densely allusive discourse, or its seeming lack of formal coherence. In their search for formal unity, critics of *The Anthemata* have tended to gravitate toward one or the other of two approaches, which I will term the ‘open’ and the ‘centrist’ readings. This divide over matters of poetic form partly reflects the polarity of purely Christian and purely mythopoeic readings of the text.

The open view is exemplified in the positions of David Blamires and Kathleen Staudt. The poem’s discursiveness lends itself to such a reading, as does Jones’s remark in the preface that *The Anthemata* ‘has no plan, or at least is not planned. If it has a shape it is chiefly that it returns to its beginning...[r]ather as in a longish conversation between two friends, where one thing leads to another’.¹¹¹ Blamires argues that ‘there is no clearly conceived centre to the work, or rather, to adapt St. Augustine’s definition of the nature of God, the poem is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. For the important substance of the poem is to be found at every point in it’.¹¹² This reading emphasises what might be called the discursive superstructure of the poem.

Kathleen Staudt prefers to emphasise the poem’s experimental implications, suggesting that *The Anthemata* is ‘a poem about process’, such that Jones is

¹¹¹ Jones, *Anthemata*, 33.

¹¹² David Blamires, *David Jones: Artist and Writer* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), 19.

‘working at the edge of modernist poetics...with a digressive imagination and an improvisatory technique that harmonize remarkably with the postmodern poetics of open form’.¹¹³ The foremost candidate for comparison would be Charles Olson, but though *The Anathemata* might seem to conform to the canons of Olson’s projective verse—mainly that ‘FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT’ and that ‘ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION’—the poem conveys little of the spontaneity and the sense of a mind in process that Olson mandates.¹¹⁴ Even at his most reminiscent of Jones, Olson remains focused on the interiority of an individual consciousness:

ya, selva oscura, but hell now
 is not exterior, is not to be got out of, is
 the coat of your own self, the beasts
 emblazoned on you And who
 can turn this total thing, invert
 and let the ragged sleeves be seen
 by any bitch or common character? Who
 can endure it where it is, where the beasts are met,
 where yourself is, your beloved is, where she
 who is separate from you, is not separate, is not
 goddess, is, as your core is,
 the making of one hell

where she moves off, where she is
 no longer arch¹¹⁵

This passage from ‘In Cold Hell, in Thicket’ may deploy some of Jones’s strategies—the insistent interrogatives, the Christian (in this case Dantean) cosmology, the cumulative series of images, the shaping of negative space—but it remains

¹¹³ Staudt, *At the Turn*, 187.

¹¹⁴ Charles Olson, *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions Books, 1967), 16-17. Another text similar to *The Anathemata*, in both scope and allusiveness, is Pound’s *Cantos*, but, as Jones made clear in a 1954 letter to W. H. Auden, he did not read the *Cantos* until after *The Anathemata* had gone to press (*Dai Greatcoat*, 160). It is important to remember that Jones, largely an autodidact, read widely but idiosyncratically, and did little to acquaint himself with the poetry of his time.

¹¹⁵ Olson, *Selected Writings*, 185.

unmistakably the deliberation of an individual mind, its direct diction and disjointed enjambments designed to express the hesitant groping toward clarity of a confused and agonised speaker enmeshed in a personal predicament. A comparable passage from *The Anathemata* reveals its altogether different sensibility:

did he hear them say
when will you pay me?
 (or had they not yet grown rich?)
 when might that be?
 when might that be??

I do not know!
I do not know!!
I do not know what time is at
or whether before or after
 was it when—
but when *is* when?
 All that we do know is
that from before long ago he
 sailed our *Mori Marusam*.
Wot sort o' Jute-land lingo's that
or is it Goidel for
 Mortuum Mare?
or did old Gaius Pliny
 get his Pytheas wrong
or had the travelled diarist
 gravelled his philology
in Cronos-*meer*?¹¹⁶

This speaker in this passage from 'Keel, Ram, Stauros' is unconcerned with the inner experience of the characters he describes. The poem may address the concrete situation of one ancient mariner, but the sailor remains a type, and his concerns generic. His poetic function is that of a drill bit sunk to a specific depth in the linguistic and cultural strata of Britain. The passage from *The Anathemata* is far more richly embroidered with allusion and etymological play, and its ambiguous treatment of chronology suggests the shadowy presence of sacred, nonlinear time within profane history. In its historical scope and its refusal of inwardness, *The Anathemata* is more mimetic than expressionist.

¹¹⁶ Jones, *Anathemata*, 170-1.

Drawing on the work of Eric Auerbach, Geoffrey Hill invokes an applicable definition of mimesis in his essay ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’: ‘a method of posing the problem so that the desired solution is contained in the very way in which the problem is posed’.¹¹⁷ The form of *The Anthemata* follows this principle: rather than tracing the effort to arrive at a solution, it encodes a predetermined solution. Its many interrogatives are rhetorical and liturgical, all operative in the context of the Word as the ultimate answer to all questions. That poetic sensibility lends itself to a more crystalline form than a purely open reading allows.

The arguments of the centrist readers begin from *The Anthemata*’s circularity. The text unfolds within a narrative frame so narrow as to make the poem circular: as Dilworth observes, ‘*The Anthemata* begins with the elevation of the consecrated Bread, the “efficacious sign” (49), and closes seconds later with the elevation of “the stemmed dish” (242)’.¹¹⁸ By definition, circles have centres; at question are the location and meaning of the poetic centre. Tom Goldpauagh cites Jackson Knight’s *The Cumaean Gates*, a book Jones read with enthusiasm, as having given him the idea to make of his poem a ‘temenos’, or a ‘protective labyrinth that encloses and protects the sacred object’. *The Anthemata* is for Jones ‘a verbal labyrinth that would protect what he felt were the endangered cultural signs’ resting at its center.¹¹⁹ Neil Corcoran, who argues for ‘metamorphic form’, in which the poem explores and enacts the transformations of history and language, locates its center in ‘Redriff’, where Eb Bradshaw insists on the importance of good ‘making’, of skilled and committed artefacture, which Jones sees disappearing from Western civilisation.

¹¹⁷ Geoffrey Hill, *The Lords of Limit* (London: Deutsch, 1984), 3.

¹¹⁸ Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 157.

¹¹⁹ Tom Goldpauagh, ‘To Make a Shape in Words’, in *David Jones: Diversity in Unity*, ed. Belinda Humfrey and Anne Price-Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 144, 132.

For Corcoran, the first half of *The Anathemata* presents ‘the “facts” of the culture which is “ours”’, and the second half examines ‘the ways in which we have understood those facts’. Nonetheless, he also refers to the passage in ‘The Lady of the Pool’ where Elen Monica discourses on the Paschal Mystery as ‘one of the great set-pieces of *The Anathemata*, its central passage on the Crucifixion’.¹²⁰

The centrality of the Cross figures, rightly, in the readings of such critics as Jeremy Hooker, Thomas Whitaker, and Thomas Dilworth. Hooker, like Goldpaugh, regards the poem as a kind of labyrinth, ‘whose centre is everywhere’ because it is ‘the omnipresence of the Cross’.¹²¹ For Whitaker, the poem ‘composes a chiasmic or parenthetical icon of the principle in and beyond all making and naming, “HE-WITH-US”, who said, “I am your bread”’.¹²² Dilworth takes the same view, but, drawing on the evidence of Jones’s visual art and on manuscript drafts of the poem, regards *The Anathemata* as ‘a recession of circles’ around a sacramental center, the Lady of the Pool’s passage about the Paschal Mystery on pages 156-8. The outermost circle is the moment of consecration in the Eucharist that opens and closes the poem. All the circles within that, formed by Jones’s practice of dividing sections in half and inserting new material, are ‘figures of simultaneity, as is the entire recession of circles, for the poem’s outer circumference coincides with its central point: sacramentally, the Eucharist and the paschal events it makes present and identical’.¹²³ Dilworth’s reading is compelling, for it suggests a brilliantly successful attempt by Jones to make the poem as a whole an efficacious sign containing all history within the sacred time of the Eucharistic rite.

¹²⁰ Neil Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, 79, 57-8, 63.

¹²¹ Jeremy Hooker, *David Jones: An Exploratory Study of the Writings* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1975), 49-50.

¹²² Thomas Whitaker, ‘*In Parenthesis* and the Poetics of Passage’, in *David Jones: Artist and Poet*, ed. Paul Hills (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997), 32.

¹²³ Thomas Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 168-171.

Many of Jones's comments on the poem's form support a centrist reading. As early as 1941, he expressed interest in concentric form, describing in a letter to Harman Grisewood his fascination with the 'wheels within wheels' structure of Arthurian romances.¹²⁴ Subsequent remarks about *The Anathemata*, particularly those made shortly after its publication, refer repeatedly to the centrality of the Cross. He makes this clear in his essay 'Wales and the Crown', published a year after *The Anathemata*:

In the course of writing *The Anathemata* I had occasion to consider the Tree of the Cross as the axial beam round which all things move... There is a monastic motto which implies that the Cross stands still while the world revolves round it. Now in considering this world-dance which has for its maypole the gleaming Tree on which the world-ransom was weighed, a person of Welsh affinity may also call to mind a particular token or relic of that same Tree.¹²⁵

The passage implies a thematic structure in *The Anathemata*, in which particulars from history all orbit, and indicate, the central image of the Cross. The monastic motto to which Jones refers is that of the Carthusians, *Stat Crux dum volvitur orbis*: the Cross stands still while the world turns. The motto clearly resonated for Jones, given that he not only quotes it fully in his introduction to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* but also refers to it in his letters in relation to *The Anathemata*. In a letter to Desmond Chute, he describes *The Anathemata* as 'a kind of "dance round the maypole" of the stauros—I suppose.... In a sense it is "static", I suppose, perhaps something to do with things being "equidistant from eternity"—don't know'.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Jones to Harman Grisewood, 21 May 1941, Georgetown University Library.

¹²⁵ Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 39.

¹²⁶ Jones, *The Dying Gaul*, 193; Chute, *Inner Necessities*, 75. Jones refers to the Carthusian motto in a 1953 exchange of letters with Desmond Chute, saying at one point that 'that is what I was trying to remember much of the time in writing ANA [*The Anathemata*], but couldn't recall how it went' (*Inner Necessities*, 43, 44n). In a letter to Saunders Lewis, Jones writes, 'Stat crux...but perhaps more commonly so in ANA'. See 'Saunders Lewis Introduces Two Letters', 21.

The myriad particulars that make up the poem are ‘equidistant from eternity’ because the poem schematises Jones’s understanding of the relation between the Absolute and the temporal as understood in Catholic sacramental theology.¹²⁷ The poem’s circularity thus echoes de la Taille’s assertion in *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined* that the Eucharist ‘can vivify man, and...usher him into a sacred and divine circle’.¹²⁸ The Cross is, iconically, ‘where horizontal and vertical come together’, just as the poem enacts this ritual intersection of the timeless with time through the tension between what Dilworth calls its ‘diachronic’ and ‘synchronic’ aspects.¹²⁹

There is in fact no real conflict between centrist and non-centrist readings; they simply emphasise different levels of what is in fact a binary structure. The form of *The Anthemata* is both linear and circular. Its juxtaposition of a narrative, ‘diachronic’ superstructure and a theological, ‘synchronic’ deep structure serves a definite purpose: to recover a sense of history as theophany. The poem’s discursive profusions celebrate the creaturely; its continual gestures toward the Paschal Mystery recall the central, sacred event that, for Jones, endows the creaturely with meaning. This conjunction achieves poetically what the Eucharist effects sacramentally.

The Anthemata, then, is sacramental in form as well as content. To adapt the closing phrase of the poem, ‘Axile Tree’, to the terminology of Mircea Eliade, the Cross is the *axis mundi*, the Centre, the place where the earthly and the unearthly meet and communicate, and as such ‘the zone of absolute reality’, such that the closer one

¹²⁷ ‘The Paschal mystery of Christ...transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection *abides* and draws everything toward life’. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 1085.

¹²⁸ De la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 36.

¹²⁹ Patrick Deane, ‘The Text as “Valid Matter”’: Language and Style in *The Anthemata*, in Matthias, *David Jones: Man and Poet*, 321; Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 156.

approaches it, the more fully one participates in reality.¹³⁰ Ordinarily a sacred circle, physically inscribed, will function in ‘demarcating the sacred precincts of a temple’, but because the Paschal mystery ‘throbs through every molecule in the universe and every second of time’, it is present everywhere and always accessible through the Eucharist.¹³¹ *The Anthemata* is, as Desmond Chute calls it, ‘one long Eucharistic hymn’, but it is also a paean to the diversity of the creaturely and a map of the cosmos.¹³²

Poetic Agency in *The Anthemata*

The Anthemata’s sacramental poetics extend beyond the poem’s Cross-centred invocation of sacred space and time. In enacting such an exoteric poetics, a ritual sensibility informed by the belief in God as Wholly Other, the poem requires a priest figure as mediator. Jones himself is that celebrant. His conviction that a poet is ‘something of a vicar whose job is legatine’ surely dates back to his years at Ditchling, where he read and discussed Maritain, and Gill instructed him in how ‘his table was the altar on which he offered his work to God’.¹³³ The opening of *The Anthemata* is in fact reflexive; the moment of consecration in the Eucharist is the moment at which Jones hopes to effect the revivifying transubstantiation of signs:

We already and first of all discern him making this thing other. His groping syntax, if we attend, already shapes:
 ADSRIPTAM, RATAM, RATIONOBILEM . . . and by pre-application and for *them*, under modes and patterns altogether theirs, the holy and venerable hands lift up an efficacious

¹³⁰ Jones, *Anthemata*, 243; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 12, 5, 17-8.

¹³¹ Douglas K. Wood, ‘The Twentieth-Century Revolt against Time: Belief and Becoming in the Thought of Berdyaev, Eliot, Huxley, and Jung’, in *The Secular Mind: Transformations of Faith in Modern Europe*, ed. W. Warren Wagar (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982), 202; John Farrell, O. P. ‘Christ’s Priesthood’ (lecture, Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 19 October 2011).

¹³² Chute, *Inner Necessities*, 93.

¹³³ Jones, *Anthemata*, 35; Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 29.

sign.

These, at the sagging end and chapter's close, standing
humbly before the tables spread, in the apsidal houses, who
intend life:

between the sterile ornaments
under the pasteboard baldachins
as, in the young-time, in the sap-years:
between the living floriations
under the leaping arches.

(Ossific, trussed with ferric rods, the failing numina
of column and entablature, the genii of spire and triforium,
like great rivals met when all is done, nod recognition across
the cramped repeats of their dead selves.)

[...]

The cult-man stands alone in Pellam's land: more pre-
cariously than he knows he guards the signa: the pontifex
among his house-treasures, (the twin-*urbes* his house is) he
can fetch things new and old: the tokens, the matrices,
the institutes, the ancilia, the fertile ashes—the palladic fore-
shadowings: the things come down from heaven together
with the kept memorials, the things lifted up and the vener-
ated trinkets.¹³⁴

The nuanced ambiguity of the diction here conflates priest and poet in a manner that makes plain the poem's purpose—the teleology of this verbal cosmos. The celebrant recites Latin phrases from the Roman Mass, but the passage identifies the 'signa' being guarded in somewhat indefinite terms: 'tokens', 'matrices', and so forth do not exclusively imply the sacred implements of the Mass. Critics have been quick to note this indeterminacy. Corcoran suggests that though the 'cult-man' is 'an impersonal and unindividuated figure....the preface leaves us in no doubt that it is David Jones himself, with his own particular inheritance, who preserves and conditions this particular "cult"'. Hooker goes further, arguing that the figure represents not only priest and poet as priest, but the 'culture-man' of Spengler and even the knight of the Grail quest, all of whom set out to "free the waters" by releasing the life locked in

¹³⁴ Jones, *Anathemata*, 49-50.

the “dead symbols””.¹³⁵ Staudt places the reader as one of the communicants at the poem’s Mass.¹³⁶

If the priest is in fact Jones, then his position ‘alone’ in the waste land suggests not only the enormity of the redemptive task he has chosen but his solitude in undertaking it. The only other presences explicitly mentioned, the personified architectural elements of the ‘apsidal house’, are decaying vestiges of the culture’s springtime. Staudt recognises in the lament for the lost ‘living floriations’ of the Gothic a Spenglerian sense of decline.¹³⁷ But that cluster of images also echoes a passage in Maritain that arguably anticipates much of ‘Rite and Fore-time’: ‘But in the cathedral of Mans look at the harmony and the transition, the sudden so self-reliant soaring into splendour: *there* is living logic like that of the contour-map of the Alps, or the anatomy of humankind’.¹³⁸ The sacred space in which the priest-poet performs his lonely rite is, like *The Anathemata* itself, a microcosm; this conflation of the spatial structure of poem, church, and cosmos signals the typology determining the poem’s form as well as its content.

But significantly, the celebrant of the Eucharist raising the Host at the poem’s start is not so precisely depicted when *The Anathemata* comes full circle:

Here, in this place
 as in Sarras city
 (where the maim was ended
 at the voyage-end)
 in his second Ephrata
 here in the upper cave of bread
 between his creatures again his Body shows.
 At the low entry
 stirs the sleeping dog?
 in Bedlem-byre once his bed.
 (Long years beyond the twentieth year!)

¹³⁵ Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, 35; Hooker, *David Jones: An Exploratory Study*, 39.

¹³⁶ Staudt, *At the Turn*, 76.

¹³⁷ Staudt, *At the Turn*, 119.

¹³⁸ Maritain, *Philosophy of Art*, 77.

Here, in this high place
 Into both hands
 he takes the stemmed dish
 as in many places
 by this poured and that held up
 wherever their glosses read:
 Here he takes the victim.

[...]

He does what is done in many places
 what he does other
 he does after the mode
 of what has always been done.
 What did he do other
 recumbent at the garnished supper?
 What did he do yet other
 riding the Axile Tree?¹³⁹

The priest-poet who stood alone in Pellam's land, following the Roman rite with dead symbols, is now associated with Sarras, site of the fulfillment of the Grail quest, expressing the prediction, or the hope, that his rite has in fact been efficacious. More importantly, the celebrant here merges with the Saviour. Unlike the specific 'him' of the poem's opening, whose recitation of the Roman Mass at the 'chapter's close' situates him historically, the 'he' of this passage is at least momentarily indeterminate, one in a series of personal pronouns flowing, without a clear shift of reference, from the person of Christ appearing among 'his creatures'. The allusions that follow to 'many places' where 'glosses' are read do not so much disengage the priest from this grammatical identity as, consistent with Catholic sacramental theology, absorb all celebrants into the priesthood of Christ. The priest is acting *in persona Christi*, which strictly means that he is not 'acting' at all, but being acted through.

This invocation of instrumental causality has its analogue in the *The Anathemata*'s sense of poetic agency, which for Jones is essential to a properly

¹³⁹ Jones, *Anathemata*, 242-3.

sacramental poetics. In the same way that a Mass transfers grace *ex opere operato*, a poet's job is 'to deliver what has been delivered to him', and therefore to adopt 'the most disinterested sensitivity' so as to be 'public and corporate' rather than 'idiosyncratic and personal'.¹⁴⁰ Though this does share Olson's sense that 'the lyrical interference of the individual as ego' must be expunged as an act of 'humilitas', it is more subtle, and more theologically determined, than Ward's idea of modernist impersonality as 'an attempt to recover for art the primitive's alleged lack of self-consciousness'.¹⁴¹ Jones's impersonality extends necessarily from his vision of poetry as a cultural sacrament. In his preface to *The Anathemata* he asserts that 'the workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work, otherwise we have that sort of "self-expression" which is as undesirable in the painter or the writer as in the carpenter, the cantor, the half-back, or the cook'.¹⁴² Jones probably drew this principle from Maritain, for whom 'the cathedral builders did not harbor any sort of thesis' because they were "'men who did not know themselves"... They just believed, and as they were, they wrought'.¹⁴³ Maritain's principle found an echo in Gill, who affirmed in 1927 that 'Christian artists' should 'endeavour to rule out from their work all that *personal idiosyncrasy and emotionalism* which, however interesting and delightful it may be in private life, is out of place in public worship'.¹⁴⁴ All sacramental acts, all forms of signification, unavoidably tap into a culture's collective reservoir of symbols, and, as Dilworth notes, 'If the separation of a work of art from

¹⁴⁰ Jones, *Anathemata*, 35; Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 98-9.

¹⁴¹ Olson, *Selected Writings*, 24; Ward, *Mythmaker*, 82.

¹⁴² Jones, *Anathemata*, 12.

¹⁴³ Maritain, *Philosophy of Art*, 98.

¹⁴⁴ Miles and Shiel, *The Maker Unmade*, 46. Note that Gill here refers to Christian artists, not Christian art, which is a notion both Maritain and Jones took care to distinguish from what Maritain called '*Church Art*'. Maritain argues that 'Christian Art' is any art that 'wears the stamp of Christianity' (*Philosophy of Art*, 98). In 'Art and Sacrament', Jones asserts that there is no such thing as 'Catholic arts of painting and engraving or the Catholic art of writing proses or poems' (*Epoch and Artist*, 144).

its object makes it a symbol, the degree of its independence from the artist largely determines its validity as a symbol'.¹⁴⁵ A sacramental poet may choose the signs he invokes, but they must be sourced in his cultural deposits, and he must suspend his individuality as best he can in order to convey the full force of the signs native to his inheritance.

This stance recalls Eliot's notion of poetic impersonality, but Jones actually regarded Eliot's work as insufficiently impersonal. In a 1954 letter to Harman Grisewood, he refers to a 'fruitless...subjectivism' that 'holds the field' poetically and is in fact 'the trouble with Tom E'.¹⁴⁶ This disdain for what Jones called "personal experience" and "psychological" kinds of poetry' reflects Jones's conviction that properly sacramental poetry cannot be produced *ex opere operantis*.¹⁴⁷ But the cultural inheritance to which a poet subjugates himself is unavoidably individuated, limited by his cultural exposure. Hence an element of subjectivity creeps into any work of art. Jones acknowledges this plainly in his preface to *The Anathemata*:

What is this writing about? I answer that it is about one's own 'thing', which *res* is unavoidably part and parcel of the Western Christian *res*, as inherited by a person whose perceptions are totally conditioned and limited by and dependent upon his being indigenous to this island. In this it is necessarily insular; within which insularity there are the further conditionings contingent upon his being a Londoner, of Welsh and English parentage, of Protestant upbringing, of Catholic subscription.¹⁴⁸

Indeed, Jones interjects himself as an individual into 'Mabinog's Liturgy'. This recalling of a Christmas truce in 1915 voices Jones's memory of his experience at the time:

and speaking most factually
and, as the fashion now requires, from observed data: On
this night, when I was a young man in France, in Gallia

¹⁴⁵ Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Jones to Harman Grisewood, January 1954, Georgetown University Library.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 155.

¹⁴⁸ Jones, *Anathemata*, 11.

Belgica, the forward ballista-teams of the Island of Britain
 green-garlanded their silent three-o-threes for this I saw
 and heard their cockney song salute the happy morning; and
 later, on this same morning certain of the footmen of Britain,
 walking in daylight, upright, through the lanes of the war-net
 to outside and beyond the rusted trip-belt, some with gifts,
 none with ported weapons, embraced him between his *fossa*
 and ours, exchanging tokens.¹⁴⁹

Neil Corcoran sees this individuation of the poetic voice as indicating that *The Anathemata* is more personal than a purely sacramental poetics would allow. Given the idiosyncratic learning and hermetic detail that stock the poem, and the fact that Jones's original lettering for the book's dust jacket reads 'David Jones' *Anathemata*', he argues for 'the essential privacy of a work that he has to compel himself to send into the public world'.¹⁵⁰ But the passage above, though it may draw on Jones's personal experience, is not subjective in the sense that it tries to present that experience. In fact, the spatially foregrounded phrase 'and speaking most factually' explicitly asserts the impersonality of the account. More importantly, this voice speaks in the transhistorical, macaronic discourse with which *The Anathemata* sacramentally invokes the fullness of the Western Christian tradition to join timelessness with time, making all things 'equidistant from eternity' in their dance around the Cross. The scene is not merely the Western Front in 1915, but Gaul during Caesar's wars ('Gallia Belgica', '*fossa*', 'ballista') and France in the Hundred Years' War ('footmen of Britain'). Jones's voice, if it is in fact his, takes its rightful place among the poem's many other individual voices, which are less persons than discourses embedded in the cultural deposits.

This notion of the self as realised in discourse, inscribed in the language of a cultural inheritance, and mediated by particular experience of that inheritance,

¹⁴⁹ Jones, *Anathemata*, 216.

¹⁵⁰ Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, 35-6.

poetically reflects Jones's exoteric notion of the self, which sees the human duality of soul and body as comprehensively expressed in outward signs. Unlike Yeats and Eliot, whose poetics reflect ontological deliberations that place the innermost self beyond or prior to signification, Jones never separates soul from language, and in a notable deviation from his usual analogical thinking, he never includes in *The Anathemata* any interior centre analogous to the cosmic centre of the Cross. His conviction that the mark of humanity is sign-making and that grace is transmitted chiefly through the sacraments, combined with his wariness of mystical aspiration, leads him to defer ontological claims about the self and to devalue inwardness.

Jones's proclivity for geological and archaeological images and metaphors reflects this exteriority. Where Yeats places his sages in caves on Mt. Meru or climbs down into the rag-and-bone shop of the heart, and Eliot descends inwardly into darkness and stillness, Jones searches outside the self for theophanies, excavating cultural deposits and prehistoric sites to unearth ritual and linguistic artifacts:

Twenty millennia (and what millennia more?)
 Since he became
 man master-of-plastic.

Who were his *gens*-men or had he no *Hausname* yet
 no *nomen* for his *fecit*-mark
 the Master of the Venus?
 whose man-hands god-handled the Willendorf stone
 before they unbound the last glaciation
 for the Umland Father to be-ribbon *die blaue Donau*
 with his Vanabride blue.
 O long before they lateen'd her Ister
 or Romanitas manned her gender'd stream.

[...]

Who else?
 And see how they run, the juxtaposed forms,
 brighting the vaults of Lascaux; how the linear is wedded
 to volume, how they do, within, in an unbloody manner,
 under the forms of brown haematite and black manganese on
 the graved lime-face, what is done, without,

far on the windy tundra
 at the kill
 that the kindred may have life.
 O God!
 O the Academies!¹⁵¹

Not only does the passage describe physical artifacts of prehistoric sign-making; from the Woman of Willendorf to the Lascaux caves, it is a linguistic excavation. The macaronic diction, shifting among German, Latin and the modern English of a nursery rhyme, is an array of relics. The passage's historical references range from the Aurignacian period to the Roman Empire to Viking mythology to nineteenth-century Vienna, all in the service of a ritual typology. The prehistoric sculptor whose hands 'god-handled the Willendorf stone' not only reflects what Hague terms 'the reflection in human artefacture of divine creation'; he is a type of the priest lifting up the Host and Chalice of the Mass.¹⁵² As Jones makes clear in a footnote, the Venus herself is an early, crude figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the same way, Jones's use of the catechetical 'under the forms of' and 'in an unbloody manner' links the sympathetic magic performed through the Lascaux paintings with the efficacious signification of the Eucharist, which is also figured, in a lamentably diminished way, in the art of the Academies. This typology reflects Aquinas's generous assessment of pre-Christian rituals, in which 'a heavenly instinct, like a private law, prompted them to worship God in a certain definite way'. Jones would have encountered this doctrine in de la Taille: 'Even those who lived in times of long ago, among shadows and figures, had to unite themselves by desire to this divine flesh and to eat in spirit of this heavenly bread'.¹⁵³ But nowhere in the passage is there any indication of the inward experience of the human beings involved, apart

¹⁵¹ Jones, *Anathemata*, 59-60.

¹⁵² Hague, *Commentary*, 46.

¹⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 226-7; De la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 32.

from the collective purposes of the rituals they perform. The unknown sculptor remains inaccessible; though his sign remains, his name—in terms of *gens*, *Hausname*, *nomen* and *fecit*-mark—has been lost. No empathic leap of imagination can recover his inner life, and this is appropriate, because his inner life is a discourse of the signs in his inheritance, of which the Woman may have been foremost.

In the character of Elen Monica, the Lady of the Pool—the most vividly realised voice in *The Anathemata*—this sense of the self as inhabiting an inherited discourse expands into the personified cultural inheritance of London. In a letter to Desmond Chute, Jones described her as ‘an amalgam of many figures—from a waterside tart of sorts to the tutelary figure of London.... Certainly she is Britannia at one point. But primarily she is a woman, a lavender-seller talking to “an ancient mariner” from the Mediterranean & telling him about London & its traditions’. Her language ranges over the whole history of the city, even after her ostensible lifetime ‘toward the end of the middle ages’. Chute himself describes her in a review as ‘satyric dithyramb to the Eucharistic chorus’. As Dilworth has noted, she has ‘the permanence of place in time’.¹⁵⁴ Elen Monica is in fact the name of a transhistorical discourse specific to the cultural heritage of London, a cornucopia of signs:

In all the white chapels
 in Lud’s town of Megara
 when we put up rejoicing candles bright
 when we pay latria
 to the Saving Wood.
 About the turn of the year, captain, when he sings out loud
 and clear from his proper: in *lingo quoque vinceretur*
 twisting his cock’s egg tongue round
 the Vulgar *lingua* like any Trojan licentious of divinity.
 And him but got within Billingsgate,
 in Puddin’ Lane, on her that calls hot herring-pies—whose
 smile’s as sweet as her marjoram: what’s got her to church
 door three times without mention of her pre-history.

¹⁵⁴ Chute, *Inner Necessities*, 45, 98; Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 217. Dilworth adds that Elen Monica has ‘the mind of London’ (154).

And *at* the turn, captain, *pridie*
the thirteenth and all, we carry out Chloris as dead as a nail.¹⁵⁵

Elen Monica's discourse, like her name, fuses the classical, Celtic and Christian traditions in the same manner that London exemplifies that cultural convergence. The linguistic play of her chatter, replete with puns and sexual innuendo, recalls Joyce's Molly Bloom and Anna Livia.¹⁵⁶ Her quicksilver command of register also locates her in a mode of discourse Erich Auerbach has identified with Christianity in particular, especially its vision of history as presented in the mystery plays Elen Monica surely knows:

In principle, this great drama contains everything that occurs in world history. In it all the heights and depths of human conduct and all the heights and depths of stylistic expression find their morally or aesthetically established right to exist; and hence there is no basis for a separation of the sublime from the low and everyday, for they are indissolubly connected in Christ's very life and suffering. Nor is there any basis for concern with the unities of time, place, or action, for there is but one place—the world; and but one action—man's fall and redemption.¹⁵⁷

This celebration of the discursive heritage of London thus also invokes the all-inclusive economy of salvation. Jones here achieves the finest expression of an exoteric poetics that, rather than renouncing phenomenal existence, affirms it as theophany, a cosmos of signs which all point, as Elen Monica does in referring to the 'Saving Wood', to the Cross, 'the great Symbol, synonymous with time's central, redemptive event'.¹⁵⁸ In 'The Lady of the Pool', Jones thus employs a cumulative style in which catalogue, anaphora, macaronics, and parataxis effect a cascade of meaning that reflects, in his words, 'the interpenetration backwards & forwards & up & down of all the images historical, legendary and mythological (both the Xtian

¹⁵⁵ Jones, *Anathemata*, 165.

¹⁵⁶ Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 227.

¹⁵⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), 138.

¹⁵⁸ Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, 154.

mythos and the non-Xtian)' that populate the cultural and historical complex called London.¹⁵⁹ As a self-described Londoner, he inhabits that nexus; Elen Monica therefore personifies one particular region of the discourse that defines David Jones.

This cumulative style, given particular vividness, even flamboyance, in 'The Lady of the Pool', also reflects Jones's conviction that all but the greatest mystics and saints 'have to be content with loving God *through* created things'.¹⁶⁰ *The Anthemata's* massive, rich elaborations of creaturely detail, including its macaronic discourse and its movements of excavation and accretion, reflect this affection for earthly beings and things. In 'Rite and Fore-time', such evocations of the creaturely combine epic scope with a sometimes poignant domesticity:

Searching where the kitchen midden tells of the decline
which with the receding cold marked the recession of the
Magdalenian splendours.

Yet there he brights fragmented protomorphs
where lies the rudimentary bowl.

How else

multifariam multisque modis

the splendour of forms yet to come?

How the dish

That holds no coward's food?

How the calix

without which
how the re-calling?

And there

where, among the exactly faceted microliths
lie the bones

of the guardian and friend.

How else Argos

the friend of Odysseus?

Or who should tend

the sores of lazars?

(For anthropos is not always kind.)

How Ranter or True, Ringwood
or the pseudo-Gelert?

How Spot, how Cerberus?

(For men can but proceed from what they know, nor is it for

¹⁵⁹ Chute, *Inner Necessities*, 70.

¹⁶⁰ Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 45.

the mind of this flesh to practise poiesis, *ex nihilo*.)¹⁶¹

The passage encompasses two parallel movements. The first spirals from an excavated Paleolithic bowl through the Third Mass of Christmas Day to Arthurian legend ('the dish / that holds no coward's food') and finally the Eucharistic chalice. The second follows the same pattern but with a heightened emphasis on humanity's bond with its fellow creature, the domesticated dog, from the Paleolithic remains of the 'guardian and friend' through *The Odyssey*'s Argos to the humorous pairing of the generic Spot and the fearsome Cerberus—the extremes of friend and guardian.¹⁶² As the Latin phrase from the Christmas Day Mass indicates, the images and allusions function typologically; they are a portion of the 'sundry times and diverse manners' in which human sign-making points to the *signa* of the Eucharist. The final, parenthetical utterance affirms that only through the known—the creaturely—can humanity, compounded of soul and body, approach its creator.

Like many such passages in *The Anathemata*, this is a poetic analogue to the remembrance of the dead in the Tridentine Mass, a gesture that includes them in the timeless communion of the Eucharist. Jones makes this parallel explicit toward the end of 'Rite and Fore-time':

Upon all fore-times.	
his perpetual light	From before time
	shines upon them.
	Upon all at once
upon each one	
whom he invites, bids, us to recall	
when we make the recalling of him	
	daily, at the Stone.
When the offerant	
our <i>servos</i> , so theirs whose life is changed	

¹⁶¹ Jones, *Anathemata*, 78-9.

¹⁶² *The Anathemata*'s multiple depictions of faithful dogs may itself be a kind of ecclesiastical pun. Jones was a Dominican Tertiary, and the Dominicans have traditionally been known as 'God's hounds'—*Domini canes*.

not taken away

is directed to say

Memento etiam.

After which it is allowed him then to say

Nobis quoque.

That we too may be permitted some part with these

like John is!¹⁶³

The passage, coming at the end of the poem's depiction of geologic and prehistoric time as preparation for both the central historical act of the Paschal Mystery and the recorded history of the British Isles, establishes that the bonds of charity among creatures reflect the 'perpetual light' of divine grace, which unites 'all at once' in a communion that transcends temporality. The poet, like the priest celebrating Mass, must not say *Nobis quoque* ('To us as well') without also saying *Memento etiam* ('Remember as well').

The Anathemata's sacramental, analogical poetics reflect a theological sensibility in which the self, debilitated by sin, stands at a tremendous remove from divinity, and can only approach it through a system of sacred signs endangered by modernity. The poem itself becomes a lay sacrament, an effort at cultural redemption. Accordingly, if its *sacramentum tantum* is the marks on the page and its *res et sacramentum* the comprehension of the complex discourse those marks encode, then its *res tantum* is the recuperation, achieved by and through the text, of those sacred signs that, enshrining Catholic belief, reveal history as theophany. In *The Anathemata*, then, the poet is the custodian of a sacred discourse, one that redeems the welter of discourses populating the poem. If he can submit himself properly to the sacred signs, he can perhaps, *ex opere operato*, show forth those signs in a manner that reveals their

¹⁶³ Jones, *Anathemata*, 81.

restorative, sanctifying powers. When, in the Preface to *The Anathemata*, Jones avers that his aim is to ‘uncover’ in the manner of a ‘mystery’, this is what he means.¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

In *David Jones: An Exploratory Study of the Writings*, Jeremy Hooker offers an intriguing assessment of Jones in relation to Eliot:

[I]n his spirit, above all in the numinous quality of his symbolism and in his tender feeling for the creaturely, the writings of David Jones are markedly different from those of Eliot or Joyce. If, however, *Four Quartets* approaches *The Anathemata* in conveying a sense of the numinous, and if there are affinities between the religious apprehensions of time in the poems, Eliot had long since abandoned the modernism whose possibilities David Jones was still extending.¹⁶⁵

Hooker’s appeal to the ‘numinous’ indicates that he shares Jones’s preference for the sensory and thus the exoteric and sacramental, and that Eliot’s apophatic poetics lacks the sense of the sacred with which Jones’s poetics invests the particular.

Yet, to adopt once more the distinctions of George Steiner, *Four Quartets*, though modally difficult, is largely free of the enormous contingent difficulties of *The Anathemata*. Eliot’s poetics in his final suite may tend toward silence, but they also privilege the declarative and imperative rather than the interrogatory, the second person rather than the third person or first-person plural, and accessible diction rather than forbiddingly macaronic discourse. Jones may have been extending the possibilities of modernism, but by the publication of *The Anathemata*, modernism as a range of approaches defined by a discernible aggregate of poets had already diffused through mid-twentieth-century verse. Jones’s intricate invocation of the sacramental time that undergirds all time was, ironically, an anachronism. It was delivered to an audience that had already absorbed the virtuosities of Eliot, Pound, and Joyce, and

¹⁶⁴ Jones, *Anathemata*, 33.

¹⁶⁵ Hooker, *An Exploratory Study*, 51.

was no longer inclined to undertake the patient reading of what seemed a backward-looking poem.

But another reason for *The Anthemata*'s failure to gain a wide audience is a particular form of modal difficulty: its lack of inwardness. It was released into a culture given to an increasing psychologising of experience. In such a climate, an impersonal presentation of cultural symbols, without any correspondingly explicit evocation of an emotional or spiritual interior life, was unlikely to attract a broad readership. *The Anthemata*'s relatively marginal place in twentieth-century literature thus has a great deal to do with its theology. Its exoteric orientation, in which the fallen self, defined by its symbolic inheritance, can fully access the sacred only through sacramental mediation rather than direct inner experience, had little traction with readers despite the accolades of Eliot and Auden. In this respect, too, *The Anthemata* was anachronistic—a predicament of which Jones was painfully aware.

As the expression of a particular mode of divinised poetics, one that positions God as Wholly Other and refuses to privilege interiority, *The Anthemata* is a remarkable achievement. Not only is it a sacramental gesture of cultural redemption and a map of a sacred cosmos; its very exotericism leads to its extraordinary discursive richness and variety. Still, *Four Quartets*, with its presentation of the solitary soul wrestling with intimations of transcendence, has commanded far more readerly and critical attention. It is to this text, and its dialectical engagement with divinity, that we now turn.

Chapter Three

The Dialectical Poetics of *Four Quartets*

Introduction

In T. S. Eliot's 1917 story 'Eeldrop and Appleplex', the character Eeldrop—generally understood as something like Eliot to Appleplex's Pound—is labelled 'a sceptic with a taste for mysticism'. Largely neglected is a descriptive phrase that soon follows: 'learned in theology'.¹ Theology of various kinds compelled Eliot's interest from an early age; as a Harvard undergraduate he read widely in contemporary scholarship on religious experience, particularly mysticism, and his later studies in Sanskrit involved, among other texts, the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and early Buddhist scripture.² But Eliot was a trained philosopher, not a theologian, and only a decade after the publication of 'Eeldrop and Appleplex' did he convert to Anglo-Catholicism and begin thoroughly educating himself in Christian theology.

Eliot immersed himself, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, in doctrinal and administrative debates and discussions within the Church of England before and during the Second World War, from the Seventh Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion in 1930 to the Moot, a discussion group on Christianity and culture convened by the missionary and editor J. H. Oldham at intervals in the decade following 1937. His letters at the time reveal his deepening interest in theology, his sense of inadequacy in the field, and his determination to keep abreast of its issues. In

¹ T. S. Eliot, 'Eeldrop and Appleplex', *The Little Review* 4:1 (May 1917), 7.

² Excellent scholarship has been done on Eliot's reading in these areas, especially by Donald J. Childs in *T. S. Eliot: Mystic, Son and Lover* (London: The Athlone Press Ltd, 1997); Cleo M. Kearns in *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions: A Study in Poetry and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Lyndall Gordon in *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (London: Vintage Books, 1998).

1931, he wrote to Paul Elmer More about how much he enjoyed their theological debates, which involved ‘long evenings enlivened by whiskey and tobacco and countercharges of heresy’. In 1947 he remarked that his personal reading was mostly theology. Perhaps most significantly, in 1934 he expressed to More the extent to which theological deliberations had become his chief intellectual concern: ‘I am painfully aware that I need a much more extensive and profound knowledge of theology, for the sort of prose work that I should like to do—for pure literary criticism has ceased to interest me’.³

One indicator of the direction Eliot’s reading may have taken is an unpublished 1939 lecture, ‘Types of English Religious Verse’, in which he asserts that ‘perhaps since the early seventeenth century there has been no age of such acute theological controversy as our own’. As Paul Murray has pointed out, the ‘acute controversy’ that most interested Eliot was the conflict between the previously dominant liberal Protestantism, which extended back through the nineteenth century to Friedrich Schleiermacher, and the so-called Neo-Orthodoxy, which hearkened back to Kierkegaard’s challenge to liberalism and whose unquestioned firebrand was the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. ‘The main thrust of Eliot’s sympathy’, asserts Murray, ‘was undoubtedly with the Neo-Orthodox group’.⁴

Eliot’s allegiance—or at least the locus of his interest—is evident in a revealing stretch of the lecture in which Eliot describes the religious poetry of the future:

[It] will be much more interested in the dogma and the doctrine; in religious thought, rather than purely personal religious feeling. The precursor of this

³ Barry Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion: T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010), 116; Roger Kojecky, *T. S. Eliot’s Social Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1971), 78.

⁴ Paul Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism: The Secret History of ‘Four Quartets’* (London: The Macmillan Press Limited, 1991), 111-12.

attitude was T. E. Hulme killed in 1917; he was not a religious poet, but his critical ideas took this direction. In more recent times has come an increasing attention paid also by laymen and even by men outside the Church, to scholastic philosophy; and among the younger English theologians, a revival deeply influenced by Thomism, and to some extent by Karl Barth and Kierkegaard. Hence it is to be expected that the religious poetry of our time will be concerned primarily with giving poetic form to theological thought, and will tend to have more kinship with that of the seventeenth century, than with that of the nineteenth.⁵

The passage reveals much—not only the theologians Eliot considers most worthy of attention, but also his sense of what the religious poetry of his time entails. It can hardly be read as a mission statement, but it does cast light on Eliot's sense of the theological terrain in the late 1930s. Three touchstones: Hulme, as the 'precursor'; Neo-Thomism, especially as mediated through the work of Jacques Maritain; and the so-called Neo-Orthodoxy of Kierkegaard and Barth. Eliot's debts to Hulme and Maritain are well known; his connexion with Barth has gone largely unexamined, despite the fact that Barth is probably the most important theologian of the twentieth century.

It would be easy to marginalise Barth as a religious thinker in a secular age. Since the 1960s, for a number of reasons, Christian theology has largely retreated from public discourse. But between the wars, and even after, theologians were often public intellectuals: Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Barth himself appeared on the cover of *Time*, and the Jewish theologian Martin Buber on that of *Saturday Review*. Before his expulsion from Germany in 1935, Barth served as chief spokesman and lightning rod for Christian opposition to the Nazi regime. But the defining moment of Barth's career—one from which he later distanced himself—came in 1922, the year of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*. In that year Barth published the second edition of his book-length commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

⁵ Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 112-13.

As one contemporary put it, the book ‘exploded like a bomb in the playground of the theologians’.⁶ Instantly controversial, *The Epistle to the Romans* inspired a group of young theologians—Barth, Emil Brunner, and Rudolf Bultmann, among others—to elaborate what came to be known as dialectical theology.

Dialectical theology was not a system; it was a dissenting stance and a form of theological criticism, and its critical praxis was inseparable from its discursive strategies of paradox and negation. It was primarily antagonistic to liberal Protestantism, or at least what liberal Protestantism had largely become. Between the wars, anyone wishing to engage in serious theological deliberation had little choice but to reckon with its challenge, which for the most part meant reckoning with Barth. As the Scottish theologian John Baillie wrote in his 1939 book *Our Knowledge of God*, ‘nobody seems to be able to talk theology these days without mentioning him’.⁷

In England, Barth’s work became available gradually. Though a translation of selected essays, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, had appeared in 1928, the 1933 publication of Edwyn Hoskyns’s translation of *The Epistle to the Romans*, reviewed favourably by Norman Porteous in the *Criterion*, allowed a broad swath of Anglican lay thinkers access to the book that had precipitated so much debate. Eliot was among them. For a committed Christian and public intellectual who described himself as combining ‘a Catholic cast of mind, a Calvinistic heritage, and a Puritanical temperament’, Barthian theology had much to offer—not only its challenges to both liberal Protestantism and the claims of mysticism, but also the discursive strategies by which it sought to convey the ineffable.⁸

⁶ D. Densil Morgan, *Barth Reception in Britain* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 21.

⁷ Sykes, ‘Theology’, 165.

⁸ T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (1957; repr., New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 243.

Barth's move to the forefront of Anglican theological discourse in the 1930s provides an overlooked piece to the interpretive puzzle of *Four Quartets*. Though criticism of the poem has thoroughly examined Eliot's use of such Christian mystical sources as St. John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, and *The Cloud of Unknowing*, critics have also recognised a countercurrent, something in the text that resists mysticism. Some see in that resistance a rigorous intellect at work: Corona Sharp concludes as much when she reflects on the poem's 'absence of ecstasy' and 'view of the world of sense as delusive and dying'. Others have responded to that tension by framing the poem as predominantly philosophical rather than religious. In his study of Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism, Barry Spurr deems *Four Quartets* 'a philosophical meditation on time in a broadly Christian spirit', and determines that 'it would narrow its catholicity of reference to call it an Anglo-Catholic poem or even a Catholic one'. Donald Childs sees *Four Quartets* as exploring 'a dynamic tension between the momentary mystical experience of belief as absolutely powerful and valid and the daily experience of belief as a series of propositions that (from the pragmatic point of view) do not absolutely work'. While Childs grasps that the poem is built around a dialectic, he misreads the point of contention: it is an issue not of faith *per se* but of the proper form of faith. Denis Donoghue gestures in this direction by observing, 'Two traditions in Christianity engaged Eliot. One was Augustinian: it involved theological exactitudes extending from Augustine to Pascal. The other was the mystical tradition'.⁹ But, as Donoghue surely knows, the Augustinian tradition did not

⁹ Sister Corona Sharp, "'The Unheard Music": T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and St. John of the Cross', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 51, vol. 3 (Spring 1982), 265; Barry Spurr, '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion*': *T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010), 116; Donald Childs, *T. S. Eliot: Mystic, Son and Lover*, 221; Denis Donoghue, *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 272.

end with Pascal, and neither did Eliot's interest in it. And there is a strong Augustinian flavour to the theology of Karl Barth.

If Eliot criticism has been slow to explore the Barthian elements in *Four Quartets*, it is not for having failed to recognise them. As early as 1978, Helen Gardner remarked, 'The concept of the "point of intersection" is a favourite one with Karl Barth, whose *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* was extremely influential in the period just before the war'. Since her observation, both Ian Glenn and Steve Ellis have called attention to Barthian aspects of the *Quartets*. Ellis, despite making some compelling comparisons of his own, largely directs his readers to Glenn's brief article, which asserts that Barth may well be the dominant theological influence on Eliot from 1933-1942. But Glenn misreads Barth: he depicts the Swiss theologian as 'trying to describe mystical experience' when, to the contrary, Barth was deeply suspicious of mysticism.¹⁰

It is this anti-mystical stance that makes Barth's influence on *Four Quartets* most illuminating. Whatever else may be said of *Four Quartets*—and it is a complex poem, the work of a great poet writing toward a kind of consummation—its mystical deliberations are undeniable. But it balances mystical aspirations with a Barthian scepticism about human possibility. Furthermore, even in its mystical deliberations, *Four Quartets* is above all about moments: moments of grace, moments of fallen existence, moments of intersection. It engages in an extended meditation on how to 'read' those moments—as intimations of mystical transcendence or, as Kierkegaard and Barth would say, the Moment of the human-divine encounter. The poem's deliberations about the ontological status of the self—suspended in the dialectic of

¹⁰ Helen Gardner, *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 145; Steve Ellis, *The English Eliot: Design, Language and Landscape in 'Four Quartets'* (London: Routledge, 1991), 131-3; Ian Glenn, 'Karl Barth and T. S. Eliot', *Standpunkte* 35, no. 1 (February 1982), 35.

time and eternity—bear the marks, so far largely unacknowledged, of Barth's influence.

Contexts: Barth, Eliot and Liberal Protestantism

The affinities between Barth and Eliot extend back well before Eliot knew of the Swiss theologian's work, and they are more various and more subtle than might first appear. Above all, both men reacted strongly against the liberalism that had come to dominate Protestant thought by the early twentieth century. Their sorties against it, though often from different positions, were part of the Protestant debate that roughly paralleled the Modernist controversy in the Roman Catholic Church.

Eliot's reaction stemmed from his deep disenchantment, from an early age, with the Unitarianism in which he was raised. Eliot would write in the *Criterion* in 1931 that he saw himself as having been brought up 'outside the Christian fold, in Unitarianism'.¹¹ The Eliot family's denomination was the gold standard of liberalism:

New England Unitarianism was the product of a reaction against Calvinism's extreme emphasis on the transcendent majesty of God and in part the product of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century philosophical idealism. Besides being the most "liberal" of the Christian creeds, it was also the most immanentist. For Eliot, the immanent, all pervasive divinity of his family's religion simply evaporated into the all that it pervaded, leaving him in a universe of nonsacred secularity.¹²

Charles William Eliot, distant relation of the poet and president of Harvard, epitomised Unitarian liberalism when he proposed 'a new ideal of God' encompassing 'the Jewish Jehovah, the Christian Universal father, the modern

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, review of *Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence*, by John Middleton Murry, *Criterion* 10, no. 41 (July 1931), 771.

¹² Eugene Webb, *The Dark Dove: The Sacred and Secular in Modern Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 198.

physicist's omnipresent and exhaustless Energy, and the biological conception of a Vital Force'.¹³

Over the course of his Harvard years, Eliot's rejection of his parents' tradition led to a search for alternatives; his effort has something in it of a young man dragging a net through Western and non-Western traditions alike in hopes that he might dredge up a system that will satisfy his desire for both transcendence and intellectual rigor. Ronald Schuchard describes Eliot's postgraduate experience as 'a three-year philosophical-spiritual journey that carried him through the metaphysics of Babbitt, Bergson, Patanjali, Bradley, and Russell in a rigorous inquiry into the nature of the Absolute'.¹⁴ A dialectic crystallises early between his fascination with mysticism and his rigorous scepticism—the precise contradiction personified in Eeldrop.

Folded in with Eliot's philosophical scepticism is his deep suspicion of the notion of human perfectibility. This was a common enough view at the time among writers and artists reacting against liberal humanism, but for Eliot it took the form of a Calvinist sense of sin that remained with him for life. In *For Lancelot Andrewes*, he referred to 'the myth of human goodness which for liberal thought replaces the belief in Divine Grace'. Years later, in a 1942 letter to Mary Trevelyan, he remarked on a 'native Calvinism' he could not shake off. In a 1923 essay on Middleton Murry, whose avowed romanticism made him an ideal foil, Eliot rejected the notion of being guided by an innate moral sense: the 'inner voice', he declaims, merely 'breathes the

¹³ Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 5.

¹⁴ Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68.

eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust'.¹⁵ Lyndall Gordon puts the matter a bit strongly:

Eliot's view of human nature is like that of Hawthorne in their kinship to Puritan New England, their recoil from the optimism of latter-day America. Both share the Calvinist presumption—Hawthorne regretfully, Eliot savagely—that man's nature is fundamentally depraved.¹⁶

While there is little in his writing to suggest that he went so far as to subscribe to the principle of total depravity, Eliot's sense of sin would also give rise to his post-conversion attachment to the sacraments of auricular confession and penance.¹⁷

Eliot found confirmation of his budding sensibility in T. E. Hulme's ebullient rejection of humanism. Schuchard makes a strong case that Eliot was familiar with Hulme as early as 1916, through the offices of Pound, and may well have met with him personally.¹⁸ At the end of his 1930 essay 'Baudelaire', Eliot invokes Hulme with a quotation from *Speculations*: 'In the light of these absolute values, man himself is judged to be essentially limited and imperfect. He is endowed with Original Sin. While he can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself be perfect'. Hulme asserts a stark categorical difference between the human and the divine: 'The *divine* is not *life* at its intensest. It contains in a way an almost *anti-vital* element'.¹⁹ That insistence on the gulf between humanity and God would also characterise the dialectical theology of Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*.

Catholicism offered a counterweight of sorts to the anti-humanist influence of Hulme. Eliot engaged most closely with the Neo-scholastic thought of Jacques

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1970), 63-4; Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 13; T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 3rd enlarged ed. (1951; London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1980), 27.

¹⁶ Gordon, 276.

¹⁷ Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 136.

¹⁸ Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 54.

¹⁹ Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 430; T. E. Hulme, *Selected Writings*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 1998), 188.

Maritain, at which he arrived through his reading of the reactionary Charles Maurras, whom he would later describe as ‘une sorte de Virgile qui nous conduisait aux portes du temple’.²⁰ Maritain would remain a touchstone for Eliot; *True Humanism*, the English translation of Maritain’s 1936 book *Humanisme intégral*, would gain Eliot’s endorsement as a foundational text of the Moot. The appeal to Eliot of Maritain’s distinction between ‘anthropocentric humanism’, which ‘believes that man is his own centre, and therefore the centre of all things’, and ‘theocentric humanism’, in which ‘the creature should be truly respected in his connection with God and because he is totally dependent on Him’, is unmistakable.²¹ Maritain also shared Eliot and Barth’s critique of ‘the man of bourgeois liberalism’:

This bourgeois man denies both evil and the irrational elements of his nature, so that he may be able to enjoy the witness of his good conscience, be content with himself, just in himself. He is thus firmly established among the illusions and deceptions of a false and nominalist conscience. Hence he makes a great play with morality and a spiritual point of view; he can be animated by a devotion, which is often sincere and ardent, to the truths and virtues of the natural order; but he empties these of their most precious content and turns them in a way into myths, because he cuts them off from the living God and from love, for he is a deist and an atheist.²²

Though more restrained in its rhetoric, this is much the same critique of liberalism as that advanced by Eliot. But as Smidt notes, Eliot was never entirely comfortable with Maritain’s affirmation of human possibility; the ‘Puritan scepticism’ Eliot could not shake was largely incompatible with any humanism, including Maritain’s relatively austere Catholic version.²³

²⁰ Kojecky, *Social Criticism*, 62. The passage translates, ‘a kind of Virgil who led us to the doors of the temple’—to the doors only, because Maurras, an atheist, did not himself enter.

²¹ Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, trans. M. R. Adamson, 2nd edition (London: The Centenary Press, 1939), 19, 65.

²² Maritain, *True Humanism*, 71-2.

²³ Keith Clements, ed., *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, Continuum imprint (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 145; Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 55.

That ‘Puritan scepticism’ placed him at odds with a Protestant liberalism that ‘had the considerable advantage of being able, tacitly, to appeal to the common feeling that real progress was being made on all sides by human society’.²⁴ For Eliot, secular and non-Christian humanisms offered no better alternative. In Irving Babbitt, Eliot saw a formidable thinker and erstwhile Buddhist who embodied a non-Christian humanism Eliot could not endorse. In his 1928 essay on Babbitt, he refers to his former teacher’s humanism as ‘a product—a by-product—of Protestant theology in its last agonies’.²⁵

To Eliot’s sensibility, the Christian life meant a frank acknowledgement that the human condition does not entail the inexorable march of progress but rather, as Barth frames it, ‘walking upon a ridge between *time* and *eternity* that is narrower than a knife-edge’.²⁶ Already in 1919, Eliot could say to Pound, ‘I am afraid of the life after death’.²⁷ Shortly after his conversion, he wrote to Paul Elmer More, ‘To me, the phrase “to be damned for the glory of God” is sense and not paradox; I had far rather walk, as I do, in daily terror of eternity, than feel that this was only a children’s game in which all the contestants would get equally worthless prizes at the end’.²⁸ In its evocation of the Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards, that utterance expresses the Calvinistic sense of sin, judgement, and grace that finds a twentieth-century approximation—though with crucial differences—in the theology of Barth.

Barth arrived at his critique of liberalism and humanism through a different form of disillusionment. Raised in the Reformed tradition, Barth was already a

²⁴ Sykes, ‘Theology’, 146.

²⁵ Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 475.

²⁶ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (1928; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publisher, Inc., 1978), 188.

²⁷ Schuchard, *Eliot’s Dark Angel*, 119. The remark famously appears in Pound’s *Canto XXIX*.

²⁸ Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 273.

minister when the advent of the First World War called into question the liberal theology in which he had been trained. In a retrospective essay, he recalled ‘the horrible manifesto of the ninety-three German intellectuals who identified themselves before all the world with the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II....among the signatories I discovered the names of almost all my German teachers’.²⁹ In that conflation of religion and nationalism, and in the failure of the Church to address the plight of the workers to whom he ministered, Barth saw complacency and arrogance—in a word, sin, which Barth would define in *The Epistle to the Romans* as ‘the assumption of an independence in which God is forgotten’.³⁰ Dialectical theology began as, in Barth’s words, ‘an impetuous movement to dethrone the then dominant, more or less liberal, even positive theology, which indeed only represented the mature stage of a development that had been going on apparently irresistibly for the past two or three centuries’. Barth and his friend Eduard Thurneysen ‘made a fresh attempt to learn our theological ABCs’, not only returning to the gospels but also studying Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky.³¹

It was this radical revisioning of the meaning of Christianity that led Barth to revise his first, relatively benign 1919 edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* into the prophetic challenge published three years later. In 1923, Barth and like-minded young theologians founded the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* (*Between the Times*) to promulgate their critique of liberal theology. The journal would last a decade before Barth effectively discontinued it by severing his connexion. In 1925, Adolf Keller published a seminal article in *The Expositor* in which he labeled the movement ‘the

²⁹ Barth, ‘Concluding Unscientific Postscript’, in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 70.

³⁰ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 168.

³¹ Barth, ‘The Humanity of God’, in Green, *Karl Barth*, 48; ‘Concluding Unscientific Postscript’, in Green, *Karl Barth*, 72.

theology of crisis'. Keller, who first brought dialectical theology to the attention of the English-speaking theological community, confirmed that, for Barth, liberal theology was 'a kind of theological fall'.³² As Barth saw it, Protestant theology had engaged in a long campaign to aggrandise the human and domesticate the divine, when the true relation of the human to the divine was one of perpetual crisis, of the judgement of the eternal on the temporal, of what Kierkegaard had called the 'infinite qualitative difference' between God and humanity. As Barth describes it in *The Epistle to the Romans*, the gospel is not merely good news of salvation, and still less is it a moral guidebook; it is rather 'a shattering disturbance, an assault which brings everything into question. For this reason, nothing is so meaningless as the attempt to make a religion out of the Gospel, and to set it as one human possibility in the midst of others'.³³

Barth's assault on the edifice of liberal theology—seemingly on religion itself—was not unprecedented; Kierkegaard had embarked on a similar crusade in the previous century. But the rhetorical audacity of *The Epistle to the Romans*, and its arrival on German bookshelves in the aftermath of a war that had called into question both Enlightenment and Romantic notions of human progress and divinity, made it a sensation. Its condemnation of liberal theology is withering:

We suppose that we know what we are saying when we say 'God'. We assign to Him the highest place in our world: and in so doing we place Him fundamentally on one line with ourselves and with things. We assume that he *needs something*: and so we assume that we are able to arrange our relation to Him as we arrange our other relationships.... And so, when we set God upon the throne of the world, we mean by God ourselves. In 'believing' in Him, we justify, enjoy, and adore ourselves.³⁴

³² Morgan, *Barth Reception*, 9.

³³ Barth, *Romans*, 225.

³⁴ Barth, *Romans*, 44.

That sort of rhetoric, at once pulpit-pounding and intellectually rigorous, proved incendiary. Not only did Barth reassert the doctrine of Original Sin; he recast the Church itself as a kind of humanist idol. Such jeremiads were alien to the Church of England, which was not only conjoined with the state but chary of the Reformed tradition, and ‘dominated by epistemological pragmatism, moralism and an aversion to claims of revelation which could not be verified according to rationalistic norms’—in short, an embodiment of much that Barth was calling into question.³⁵ But what came directly and unequivocally from Barth had already come sardonically from the pens first of Hulme and then of Eliot, whose drily scathing review of the liberal theologian Hastings Rashdall’s *Conscience and Christ* had appeared in 1916:

Now it follows almost inevitably, if one holds a theory of conscience similar to Dr. Rashdall’s, that conscience will consist in the usual structure of prejudices of the enlightened middle classes. To this middle-class conscience the teaching of Jesus is gradually assimilated... For Canon Rashdall the following of Christ is “made easier” by thinking of him “as the being in whom that union of God and man after which all ethical religion aspires is most fully accomplished.” Certain saints found the following of Christ very hard, but modern methods have facilitated everything.³⁶

Eliot’s cool sarcasm reflects the comfortable position of a reviewer who can throw a few well-aimed stones into the theological melee from a vantage point above the fray. But the underlying theological bent is clear: liberalism’s removal of the ‘anarchic, or unsafe, or disconcerting’ in Christianity is an attempted domestication of the divine, an evasion of the crisis posed not only by the teachings of Jesus but by the Christian mysteries of the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Atonement. To this extent at least, Eliot’s thought followed a line that converged with Barth’s. After his conversion, Eliot’s affinity with Barth’s critique of liberalism became even more pronounced, presented as it was in direct terms reminiscent of Barth himself:

³⁵ Morgan, *Barth Reception*, 3.

³⁶ Eliot, review of *Conscience and Christ*, by Hastings Rashdall, *International Journal of Ethics* 27, no. 1 (Oct 1916), 111-12.

One of the consequences, as it seems to me, of our failure to grasp the proper relation of the Eternal and the Transient, is our *over-estimation of the importance of our own time*. This is natural to an age which, whatever its professions, is still imbued with the doctrine of progress.... No age has been more ego-centric, so to speak, than our own.³⁷

Surprisingly, when in the late 1920s Barth's work began to be felt within the Church of England, it drew significant support, mainly from the Anglo-Catholic community of which Eliot had become a member. Though some Anglican theologians dismissed it as 'desperado theology' or 'neo-Calvinist transcendental supernaturalism', others saw Barth as returning Protestantism to first principles. In a 1933 article, John Baillie affirmed dialectical theology's 'protests against our overweening humanism, our cheap evolutionism, our smug immanentism ... [I]n what it has to say about our human significance as over against God and our utter dependence on him for our salvation it is difficult to do anything but rejoice'. Barth's thought found champions in J. K. Mozley and, much more prominently, Edwyn Hoskyns. Mozley wrote an appreciative review of Douglas Horton's 1928 translation of *The Word of God and the Word of Man*; he described Barth as 'a stormy petrel of theology' but expressed admiration for his work, particularly his dialectical approach. Hoskyns's Barth-inspired article 'The Christ of the Synoptic Gospels', along with his related sermons in Cambridge, injected Barth forcefully into the Anglican theological conversation even before Hoskyns's translation of *The Epistle to the Romans* appeared in 1933. In that year, a spate of books on Barth appeared in Britain.³⁸ In 1936, a translation of the first volume of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, titled *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, appeared in English, and the following year an essay by Barth appeared immediately after Eliot's introductory essay in *Revelation*, a collection edited by John Baillie and the editor and publisher Hugh Martin. Eliot and

³⁷ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *Criterion* 12, no. 46 (October 1932), 75.

³⁸ Morgan, *Barth Reception*, 104, 175, 164, 110, 117, 123.

Barth, like the other contributors to *Revelation*, read each other's contributions in advance of publication.³⁹

But by the end of 1933, Barth had become famous for an entirely different reason: as a leading organiser and spokesman of what became the Confessing Church, the Christian resistance to Hitler's formation of the so-called German Christian Church. His first pamphlet opposing the Nazification of the German churches was translated into English within months of its appearance in mid-1933; the following year, Barth penned the Barmen Declaration, which, with its categorical rejection of six 'false doctrines' advanced by Nazi policy, refused to offer the allegiance of the German Evangelical Church to any temporal power. In 1935, Barth was deported, spending the war years in his native Switzerland.

Eliot, from his vantage point as editor of the *Criterion* and at Faber, played an ambiguous role in these Barthian controversies. On the one hand, he published Porteous's review of Hoskyns's translation of *The Epistle to the Romans*; on the other, he participated in the grievous failure of Hoskyns and other Anglicans to recognise and respond appropriately to the increasingly virulent state-sponsored anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany. Barth himself, for all his resistance on behalf of the Church, remained quiet on that issue long enough to have earned some measure of censure. Eliot escaped culpability only when the German author of an explicitly anti-

³⁹ Glenn, 'Karl Barth and T. S. Eliot', 35. In addition, Barth receives more mention than any other thinker in the minutes of the Moot, often in the remarks of John Baillie. Though Maritain occupies a more central position in the deliberations of the Moot, Barth comes up repeatedly. Eliot was surely also cognizant of Barth's Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen in 1937-8, published in 1938 as *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*.

Semitic lecture on ‘The Jewish Question’, promoted by Hoskyns and evidently not rejected by Eliot, withdrew the piece from publication by Faber.⁴⁰

Eliot and Barth did not concur on all things theological. Eliot’s reverence for the Roman Catholic Church as ‘the great repository of wisdom’, especially in light of its medieval mysticism as well as Thomist thought, led him to embrace several doctrines—Catholic sacramental theology, Marianism, and the mystical *via negativa*, among others—that the Reformed Barth would not accept.⁴¹ Anglo-Catholicism was, after all, an attempt ‘to recall the modern English Church to its ancient, pre-Reformation origins and its persisting Catholic character and heritage’. One aspect of Eliot’s Catholicism is his affinity for analogy, which Barth rejected as theologically invalid and even pernicious.

But both Eliot and Barth can be seen as taking a middle way between Catholicism and Reformed Protestantism. Somewhat ironically, Barth’s return to first principles of the Reformed tradition resonates with Catholicism in unexpected ways. The Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of the most astute and appreciative critics of Barth, regards him as presenting ‘the most thorough and penetrating display of the Protestant view and the closest rapprochement with the Catholic’, and notes Barth’s position as ‘midway between liberal Protestantism and Catholicism’. ‘His theology’, says von Balthasar, ‘is lovely’.⁴² Though Barth of course remained resistant to ‘the unceasingly actual Roman temptation’, he averred that, if forced to make an absolute choice between the liberal ‘Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Troeltsch interpretation of the Reformation’ and Roman Catholicism, he

⁴⁰ Morgan, *Barth Reception*, 136-7.

⁴¹ Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 45.

⁴² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 23, 30, 25.

‘would rather become a Catholic’.⁴³ In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Barth concedes that he might ‘come to an agreement in thought even with a Catholic theologian, and even over the subject of the altar sacrament—without any accompanying desire to take it from him’.⁴⁴ And there is an Origenist streak in Barth’s theology that Eliot would likely find objectionable, extending so far as to make Barth that most improbable of creatures, a Calvinist universalist.⁴⁵

But there remain, in addition to shared convictions and emphases, a form of religious feeling and a set of discursive strategies that Eliot and Barth share to a striking degree—a degree that suggests considerable influence of the theologian on the poet. These conjunctions form part of the fabric of *Four Quartets*, in which Barth is, so to speak, the interlocutor of St. John of the Cross. Precise structural analyses of the *Quartets* do little to elucidate how this dialectic unfolds; the poem weaves together its motifs in such a way as to accommodate a range of such readings. What matters here is the overall development of the tension between mystical theology and Barthian critique, and the theologically charged strategies by which the poem seeks a resolution to that dialectic.

From Dialectical Theology to *Four Quartets*

When, in ‘Types of English Religious Verse’, Eliot refers to ‘Karl Barth and Kierkegaard’ as one strain of theology distinct from Thomism, he is noting the

⁴³ Barth, ‘The Humanity of God’, in Green, *Karl Barth*, 64; Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 31.

⁴⁴ Barth, *The Word of God*, 133.

⁴⁵ In his Gifford Lecture titled ‘God’s Decision and Man’s Election’, Barth reframes the Calvinist doctrine of election to mean that, through Christ, all humanity is elected to salvation. Barth did not deny charges of universalism, pointing instead to Colossians 1:19, in which Paul affirms that what God accomplished through Christ was to ‘reconcile all things unto himself’ (AV), and asserting that it would be arrogant to set ‘any limits on our side to the friendliness of God toward humanity’ (Barth, ‘The Humanity of God’, in Green, *Karl Barth*, 64).

former's debt to the latter. In two senses, Kierkegaard opened up the space that Barth came to occupy and extend: he was not a systematic theologian but a critical theologian, and he advanced his critique by deploying an array of often demanding discursive strategies. Kierkegaard, unlike Barth, was an unwieldy blend of devotional writer and satirist; his works, often using satirical pseudonyms, run a discursive gamut from the direct and homiletic to the idiosyncratic and farcical.

Kierkegaard critiqued humanism in general and the culture of liberal Protestantism in particular. Many of his declaratives—for instance, that there is 'a life-and-death enmity' between God and humanity, and that although Christianity is a 'divine scandal', or more precisely because of that, liberal Protestantism has 'abolished Christianity under the guise of preserving it'—resonate through Barth's work.⁴⁶ Barth declares in his preface to *The Epistle to the Romans*, 'if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance'.⁴⁷ But, as Balthasar points out, Barth is no abject disciple of Kierkegaard. He notes that Barth's work contains a 'refutation of Kierkegaard', in that while both theologians focus on what Barth calls 'the permanent KRISIS of the relation between time and eternity', Kierkegaard's vision is 'unworldly, ascetic, polemic' while Barth's is ultimately 'the immense revelation of the eternal light that radiates over all of nature and fulfills every promise; it is God's Yes and Amen to himself and his creation'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 6 vol. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-78), 6:313, 337, 354.

⁴⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 10.

⁴⁸ Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 26; Barth, *Romans*, 10-11.

But the most fundamental principle that Barth inherits from Kierkegaard is that of the human condition as paradoxical—because Christianity presents humanity with what Kierkegaard called ‘The Absolute Paradox’ of the Incarnation. The Incarnation ‘unites the contradictories, is the eternalizing of the historical and the historicizing of the eternal’. Facing this irruption of the eternal into the temporal, humanity stands revealed in its sin and guilt, but it also experiences divine grace. The Incarnation is absurd, presenting an incomprehensible and absolute demand that requires a Christian to take a leap of faith and ‘die to being human in the ordinary sense’ in order to be transformed by grace and begin to realise full humanity.⁴⁹ Herein lies the scandal that every form of humanism seeks to repress. Hence Barth’s own paradoxical formulation that ‘[r]ightly understood, there are no Christians: there is only the eternal opportunity of becoming Christians—an opportunity at once accessible and inaccessible to all men’.⁵⁰

‘By words, we shall never reach the place where problems cease’, Barth declares, yet ‘[c]oncerning the dawn upon which we have gazed we are able neither to speak nor to be silent’.⁵¹ Here, he confronts, like Kierkegaard, the problem of what Steiner terms ontological difficulty—the insufficiency of language to fulfil the customary contract between writer and reader. But instead of using Kierkegaard’s complex and challenging array of discursive moves and gradations of tone, Barth distils his discourse into something more concentrated and prophetic. He eschews contingent difficulty in favour of a kind of theopoetics of tactical difficulty.

Ontological difficulty, central to Barth’s theology, takes the form of the Augustinian

⁴⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, vol. 7 of *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61, 222; Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 6:313.

⁵⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 321.

⁵¹ Barth, *The Word of God*, 180; *Romans*, 327.

distinction between Word and words; Barth acknowledges the inevitable failure of the latter, but refuses to confront that failure through any strategy that might sever the contract with the reader and close off the text. It is this discourse—the discourse of dialectical theology—that leaves its mark on *Four Quartets*.

Barth himself described dialectical theology in terms that reveal his intention to use tactical difficulty as a way of pointing to ontological difficulty without inscribing it into the text: ‘a web of radically incomplete thoughts and sentences that point beyond themselves to the ineffable reality of God’s speech to us, which alone can fill up what is missing in our speech’.⁵² More specifically, Barthian discourse trades in paradoxical juxtapositions of affirmation and negation, so as to create a kind of semantic void where the divine might make its presence felt:

The genuine dialectician knows that this Center cannot be apprehended or beheld, and he will not if he can help it allow himself to be drawn into giving direct information about it....But on occasions when dialectic utterance has seemed to succeed [in bearing witness], it was not because of what the dialectician did, not because of the assertions he made...but because, through his ambiguous and unambiguous assertions, the living Truth in the center, the reality of God, asserted itself.⁵³

What emerges as crucial here is the sense of authorial agency—and the lack thereof. The enterprise of paradoxical discourse is itself paradoxical: the author constructs his utterances in order to vacate them. The text’s tactical difficulties paradoxically make it transparent, opening a gap through which the divine, in its absolute freedom, may choose to make its presence felt. The dialectician can make nothing happen; he can only create a space in which something might happen. He cannot bear witness, but only ‘seem to succeed’ in bearing witness. When ‘East Coker’ describes each effort to use words as ‘a different kind of failure’, that sense of communicative passivity is linked, as in Barth, to the unreality of the temporal world and the inability of fallen

⁵² Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 78.

⁵³ Barth, *The Word of God*, 206, 210-11.

humanity to know God, much less communicate anything about God.⁵⁴ Only by accepting abject failure can one get oneself out of the way, so to speak, and let grace perform whatever operations it may.

Of course, as with many other religious traditions, paradox rests at the scriptural heart of Christianity. It takes such prominent forms as Jesus's assertion in Matthew 10:39 that 'He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it' (AV), and Paul's cascade of paradoxes in Second Corinthians 6:8-10: 'By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, yet true; As unknown, and yet well known, as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things' (AV). And Christianity's rich tradition, both Western and Eastern, of negative (or apophatic) theology—particularly the Neoplatonic strain founded largely on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius—trades heavily in paradox and negation. One need only consider the conclusion of Pseudo-Dionysius's *The Mystical Theology*: 'There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it... Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial'.⁵⁵ Eliot knew this rhetorical tradition well through his abiding interest in the mystical *via negativa*, which has been studied in depth by a range of critics.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (1950; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1980), 128. Of course, the problem of the insufficiency of language was hardly limited to theology in the twentieth century. In *Four Quartets*, however, it takes on a decidedly theological cast.

⁵⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 141.

⁵⁶ A number of critics have examined Eliot's engagement with apophatic and mystical theology, perhaps most prominently Donald Childs, Eloise Knapp Hay, Paul Murray, and Cleo McNelly Kearns, whose most relevant works are cited in this thesis.

Barth's dialectical discourse clearly falls within the range of negative theology as defined by Cleo Kearns: the assumption that 'any attempt to specify the characteristics or mode of being of the divine is not simply inadequate, which would be a truism, but essentially misleading and even false, because divinity is so far beyond the categories of human understanding and ontology as to make them a hindrance rather than a help to its apprehension'.⁵⁷ But Barth's systematic deployment of paradox and negation works counter to mystical discourse. Though he continually affirms 'the hidden nature of God, unpredictable and irreproducible in human language, and therefore unsusceptible of adequate expression in human language', Barth removes God from all human understanding, including the mystical apprehension that Maritain ranks as the highest degree of knowledge.⁵⁸

The degree to which Barth uses the discourse of paradox and negation to very different ends from those of the apophatic mystic is evident in comparison with passages from *Four Quartets* that draw on Pseudo-Dionysius and St. John of the Cross. First, from 'Burnt Norton':

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline.⁵⁹

Here, Eliot is engaging in precisely the dialectical exercise described so well by Barth: creating a void between affirmation and negation in which the transcendent reality beyond all human thought might be glimpsed. The passage hews strikingly close to one in *The Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius: 'It is not immovable,

⁵⁷ Cleo McNelly Kearns, 'Negative Theology and Literary Discourse in *Four Quartets*: A Derridean Reading', in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's 'Four Quartets'*, ed. Edward Lobb (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 131.

⁵⁸ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1 of *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thompson (1936; repr., London: T&T Clark, 1963), 149.

⁵⁹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 119.

moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live, nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time'.⁶⁰ A similar allusion, this one to St. John of the Cross and even closer to direct quotation, occurs in 'East Coker':

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
 You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by a way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.⁶¹

Eliot has now turned his dialectic not on the nature of God but on the surrender and transformation of the individual self. The passage is remarkable for its faithfulness to its source in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

In order to arrive at having pleasure in everything,
 Desire to have pleasure in nothing.
 In order to arrive at possessing everything,
 Desire to possess nothing.
 In order to arrive at being everything,
 Desire to be nothing.
 In order to arrive at knowing everything,
 Desire to know nothing.
 In order to arrive at that wherein thou hast no pleasure,
 Thou must go by a way wherein thou hast no pleasure.
 In order to arrive at that which thou knowest not,
 Thou must go by a way that thou knowest not.
 In order to arrive at that which though possessest not,
 Thou must go by a way that thou possessest not.
 In order to arrive at that which thou art not,
 Thou must go through that which thou art not.⁶²

Eliot is of course grounding the mystical deliberations of *Four Quartets* in the authority of a great practitioner of the *via negativa*.

Unlike those of Barth, these paradoxes and negations of St. John of the Cross function not to open a space in which the divine might reveal itself, but to confound the self into self-negation, the self-emptying of active purgation through which the

⁶⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 141.

⁶¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 127.

⁶² Gardner, *Composition*, 107.

individual opens himself to divine infusion. This is the ‘Internal darkness, deprivation / And destitution of all property, / Desiccation of the world of sense, / Evacuation of the world of fancy’ enjoined in ‘Burnt Norton’ as the ‘way down’.⁶³ But for Barth, the mystics do not go far enough. The paradoxical negations of dialectical theology are constructed to exceed those of the *via negativa*: ‘God is pure negation. He is both “here” and “there”. He is the negation of the negation in which the other world contradicts this world and this world the other world. He is the death of our death and the non-existence of our non-existence’.⁶⁴ Pursue the negations far enough, and they become resounding affirmations. This is one way Barth indicates the Yes concealed in the divine No.

A passage from *The Epistle to the Romans* reveals how the discourse of paradox and negation takes a different turn in Barth:

When history points beyond itself and discovers in itself its own inadequacy, when there emerges in history a horror at history, then its high places are made known. When an impress of revelation is nothing but a sign-post to Revelation, the impress is itself eternal reality; when the waiting of the pious is veritably only an expectancy which drives out all memory of piety, this waiting IS a waiting in the Kingdom of God; when a solid sense of possession is known to be itself wholly questionable, the possession is eternally solid. The whole course of this world participates in true existence when its non-existence is recognized.⁶⁵

This is apophatic theology minus the mysticism. Every construction makes plain the unreality of the earthly in relation to the eternal. Barth’s paradoxes open on the space between *The Waste Land* and ‘Burnt Norton’: only after we have recognised the world as a waste land can we be open to the vision in the rose garden.

Significantly, the passage allows for such moments of revelation. As Barth asserts in *The Epistle to the Romans*, ‘God may speak to us through Russian

⁶³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 120.

⁶⁴ Barth, *Romans*, 142.

⁶⁵ Barth, *Romans*, 90-91.

communism or a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub or a dead dog. We shall do well to listen to Him if He really does so'.⁶⁶ We may be gifted by grace with moments of illumination, but we must not misread them as signs of our righteousness, or as intimations of our ability to access or actualise our own inner divinity.

Rather than accept that mystical practice might manage to bridge the inconceivable gulf between sinful humanity and God, Barth insists that human effort does not cooperate with grace, that only by God's judgement and action in favour of humanity via the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ is humanity restored to communion with its creator. Mysticism, says Barth, is unnecessary and dangerous. He argues against the assertion 'of mystical ideas, of the union of God and humanity... whenever these ideas are used other than in an eschatologically ensured connexion'.⁶⁷ In other words, to speak of union on this side of death is hazardous at best and usually delusional.

Above all, Barth is wary of the lure of the mystical *via negativa*: 'There is no limit to the righteousness of men: it may run not only to self-glorification, but also to self-annihilation, as it does in Buddhism and mysticism and pietism. The latter is a more terrible misunderstanding than the former, because it lies so near to the righteousness of God'.⁶⁸ For the follower of the *via negativa*, 'the Darkness to which he surrenders himself' can only 'somehow magnify to gigantic size the question mark set up beyond life's boundary'.⁶⁹ Mysticism, even in its seeming fulfilment, only highlights the distance from the human to the divine. 'The mystic's "Way of Denial"', he declares, 'is a blind alley, as are all "ways"'. The only way is the Way, and that Way is Christ'. Even contemplative prayer can only 'serve to make clear how little

⁶⁶ Barth, *Doctrine*, 60.

⁶⁷ Barth, 'Feuerbach', in Green, *Karl Barth*, 94.

⁶⁸ Barth, *Romans*, 109.

⁶⁹ Barth, *The Word of God*, 203-5.

the man of prayer is able to escape from what he himself has thought and experienced, how utterly he—yes, precisely he—is a man and no more’. Mystical aspirations are likely to leave one ‘unable to reckon with anything except feelings and experiences and events’.⁷⁰

Barth’s critique of mysticism is another aspect of his thought with roots in Kierkegaard. As Paul Murray has pointed out, Eliot was probably aware of Kierkegaard’s sardonic dismissal of mystics.⁷¹ In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard refers to mysticism as ‘not only a dangerous road but a wrong road’. He goes on to elaborate his central criticism of mystics: that their attempt at non-attachment, their passivity as they wait for exalted experiences, is both an abdication of responsibility and a kind of spiritual addiction. All human beings are bound to choose for themselves how they will inhabit the world, but the mystic ‘chooses himself abstractly; one can therefore say that he is continually choosing himself out of the world’. He casts withering scorn on the mystical hunger for intimations of transcendence: ‘It is frightful to read a mystic’s laments over the flat moments’.⁷² The closing utterance of ‘Burnt Norton’—‘Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after’—stands rebuked by Barth’s admonition and Kierkegaard’s disdain.⁷³

Clearly, Eliot did not share Barth’s or Kierkegaard’s dismissive attitude toward mysticism; his post-conversion writings are saturated with allusions to Christian mystics and to mystical practice. Ronald Schuchard asserts with some reason that, by the time he wrote *Ash-Wednesday*, Eliot was ‘a committed follower of St. John [of the Cross] and the way of contemplation, a way that necessitates moving

⁷⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 316, 53.

⁷¹ Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 113.

⁷² Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, vol. 3 of *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 247, 249, 242.

⁷³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 122.

through the dark night of sense and desire, and purging the memory and the will, in order to attain the divine union'. In 1928, he even took a vow of celibacy.⁷⁴ But Eliot did bring his scepticism to bear, most forcefully in his 1928 review of the *Selected Letters* of Baron Friedrich von Hügel: 'Mysticism—even the particular Christian mysticism studied by von Hugel—is not the issue of our time. We are able to quote with approval that remark of Bossuet: "true mysticism is so rare and unessential, and false mysticism so common and dangerous that one cannot oppose it too firmly"'.⁷⁵ Eliot's sense that any claim of mystical experience needs careful sifting must be counted an important ingredient in his approach to mysticism.

In the Clark Lectures of 1926, Eliot had already incorporated an element of scepticism into his understanding of mysticism, in the form of his distinction between 'classical' and 'romantic' mysticisms. Interestingly, Eliot placed St. John of the Cross, as well as the other sixteenth-century Spanish mystics, firmly in the latter camp, as opposed to the higher, more impersonal and intellectual mysticism of the Thomists, Richard of St. Victor, and Dante: 'The Aristotelian-Victorine-Dantesque mysticism is ontological; the Spanish mysticism is psychological. The first is what I call classical, the second romantic'. In a revealing stretch of his lecture on Crashaw, Eliot makes a rather Barthian distinction between St. Theresa of Avila's 'tendency to *substitute* divine love for human love, and for the former to take on the characteristics of the latter', and Dante's awareness 'that human love and divine love were different, and one could not be substituted for the other without the distortion of human nature'. This failure to acknowledge the enormous difference between creature and creator—

⁷⁴ Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 155, 157.

⁷⁵ Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 4. Interestingly, the reference to Bishop Bossuet points to the 17th-century Quietist controversy, in which Bossuet suppressed Madame Guyon, a mystic cited repeatedly as undisciplined and self-indulgent by Evelyn Underhill in *Mysticism*—which Childs identifies as the most influential book in Eliot's study of mysticism (34).

this ‘substitution of the divine passion by the human’—had vitiated the devotional verse of recent centuries.⁷⁶ Eliot’s assessment of the risks of ‘romantic’ mysticism parallels Barth’s caution about how one can misread the movements of divine grace:

The unity of the divine will is divided only that it may be revealed in overcoming this division. But it is only too easy to confuse this invisible occurrence in God with that observable series of psychophysical experiences in which it is manifested. Or, to put this another way, the observable flux of human experience which points to the transformation of that experience in God may be projected backwards metaphysically into the will of God. Men will then direct their attention, not towards the Unknown God, but towards their own selves; and the continuity which they perceive existing between their lower and their higher experiences will appear to them invested with transcendent sanction and authority.⁷⁷

Understanding the role of Barth’s theology in *Four Quartets* requires an awareness of how he regarded mysticism as treacherous territory, rife with opportunities for self-delusion and spiritual experience-seeking.

And Eliot certainly had powerful experiences. Lyndall Gordon cites two of them, moments of transcendent silence on the streets of Boston in 1910 and then in Paris a year later, as defining experiences in his life. The poem which issued from the first experience of what Gordon calls ‘the timeless moment’ concludes, ‘You may say what you will, / At such peace I am terrified / There is nothing else beside’.⁷⁸ Spurr quotes Wallace Fowlie’s account of how, in Boston in 1932 or 1933, Eliot fell ‘flat on his face in the aisle, with his arms stretched out’ after receiving the Eucharist, in what Fowlie realised was ‘a mystical experience’.⁷⁹ The moment in the hyacinth garden in *The Waste Land* has often been read as mystical. But the only sustained treatment of

⁷⁶ T. S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry: The Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1926 and the Turnbull Lectures at The Johns Hopkins University, 1933*, ed. Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1993), 166-7.

⁷⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 189.

⁷⁸ Gordon, *An Imperfect Life*, 23, 56. Interestingly—though perhaps coincidentally—the poem’s final line reads like a direct translation of a reference to the Self in *Chāndogya Upanishad* 8.11.2.

⁷⁹ Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 121.

such moments occurs in *Four Quartets*. Eliot told Kristian Smidt that in the *Quartets* he was ‘seeking to express equivalents for small experiences he had had, as well as for mystical insight derived from his reading’.⁸⁰ The most prominent rendering of such a ‘small experience’ is the rose garden sequence in ‘Burnt Norton’.

The fact that ‘Burnt Norton’ was originally a solitary poem is important to understanding its place in the dialectic between mystical and Barthian theology. The intervening years between it and ‘East Coker’ involved serious, sometimes devastating reassessments for Eliot. Whatever happened between him and Emily Hale on their visit to Burnt Norton in 1934, it evidently did not move him to free himself from his vow of celibacy. In *The Family Reunion*, he explored the personal dimensions of ‘sin and expiation’, depicting his protagonist as ministered to by women but ultimately determined to seek his salvation through renunciation.⁸¹ Eliot also confronted the disastrous onset of the Second World War. His deliberations at the close of *The Idea of a Christian Society*, written shortly after the Munich Accords, reveal how events had led him back to an acute sense of human sinfulness:

The feeling which was new and unexpected was a feeling of humiliation, which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and atonement; what had happened was something in which one was deeply implicated and responsible.... We could not match conviction with conviction, we had no ideas with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas presented to us. Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled around anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends?⁸²

For over two decades, Eliot had confidently condemned the arrogance and complacency of liberalism and humanism. Now he felt himself enmeshed in what he

⁸⁰ Kristian Smidt, *The Importance of Recognition: Six Chapters on T. S. Eliot* (Trykk, Norway: A. S. Pedder Norbye, 1973), 42.

⁸¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 275.

⁸² T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1939), 65.

disdained. The references to banking and other industries doubtless reflected his sense of culpability as a prominent establishment figure as well as a career businessman. In the final issue of the *Criterion*, he described his feeling as ‘a depression of spirits so different from any other experience of fifty years as to be a new emotion’. Eliot was, as he mentioned in a later interview, thrown in on himself by the onset of the war.⁸³ His Calvinistic sense of human sinfulness, and of the catastrophic breach between time and eternity, had ample room to re-assert itself after the more sanguine sensibility that supports ‘Burnt Norton’ came into question.

As Lyndall Gordon notes, ‘Until *Burnt Norton*, Eliot aspired to the way up of the chosen, those who live perpetually in the light of grace, but after his imaginative encounter with the Furies of 1934-9, he aligned himself, in the later *Quartets*, with the other party, the flawed beings who must be remade’. It may be more accurate to say that he aligned himself and all humanity in a Barthian estrangement from the divine. The wartime *Quartets* explore a ‘way down’ that presumes ‘the otherness of the divine spirit’ and requires ‘an operation on Original Sin’.⁸⁴ Such an operation cannot be performed by the patient.

Eliot denied being a mystic himself, though not primarily out of scepticism. In a 1961 interview, he suggested that being a poet—even at times a devotional poet—barred him from being a mystic: ‘I don’t think I am a mystic at all, though I have always been much interested in mysticism....A great many people of sensibility have had some more or less mystical experiences. That doesn’t make them mystics. To be a mystic is a whole-time job—so is poetry’. He had made a similar remark in a 1927 review of a book on Blake, which suggests that his position remained consistent over

⁸³ T. S. Eliot, ‘Last Words’, *Criterion* 18, no. 71 (January 1939), 274; Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 208.

⁸⁴ Gordon, *An Imperfect Life*, 340.

the years. This insistence that mysticism is a ‘whole-time job’ bears on the dialectic of withdrawal and engagement in which the self of *Four Quartets* is suspended.

The renunciate inclination that pervades most of Eliot’s post-conversion poetry—and stretches of his earlier work as well—is a human manifestation of what Barth calls ‘the greedy dialectic of time and eternity’.⁸⁵ For Eliot, the mystical *via negativa* would be all-consuming, and require withdrawal into a purely contemplative life. The fact that a number of great mystics—one thinks of Bernard of Clairvaux and even St. John of the Cross—were vigorous administrators, reformers, and even diplomats does not seem to have made a difference in Eliot’s conception of what the ‘job’ entails. His 1928 vow of celibacy, and perhaps his vision of the 1935 *Collected Poems* as a final poetic publication, may have been gestures in the direction of a monastic vocation. After the war, the urge remained: Eliot confided to a friend that he planned an eventual retirement to the monastic community of Nashdom Abbey in Buckinghamshire, and in a 1948 talk in Washington, DC, he said that he was suited to a monastic life in which the conflict between the mystical and the practical would be defused. In 1940, while working on ‘East Coker’, he so effectively enforced his solitude that even John Hayward knew little of his activities, and William Force Stead described him as ‘an introvert living mostly in himself’.⁸⁶ But during the war, history also took on a new immediacy and urgency. How to reconcile the dialectic of time and eternity, and thereby to conceive of a form of renunciation that would not absent a devout Englishman from the trials embroiling his adopted homeland and Church, became a central theme in *Four Quartets*. In sifting the question, Eliot drew on Barthian theology to interrogate and modify the position he had established in ‘Burnt Norton’.

⁸⁵ Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 1; Barth, *Romans*, 530.

⁸⁶ Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 153; Gordon, *An Imperfect Life*, 354

The Rose Garden in 'Burnt Norton': From Vision to Dialectic

There is a striking shift in sensibility between 'Burnt Norton', an only implicitly religious poem in which humanity's fallen condition receives far less emphasis than the moments in which it is transcended, and the wartime *Quartets*, with their far more sober deliberations about the human predicament, and their deferral of beatitude. But the first movement of 'Burnt Norton', the rose garden sequence, remains the keynote of the larger work; its theme is modified but never abandoned. The later *Quartets* continue, in a more chastened manner, an examination of mystical consciousness that begins in the first recounting of an experience at Burnt Norton.

The poem opens with echoes of two very different thinkers, Bergson and Augustine. Critics have long seen these connexions; Paul Murray, Russell Kirk, and Morris Weitz in particular have argued cogently that the first ten lines of the poem present a rejection of the former in favour of the latter. Rather than accept Bergson's notion of the *durée*, in which the flux predominates and all time is effectively the present and therefore 'unredeemable', Eliot affirms the notion of time found in Book 11 of Augustine's *Confessions*: 'that all which is both past and future is created and doth flow out from that which is always present'.⁸⁷ Careful attention to the lines makes this conclusion inescapable:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction

⁸⁷ Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 36, 48; Russell Kirk, *T. S. Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1971), 291; Morris Weitz, 'T. S. Eliot: Time as a Mode of Salvation', in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (1969; repr., Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 139-42.

Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.⁸⁸

As Helen Gardner has documented, these lines, and the four that follow them, formed the genesis of 'Burnt Norton', having been cut from a speech by the Second Priest after the departure of the Second Tempter in *Murder in the Cathedral*.⁸⁹ But they clearly reflect an abiding concern of Eliot, being recycled not only in 'Burnt Norton' but later, in *The Family Reunion*, when Harry first berates the gathering at Wishwood:

I am the old house
 With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,
 In which all past is present, all degradation
 Is unredeemable. As for what happens—
 Of the past you can only see what is past,
 Not what is always present. That is what matters.⁹⁰

The common denominator here is the inextricable tie between time and sin. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, the possibility put to Thomas by the Second Tempter is to go back in time and remake a crucial decision. For Thomas, this would mean not resigning the Chancellorship; for Harry—in a sense that invites autobiographical speculation—it would mean, among other things, not having married the woman over whose fate he feels irrational guilt. But, as Harry's remarks make clear, his bondage to sin—the 'universal bondage' the Chorus proclaims—is ineluctable; he was born into it at the 'old house' in which he spent his childhood. Thomas, the saint, must resist the temptations that attend his fateful choice; Harry, the sinner, must confront and accept his past, but nothing within it will save him. He must fare forward, aided by divine grace in the form of the ghosts—the Eumenides—that attend him, and which he only recognises as 'bright angels' after making the fateful decision to abandon

⁸⁸ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 117.

⁸⁹ Gardner, *Composition*, 79.

⁹⁰ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 234.

Wishwood.⁹¹ Any attempt to rewrite our individual or collective pasts—to transcend time for our own ends—will only mire us deeper in sin.

The opening ten lines of ‘Burnt Norton’ and Harry’s speech both pivot on a change in the meaning of ‘present’, from temporal to spiritual. The presence invoked at the close of each passage supersedes, even obliterates, the considerations preceding it. This divine presence, the ‘one end, which is always present’ and therefore beyond all endings, is ‘what matters’. It is why, as Eliot will affirm in ‘East Coker’, ‘The poetry does not matter’.⁹²

The vision in the rose garden thus offers both a glimpse of transcendence and a temptation; the recognition of both aspects initiates the dialectic that the rest of *Four Quartets* will develop. The rose garden sequence, so richly intertextual and ambiguous in its imagery, derives from a range of sources: Gardner cites texts including Eliot’s own ‘New Hampshire’, *Alice in Wonderland*, Kipling’s ‘They’, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s ‘The Lost Bower’. The passage also echoes Augustine and Monica’s vision at Ostia in Book 9 of the *Confessions*. As Dominic Manganiello and others have noted, the vision in the pool draws on Canto 30 of Dante’s *Paradiso*.⁹³ But while critics have noted the similarity between the vision in the rose garden and Dante’s first glimpse of the Celestial Rose in *Paradiso* 30, no one has yet explored the full, revealing range of parallels between the two texts.

That Eliot did not have Dante in mind when he composed the vision passage is unthinkable; the parallels are simply too insistent. In each case, the transformation of light from fluid into flower signifies the passage from time into eternity. First, Dante. After a nine-line meditation on the precise point in earthly time at which the vision

⁹¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 242, 281.

⁹² Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 125.

⁹³ Gardner, *Composition*, 39-41; Dominic Manganiello, *T. S. Eliot and Dante* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989), 102-3.

happens—a passage that may be a formal and conceptual analogue to the opening of ‘Burnt Norton’—Dante acknowledges a kind of poetic surrender at his inability to capture in words the increasingly luminous beauty of Beatrice. She promises him a vision: ‘Here you will see both ranks of Paradise / and see one of them wearing that same aspect / which you will see again at Judgment Day’.⁹⁴ Dante is at first overwhelmed with light, but then finds himself lifted into a visionary experience:

...I became aware that I was rising
beyond the power that was mine; and such
new vision kindled me again, that even
the purest light would not have been so bright
as to defeat my eyes, deny my sight;
and I saw light that took a river’s form—
light flashing, reddish-gold, between two banks
painted with wonderful spring flowerings.
Out of that stream there issued living sparks,
which settled on the flowers on all sides,
like rubies set in gold; and then, as if
intoxicated with the odors, they
again plunged into the amazing flood:
as one spark sank, another spark emerged.⁹⁵

This initial stage of Dante’s vision finds an echo in the progress of Eliot and his companion between the ranks of roses to the dried pool, at which point ‘the pool was filled with water out of sunlight’. Both images are linear and progressive, indicating the flux of time, rather like Heraclitus’s river. Dante’s image of the blessed as sparks, emerging from and returning to the divine fire, suggests a Neoplatonic sense of emanation into the flux and return to the still center that Morris Weitz has identified in ‘Burnt Norton’.⁹⁶ Beatrice then explains Dante’s limitations before his vision unfolds further:

She added this: ‘The river and the gems
of topaz entering and leaving, and

⁹⁴ Dante, *Paradiso*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (1982; repr., Bantam Dell, 1986), 30.43-5.

⁹⁵ Dante, *Paradiso*, 30.56-66.

⁹⁶ Weitz, ‘T. S. Eliot’, 142.

the grasses' laughter—these are shadowy
prefaces of their truth; not that these things
are lacking in themselves; the defect lies
in you, whose sight is not yet that sublime'.⁹⁷

'The grasses' laughter' anticipates the rose garden's 'leaves... full of children, /
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter'. Here Eliot fuses Dante and Kipling, the
laughter of the ghostly children in 'They' with, as Manganiello has recognised, the
spirits of baptised children among the petals of the Celestial Rose.⁹⁸ The Rose appears
next, as the linear image of the river of time transforms into the circular image of
eternity:

And as a hill is mirrored
in waters at its base, as if to see
itself—when rich with grass and flowers—graced,
so, in a thousand tiers that towered above
the light, encircling it, I saw, mirrored,
all of us who have won return above.
And if the lowest rank ingathers such
vast light, then what must be the measure of
this Rose where it has reached its highest leaves!⁹⁹

Eliot had read in Evelyn Underhill, for whom Dante is unquestionably an
accomplished mystic, that Dante is granted here a glimpse of 'two-fold Reality, as the
moving River of Light and the still white Rose'—time and eternity—but he is not
ready for the vision of 'the One' that transcends all duality.¹⁰⁰ In 'Burnt Norton', the
Rose becomes a lotos, and the warning that one is not ready for the supreme vision
comes not from Beatrice, but from a bird:

And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.

⁹⁷ Dante, *Paradiso*, 30.76-81.

⁹⁸ Manganiello, 103-4.

⁹⁹ Dante, *Paradiso*, 30.109-117.

¹⁰⁰ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 340.

Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
 Cannot bear very much reality.¹⁰¹

The lotos is a curious choice, a non-Western symbol of perfection in that, as Eliot wrote in his Harvard notes on Buddhism, ‘it has many flowers and many fruits *at once*’,¹⁰² and in that it roots in the muddy bottom of a pool yet produces a beautiful blossom. Its emergence as the centre of a vision in a rose garden suggests that Eliot wanted to evoke all the Western symbolic valences of the rose while also emphasising a flower linked particularly with purity and transcendence.

But, like Dante, Eliot is told—in three successive monosyllabic imperatives—that his vision is not ready for the reality that might break upon him if he remains by the pool. The declaration that ‘human kind / Cannot bear very much reality’ is at once an observation, an implied rebuke, and, in light of its origin in *Murder in the Cathedral*, a warning. In the play, Thomas addresses it to the Chorus, warning them that, in time, the events they have witnessed will come to seem ‘unreal’ and lose their force.¹⁰³ Human kind cannot bear very much reality because reality’s overwhelming being destroys humanity’s nonbeing—what Rilke suggests by the embrace of an angel in the first of the *Duino Elegies*. The bird is thus declaring Eliot’s unreadiness for the beatific vision. But he must also not lose sight of the fact that, in this moment, he has received a gift; if he convinces himself that his experience was an illusion, he will lose whatever he gained by it.

Significantly, Canto 30 of the *Paradiso* is where Dante must let go of Beatrice and accept another, even more exalted guide, Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard was not only a formidable mystic; he was also the supreme exemplar of Marian devotion,

¹⁰¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 118.

¹⁰² Eloise Knapp Hay, *Eliot’s Negative Way* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 167.

¹⁰³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 209.

which, among other things, is the sublimation of erotic love into spiritual yearning, and which takes on increasing prominence as the *Quartets* progress. One possible implication of this extended allusion to Dante is that Eliot is deciding, perhaps in light of the visionary experience at Burnt Norton, to forgo romantic love and the earthly happiness it offers in favour of a total commitment to divinised love. Of course, we can no more identify the speaker in the poem with Eliot the poet than we can Dante the pilgrim with Dante the poet—but *Four Quartets* certainly invites such speculation, to the point that many critics take it as given.

This Dantean reading of the rose garden sequence brings some resolution to the welter of interpretations this difficult passage has inspired, and locates it within the dialectic of which Barthian theology is part. Critics have divided sharply over the nature of the vision. Some, such as Paul Murray, see the vision of light as ‘an illusion or an escape’ into an imaginary happiness, which gives way to the exhilarating but overwhelming intimation of reality with the hidden children and the bird’s rebuke. Others, such as Peter Walker and Kristian Smidt, deny any truly transcendent experience at all: Walker regards the experience as ‘the intuition of a world held in something of a wholeness’, while Smidt sees it as ‘an instant of happiness’ born of ordinary human love.¹⁰⁴ A resolution to this debate may lie in the most cryptic aspect of the passage, one that does not derive from Dante.

The identity of the indeterminate ‘they’ poses a particular challenge. As Ronald Bush has indicated, the unidentified figures ‘are capable of assuming different emotional valences’. He is certainly right to point to the ‘they’ identified as the Eumenides in *The Family Reunion*, who harry the tortured Harry toward his crucial

¹⁰⁴ Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 50; Peter Walker, ‘T. S. Eliot: Poetry, Silence, and the Vision of God’, in *European Literature and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Jasper and Colin Crowder (London: Macmillan, 1990), 93; Smidt, *Importance of Recognition*, 38.

choice.¹⁰⁵ But it is vital to remember that what Harry needs is not to change who he is—he cannot, fundamentally, do this—but to change how he sees. He realises that true happiness ‘Did not consist in getting what one wanted / Or in getting rid of what can’t be got rid of / But in a different vision’.¹⁰⁶ Further, ‘they’ in ‘Burnt Norton’ do not at any point seem threatening. They seem rather like benign ghosts or memories of ‘our first world’—which can be read as childhood or Eden, or both. As such, they may present a temptation identical to that posed by the Second Tempter in *Murder in the Cathedral*: ‘to retrace one’s steps, to try to go back to the moment when a choice was made and make a different choice’.¹⁰⁷

This suggests a revised version of the reading advanced by Murray. There is a false vision in the garden—it is the false intimation that Eliot can re-enter and be reconciled with a past existence he abandoned long before. In this reading, the past is a delusional Eden offered by ‘the deception of the thrush’, in which, as Manganiello suggests, Eliot ‘attempts to find his real self “as it might have been” if Adam had not fallen’—or if Eliot could undo the errors of the intervening years.¹⁰⁸ Childs’s identification of ‘they’ with Adam and Eve applies here, because, as he notes, their position behind Eliot and his companion, reflected in the pool, suggests that, for the moment, Original Sin has been very nearly, though not completely, shed.¹⁰⁹ But of course it cannot be left behind, just as the past cannot be re-entered and refashioned.

¹⁰⁵ Bush, *T. S. Eliot*, 190-1.

¹⁰⁶ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 275.

¹⁰⁷ Gardner, *Composition*, 39.

¹⁰⁸ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 118; Manganiello, *T. S. Eliot and Dante*, 102. In *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), A. David Moody provides an interesting alternative reading in which the thrush’s ‘deception’ is derived from the French ‘décevoir’, in the sense of stripping away illusion to reveal the real (186). This interpretation would lend even more credibility to the vision.

¹⁰⁹ Childs, *Mystic, Son and Lover*, 199. Smidt, in *The Importance of Recognition*, also offers an Edenic reading, in which Eliot and his companion are ‘the first and perfect lovers’. This does not convince, especially given the presence of ‘they’ (39).

And the temptation to do so is obliterated by the vision of light, and the pressure of the eternal in its vastly different, overwhelming revelation.

The rose garden sequence, then, remains indeterminate in some aspects, but it cannot rightly be termed the account of a false vision, or even of a mere moment of earthly happiness. In its dense intertextuality, it is a study in contingent difficulty; with its indeterminate pronouns and ambiguous, polyvalent symbols, it also presents tactical difficulties. But, as its connexion with *Paradiso* 30 reveals, it primarily records an experience of transcendence. Denis Donoghue describes the vision, in appropriately Dantean terms, as ‘an intuition of divine grace, given lest we despair ... an epitome, a sample of the ultimate experience, beatitude, the Heaven of God’s presence’.¹¹⁰ What remains of ‘Burnt Norton’ is a consideration of ordinary existence in light of that revelatory moment, a discursive reflection in which ‘the distinction between the Timeless and the temporal becomes the distinction between the Word and words’.¹¹¹ In marking that ‘infinite qualitative distinction’, Eliot begins the dialectic that measures mystical aspiration against Barthian critique.

Over the course of the rest of the *Quartets*, Eliot’s deliberations on mystical exaltation and ordinary existence will broaden to include a series of principles framed in largely Barthian terms: the nature of fallen experience, the ‘Moment’ of the encounter with the divine, the death of the old self, the practice of waiting, the Incarnation as the constant of history and the meaning of beatitude. It is a formidable array of topics, and it reveals the extent to which *Four Quartets* is in fact more determinedly theological than many critics have allowed. The dialectic between mysticism and Barthianism may assert itself more forcefully in the wartime *Quartets*, but it quietly begins in ‘Burnt Norton’. As Hugh Kenner suggests, the rose garden

¹¹⁰ Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 258.

¹¹¹ Weitz, ‘T. S. Eliot’, 148.

offers ‘a revelation so rich in its promise that the whole of *Four Quartets* exfoliates from it’.¹¹²

Fallen Existence

The vision in the rose garden, if it is to be understood as a ‘Moment’ that demands interpretation and self-transformation, must be seen against the backdrop of a fallen human condition. Eliot’s assertion, especially in the wartime *Quartets*, of human sinfulness and desolation reflects the ‘native Calvinism’ to which he would refer in 1942, and which he shared with Barth. In a brief but revealing passage connecting Barth and Eliot, Steve Ellis observes, ‘Whatever Catholic devotional elements and iconography might have rendered *Four Quartets* unsympathetic to Barth, it seems that on the question of the status of the creature and the creation the two men are agreed’.¹¹³ That status, as we have seen, involves an inconceivable gulf between humanity and God. For Barth, ‘The word “humanity” means unredeemed men and women; the word “history” implies limitation and corruption; the pronoun “I” spells judgement’. The human condition is one of ‘limitation, finitude, creaturehood, separation from God’. For Eliot, it means that the round of earthly life, in and of itself, adds up to little more than ‘dung and death’.¹¹⁴

Barth gives extraordinary prominence to death as the boundary of the fallen human condition, and death marks the frontier of the wartime *Quartets*. It enters ‘Burnt Norton’ rather obliquely, in one reference to ‘Chill / Fingers of yew’—a tree evoking images of grave-strewn churchyards—and the pronouncement that ‘that which is only living / Can only die’. Though that last monosyllable carries a concrete

¹¹² Hugh Kenner, ‘Into Our First World’, in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, Casebook Series (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969), 174.

¹¹³ Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 13; Ellis, *The English Eliot*, 131-3.

¹¹⁴ Barth, *The Word of God*, 85, 189-90; Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 124.

finality, the poem is far more concerned with moments of grace than with crossing the final boundary. But in 1940, surrounded by death and destruction on an unprecedented scale, confronted with what many regarded as evil made manifest, Eliot had no shortage of occasions to reflect on sin and death.

The vision that begins ‘East Coker’ is of a very different sort than the experience in the rose garden. The poem’s opening meditation on temporal existence has the concrete immediacy of several short, blunt catalogues:

Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.¹¹⁵

In their evocation of inevitable decay, they anticipate the final verdict on the human round that will end the poem’s first movement: ‘dung and death’. The description of the spectral village festival, rendered in the repetitive rhythms of campfire story and in archaic diction recalling Eliot’s ancestors, is not a cosmic ‘dance’ around a Dantean ‘still point’ but a heavy, clumsy circuit around an earthly fire. Critics have surprisingly failed to notice how, in a slower but no less inescapable fashion, the earth of ‘East Coker’ is as ravenous as the sea in ‘The Dry Salvages’: it consumes all. Death—not the death to self of the *via negativa* but the organic, earthbound death of fallen existence—very nearly has the last word. Only with a brief closing strophe suggesting a self tied not to one place but seemingly looking down from a great height as ‘Out at sea the dawn wind / Wrinkles and slides’, does the first movement of ‘East Coker’ promise anything beyond eventually ‘nourishing the corn’.¹¹⁶

‘The Dry Salvages’ extends this contemplation of death further, squaring up to fallen existence, especially as it is made manifest in ‘*the permanence of past pain*’. As Paul Murray has pointed out, it is the only *Quartet* that fails to record a visionary

¹¹⁵ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 123.

¹¹⁶ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 123-4.

moment of grace or mystical experience. In ‘Burnt Norton’, Eliot devalued profane time, time apart from moments of grace, as a waste; in ‘The Dry Salvages’, he confronts a very different kind of ‘wastage’. This is partly because, as Eliot once hinted in a reading, ‘The Dry Salvages’ is the *Quartet* most directly linked to the poet’s own mortality; it begins on the Mississippi, near where Eliot was born, and ends where he expects to end, ‘at the parish church of a tiny village in Somerset’.¹¹⁷ Eliot returns to the nautical imagery that formed such a large portion of early drafts of *The Waste Land*, and here the *Quartets* verge on a similar bleakness of spirit—with the crucial difference that this poem’s deliberations are grounded in religious doctrine and steered toward resignation and acceptance of the divine will.

In ‘The Dry Salvages’, the river within and the sea without point to our fallen, time-bound inward condition and the outward destruction we must inhabit in our estrangement from the divine. As A. D. Moody has suggested, the sea in this poem kills, and in ‘toss[ing] up our losses’, the sea offers up only the detritus of death and occasions for grief. Morris Weitz points to the fallen human condition as one characterised by ‘the intractable, inevitable character of destruction, which is the real meaning of the flux if we take it as the ultimate’. Such items as ‘the broken oar / And the gear of foreign dead men’, ‘the bone on the beach’ and the wreckage of ‘earlier and other creation’, evoke both the war at sea and the seeming insignificance of human lives measured against geologic ages of life giving way to death. As Weitz observes, ‘The temporal preserves its own destruction’.¹¹⁸

The poem refuses to offer any consolatory bromides to those left behind. The despair of the ‘anxious worried women’ awaiting the return of loved ones is answered

¹¹⁷ Gardner, *Composition*, 118; Murray, *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 103; Smidt, *Importance of Recognition*, 43.

¹¹⁸ A. David Moody, *Tracing T. S. Eliot’s Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175; Weitz, ‘T. S. Eliot’, 150-1.

only in three monosyllabics: ‘Clangs / The bell’. Though that bell, at first a reminder of the inexorable destructiveness of the sea, will later be transfigured into a ‘Perpetual angelus’, it tolls initially as one of the poem’s many reminders of ‘what men choose to forget’. The grieving are left with the dubious counsel that ‘We have to think of them as forever bailing, / Setting and hauling...Not as making a trip that will be unpayable / For a haul that will not bear examination’—a false consolation that wilts in the face of the ‘soundless wailing’ of death and suffering.¹¹⁹

Yet, in Barthian terms, such destruction also has a higher purpose, for in bringing the soul to despair it prepares it for redemption: ‘What is pleasing to God comes into being when all human righteousness is gone, irretrievably gone, when men are uncertain and lost, when they have abandoned all ethical and religious illusions, and when they have renounced every hope in this world and in heaven’. Only when one has surrendered all pretense of human sufficiency can the ‘moments of agony’ also serve as occasions for grace. It is the doctrine of the *felix culpa* given a decidedly Calvinist slant—the suffering of fallen existence eventually compels us to face our nonbeing and direct our gaze Godward. At this point, the only solution is a self-surrender akin to ‘the barely prayable / Prayer of the one Annunciation’: ‘Let it be according to Thy will’. Cleo Kearns verges on this Barthian understanding when she asserts that, while the ‘unprayable prayer’ of the ‘bone on the beach’ marks death as the boundary of human experience, paradoxically, ‘a limit is an advance’ because, ‘this ultimate negation, properly confronted at last at its most darkly potent, with the capital punishment implied in its capital D, precipitates a reversal that involves less a change of direction than a change of address’—one marked by the shift to the capital

¹¹⁹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 130-3.

A of ‘Annunciation’.¹²⁰ Here is the Yes concealed within the No, the pardon concealed within the judgement.

In ‘Little Gidding’, *Four Quartets* culminates by contemplating what lies beyond the boundary of death and then imaginatively crossing it. Though the speaker identifies the ‘frost and fire’ that ‘flames the ice’ with the ‘pentecostal fire’ of descending grace—Schuchard rightly suggests that ‘zero summer’ can be read as a state of beatitude exceeding that of ‘midwinter spring’—it is crucial to note that the constellation of images that open the poem also suggests temptation.¹²¹ In *Murder in the Cathedral*, the first tempter, who would have Thomas forsake his renunciation of earthly privilege and pleasure and return to ‘seasons that are past’, conjures the same images, to the end of recovering a hedonistic existence best left behind:

Spring has come in winter. Snow in the branches
 Shall float sweet as blossoms. Ice along the ditches
 Mirror the sunlight. Love in an orchard
 Send the sap shooting. Mirth matches melancholy.¹²²

This is the same temptation presented in ‘Burnt Norton’—to revert to an earlier life when earthly happiness seemed both attainable and sufficient, to give up on the higher dream. The images thus show two edges, which the poem later describes as ‘fire or fire’: one can either see them as offering the promise of recovered earthly passion or accept them as purgatorial and submit to the purifying disciplines of a deepening renunciation.¹²³ To choose the former is to mire oneself deeper in sin; for Eliot, as for Barth, all that exists on this side of the boundary of death is under judgement.

¹²⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 68; Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 132; Kearns, ‘Negative Theology’, 150-1.

¹²¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 138; Schuchard, *Eliot’s Dark Angel*, 187

¹²² Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 184. Though Gardner (in *Composition*, 159) notes the evident source of the lines in *Murder in the Cathedral*, she does not comment on their import there, nor have I come across any such observation elsewhere.

¹²³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 144.

Unlike Dante, whose influence comes to the fore for the first time since ‘Burnt Norton’, Eliot does not depict himself as a pilgrim crossing the boundary; rather, a denizen of the afterlife comes to him in the desolate aftermath of a bombing. The bombing itself has a doubleness: the ‘dark dove’ is both the manifestation of human sin and the terrifying descent of divine grace, which comes not as a soothing reassurance but as, in Barth’s words, a ‘terribly shattering’ visitation arriving ‘vertically, from above’. Barth went so far as to describe the site of the Incarnation, the decisive descent of the divine into the fallen world, as ‘the crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell’.¹²⁴ The ‘intersection time’ of the strange meeting in ‘Little Gidding’ is a Moment of a sort, a meeting of two spheres of existence.

The ghostly double may be compounded of multiple poetic forebears, but, as Gardner notes, both the drafts of ‘Little Gidding’ and Eliot’s subsequent comments establish that Eliot primarily meant to invoke the shade of Yeats. Yeats had, of course, recently crossed the final boundary, but that he should dominate the persona of Eliot’s *doppelgänger* suggests more than the early drafts, in which the poets are linked in ‘that unending fight / To give the people speech’, might indicate. The later drafts’ shift away from this shared endeavour indicates that Yeats gradually took on more spiritual than poetic importance. For Eliot, he is the epitome of mystical aspirations gone wrong, a spiritual experience-seeker who tried to ‘take heaven by magic’, and was unwilling to surrender himself to God.¹²⁵ In his refusal to submit to, as Barth frames it, ‘the final negation of the man of this world and of all his possibilities’, Yeats is an idolater of personality. His religion of self, though it may

¹²⁴ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 140-2; Barth, *Romans*, 29-30.

¹²⁵ Gardner, *Composition*, 176-87; T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1933), 140.

mimic Eckhart's and Boehme's discourse of inwardness, reaches not for an impersonal divine ground but for an exalted individual existence; it is the final flowering of 'romantic heresies of Deification'. Eliot had indicated as much in 1933, when he described Yeats as trying to 'fabricate an *individual* religion'.¹²⁶

Whether Eliot regarded Yeats as damnable is open to question. In a letter to John Hayward, he wrote that he would not presume to 'take the responsibility of putting Yeats or anybody into Hell', but that may merely be a gesture of modesty. In the event, the purgatorial flames from which the ghost has come, rightly described by Donoghue as recalling those of the Byzantium poems, are somewhat ironic.¹²⁷ But Eliot's choice of *doppelgänger*, and of the bitter wisdom it offers, is theologically serious: it testifies to the hazards of mystical aspiration, in whatever form. Yeats's straying into what surely seemed a pseudo-mystical region of unlikeness thus held a special significance for Eliot.

The compound ghost speaks not of consolation but of the 'gifts reserved for age': 'impotence', 'rage', 'laceration', and 'shame', among other words, which accumulate a sense of the violence as well as the decay inherent in fallen existence. And the spirit speaks truth; its words are 'tongued with fire' because, as Donoghue notes, 'the dead are now complete, as we are not yet complete, perfected in death'. The only hope for the 'exasperated spirit' is to submit to purgation. Echoing Hamlet, the *doppelgänger* suggests as much in an early draft: 'The rest is grace'.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 194; F. O. Matthiessen, 'The "Quartets"', in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, Casebook Series (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969), 97; T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy, the Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia, 1933* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1934), 44.

¹²⁷ Gardner, *Composition*, 176; Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 282.

¹²⁸ Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 287; Gardner, *Composition*, 184.

The fallen self must therefore, in order to recover its relation to God, first plumb the depths of its own sinfulness. This withering but potentially transformative recognition, precipitated by moments in which we experience our ‘terrible isolation from every other human being’ and face ‘our unworthiness, but for Grace, of nothing but damnation’, are as central to Eliot’s sensibility as to Barth’s theology. In a 1928 letter to Paul Elmer More, written in the aftermath of his first confession, Eliot reflects on how people who feel no need for religion seem ‘unconscious of any void—the void that I find in the middle of all human happiness and all human relations, and which there is only one thing to fill...only Christianity helps to reconcile me to life, which is otherwise disgusting’.¹²⁹ The void, in terms framed by Augustine and invoked by Barth, is the nonbeing at the heart of fallen existence. Human beings ‘are what they are not’ because their divine origin and innermost ground is obscured by what Barth calls ‘the Adam...the EGO of this world’.¹³⁰ It is the same sense of nonbeing described by Harry in *The Family Reunion*:

I felt, at first, that sense of separation,
Of isolation unredeemable, irrevocable—
It’s eternal, or gives a knowledge of eternity,
Because it feels eternal while it lasts. That is one hell.
Then the numbness came to cover it—that is another—
That was the second hell of not being there,
The degradation of being parted from my self,
From the self which persisted only as an eye, seeing.¹³¹

The condition of sin as depicted by Eliot involves a twofold fall. First comes the ineluctable condition of separation from the divine origin, which, if we are fortunate, we become aware of as ‘isolation unredeemable’. The fallen self then recoils into a dissociative denial of that first awareness. Sensing our nonbeing, we retreat further

¹²⁹ Schuchard, *Eliot’s Dark Angel*, 120, 157.

¹³⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 343, 181.

¹³¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 272.

into it by concealing it under a ‘cover’ of numbness rather than submitting to the negation that will paradoxically return us to being. Until we surrender to that transformation, we can only choose between numbness and horror, ‘not being there’ and being ‘in a world not of persons / But only of contaminating presences’.¹³²

This dynamic lies behind Eliot’s admonition to ‘descend lower’ along the *via negativa* in the third movement of ‘Burnt Norton’. The fallen condition is here presented as ‘a place of disaffection’—of abject numbness rather than horror:

Only a flicker
Over the strained time-ridden faces
Distracted from distraction by distraction
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
Tumid apathy with no concentration
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
That blows before and after time,
Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
Time before and time after.¹³³

This passage is the first of several in *Four Quartets* in which, as Graham Hough establishes, ‘The emptiness, futility and ugliness of the time-bound life is unremittingly enforced’.¹³⁴ As the last line indicates, this numbness in the face of what ‘Burnt Norton’ calls the ‘partial horror’ of the human condition is the ‘waste sad time / Stretching before and after’ the momentary glimpses of ‘partial ecstasy’.¹³⁵

‘Burnt Norton’ presents the condition of numbness as a kind of objectification, reducing human beings to the level of ‘bits of paper’ at the mercy of forces outside and within themselves. It recalls Barth’s depiction of fallen humanity: ‘Their sin is their guilt; their death is their destiny; their world is formless and tumultuous chaos, a chaos of the forces of nature and the human soul; their life is illusion. This is the

¹³² Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 272.

¹³³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 120.

¹³⁴ Graham Hough, ‘Vision and Doctrine in *Four Quartets*’, *Critical Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (June, 1973), 113.

¹³⁵ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 119, 122.

situation in which we find ourselves'. The parallel passage in the third movement of 'East Coker', which belittles the vanity of human achievement through a catalogue of prominent roles—including Eliot's own as one of 'the eminent men of letters'—also emphasises the nonbeing of fallen humanity. Death is redundant in this place, a disappearance of 'the vacant into the vacant' such that 'there is no one to bury'.¹³⁶

Barth says as much in *The Epistle to the Romans*:

Dark, blind, uncritical, capricious, mankind becomes a thing in itself.
Heartless, perceiving without observing and therefore empty, is our thought:
thoughtless, observing without perceiving and therefore blind, is our heart.
Fugitive is the soul in this world and soulless is the world, when men do not
find themselves within the sphere of the knowledge of God, when they avoid
the true God in whom they and the world must lose themselves in order that
both may find themselves again.¹³⁷

In this condition of estrangement and emptiness, maintained by an avoidance of truth, all human experience and wisdom are delusional. 'Human righteousness', declares Barth, 'is in itself an illusion: there is in this world no observable righteousness'. With this recognition, the wisdom of the elders and of accumulated experience is revealed as a fraud:

Had they deceived us
Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?
The serenity only a deliberate hebetude,
The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets
Useless in the darkness into which they peered
Or from which they turned their eyes. There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment,
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 126.

¹³⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 48.

¹³⁸ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 125.

The first-person plural here recalls Eliot's editorial voice from his commentaries in the *Criterion*; it claims the high ground of dispassionate observation. And it concludes that any faith in human wisdom and experience, collective or individual, is misplaced. Experience is mostly an occasion for human arrogance to assert itself, to assume an insight into the pattern of history that is really only an idolatrous projection of the fallen self. The choice of 'elders' does not only suggest the statesmen responsible for the demoralising betrayal of the Munich Accords, which Eliot lamented in *The Idea of a Christian Society*; it points to the Church. And Barth is relentless in his critique of the Church as an institution that itself unavoidably tends toward arrogance and idolatry, toward the attempt to domesticate God. It participates in the numbness of sin, the turning of the eyes from truth: 'Our quest for God cannot be due to the influence of theology and the church, for theology and the church from the beginning of the world have done more in this particular to narcotize than to stimulate'. But the church's participation in sin only reflects the general condition. In his essay following Eliot's in the 1937 book *Revelation*, Barth asserts that even if humanity is confirmed in receiving divine grace, 'Human experience has no power of its own to become...a reminder of such a confirmation. And that is the error again and again made at this point'.¹³⁹ To look for authentic wisdom in human experience is to confound time with eternity.

The fallen condition of humanity also manifests itself in language. The resulting gulf between the Word and words, a prominent trope in the Christian tradition, figures most famously in Augustine's *Confessions*. Recounting the end of the vision he shared with Monica at Ostia, he describes 'returning from these thoughts to vocal expressions of our mouth, where a word has both a beginning and ending.

¹³⁹ Barth, *The Word of God*, 54; John Baillie and Hugh Martin, eds., *Revelation* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1937), 71.

How unlike unto thy Word, our Lord, who remains in himself for ever without becoming aged, and yet renewing all things?’¹⁴⁰ Dante experiences the same incapacity of human speech in the *Paradiso*. As Donald Childs has observed, ‘mystical aphasia’, the painful inability to communicate transcendent experience, is central to Eliot’s work, which abounds in failed attempts to convey the ineffable.¹⁴¹

In *Four Quartets*, the theology of the Word enters before the poem proper, and to establish it Eliot reaches back to pre-Christian, even pre-Socratic thought. The text’s two Heraclitean epigraphs did not appear until the publication of the complete work, where they were printed on the reverse of the table of contents; in subsequent publications they appeared below the title of ‘Burnt Norton’. Despite the change, they are best read as foreshadowing concerns that govern the entire poetic suite.¹⁴² The second, which translates ‘although the Logos is common [universal] the many live as though they had a private understanding’, implicitly links the separation of sin to human utterance.¹⁴³ Barth applies the same principle even to those who would devoutly speak of God: ‘We certainly cannot defend ourselves against the reproach that our thought is a “mere play of words” by referring to the divinity of the Logos, for what we say...is not the divine Logos: what we say breaks apart constantly into a multiplicity of logoi’.¹⁴⁴

Theological aphasia is thus not exclusive to mysticism; it is central to dialectical theology. Barth was no poet, but he was a minister, charged with communicating the Word, and he agonised over the implications of that task: ‘As

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. William Watts, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1961), 2:49-51.

¹⁴¹ Childs, *Mystic, Son and Lover*, xii.

¹⁴² Gardner, *Composition*, 82.

¹⁴³ Heraclitus, *The Cosmic Fragments*, ed. G. S. Kirk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 57.

¹⁴⁴ Barth, *The Word of God*, 175-6.

ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both our obligation and our inability and by that very recognition give God the glory. That is our perplexity'.¹⁴⁵ Again, rather than resort to a hermetic strategy that foregrounds ontological difficulty, one must explicitly recognise the aphasia as unavoidable. Eliot takes precisely this course in 'Burnt Norton':

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.¹⁴⁶

The burden of articulating the stillness of the Word is more than words can bear. Through an extraordinarily serious and subtle pun, Eliot contrasts words, which 'decay', with the note of a violin, which in a musical sense does not decay—though even that undecaying note occurs in time and therefore must begin and end. 'Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness'. On one level, Eliot is invoking the liturgical 'perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation' praised in *The Rock*.¹⁴⁷ But more importantly, he is reframing Debussy's famous dictum that music is the space between the notes, not the notes themselves. Properly patterned words, like music, reach into the silence because their ultimate origin and meaning is found in the space before, between, and after them. That very reach is enacted in the enjambment of the two lines referring to it. All language, viewed in this way, is paradoxical: fallen and inadequate in itself, it nonetheless opens spaces in which absolute meaning may be glimpsed. If each attempt to speak is 'a raid on the inarticulate / With shabby equipment always deteriorating', then what remains is the

¹⁴⁵ Barth, *The Word of God*, 186.

¹⁴⁶ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 121.

¹⁴⁷ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 111.

humble work of communicating in as efficacious a pattern as possible, such that the words form ‘a complete consort dancing together’—knowing that the reality incommunicable through words is nonetheless present, and at times even accessible, in the pattern of silences they form. The words’ very nonbeing makes possible the self-revelation of Being.¹⁴⁸

In a poem, one might express the remembered experience of an exalted moment, but one cannot verbalise divinity; one can only attempt to create the linguistic conditions for divine self-revelation. This is the praxis of dialectical theology. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot begins here, but as he works toward a proper relation to the dialectic of time and eternity, he gradually relies less on paradox and negation, and more on other Barthian principles. Foremost among these is the Moment in its connexion to the Incarnation.

From the Moment to Incarnation

‘The moment in the rose-garden’ recalls what Barth, following and developing Kierkegaard, calls ‘the eternal “Moment” of the knowledge of God’, the timeless Moment of human-divine encounter, in which divine reality pierces fallen existence, at once revealing the spiritual destitution of the self and offering the possibility of reconciliation. This Moment, which Glenn rightly affirms as vital to Eliot’s use of Barth, is a central trope in Barthian theology.¹⁴⁹ Every Moment is an unveiling, an entry into the mysterious intersection of time and eternity effected through Christ:

Then it is that we perceive the time in which we stand to be the present time, that is to say, the ocean of concrete, observable reality, in which the submarine island of the ‘Now’ of divine revelation is altogether submerged but remains, nevertheless, intact, in spite of its shallow covering of observable things. This ‘Now’ (iii. 21), this ‘Moment’ beyond all time, when men stand before God,

¹⁴⁸ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 128.

¹⁴⁹ Glenn, ‘Karl Barth and T. S. Eliot’, 38.

this 'Point' from which we come, but which is no point in the midst of other points, Jesus Christ crucified and risen,—is the Truth. All that is before and after this 'Moment of moments', everything which encircles, like a plane, this 'Point' which cannot be reproduced,—is time.... And so, the time in which we live conceals and yet preserves Eternity within it, speaks not of Eternity yet proclaims it in its silence.¹⁵⁰

This is 'the point of intersection of the timeless / With time'—the point at which, as Barth famously asserted, 'God intersects vertically, from above'.¹⁵¹ The Moment is both an illumination and a destruction. It confers divine grace, and that very grace forces a crisis in which a person's 'inner life is radically broken down', and through which 'everything before and after is set in a new context'. For those caught up in the Moment, 'the roots of their being are lit up, as by a flash of lightning... for, since men are what they are not, the roots of their existence are deeply buried in the unity of God'. Barth here uses the rhetoric of paradox and illumination as would a mystical theologian, but in his theology the Moment will likely offer not a 'new, deep, positive, religious experience', but rather a devastating recognition of one's nonbeing confronted with the hyperessentiality of God. The dove often descends 'with flame of incandescent terror'.¹⁵²

It is for this reason that human kind cannot bear very much reality. The children in the leaves, hidden below Barth's 'shallow cover of observable things' and precipitating the bird's command to 'Go, go, go', embody the exhilarating but terrifying possibility that reality will emerge in all its annihilating glory. 'When eternity confronts human existence', asserts Barth, 'it renders that existence sinful'; too direct a confrontation with eternity, without the protective 'enchainment of past

¹⁵⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 304.

¹⁵¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 136; Barth, *Romans*, 30.

¹⁵² Barth, *Romans*, 125, 343-4; Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 143. German bombing during the Blitz is only one of many valences to Eliot's 'dark dove'.

and future', would leave a human being naked before 'heaven and damnation / Which flesh cannot endure'.¹⁵³

For Barth, the crisis of the Moment is not so much precipitated as revealed, because it is perpetual, though unseen. At its heart is Jesus Christ. 'Through Jesus Christ men are judged by God' Barth declares. 'This is their KRISIS, but it is both negation and affirmation, both death and life'.¹⁵⁴ In Barth's substitutionary doctrine of Atonement, God became human in Jesus Christ so as to accept, on humanity's behalf, the judgement of eternity on time and sin, so that rather than face only divine justice, humanity can be mercifully elected to salvation, restored eschatologically to its original union with God. The divine No is not unsaid, but is joined to a divine Yes—both responses encompassed by the death and Resurrection of Christ. The human condition, transformed by that paradoxical event, now finds life in death, and death in life. Suspended thus, humanity is 'in the aspect of time / Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being'—capable of being taken into the Moment, but called by such a descent of grace to surrender the self and allow it to be remade.¹⁵⁵

The proper response to the Moment is therefore to submit to the destruction and regeneration it offers, and to accept one's nonbeing in the face of God's being; to do otherwise is effectively idolatry. In 'Burnt Norton', however, Eliot seeks to anchor himself to the Moment as it exists in time rather than to understand it as perpetual. His course involves a practice of remembrance:

To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
 The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.

¹⁵³ Barth, *Romans*, 245; Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 119.

¹⁵⁴ Barth, *Romans*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 122.

Only through time time is conquered.¹⁵⁶

Here, the poem catalogues an array of ‘moments’ in which the speaker presumably glimpsed transcendence. As Manganiello observes, Eliot’s meditation on these moments follows Augustine’s theory of memory as the seat of self-consciousness and therefore as a mechanism for devotional practice.¹⁵⁷ Barth also emphasises the importance of memory, but not in the sense of remembering experiences as a form of devotion. In a related but different Augustinian sense, the Moment is itself a kind of remembrance, because the relationship between God and humanity ‘can be re-established only through the—*clearly seen*—memory of eternity breaking in upon our minds and hearts’. But Barth stresses the difficulty of that vision: ‘there are mystics and ecstasies who have never *seen clearly*. The encounter of grace depends on no human possession’—even, in the final analysis, experiences. It is all too easy to have the experience and miss the meaning. And it is for this reason that Barth would regard the closing lines of ‘Burnt Norton’ as indicating a spiritual sickness. ‘Ecstasies and illuminations, inspirations and intuitions, are not necessary’, he asserts. ‘Happy are they who are worthy to receive them! But woe be to us, if we wait anxiously for them!’¹⁵⁸

But as Barth has indicated, the supreme Moment is the decisive event of the Incarnation. The central point of Christian orthodoxy is that some two thousand years ago, in a province of the Roman Empire, the Word became flesh—an unthinkable irruption of eternity into time. The Incarnation as supreme Moment is a crucial point of intersection between dialectical theology and *Four Quartets*.

¹⁵⁶ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 119-120.

¹⁵⁷ Manganiello, *T. S. Eliot and Dante*, 102.

¹⁵⁸ Barth, *Romans*, 59, 298.

Only with 'The Dry Salvages' does Eliot introduce the customary terms for Christian mysteries, beginning with the Annunciation and concluding with Incarnation. In drafts, he also introduced 'Atonement', which 'makes action possible', but he chose to excise that reference for fear of the poem's becoming 'rather too heavily loaded theologically'.¹⁵⁹ In having introduced the two other mysteries, Eliot had already demonstrated a willingness to take on considerable theological freight, at least by implication, and in 'Little Gidding' he calls upon a third. The sequence suggests a condensed salvation narrative: first, the Annunciation, to which Mary accedes; second, the Incarnation, the archetypal intersection of the eternal with the temporal; third, the Atonement, which goes unmentioned but is the effect of the Incarnation; and finally Pentecost, which is introduced in 'Little Gidding' and signifies the descent of the Holy Spirit to perform the operations of grace. The hinge of the narrative is the Incarnation. It certainly played that role for Eliot, for whom 'the fullness of Christian revelation resides in the essential fact of the Incarnation, in relation to which all Christian revelation is to be understood'.¹⁶⁰

It is precisely on the point of the Incarnation that critics have differed most sharply over the theological dimension of *Four Quartets*. The two main positions crystallised early on in the work of F. O. Matthiessen and R. D. Flint. Matthiessen argues, 'The doctrine of Incarnation is the pivotal point on which Eliot's thought has swung well away from the nineteenth-century's romantic heresies of Deification'; Flint demurs, suggesting that Incarnation in the poem means only 'the constant ingression of spiritual reality into time'. Bush accords with Matthiessen, as does Moody, who goes so far as to assert that the Incarnation 'became the governing idea of all [Eliot's] poetry after 1925'. If one considers Eliot's poetry as partly—and

¹⁵⁹ Gardner, *Composition*, 146-7.

¹⁶⁰ Baillie and Martin, *Revelation*, 2.

unavoidably, given its themes—expressing his theology, Moody’s point strikes home. Especially interesting is Moody’s observation that Becket’s Christmas sermon in *Murder in the Cathedral* yokes the Incarnation to the Atonement, such that ‘at this same time of all the year...we celebrate at once the Birth of Our Lord and His Passion and Death upon the Cross’.¹⁶¹ If the Incarnation and the Atonement are two sides of the same divine coin, then deleting ‘Atonement’ from ‘The Dry Salvages’ sacrifices little in the way of theological import.

But in a larger sense, the treatment of Incarnation in *Four Quartets* transcends the dialectic outlined above. The choice between the Incarnation as a once-and-for-all event and Incarnation as a continual process is a false dichotomy. Eliot could avail himself of three main theological paths to a dogmatically viable synthesis. One is the Catholic sacramental tradition embodied, as we have seen, in the work of Maurice de la Taille, which establishes that every performance of the Eucharist is a re-entry into the Atonement, for the Paschal Mystery exists outside time and is therefore always sacramentally present. A second is a mystical perspective that Eliot would have first encountered in Underhill, who describes the Incarnation as going beyond ‘the historical birth and earthly life of Christ’, so that it is ‘also a perpetual Cosmic and personal process. It is an everlasting bringing forth, in the universe and also in the individual ascending soul, of the divine and perfect Life’. Frank Burch Brown invokes such a belief when he describes the Incarnation as presented in *Four Quartets* as ‘a principle forever at work in the structure of things’. This mystical doctrine has its non-mystical analogue in some theologies of the Church as the Body of Christ.

¹⁶¹ Matthiessen, ‘The “Quartets”’, in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, Casebook Series (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969), 97; R. W. Flint, ‘The *Four Quartets* Reconsidered’, in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, Casebook Series (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969), 116; Bush, *T. S. Eliot*, 224; Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot*, 132.

Moody incorporates both doctrines into his observation that, in *Four Quartets*, Incarnation is ‘a way of life, a mode of existence’, which involves not only ‘the struggle of the saint to be at one with the Word which is affirmed’ but also ‘the one right action’ in which Christians must collaborate.¹⁶²

The third path to a synthesis is opened by Barth, and it provides much of the discourse of Incarnation in Eliot’s late poetry. For Barth, as for Kierkegaard, the Incarnation is the supreme paradox: ‘While it is beyond our comprehension that eternity should meet us in *time*, yet it is true because in Jesus Christ *eternity* has become time’. Christ thus ‘exposes the gulf which separates God and man, and by exposing it, bridges it’.¹⁶³ More than any other, Barth’s theology of the Incarnation anticipates that of the *Quartets*:

In this name [Jesus Christ] two worlds meet and go apart, two planes intersect, the one known and the other unknown. The known plane is God’s creation, fallen out of its union with Him, and therefore the world of the “flesh” needing redemption, the world of men, and of time, and of things—our world. This known plane is intersected by another plane that is unknown—the world of the Father, of the Primal Creation, and of the final Redemption. The relation between us and God, between this world and His world, presses for recognition, but the line of intersection is not self-evident. The point on the line of intersection at which the relation becomes observable and observed is Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus.... The particularity of the years A.D. 1-30 is dissolved by this divine definition, because it makes every epoch a potential field of revelation and disclosure.¹⁶⁴

Here is the language of intersection noted by Gardner—joined with a vision of the Incarnation as both a unique, historically specific occurrence and a timeless communication from the divine that makes revelation possible throughout all time. In this sense, the Incarnation is the Moment that makes possible all Moments. The

¹⁶² Underhill, *Mysticism*, 118; Frank Burch Brown, ‘The Progress of the Intellectual Soul: T. S. Eliot, Pascal, and *Four Quartets*’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 10, no. 1 (March, 1983), 36; Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot*, 235, 237.

¹⁶³ Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, trans. J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 72; Barth, *Romans*, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Barth, *Romans*, 29.

Incarnation thus becomes the figure in the carpet of time; in a favourite metaphor, Barth describes it as ‘the crimson thread which runs through all history’.¹⁶⁵

This doctrine of the Incarnation as a twofold intersection, both historically specific and eternally present, found expression before *Four Quartets* in *The Rock*, which, significantly, Eliot began to write shortly after the publication of Hoskyns’s translation of *The Epistle to the Romans*.¹⁶⁶ As a unique event, the Incarnation dominates the seventh Chorus:

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time
and of time,
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history:
transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time
but not like a moment of time,
A moment in time but time was made through that moment:
for without the meaning there is no time and that moment
of time gave the meaning.¹⁶⁷

But elsewhere, *The Rock* asserts this intersection as perpetual, especially for Christians:

Remember, all you who are numbered for GOD,
In every moment of time you live where two worlds cross,
In every moment you live at a point of intersection,
Remember living in time, you must live also now in eternity.¹⁶⁸

The liturgical rhythm of both passages frames an incantatory, mesmeric repetition of ‘moment’ and ‘time’, which in turn forms a kind of verbal scaffolding from which hang such things as ‘history’ and ‘meaning’. It maps the idea of the Incarnation—a largely Barthian discourse of intersection, Moment and pattern—that pervades *Four Quartets*.

¹⁶⁵ Barth, *Romans*, 96.

¹⁶⁶ Gordon, *An Imperfect Life*, 258.

¹⁶⁷ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 107.

¹⁶⁸ T. S. Eliot, *The Rock: A Pageant Play Written for Performance at Sadler’s Wells Theatre 28 May – 9 June 1934 on Behalf of the Forty-five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1934), 52. Note also the suggestion of predestination in the phrase ‘numbered for GOD’.

The theme of intersection arrives, appropriately, with the first mention of the Incarnation, in the closing movement of ‘The Dry Salvages’:

But to apprehend
 The point of intersection of the timeless
 With time, is an occupation for the saint—
 No occupation either, but something given
 And taken, in a lifetime’s death in love,
 Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
 For most of us, there is only the unattended
 Moment, the moment in and out of time,
 The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
 The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning,
 Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
 That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
 While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
 Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
 Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
 The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
 Here the impossible union
 Of spheres of existence is actual...¹⁶⁹

Though it opens with a frank acknowledgement that Eliot is no candidate for sainthood, the real movement of this passage is toward an understanding of Incarnation. The absence of an article is jarring to the ear but not to the sense, because the passage has already suggested that Eliot has something more in mind than one historical occurrence. In a lilting sequence of relaxed, four- and five-stress lines, the passage forms three movements of one sentence each.

The first uses the Barthian metaphor of intersection to suggest the nature of sainthood; ‘to apprehend / The point of intersection’ is to fully experience the mystery of the Incarnation both as singularity and as eternal presence, and thereby to sound the central depths of the Christian faith. The indeterminacy of ‘something given / And taken’, stretched across an enjambment, suggests both the complete self-surrender of the saint and the descent of divine grace. As for ‘the rest of us’, our Moments of revelation may lead to transformation, but not to what Underhill calls the unitive life.

¹⁶⁹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 136.

The second movement catalogues not mystical visions but lesser moments of self-surrender, involving the senses and twined together with alliteration and assonance, particularly of ‘wild thyme’, ‘winter lightning’ and ‘waterfall’—verbal music that leads into an image of losing oneself in actual music. Even these experiences, which are not the shattering Moment of encounter with the divine, participate in the supreme Moment of the Incarnation. They are intimations of what lies ‘beneath the cover of observable things’. As Barth asserts, ‘The utter godlessness of history does not alter the fact that it is marked everywhere by peculiar impressions of revelation, by opportunities and open doors, which, when seen from God’s side, can summon men to recollection and knowledge’. Because all moments are arranged around the central Moment of the Incarnation, any of them can be a small ‘field of revelation and disclosure’.¹⁷⁰

This sense of each moment opening on the supreme Moment is made explicit once more in ‘Little Gidding’, where, in Nicholas Ferrar’s long-abandoned church, ‘the intersection of the timeless moment / Is England and nowhere’. The setting is at once England within time and ‘nowhere’ out of time; it touches Barth’s crimson thread, the Incarnation as the manifestation in time of the ‘one end, which is always present’.¹⁷¹ Yet Eliot stops short of yoking his Barthian discourse to an unequivocally mystical sensibility. ‘The Dry Salvages’ may culminate by mentioning saints, but ‘Little Gidding’ is full of ghosts: not only the familiar compound ghost of the second movement, but also the presences of Nicholas Ferrar, Charles I, and other members of ‘old factions’ who have accepted ‘the constitution of silence’—perfected, like the symbols they left behind, only in death. As David Moody observes, the meaning of

¹⁷⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 80, 29.

¹⁷¹ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 139, 117.

much of Eliot's poetry is that 'it is only in his death that man can be united with the divine'.¹⁷²

In the wartime *Quartets*, then, the dialectic shifts toward a more Barthian understanding of 'ecstasies and illuminations', one reflecting a chastened conviction that 'The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility'. Rather than regarding his 'moments' as devaluing less exalted experience, Eliot now sees them as 'echoed ecstasy / Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony / Of death and birth'.¹⁷³ As the wartime *Quartets* gradually reveal, giving up mystical aspirations does not necessarily mean forgoing a different *via negativa*—one that involves death and birth in a spiritual sense, and that reframes the dialectic of time and eternity in terms of withdrawal and engagement.

The Moment and Christian Praxis

Four Quartets may question the human capacity to gain wisdom from experience, but the poem repeatedly affirms the rigors of the *via negativa*. As we have seen, 'East Coker' does so by invoking St. John of the Cross:

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
 You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by a way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.¹⁷⁴

In the wartime quartets, Eliot's commitment to the negative way is tied to a new conviction that experiences of transcendence are not answers so much as questions, and even demands, to which Eliot has no adequate response other than self-negation.

¹⁷² Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 143; Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot*, 195.

¹⁷³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 126-7.

¹⁷⁴ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 127.

Barth addresses this predicament forcefully, with a respectful scepticism, in his assessment of the mystical *via negativa*. The passage merits quotation at length:

Whatever objections may be raised against mysticism as a whole, one may not neglect this doctrine with impunity. Here something happens; here we are not left standing with instructions to believe; here we are seriously attacked; here God becomes man with such vigor that there is nothing of man, so to speak, left over... But even here we cannot speak of God. The mystics, and we all in so far as we are mystics, have been wont to *assert* that what annihilates and enters into man, the Abyss into which he falls, the Darkness to which he surrenders himself, the No before which he stands is *God*; but this we are incapable of *proving*. The only part of our assertion of which we are *certain*, the only part we can *prove*, is that man is negated, negated. But man here on earth can never be more negative than the negativity from which he *emerged*. What then can the way of self-criticism do but somehow magnify to gigantic size the question mark set up beyond life's boundary?¹⁷⁵

Barth's assessment may be respectful—it even acknowledges his own mystical inclination—but it remains a forceful critique of negative mysticism. Put simply, how can one trust one's own self-negation? How far can such a movement extend, and how can one be sure that its darkness is the darkness of God?

Eliot's new emphasis on what mystical experience requires and points to suggests that he has submitted the mystical *via negativa* to this Barthian scrutiny. Hence his transformation of the single agonised darkness in *Samson Agonistes*—'dark dark dark'—into three distinct forms of darkness in 'East Coker' III. The first dark, the nonbeing that inhabits and awaits all the carefully constructed and maintained selves of fallen humanity, is altogether different from the 'darkness of God' that descends in contemplation, which in turn must not be confused with the blank inertia that masquerades as contemplative darkness but is in fact a kind of vacuous solipsism. But the three extended similes of darkness that follow remain ambiguous. The extinguishing of lights between scenes in a theatre, the darkness of a paused tube train in which passengers confront 'the growing terror of nothing to think about', and the

¹⁷⁵ Barth, *The Word of God*, 203-4.

experience under ether of being ‘conscious but conscious of nothing’ might point to the divine darkness, but they could as easily suggest the delusional darkness of spiritual inertia.¹⁷⁶ The dash after ‘conscious of nothing’ truncates the chain of similes, an anacoluthon that leaves the meaning of the sequence unresolved. The only conclusion to be drawn is that, insofar as possible, a practitioner of the *via negativa* must be able to distinguish one form of darkness from another.

Yet, just as contemplatives are not the sole chroniclers of mystical aphasia, they do not have sole claim to the concept of a negative way. Eliot’s treatment in *Four Quartets* of the practice of renunciation is one reason why critics have so far failed to adequately explore the Barthian countercurrent in the text: not only does Barth use some of the same discursive strategies as the mystical theologians; he also insists that the Christian life is inherently a negative way, though not a mystical one. As a result, his influence on the poem’s sense of actual praxis is camouflaged from readers unfamiliar with his theology. Though the goal of Barth’s negative way may not be mystical union, in certain points it resembles the self-negation of the mystics, most especially in its insistence on spiritual aphaeresis, ‘a discarding of all that is not valid’.¹⁷⁷ Since, for the early Barth of dialectical theology, earthly existence is essentially invalid, his exhortations to renunciation reach a pitch nearing—but not matching—those of St. John of the Cross, who, as Eliot quotes him in the epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes*, would have the soul aspiring to mystical union ‘divest itself of the love of created beings’.¹⁷⁸ But Barth’s goal is to pull down human vanity so as to make clear the Yes within the divine No; in that spirit, he speaks more in terms of

¹⁷⁶ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 126.

¹⁷⁷ Hay, *Eliot’s Negative Way*, 172.

¹⁷⁸ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 74.

abandoning self than of forsaking attachment to others. Barthian renunciation requires self-simplification, but it militates against withdrawal from the world.

‘Death and birth’ rest, for Eliot, Barth, and the mystics, at the heart of the Christian life. The paradox of dying in order to live, which has its roots in Matthew 10:39—‘He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it’ (AV)—is so central to Christianity that it was surely impressed on Eliot’s mind from an early age. While at Harvard, he read in Underhill and other writings on mysticism about the purgative necessity ‘to kill the old self, break up his egoistic attachments and cravings, in order that the higher centre, the “new man,” may live and breathe’. In his 1927 essay on F. H. Bradley, Eliot quoted one of Bradley’s more mystical passages: ‘How can the human-divine ideal ever be my will? The answer is, Your will it can never be as the will of your private self, so that your private self should become wholly good. To that self you must die, and by faith be made one with that ideal.’ Eliot’s later engagement with the mystical *via negativa* entailed a ruthless process of what Richard of St. Victor called ‘self-simplification’, which, according to Underhill, takes two forms: ‘the cleansing of that which is to remain, and the stripping of that which is to be done away’.¹⁷⁹

In Kierkegaard, the principle of self-simplification gives rise to the metaphor of the practicing Christian as stripping off clothes in order to swim: one ‘must strip in a far more inward sense, must take off a much more internal attire of thoughts, opinions, selfishness, etc. before one is sufficiently naked’. Barth takes up this image when he defines faith as ‘the radically new disposition of the man who stands naked before God and has been wholly impoverished that he may procure the one pearl of great price’, and affirms, ‘Through the dissolution of the outer man the inner man is

¹⁷⁹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 217; Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 452; Underhill, *Mysticism*, 204.

renewed day by day'. Eliot uses it in a 1935 article in *Time and Tide*: 'to be free we must be stripped...of any number of incrustations of education and frequentation'.¹⁸⁰ But, as Bush rightly asserts, Eliot understood early on how 'the old self, even broken, will not let go', and how much the aspiring Christian must therefore rely on divine grace to accomplish such a transformation.¹⁸¹ The old self can only be extirpated by its death, which can only be effected through grace.

It is because 'what is only living / Can only die' that the silence between and around words, and especially after them, points toward the meaning of all things. But the phrase 'can only' is ominously ambiguous. On one hand, it is a tautology: mortal things must die. But it also suggests—and this is not at all the same thing—that the one path available to all living beings is death. The first meaning is concrete and declarative; the second, abstract and imperative. It implies that, just as words reach into silence only 'after speech', human lives find their meaning only in death, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. Life as we know it is 'only living', not fully being. The dialectical self, 'Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being', must die to the former to be fulfilled in the latter.¹⁸² On this point, Barth and Eliot are in near perfect accord. Barth writes, 'What is in time has not yet reached the boundary of death, has not yet been taken under the government of God. It must yet die in order to enter into life'. This shared conviction is what Moody recognises when he asserts that *Four Quartets* 'systematically subverts and inverts "normal" humane values. Its wisdom is the negative wisdom of humility; its love is concerned only to conceive the Word heard in humble submission to death'.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 4:504; Barth, *Romans*, 98, 103; Eliot, 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide* 16, no. 3 (19 January 1935), 89.

¹⁸¹ Bush, *T. S. Eliot*, 171.

¹⁸² Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 121-2.

¹⁸³ Barth, *The Word of God*, 89; Moody, *Tracing T. S. Eliot's Spirit*, 177.

After his conversion, Eliot made that allegiance to death explicit. In his 1929 essay on Dante, he asserted that we must not ‘expect more from *life* than it can give or more from *human* beings than they can give’, but rather ‘look to *death* for what life cannot give’.¹⁸⁴ Four years later, remarking on Victor Francis Calverton’s book *The Liberation of American Literature*, Eliot declared, ‘What faith in life may be I know not; I might inform Mr. Calverton that, for the Christian, faith in death is what matters’. The pronouncement recalls Barth’s *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated a few years before: ‘To understand the New Testament Yes as anything but the Yes contained in the No, is not to understand it at all. Life comes from *death!*’¹⁸⁵

In its most direct sense, death is for Barth the boundary between time and eternity, the marker of the ‘infinite qualitative difference’ between the unreality of the fallen temporal world and the reality of God. Only in crossing that boundary does one attain full being; before that consummation, the Christian life within time must ground itself in acceptance of divine judgement. In order for ‘the new man’ to take the place of the old, ‘men must die, they must die daily, save in so far as they stand under the “No” and the “Yes” of God, and are passing from atonement...to redemption, from the cross to resurrection’.¹⁸⁶ Only by submitting to the divine judgement and participating in the sentence does one begin truly to live. Speaking of this submission and of the workings of divine grace in the individual life, Barth’s discourse often resembles that of St. John of the Cross. *The Epistle to the Romans* anticipates the paradoxical assertion in ‘East Coker’ that ‘where you are is where you are not’:

¹⁸⁴ Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 275.

¹⁸⁵ T. S. Eliot, ‘A Commentary’, *Criterion* 12, no. 47 (January 1933), 248; Barth, *The Word of God*, 80.

¹⁸⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 415, 108.

In naming myself son of God, I mean precisely what is meant when Christ is so named. . . . I do not mean to designate “myself”, the man of this world, thus. I mean always that new, unobservable, other man, who stands before God and lives in him. I designate him that I am—not. I denote thereby Christ in me.¹⁸⁷

The divine verdict on the fallen self, locked in its carapace of pride, is a death sentence; the new self that subsequently emerges is a child of God.

In this sense, both for mystics of a Neoplatonic cast and for Barth, the Christian life also entails a return to one’s origin. ‘East Coker’ begins the task of reconciling the heightened moments valorised in ‘Burnt Norton’ with the ‘waste sad time / Stretching before and after’. That process begins with what Moody has suggested is the formal principle of the wartime *Quartets*: to ‘progress by returning to origins’. This paradoxical movement also begs the question of what is entailed by origins—what is meant in ‘East Coker’ by ‘beginning’.¹⁸⁸ Though in one sense it means an examination of one’s heritage, on a deeper level it points to the Augustinian doctrine that we must not only strip away the accumulated sediment of the fallen self but also remember and return to our true origin in God. Eliot would certainly have encountered a mystical elaboration of this principle early on, in *Underhill*, where the destiny of the ‘transcendental personality’ is described as ‘a “return to his Origin”’.¹⁸⁹ But the idea also has a place in the anti-mystical theology of Barth, where it is described as the ‘memory of eternity breaking in upon our minds and hearts’. This remembrance is a kind of awakening that transforms our relationship to time: ‘Did we but awake’, Barth laments, ‘did we but remember; did we but step forth from unqualified time into the time that has been qualified; were we only terrified by the

¹⁸⁷ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 127; Barth, *Romans*, 296.

¹⁸⁸ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 122; Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot*, 206; Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 123.

¹⁸⁹ *Underhill, Mysticism*, 259.

fact that, whether we wish it or not, we do stand at every moment on the frontier of time.’¹⁹⁰

Remembering one’s divine origins precipitates a renunciation of one’s earthly origins. This is what Eliot had in mind in asserting, in a 1935 article, that we must ‘divest ourselves even of our ancestors’.¹⁹¹ Ian Glenn sees Barth’s insistence that an aspiring Christian must reject ‘the voice of his own blood and of the blood of his parents and his ancestors’ as the basis for the ‘argument’ of ‘East Coker’. Given that Barth describes them as ‘voices all falsely endowed with divine dignity and authority’, Glenn’s reading has merit, not least because it resonates with the poem’s rejection of ‘the wisdom of old men’.¹⁹² But there is no outright dismissal of the past in *Four Quartets*; rather, the poem traces an inward renunciation that is also, paradoxically, a reconciliation, because it makes possible a relationship of disinterested love.

This renunciation also allows for a transformed relationship to the dialectic of time and eternity. In its Anglo-Catholic aspect, *Four Quartets* affirms that a true saint can ‘apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time’, but even in that context Eliot is no saint, and must accept that, for him as for many others, ‘there is only the unattended / Moment, the moment in and out of time’.¹⁹³ In light of this new humility about his inability to discern the pattern of human experience, he resolves to stop privileging moments of transcendence:

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,

¹⁹⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 48, 500-1.

¹⁹¹ Eliot, ‘Notes on the Way’, 89.

¹⁹² Glenn, ‘Karl Barth and T. S. Eliot’, 37; Baillie and Martin, *Revelation*, 51; Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 125.

¹⁹³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 136.

But a lifetime burning in every moment,
 And not the lifetime of one man only
 But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.¹⁹⁴

As David Moody observes, ‘The poet is now not transcending but entering into history’.¹⁹⁵ And entering into history means moving beyond ‘the lifetime of one man only’ into a restored sense of communal destiny.

Apart from the recognition of one’s origins, the praxis explicitly set forth in ‘East Coker’ would seem to point toward the passive purgation of St. John of the Cross, in which one must give up all striving and ‘allow the soul to remain in peace and quietness....free and disencumbered and at rest from all knowledge and thought’, so that it can receive the peace that ‘God is instilling into it and impressing upon it’.¹⁹⁶ Like John of the Cross, Eliot emphasises that, during passive purgation, any effort on the part of the aspirant is counterproductive:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
 For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
 For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.¹⁹⁷

The lines are at once meticulously balanced and fluid with enjambment, culminating in a paradoxical *coincidentia oppositorum* characteristic of John of the Cross. Their injunction to stillness is certainly typical of much spiritual writing; Barth himself invokes it: ‘We make a veritable uproar with our morality and culture and religion’, he asserts, ‘[b]ut we may presently be brought into silence, and with that will begin our true redemption’. This interior stillness is, for Barth, a form of practice that opens one to grace, though it cannot elicit it: ‘There is a fundamentally different way to

¹⁹⁴ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 129.

¹⁹⁵ Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot*, 206.

¹⁹⁶ St. John of the Cross, *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. E. Allison Peers (1934; repr., London: Burns Oates, 1943), 1:379-80.

¹⁹⁷ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 126-7.

come into a relation with the righteousness of God. This other way we enter not by speech nor reflection nor reason, but by being still'.¹⁹⁸

In 'East Coker', being still is equated with waiting. The verb 'wait' is occasionally linked with contemplation in Allison Peers's translation of St. John of the Cross's *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, and with the Christian life in a broader sense in Barth; the practice of waiting thus cuts across the mystical and anti-mystical negative ways. According to Barth, 'Men are compelled to wait, and only to wait...their waiting is a waiting upon God alone'. Like Eliot, Barth frames this practice of waiting in paradoxical terms:

And we—we must wait, as though there were something lying beyond good and evil, joy and sorrow, life and death; as though in happiness and disappointment, in growth and decay, in the "yes" and in the "no" of our life in the world, we were expecting something. We must wait, as though there were a God whom, in victory and defeat, in life and in death, we must serve with love and devotion. 'As though?' Yes, this is the strange element in the situation.

Barth's description of the practice of waiting—patient, deliberate, without object—anticipates that in 'East Coker'. Elsewhere, Barth goes so far as to suggest that Christianity itself is a kind of waiting: 'We can then, if we understand ourselves aright, be none other than they who wait'.¹⁹⁹

But waiting does not mean inaction. Barth does not countenance Quietism: 'We are not permitted to seek salvation by doing nothing or remaining unmoved'.²⁰⁰ And given that the wartime *Quartets* are also what Eliot called 'patriotic poems', the problem of right action remains. On this point the dialectic of withdrawal and engagement, eternity and time, comes to a head. In framing his solution, Eliot turns not to Christian theologians but to the philosophical poem he considered second only

¹⁹⁸ Barth, *The Word of God*, 23-4.

¹⁹⁹ Barth, *Romans*, 151, 314-15.

²⁰⁰ Barth, *Romans*, 379.

to Dante's *Commedia*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*.²⁰¹ By invoking the principle of *niṣkāma karma*, or desireless action, Eliot connects the renunciate traditions of India with the Christian negative way. The move suggests a displacement of mystical deification into an alternative tradition, as well as an attempt to link contemplation with action. In language recalling the Upanishadic distinction between the fallen, individuated self and the Ātman, the former is depicted in 'The Dry Salvages' as hopelessly mutable, subject to the vagaries of outward and inward circumstance: 'You are not the same people who left that station / Or who will arrive at any terminus'. Smidt's contention that the passage hints at reincarnation is suggestive but hardly consistent with Christian orthodoxy and probably wide of the mark. If 'time is no healer; the patient is no longer here', it is because the fallen self is by nature inconstant; the needful healing is that effected by grace, which redeems us from our inconstancy.²⁰²

In the *Gītā*, liberation entails achieving inner stillness through spiritual practice, which allows one to shed the illusory sense of self that veils the true, eternal Self. One form of practice, the one enjoined upon Ārjuna by Krishna, is *karma yoga*, the yoga of action without attachment. The wise man works 'with an even mind' because he is inwardly anchored in the eternal. 'Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat', he relinquishes all personal investment in outcomes, leaving them to God: 'To action alone thou hast a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction'.²⁰³

Another aspect of the *Gītā* that surely resonated with Eliot was its affirmation of *bhakti yoga*, or the path of selfless devotion. Krishna, like Christ, is God become

²⁰¹ Bush, *T. S. Eliot*, 222; Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 258.

²⁰² Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 134; Smidt, *Poetry and Belief*, 188.

²⁰³ Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgītā*, 114, 119.

human; among other teachings, he preaches a gospel of love and a doctrine of salvation by faith. This doctrine lies behind Krishna's assertion that 'Thinking of whatever state (of being) he at the end gives up his body, to that being does he attain... Therefore at all times remember Me and fight. When thy mind and understanding are set on Me, to Me alone shalt thou come without doubt'.²⁰⁴ The obvious parallels with Christian devotion allow for such an unexpectedly ecumenical move.

Eliot does, however, recalibrate what he borrows, modifying Krishna's teaching to remove the Indic element of reincarnation:

...consider the future
And the past with an equal mind.
At the moment which is not of action or inaction
You can receive this: 'on whatever sphere of being'
The mind of a man may be intent
At the time of death'—that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
And do not think of the fruit of action.²⁰⁵

The 'one action' that will 'fructify in the lives of others' is, paradoxically, internal—an act of will, or 'intent'. In the context of the *Gītā*, it is an interior renunciation that does not free one from action but rather liberates one's actions from the taint of self-interest. Every moment can be the time of death in a broadly Christian sense of dying to self, or, in a more Barthian sense, because every moment in time comes under the death sentence delivered by eternity. Either meaning entails a self-surrender that, insofar as possible within the temporal realm, leads to 'purification of the motive'.²⁰⁶ The translation of 'sphere of being' for the Sanskrit *bhāvat*, or state of being, integrates the passage into the *Quartets*' Barthian discourse of the Incarnation. This is

²⁰⁴ Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgītā*, 229.

²⁰⁵ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 134.

²⁰⁶ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 143.

fitting not only in aesthetic terms but also in theological ones, for Barth advocates giving up the fruits of one's actions. 'AGAPE reminds us that the purity of human intercourse cannot be measured by positive "success"', Barth insists, 'for the endeavour to bring about positive "results" is a motion of EROS. AGAPE consists, rather, in the offering of a pure sacrifice'. Eliot had already suggested the same principle in *The Rock*: 'Make perfect your will. / I say: take no thought of the harvest, / But only of proper sowing'.²⁰⁷ In surrendering the fruits of all one's actions to God, one makes of one's life a sacrament.

Eliot certainly had multiple reasons to incorporate the *Gītā* into 'The Dry Salvages'. Not only was it a favourite text; as Eloise Knapp Hay notes, he might well, in this most American of the *Quartets*, have been recalling the Transcendentalists.²⁰⁸ But the main attraction of the *Gītā* was its articulation of a doctrine of right action similar to that voiced by Barth: an inward renunciation practised in the midst of intense engagement with history. After all, the *Gītā* is set on a battlefield, with a protagonist torn between withdrawal and engagement in a military as well as a spiritual sense. Ārjuna is granted a vision of God that threatens him with annihilation; then, with an equal mind, he rides to battle.

Only, then, by not seeking to evade 'the greedy dialectic of time and eternity', by not succumbing to an idolatry of exalted experiences that leads to withdrawal from the temporal, can one approach an authentic Christian life.²⁰⁹ In 'The Dry Salvages', this return to history allows for 'an approach to the meaning' which Eliot had previously 'missed', because it is 'beyond any meaning / We can assign to happiness'. Seen from this vantage point, moments of human happiness—even of 'sudden

²⁰⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 453-4; Eliot, *The Rock*, 9.

²⁰⁸ Hay, *Eliot's Negative Way*, 181.

²⁰⁹ Barth, *Romans*, 530.

illumination’—have no more and no less reality than ‘moments of agony’. Every moment is ‘a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been’, because every moment of time stands judged by eternity. Yet, because of the Incarnation, every moment is also a ‘point of intersection’ we must strive, however failingly, to ‘apprehend’. In this light, the light of ‘Little Gidding’, ‘history is a pattern of timeless moments’.²¹⁰ Barth says precisely this:

We spend our years as a tale that is told—this is the secret of time which is made known in the ‘Moment’ of revelation, in that eternal ‘Moment’ which always is, and yet is not. Time is, then, irreversible; and of this the irrevocable hurrying away of the past and the relentless approach of the future are a parable. But a parable of it also is the completely hidden, unobservable, intangible present which lies ‘between’ the times. Facing, as it does, both ways, each moment in time bears within it the unborn secret of revelation, and every moment can be thus qualified—*This do, knowing the time*. And so, the known time—apprehended and comprehended in its transcendental significance—provides the occasion for the incomprehensible action of love. Wherever a moment in the past or in the future has been qualified by the *Now* of revelation that lies in the midst between the two, there is the opportunity for the occurrence of love.²¹¹

The passage reads almost like an abstract of the last two movements of ‘Little Gidding’. As Barth proclaims and Eliot affirms, Love is the ‘incomprehensible action’—‘the unfamiliar Name’—which endows each moment in the pattern of history with ‘transcendental significance’. Revelation can be experienced ‘*Now*’—‘Quick now, here, now, always’. It erupts in ‘the intangible present which lies “between” the times’—‘in the stillness / Between two waves of the sea’.²¹² And it points to right action: ‘*This do, knowing the time*’. In this celebration of the Yes concealed within the divine No, Barth lays bare an ecstatic vision of the Incarnation—and of beatitude. The descent of the Holy Spirit, with its pentecostal fire, may be a

²¹⁰ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 133, 125, 136, 144.

²¹¹ Barth, *Romans*, 497-8.

²¹² Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 144-5.

shattering visitation, but it leads to ‘expanding / Of love beyond desire, and so liberation’.²¹³

It is this vision of *agape*—love that transcends attachment—that provides Eliot with the means for a climactic synthesis encompassing both mystical aspiration and consciousness of sin, both his Anglo-Catholic and his Calvinist sensibilities, and ultimately both withdrawal from and engagement with history. The crescendo of affirmative images, allusions and quotations culminates in a Dantean anticipation of the afterlife, ‘When the tongues of flame are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one’.²¹⁴ That final, resounding, monosyllabic ‘one’ points beyond the boundary of death, to where the dialectic of time and eternity is resolved.

Conclusion

In a 1930 article, Eliot distinguished between poetry and propaganda by saying that ‘poetry...is not the assertion that something is true, but the making that truth more fully real to us; it is the creation of a sensuous embodiment. It is making the Word Flesh’. The observation holds for *Four Quartets*, which is not an exercise in Christian apologetics but a poetic exploration of largely, though not exclusively, Christian themes—what we might expect from a poet who was heard to say that his religious life was ‘the *whole* of me, yet too many people think it is irrelevant’.²¹⁵ Those themes trace a movement of thought and feeling about the ontological status of the self in relation to eternity—a dialectical relationship governed by divine judgement. The process also reveals his own interior dialectic between Calvinist and

²¹³ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 142.

²¹⁴ Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 145.

²¹⁵ Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot*, 368 n.44; Gordon, *An Imperfect Life*, 468.

Anglo-Catholic sensibilities. That in formulating his conceptual framework and his discursive strategies he should turn to Barth—a theologian at once severely Protestant and nearly reconcilable with Catholicism—is not surprising. What is surprising is that critics have taken so little note of such an illuminating aspect of *Four Quartets*.

Eliot knew both Yeats and David Jones, and as a devout Anglo-Catholic interested in mysticism and in Indic traditions he occupies a space between the syncretic mysticism of Yeats and the concrete sacramentalism of Jones. In a sense, his advocacy of the two as publisher and critic reflects this triangulation. From that position, he articulates in *Four Quartets* his own dialectical theology, framed in a poetics at first of paradox and negation, but increasingly of concrete historicity and eschatological hope. That development reflects a process outlined by Barth himself, aptly enough in his description of a piece by Mozart: ‘a glorious upsetting of the balance, a *turning* in which the light rises and the shadows fall, though without disappearing, in which joy overtakes sorrow without extinguishing it, in which the Yea rings louder than the ever-present Nay’.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Green, *Karl Barth*, 324.

General Conclusion

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade discusses how life presents itself to someone for whom the sacred is a powerful and binding presence that gives meaning to existence:

Let us attempt to understand the existential situation of one for whom all these homologies are *experiences* and not simply *ideas*. Clearly, his life has an additional dimension; it is not merely human, it is at the same time cosmic, since it has a transhuman structure. It could be termed an open existence, for it is not strictly confined to man's mode of being.¹

This 'transhuman structure' is necessarily mirrored in the structure of such a person's thought and feeling. In an essay on David Jones published shortly after the poet's death in 1974, René Hague commented on the centrality of religious faith and feeling to Jones's life and work: '[I]t is not a matter of "acceptance" in the sense that a creed is "accepted" or "rejected", but one that concerns his whole make-up, psychological, intellectual, spiritual, of a *habitus*, one might say with the schoolmen'.² Hague's remark recognises the reality that deeply held religious convictions, especially those connected to established and highly elaborated traditions, exert a powerful influence on the content and shape of a poet's thought, and therefore on the content and shape of his poetry.

The writings of Yeats, Jones, and Eliot reflect this dynamic, as does much of the literature of the past century. Any criticism that aspires to a comprehensive view of that literature must take into account the 'added dimension' of religious thought and feeling—not only as a set of ideas, but also as a structural principle at work behind and within literary texts. This sort of criticism poses difficulties—it requires a

¹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 166.

² René Hague, 'The Clarity of David Jones', *Agenda* 12, no. 4 – 13, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1975), 118-9.

great deal of spadework in such disciplines as theology and comparative religion, and it raises questions of authorial intent—but it is valuable, and it has been done well by a number of scholars. But it has not been done enough. Even this thesis is necessarily only a beginning, as the constraints of the thesis form have prevented me from delving further into such areas as the plays of Yeats and Eliot, or the other poems of Jones. In principle, what I have tried to accomplish here is to integrate that ‘added dimension’ more fully into the critical conversation.

It is crucial that this kind of criticism not isolate the religious deliberations of authors from their historical consciousness, effectively partitioning off the spiritual from the secular aspects of their work. As I have hoped to make clear, some of the most compelling aspects of these texts involve their attempts to construct a relation between the sacred and the profane. The epigraph to this thesis, from *Native Realm* by the Catholic poet Czeslaw Milosz, voices the predicament of a religious artist negotiating this dialectic of the eternal and the temporal:

I was stretched, therefore, between two poles: the contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history; in other words, between transcendence and becoming. I did not manage to bring these extremes into a unity, but I did not want to give either of them up.³

Milosz’s poetry is partly an attempt to resolve that dilemma, that *metaxy*—the tension between Being and Becoming which rests at the heart of the poetry of Yeats, Jones, and Eliot. Their confrontations with this issue were sharpened by the philosophical and theological critique that began in the nineteenth century and the historical traumas that shaped the twentieth. They and their contemporaries had access not only to Western scriptures but to sound translations of Indic and other non-Western sacred texts; not only to a domesticated form of Christianity but to a wide range of

³ Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, trans. Catherine S. Leach (1968; repr., Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981), 125.

sophisticated, challenging, and divergent theological thought. Scholarly inquiry and religious orthodoxy shared intellectual and cultural space with syncretic and universalist movements often fueled by uncritical enthusiasm. This vigor and diversity are reflected in the literature, such that a number of avenues for future research remain open and largely untravelled.

As the chapter on Yeats makes clear, more can be said about the influence of Theosophy on twentieth-century literature. Though a number of excellent general studies on the connexions between modernism and the mystical and esoteric have already been produced—the work of Alex Owen, Timothy Materer, Sanford Schwartz, and Leon Surette comes to mind—the book has yet to be written on the role of the Theosophical Society as a way-station for the avant-garde in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similarly, though excellent studies exist of the influence of Indic traditions on twentieth-century poetry, especially in the work of Andrew Perl, Cleo Kearns, and Ramesh Chandra Shah, most of these studies have either emphasised Buddhism at the expense of Hinduism or succumbed to what Richard King has called ‘Vedānticization’, in which one school of Indic philosophy has been successfully marketed as the essence of Hinduism.⁴ Such criticism has particularly neglected Tantrism, both Buddhist and Hindu, the importance of which to the work not only of Yeats but also of such poets as Octavio Paz and Gary Snyder awaits more thorough study.

That sort of research opens on another, more theoretical area: examining the appropriation of non-Western philosophical and religious traditions into Western literature, not so much through a postcolonial approach as from the standpoint of theology and poetics. Any such criticism must address the issue of commensurability.

⁴ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the Mystic East* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 69, 138.

More can be done to examine how Western writers have sought to incorporate into their work principles of non-Western traditions both linguistically and philosophically far removed from the writers' fundamental presuppositions. As in the case of Yeats, most such efforts have involved attempting to translate into English words for which English has no equivalents, and concepts that challenge dominant Western notions of subject and object, of the ontological status of the individual self, and of the structure and workings of the human mind. Further, much of the translation and appropriation by Western poets of non-Western philosophical traditions involves deliberations about things presumed to be supra-linguistic: mystical consciousness, encounters with the sacred, and the nature or experience of divinity. Such discourses of the Absolute often hinge on the idea that what is most translatable, from language to language and culture to culture, is the ineffable. And that is not, as it might seem, a paradoxical proposition. When, theologically speaking, signification reaches the region of its limit, how does its insufficiency militate against the historically and culturally determined discourses used to mark out that space? How do the discursive strategies so often used to navigate this region of meaning—paradox, negation, ellipsis, and spatialised silence, among others—intersect with the issue of cultural commensurability? When poetic translation, both linguistic and cultural, confronts what Steiner has called 'ontological difficulty', fundamental issues of commensurability are forced to the surface.

Closely related to the problem of commensurability is that of subjectivity, a topic that, from Husserl's transcendental ego to James's stream of consciousness and Freud's fragmented psyche, played a decisive role in the literature and art of the twentieth century. What has not been sufficiently explored is the relation in that literature between subjectivity and the sacred. In his 2012 lecture 'Fields of Force',

Geoffrey Hill drew on Kierkegaard to establish a critical criterion for the poetry of the past century:

[A]n essential aim for every good poet throughout the greater part of the twentieth and of the toehold we so far possess in the twenty-first centuries has been to achieve, by a variety of technical means, the effect of possessing an objective sense of one's own subjectivity.⁵

The reference is to an entry in Kierkegaard's journals, in which he asserts that 'to relate objectively to one's own subjectivity' is an essential aspect of an authentic life, without which 'the possibility of being sharpened to an *I* is quickly truncated to a third person'. To relate objectively to one's own subjectivity, like Socrates facing his death sentence, is to achieve 'subjectivity raised to the second power'. God, for Kierkegaard, is 'infinite subjectivity'.⁶

Kierkegaard here touches on what Hillis Miller has identified as the crisis defined by Nietzsche:

Man has killed God by separating his subjectivity from everything but itself. The ego has put everything in doubt, and has defined all outside itself as the object of its thinking power. Cogito ergo sum: the absolute certainty about the self reached by Descartes' hyperbolic doubt leads to the assumption that things exist, for me at least, only because I think them.⁷

Subjectivity, then, is inseparable from authority, from power, from Being. If this is the case, then there is an intrinsic link between where we locate subjectivity and how we experience the sacred. As Kierkegaard suggests, to the extent that subjectivity is tied to individuated consciousness, the sense of the sacred tends to attenuate.

There are three fundamental ways of conceiving an objective relationship to one's own subjectivity: to consider oneself an object in relation to the infinite subjectivity of an Absolute Subject who is Wholly Other; to believe in a deep,

⁵ Geoffrey Hill, 'Fields of Force' (Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, Oxford University, 27 November 2012).

⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 4:364.

⁷ Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 3.

impersonal Subject that lies concealed beneath the false subjectivity of the individuated personality; or to posit a fragmented personality in which one part may assume subjectivity and objectify the others. The three approaches are not mutually exclusive, but any one of them can be adopted independently. Yeats was inclined to emphasise the second, Jones the first; Eliot tended toward a synthesis of the three. The three poets present a schema by which one might examine the work of other writers.

The phenomenon of seeking to recuperate a sense of the sacred by renegotiating the relation between subjectivity and individuated consciousness offers interesting possibilities for future criticism. The literature of the twentieth century that engages in such a project of resacralisation extends across genres and covers a broad range of approaches, from both Western and non-Western orthodox religion to syncretism, and even to the occult. In terms of poetry, the writings of figures as diverse as Milosz, Hill, Paz, Wallace Stevens, James Merrill, and Anne Carson offer particularly interesting studies in the relation between subjectivity and the sense of the sacred.

If the relative neglect of how religion and theology have informed the poetics of many important twentieth-century texts has left a blank space on the critical map, the terrain in that uncharted territory is varied and challenging. Our literary genealogies as well as our engagement with individual texts can only be enriched by further study of 'transhuman structure' as a formative principle. What Hilton Kramer has said about Mondrian and Kandinsky applies equally to Yeats, Eliot, Jones, and others: '[I]f, some eighty-plus years after the birth of abstraction, we still take an interest in the art of its progenitors, we are obliged, I believe, to examine the ideas

that shaped it, however odd or alien those ideas may look to us today'.⁸ This thesis has been an effort in that direction.

⁸ Kramer, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 6.

Bibliography

I. Published Primary Sources

T. S. Eliot

- Eliot, T. S. 'A Commentary'. *Criterion* 2, no. 7 (April 1924): 231-5.
- 'A Commentary'. *Criterion* 8, no. 31 (December 1928): 185-190.
- 'A Commentary'. *Criterion* 12, no. 46 (October 1932): 73-9.
- 'A Commentary'. *Criterion* 12, no. 47 (January 1933): 244-9.
- *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950*. 1950. Reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1980.
- 'Eeldrop and Appleplex'. *The Little Review* 4, no. 1 (May 1917): 7-11.
- *For Lancelot Andrewes*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1970.
- *The Idea of a Christian Society*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1939.
- 'Last Words', *Criterion* 18, no. 71 (January 1939): 269-75.
- 'The Mystic and Politician as Poet: Vaughan, Traherne, Marvell, Milton'. *The Listener* 3, no. 64 (April 2, 1930): 590-1.
- 'Notes on the Way'. *Time and Tide* 16, no. 3 (19 January 1935): 88-90.
- *On Poetry and Poets*. 1943. Reprint, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2009.
- Review of *Conscience and Christ*, by Hastings Rashdall. *International Journal of Ethics* 27, no. 1 (Oct 1916): 111-12.
- Review of *Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence*, by John Middleton Murry. *Criterion* 10, no. 41 (July 1931): 768-74.
- *Selected Essays*, 3rd enlarged ed. 1951. Reprint, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1980.
- 'The Silurist'. *The Dial* 83, no. 3 (September 1927): 259-63.
- 'Thinking in Verse: A Survey of Early Seventeenth-Century Poetry'. *The Listener* 3, no. 61 (March 12, 1930): 441-3.
- *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*. Edited by Ronald Schuchard. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1993.

David Jones

Jones, David. *The Anathemata: Fragments of an Attempted Writing*. 1952. Reprint, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010.

----- *Dai Greatcoat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in his Letters*. Edited by René Hague. 1980. Faber Finds ed. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2008.

----- *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings*. Edited with an introduction by Harman Grisewood. 1978. Faber Finds ed. Faber and Faber Limited, 2009.

----- *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*. Edited by Harman Grisewood. New York: Chilmark Press, 1959.

----- *In Parenthesis*. 1937. Reprint, New York: New York Review of Books, 2003.

----- *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments*. 1974. Reprint, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1995.

W. B. Yeats

Bridge, Ursula, ed. *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901-1937*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1953.

Yeats, W. B. *Autobiographies*. London: Macmillan, 1955.

----- *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Electronic Edition*. Edited by John Kelly. InteLex Past Masters English Letters Database. Charlottesville, Virginia: InteLex Corporation, 2002. <http://www.nlx.com/collections/130>.

----- *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. Edited by Richard J. Finneran. 1st Scribner Paperback Poetry ed. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

----- *A Critical Edition of Yeats's "A Vision" (1925)*, edited by George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood. London: Macmillan, 1978.

----- *Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan, 1961.

----- *Explorations*. London: Macmillan, 1962.

----- Introduction to *Gītānjali*, by Rabindranath Tagore. Scribner Poetry ed. 1912. Reprint, New York: Scribner, 1997.

----- Introduction to *An Indian Monk: His Life & Adventures*, by Shri Purohit Swami. 1932. Reprint, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2003.

----- Introduction to *The Holy Mountain*, by Bhagwan Sri Hamsa. London: Faber and Faber, 1934.

- . Introduction to *Patanjali's Path to Yoga*, by Shree Purohit Swami. 1938. Reprint, New Delhi: Rupa, 2003.
- . *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*. Edited by Allan Wade. New York: Macmillan, 1955.
- . *Mythologies*. 1959. Reprint, New York: Touchstone, 1998.
- . Preface to *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, translated by Shree Purohit Swami and W. B. Yeats. 1937. Reprint, New Delhi: Rupa, 2003.
- . *A Vision*. 2nd ed., reissued. 1937. Reprint, London: Macmillan, 1962.

II. Manuscripts and Special Collections

- Harman Grisewood Papers. Georgetown University Library. Washington, DC.
- The Library of David Jones. National Library of Wales. Aberystwyth.
- The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T. S. Eliot Material. King's College, Cambridge.
- The William Butler Yeats Collection. University of Delaware Library. Newark, DE.

III. Secondary Sources

- Albright, Daniel. *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Altieri, Charles. 'What Pound and Stevens Share: The Break from Epistemic Views of Value in Modernist Poetry'. Lecture, American Literature Research Seminar, Oxford University, 3 November 2011.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *The 'Summa Theologica' of St. Thomas Aquinas*. 2nd ed. 8 vols. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1927.
- Arkins, Brian. 'Yeats: Platonist, Gnostic, or What?' In *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies 7*, edited by Richard J. Finneran, 3-16. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by Willard Trask. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957.

- Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*. Translated by William Watts. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1961.
- Avalon, Arthur, and M. P. Pandit, trans. and eds. *Kulārṇava Tantra*. 1917. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000.
- Bachchan, H. W. B. *Yeats and Occultism*. 1965. Reprint, New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1974.
- Bagchee, Shyamal. 'Sexual Passion and Nationalism in Extremis in Yeats's "The Statues"'. *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 6, no. 2 (December 1980): 18-33.
- Baillie, John, and Hugh Martin, eds. *Revelation*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1937.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Theology of Karl Barth*. Translated by Edward T. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992.
- Barth, Karl. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Vol. 1 of *Church Dogmatics*. Translated by G. T. Thomson. 1936. Reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963.
- *The Epistle to the Romans*. Translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*. Translated by J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938.
- *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton. 1928. Reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publisher, 1978.
- Billigheimer, Rachel V., 'Tragedy and Transcendence in the Dance Plays of W. B. Yeats'. *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 25, no. 1/2 (July-December 1999), 247-63.
- Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Edited by David V. Erdman. Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Blamires, David. *David Jones: Artist and Writer*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971.
- Blavatsky, H. P. *The Key to Theosophy*. New York: W. Q. Judge, 1890.
- Blissett, William. *The Long Conversation: A Memoir of David Jones*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Bloom, Harold. *Yeats*. Oxford University Press paperback ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

- Bohlmann, Otto. *Yeats and Nietzsche: An Exploration of Major Nietzschean Echoes in the Writings of William Butler Yeats*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Bradford, Curtis, 'On Yeats's Last Poems'. In *Yeats: Last Poems*, edited by Jon Stallworthy, 75-97. Casebook Series. London: Macmillan, 1968.
- Brown, Frank Burch. 'The Progress of the Intellectual Soul: T. S. Eliot, Pascal, and *Four Quartets*'. *Journal of Modern Literature* 10, no. 1 (March, 1983): 26-39.
- Brown, Terence. *The Life of W. B. Yeats: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.
- Brunner, Larry. *Tragic Victory: The Doctrine of Subjective Salvation in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Whitston, 1987.
- Bryant, Edwin, trans. and ed. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press, 2009.
- Bush, Ronald. *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style*. 1984. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1995.
- The Catechism of the Council of Trent*. Translated by Rev. J. Donovan. Dublin: W. Folds and Son, 1829.
- Childs, Donald J. *T. S. Eliot: Mystic, Son and Lover*. London: The Athlone Press, 1997.
- Chute, Desmond. *Inner Necessities: The Letters of David Jones to Desmond Chute*. Toronto: Anson-Cartwright Editions, 1984.
- Conrad, Richard, O.P. 'Sacramental Theology', lecture no. 2. Lecture, Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 12 October 2011.
- 'Sacramental Theology', lecture no. 3. Lecture, Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 19 October 2011.
- 'Sacramental Theology', lecture no. 4. Lecture, Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 2 November 2011.
- Clements, Keith, ed. *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*. Continuum imprint. London: T&T Clark, 2010.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Illustrated and introduced by David Jones. Edited with Preface and Afterword by Thomas Dilworth. London: Enitharmon Press, 2005.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda. *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*. 8th Indian ed. 1918. Reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003.

- Corcoran, Neil. *The Song of Deeds: A Study of the 'Anathémata' of David Jones*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982.
- Cormack, Alistair. *Yeats and Joyce: Cyclical History and the Reprobate Tradition*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008.
- Coulson, John. *Religion and Imagination: 'in aid of a grammar of assent'*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Cox, C. B. and A. E. Dyson, eds. *1918-1945*, vol. 2 of *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler. *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Dante, *Paradiso*. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum. Bantam Classic ed. 1986. New York: Bantam, 2004.
- Dasgupta, S. *A History of Indian Philosophy*. vol. 1. 1st Indian ed. 1975. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992.
- Davenport, A. 'W. B. Yeats and the Upanishads'. *The Review of English Studies* 3, no. 9 (January, 1952): 55-62.
- Deane, Patrick. The Text as "Valid Matter": Language and Style in *The Anathemata*', in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, edited by John Matthias, 307-29. Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1989.
- De la Taille, Maurice. *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1930.
- Dettmar, Kevin J. H. "'Evil Gathers Head": Yeats' Poetics of Evil'. *College Literature* 13, no. 1 (1986): 71-87.
- Dilworth, Thomas. *Reading David Jones*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008.
- . *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988.
- Dix, Gregory. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945.
- Donoghue, Denis. *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- . *Yeats*. Fontana Modern Masters Series. 1971. Reprint, Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1982.

- Dyczkowski, Mark S.G. *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. 1954. Reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.
- *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. 1957. Reprint, Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 1987.
- Ellis, Steve. *The English Eliot: Design, Language and Landscape in 'Four Quartets'*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Ellmann, Richard. *The Identity of Yeats*. London: Faber, 1968.
- *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*. New York: Norton, 1999.
- Engelberg, Edward. *The Vast Design: Patterns in W. B. Yeats's Aesthetic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964.
- Farrell, John, O.P. 'Christ's Priesthood'. Lecture, Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 19 October 2011.
- Feuerstein, Georg, trans. *The Yoga-Sūtra of Patañjali*. Folkestone, England: Dawson, 1979.
- Flint, R. W. 'The Four Quartets Reconsidered', in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, edited by Bernard Bergonzi, 107-118. Casebook Series. Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969.
- Flood, Gavin. *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2006.
- 'Towards a Comparative History of Inwardness'. Lecture, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford University, 11 October 2012.
- Foster, R. F. *The Apprentice Mage*. Vol. 1 of *W. B. Yeats: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- *The Arch-Poet*. Vol. 2 of *W. B. Yeats: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. 1933. Reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1989.
- Fullerton, N. & Alexander. 'Misleading Terms'. *The Path* 5, no. 8 (May, 1890). http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/path/v05n02p50_misleading-terms.htm (accessed 15 September 2011).

- Gardner, Helen. *The Art of T. S. Eliot*. 1949. Reprint, London: The Cresset Press, 1961.
- *The Composition of Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1978.
- Gibson, Matthew. "What Empty Eyeballs Knew": Zen Buddhism in "The Statues" and the *Principles of A Vision*'. In *Yeats Annual* no. 11, edited by Warwick Gould, 141-56. New York: St. Martin's, 1995.
- Glenn, Ian. 'Karl Barth and T. S. Eliot'. *Standpunkte* 35, no. 1 (February 1982): 35-42.
- Golding, John. *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2002.
- Goldpauh, Tom. 'To Make a Shape in Words', in *David Jones: Diversity in Unity*, edited by Belinda Humfrey and Anne Price-Owen, 132-52. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.
- Gordon, Lyndall. *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1998.
- Green, Clifford, ed. *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Grimes, John. *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Guha, Naresh. *W. B. Yeats: An Indian Approach*. Calcutta: Jadavpur University, 1968.
- Haffner, Paul. *The Sacramental Mystery*. Leominster: Gracewing, 1999.
- Hague, René. 'The Clarity of David Jones'. *Agenda* 12, no. 4 – 13, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1975): 109-25.
- *A Commentary on 'The Anathemata' of David Jones*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977.
- Hamsa, Bhagwan Sri. *The Holy Mountain*. London: Faber and Faber, 1934.
- Hariharānanda Āranya, Swami. *The Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali*. Translated by P. M. Mukerjee. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- Harnack, Adolf. *What Is Christianity?* Translated by T. Bailey Saunders. 2nd rev. ed. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903.
- Harper, Margaret Mills. "How Else Could the God Have Come To Us?": Yeatsian Masks, Modernity, and the Sacred'. *Nordic Irish Studies* 6 (1997): 57-72.
- Harper, Margaret Mills. 'Yeats's Religion', in *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 13, edited by Richard J. Finneran, 48-71. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.

- Haskell, Dennis. "‘Long-legged Fly’ and Yeats’s Concept of Mind”, in *Yeats Annual* no. 10, edited by Warwick Gould, 250-6. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993.
- Hassett, Joseph M. *Yeats and the Poetics of Hate*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986.
- Hay, Eloise Knapp. *Eliot’s Negative Way*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Heller, Erich. *The Artist’s Journey into the Interior*. 1st Vintage Books ed. 1959. Reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- Henn, T. R. *The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats*. University Paperbacks ed. Fakenham, UK: Cox & Wyman, 1969.
- Heraclitus. *The Cosmic Fragments*. Edited by G. S. Kirk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954.
- Hill, Geoffrey. ‘Fields of Force’. Oxford Professor of Poetry Lecture, Oxford University, 27 November 2012.
- . *The Lords of Limit*. London: Deutsch, 1984.
- Holdridge, Jefferson. ‘Heart’s Victim and Its Torturer: Yeats and the Poetry of Violence’. *Irish University Review* 27, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1997): 111-129.
- Hone, Joseph. *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939*. London: Macmillan, 1967.
- Hooker, Jeremy. *David Jones: An Exploratory Study of the Writings*. London: Enitharmon Press, 1975.
- Hough, Graham. ‘Vision and Doctrine in *Four Quartets*’. *Critical Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (June, 1973), 107-27.
- Hulme, T. E. *Selected Writings*. Edited with an introduction by Patrick McGuinness. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Hume, Robert Ernest, trans. *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*. Oxford India Paperback ed. 1877. Reprint, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Humfrey, Belinda, and Anne Price-Owen, eds. *David Jones: Diversity in Unity*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.
- Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *À Rebours*. Edited by Mark Fumaroli. 1884. Reprint, Paris: Gallimard, 1977.
- Hynes, Samuel. ‘Yeats’s Wars’. *The Sewanee Review* 97, no. 1 (1989): 36-55.
- Islam, Shamsul. ‘The Influence of Eastern Philosophy on Yeats’s Later Poetry’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 19, no. 4 (October, 1973): 283-290.

- James, Merlin. *David Jones 1895-1974: A Map of the Artist's Mind*. London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995.
- Jeffares, A. Norman. *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968.
- , 'The General and Particular Meanings of 'Lapis Lazuli''. In *Yeats: Last Poems*, edited by Jon Stallworthy, 160-65. London: Macmillan, 1968.
- , *A New Commentary on the Poems of W. B. Yeats*. London: Macmillan, 1984.
- , ed. *Yeats's Poems*. London: Macmillan, 1989.
- John of the Cross, St. *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*. Translated by E. Allison Peers. 3 vols. 1934. Reprint, London: Burns Oates, 1943.
- Jyoti, Murdhna. 'Seership', *The Path* 1, no. 1 (April 1886). http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/path/v01n01p14_seership_murdhna-joti.htm (accessed 9 September 2011).
- Kane, Julie. 'Varieties of Mystical Experience in the Writings of Virginia Woolf'. *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 328-349.
- Kearns, Cleo McNelly. 'Negative Theology and Literary Discourse in *Four Quartets*: A Derridean Reading', in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's 'Four Quartets'*, edited by Edward Lobb, 131-57. London: The Athlone Press, 1993.
- , *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions: A Study in Poetry and Belief*. 1987. Reprint, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Keay, John. *China: A History*. London: HarperPress, 2009.
- Kenner, Hugh. 'Into Our First World', in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, edited by Bernard Bergonzi, 168-96. Casebook Series. Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or*. Vol. 3 of *Kierkegaard's Writings*. Translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- , *Philosophical Fragments*. Vol. 7 of *Kierkegaard's Writings*. Translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- , *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. 6 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978.

- King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the Mystic East*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Kirk, Russell. *T. S. Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Koch, Vivienne. *Yeats: The Tragic Phase*. 1951. Reprint, Hamden, CT: Archon, 1969.
- Kojecky, Roger. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1971.
- Komesu, Okifumi. *The Double Perspective of Yeats's Aesthetic*. Gerrards Cross, UK: Colin Smythe, 1984.
- Kramer, Hilton. *The Triumph of Modernism: The Art World, 1987-2005*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006.
- Küng, Hans. *Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007.
- Lampert, Laurence. 'Yeats's Nietzschean Dialogue', in *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 11 (1993), edited by Richard J. Finneran, 129-158. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995)
- Levi, Peter. 'History and Reality in David Jones'. *Agenda* 11, no. 4-12, no. 1 (Autumn-Winter, 1973-4): 56-9.
- Lewis, Saunders. 'Two Letters Introduced by Saunders Lewis', *Agenda* 11, no. 4-12, no.1 (Winter/Spring, 1973-4): 17-29.
- Lilley, A. L., and George Tyrell, trans. *The Programme of Modernism: A Reply to the Encyclical of Pius X, 'Pascendi Domini Gregis'*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908.
- Longenbach, James. *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats & Modernism*. 1988. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Lynn, Richard John, ed. and trans. *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the 'I Ching' as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Majumdâr, Shrîyukta Baradâ Kânta. Introduction to *Principles of Tantra: The Tantratattva of Shrîyukta Shiva Chandra Vidyârnavâ Bhattâchâryya Mahodaya*. Vol. 2. London: Luzac & Co., 1916.
- Manganiello, Dominic. *T. S. Eliot and Dante*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1989.
- Mann, Neil. 'A Vision: Ideas of God and Man', in *Yeats Annual* no. 8, edited by Warwick Gould, 157-175. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991.

- Maritain, Jacques. *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953.
- . *Philosophy of Art, Being "Art et Scholastique" by Jacques Maritain, translated by the Rev. John O'Connor, S.T.P. with an introduction by Eric Gill O.S. D.* Ditchling, Sussex: S. Dominic's Press, 1923.
- . *Three Reformers: Luther—Descartes—Rousseau*. 1928. Reprint, London: Sheed & Ward, 1941.
- . *True Humanism*. Translated by M. R. Adamson. 2nd ed. London: The Centenary Press, 1939.
- Materer, Timothy. *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Matthias, John, ed. *David Jones: Man and Poet*. Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1989.
- Matthiessen, F. O. 'The "Quartets"', in *Four Quartets: A Casebook*, edited by Bernard Bergonzi, 88-104. Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave, 1969.
- McGinn, Bernard. 'Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal'. *Spiritus* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 44-63.
- Meihuizen, Nicholas. *Yeats and the Drama of Sacred Space*. Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998.
- Mettepenningen, Jürgen . *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*. London: T & T Clark, 2010.
- Miles, Jonathan. *Backgrounds to David Jones: A Study in Sources and Drafts*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990.
- Miles, Jonathan, and Derek Shiel. *David Jones: The Maker Unmade*. 1995. Reprint, Bridgend, UK: Poetry Wales Press, 2003.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *Poets of Reality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap/Harvard, 1966.
- Milosz, Czeslaw. *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*. Translated by Catherine S. Leach. 1968. Reprint. Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981.
- Mokashi-Punakar, Shankar. 'Shri Purohit Swami and W. B. Yeats'. In *The Image of India in Western Creative Writing*, edited by M. K. Naik, S. K. Desai and S. T. Kallapur, 127-48. Madras: Karnatak University and Macmillan, 1971.
- Moody, A. David. *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- . *Tracing T. S. Eliot's Spirit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- Moore, Virginia. *The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality*. New York: Macmillan, 1954.
- Morgan, D. Densil. *Barth Reception in Britain*. London: T&T Clark International, 2010.
- Murray, Ciaran. 'Night of the Living Sculptures: Asia and Europe in Yeats'. *Journal of Irish Studies* 16 (2001), 149-59.
- Murray, Oswyn. "'It was a dark and stormy night": David Jones and History', in *David Jones: Artist and Poet*, edited by Paul Hills, 1-17. Aldershot, UK: Scholar, 1997.
- Murray, Paul. *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism: The Secret History of Four Quartets*. 1991. Houndsmills, UK: The Macmillan Press, 1994.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Vintage Books ed. New York: Random House, 1974.
- . *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*. Modern Library ed. 1927. Reprint, New York: Random House, 1954.
- . *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- O'Donnell, William. 'The Art of Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli"'. *The Massachusetts Review* 23, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 353-67.
- Olney, James. *The Rhizome and the Flower: The Perennial Philosophy—Yeats and Jung*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Olson, Charles. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Robert Creeley. New York: New Directions Books, 1967.
- Oppel, Frances. *Mask and Tragedy: Yeats and Nietzsche 1902-10*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987.
- O'Shea, Edward. *A Descriptive Catalog of W.B. Yeats's Library*. New York: Garland, 1985.
- Owen, Alex. *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Padoux, André. *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*. Translated by Jacques Gontier. 1st Indian ed. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992.
- Parish, Richard. *Catholic Particularity in Seventeenth-Century French Writing: 'Christianity is strange'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- Patrides, C. A. 'Gaiety Transfiguring All That Dread: The Case of Yeats', in *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies*, no. 5, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 117-131. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads*. Translated by Stephen MacKenna. 1917-30. Reprint, Burdett, NY: Larson, 1992.
- Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Rev. ed. London: Faber and Faber, 1975.
- Prabhavananda, Swami. *The Spiritual Heritage of India*. 2nd Indian ed. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981.
- Prāsada, Rāma, trans. *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras*. 1912. Reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2002.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.
- Purohit Swami, Shri. *An Indian Monk: His Life & Adventures*. 1932. Reprint, New Delhi: Rupa, 2003.
- . *Patañjali's Path to Yoga*. 1938. Reprint, New Delhi: Rupa, 2003.
- Purohit Swami, Shree, and W. B. Yeats, trans. *The Ten Principal Upanishads*. 1937. Reprint, New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2003.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel. *1913: The Cradle of Modernism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.
- Radhakrishnan, S., trans. *The Bhagavadgītā*. 20th impression. New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2004.
- . *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. 2nd ed. Reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- , trans. *The Principal Upanishads*. 1953. Reprint, New York: HarperCollins, 2010.
- Raine, Kathleen. *Death-in-Life and Life-in-Death: 'Cuchulain Comforted' and 'News for the Delphic Oracle'*. Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1974.
- . *Yeats the Initiate*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986.
- Ramazani, R. Jahan. 'Yeats: Tragic Joy and the Sublime'. *PMLA* 104, no. 2 (March, 1989): 163-177.
- Reardon, Bernard. *Roman Catholic Modernism*. London: A. & C. Black, 1970.
- Ridler, Alec R. *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church: Its Origins & Outcome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934.

- Rosenthal, M. L. *Running to Paradise: Yeats's Poetic Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Sanderson, Alexis. *Meaning in Tantric Ritual*. New Delhi: Tantra Foundation, 2006.
- . 'Saivism and the Tantric Traditions', in *The World's Religions*, edited by Stewart Sutherland, L. Houlden, P. Clarke and F. Hardy, 660-704. London: Routledge, 1988.
- . 'Swami Lakshman Joo and His Place in the Kashmirian Śaiva Tradition', in *Samvidullāsaḥ = Samvidullāsaḥ: manifestation of divine consciousness: Swami Lakshman Joo, saint-scholar of Kashmir Śaivism, a centenary tribute*, edited by Bettina Baumer and Sarla Kumar, 93-126. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2007.
- Schmidt, Eric Leigh. 'The Making of Modern Mysticism'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (June, 2003): 273-302.
- Schuchard, Ronald. *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . 'T. S. Eliot at Fabers: Book Reports, Blurbs, Young Poets'. *Areté* 23 (Summer-Autumn 2007): 63-87.
- Schwartz, Sanford. *The Matrix of Modernism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Sedlar, Jean. *India and the Greek World: A Study in the Transmission of Culture*. Totowa, NJ: Roman & Littlefield, 1980.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Thomson Learning, 2006.
- . *The Tempest*. Edited by Frank Kermode. The Arden Shakespeare. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Sharma, Arvind. *Sleep as a State of Consciousness in Advaita Vedānta*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- Sharp, Sister Corona. "'The Unheard Music": T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and St. John of the Cross', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 51, vol. 3 (Spring 1982): 264-78.
- Sikka, Shalini. 'Indian Thought'. In *W. B. Yeats in Context*, edited by David Holdeman and Ben Levitas, 256-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- . *W. B. Yeats and the Upanishads*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

- Singh, Jaideva, trans. *Śiva Sutras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991.
- Smidt, Kristian. *The Importance of Recognition: Six Chapters on T. S. Eliot*. Trykk, Norway: A. S. Pedder Norbye, 1973.
- . *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Smith, Stan. 'The Disconsolate Chimera: T. S. Eliot and the Fixation of Modernism', in *Rethinking Modernism*, edited by Marianne Thormählen, 180-203. Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003
- Southam, B. C. 'Yeats: Life and the Creator in "The Long Legged Fly"'. *Twentieth Century Literature* 6, no. 4 (Jan. 1961): 175-9.
- Spanos, William. 'Modern Literary Criticism and the Spatialization of Time'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29, no. 1 (Autumn, 1970): 87-104.
- Spender, Stephen. *The Struggle of the Modern*. London: Methuen, 1965.
- Spurr, Barry. *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T.S. Eliot and Christianity*. Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010.
- Sri, P. S. 'The Influence of Vedānta on Yeats's "Supernatural Songs"', in *Yeats Annual* no. 16, edited by Warwick Gould, 113-129. London: Palgrave, 2005.
- . 'Yeats and Mohini Chatterjee', in *Yeats Annual* no. 11, edited by Warwick Gould, 61-76. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994.
- Stallworthy, Jon. *Vision and Revision in Yeats's 'Last Poems'*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969.
- Staudt, Kathleen Henderson. *At the Turn of a Civilization: David Jones and Modern Poetics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- . 'The Decline of the West and the Optimism of the Saints: David Jones's Reading of Oswald Spengler', in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, edited by John Matthias, 443-63. Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1989.
- . 'Incarnation Reconsidered: The Poem as Sacramental Act in *The Anthemata* of David Jones'. *Contemporary Literature* 26, no. 1 (Spring, 1985): 1-25.
- . 'The Text as Material and Sign: Poetry and Incarnation in William Blake, Arthur Rimbaud, and David Jones'. *Modern Language Studies* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 13-30.
- Steiner, George. *Nostalgia for the Absolute*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2004.

- '. 'On Difficulty'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36, no. 3, (Spring 1978): 263-276.
- '. "'Tragedy," Reconsidered'. *New Literary History* 35:1 (Winter 2004): 1-15.
- Surette, Leon. *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and the Occult*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.
- Sykes, S. W. 'Theology', in *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain, Volume 2: 1918-1945*, edited by C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, 146-70. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Taimni, I. K, trans. *The Science of Yoga*. 2nd Quest Books ed. Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1968.
- Talar, C. J. T., ed. *Modernists and Mystics*. Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2009.
- Taylor, Kathleen. *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: An Indian Soul in a European Body?*. Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001.
- Thomas, Calvin. 'Knowledge and Embodiment in Yeats'. *South Central Review* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 53-60.
- Tillich, Paul. *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*. Edited by Carl E Braaten. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.
- '. *On Art and Architecture*. Edited by John Dillenberger with Jane Dillenberger. New York: Crossroad, 1987.
- '. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63.
- Tyrrell, George. *Christianity at the Crossroads*. 1909. Reprint, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. 1911. Reprint, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005.
- Urban, Eusebio. 'The Three Planes of Human Life', *The Path* 3, no. 5 (August 1888). http://theosociety.org/pasadena/path/v03n05p147_the-three-planes-of-human-life.htm (accessed 9 September 2011).
- Valéry, Paul. 'Letters from France I: The Spiritual Crisis'. *The Athenaeum* no. 4641 (April 11, 1919): 182-4.
- Walker, Peter. 'T. S. Eliot: Poetry, Silence and the Vision of God'. In *European Literature and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, edited by David Jasper and Colin Crowder, 86-104. London: Macmillan, 1990.

- Ward, Elizabeth. *David Jones: Mythmaker*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983.
- Webb, Eugene. *The Dark Dove: The Sacred and Secular in Modern Literature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.
- Weitz, Morris. 'T. S. Eliot: Time as a Mode of Salvation', in *T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets*, edited by Bernard Bergonzi, 138-52. Casebook Series. 1969. Reprint, Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Whicher, Ian. *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana*. 1st Indian ed. New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2000.
- Whitaker, Thomas. 'Homo Faber, Homo Sapiens', in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, edited by John Matthias, 465-87. Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1989.
- , 'In Parenthesis and the Poetics of Passage', in *David Jones: Artist and Poet*, edited by Paul Hills, 31-42. Aldershot, UK: Scolar, 1997.
- , *Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964.
- White, David Gordon. *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- , ed. *Tantra in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. Edited by Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 1973.
- Williams, Rowan. *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Wilson, Bruce. "'From Mirror After Mirror": Yeats and Eastern Thought'. *Comparative Literature* 34, no. 1 (Winter, 1982): 28-46.
- Wood, Michael. *Yeats & Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Woodroffe, Sir John. *The Garland of Letters: Studies in the Mantra-Śāstra*. 6th ed. 1922. Reprint, Madras: Ganesh & Company, 1974.
- , *Introduction to Tantra-Śāstra*. 7th ed. 1952. Reprint, Pondicherry, India: Ganesh & Company, 1980.
- , *The Serpent Power*. 8th ed. Madras: Ganesh & Company, 1972.
- Woods, James Haughton. *The Yoga System of Patañjali*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1914.