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The End of Modernism in English Poetry



Thesis submitted for the degree of D.Phil.

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University of Oxford

Hilary Term 1992

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'The End of Modernism in English Poetry': Abstract

'End' as 'goal' and 'limit' is explored in signs, symbols, metaphors, metonymies, and myths in the works of G.M. Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, and Pound, before the study examines the aesthetics of modernist poetry which - through psychoanalysis, economy, and language philosophy - presents itself as one facet of the 'modernist project'. Modernist poetry struggles with its material, the lacking motivation of signs, the unstable connection of signifier and signified. Already in Hopkins this creates tensions between mimetic endeavour and construction. Appropriation and distancing as compensation strategies prefigure modernism's tendencies of simultaneous expansion and reduction. They produce impasses, evident in attempts to signify the self: absence, dissolution, and submission to myth, recurring limits in modernist poetry.

Yeats's poems avoid mimetic tensions by focussing on opaque signifieds of symbols, intertextuality rather than empiricism. Yet the excluded 'outside' in the shape of history questions works and their creator. Again, silence, dissolution, or superhistoricism become refuges, leading to dissolution of symbols into metaphors and metonymies or their sublimation in myth. Eliot's poems seemingly return to realism. Yet their focussing on everyday life disguises the internalisation of reality in psychological landscapes. Difficulties of drawing borderlines between subject and object(s) result: objects become threatening and characters mutilated in reifications, processes expressed in shifts from metaphor to metonymy.

Pound's stabilising strategies reify language itself. His personae try to legitimise poems by incorporating histories of others, but produce overcharge and disintegration. Imagism refines modernism's reductive move, but creates monadic closure. Attempts at impersonality and superhistoricism lead to the dominance of the suppressed. Vorticism's construction/destruction dialectic does not tolerate 'works'. Only the ideogrammatic method achieves the shift to signifiers only which enables poems to 'include' reality and history at the cost of blindness towards themselves.

Psychoanalysis displays analogies in its holistic concepts and simultaneous internal delineations, its distrust of signs and incomplete and lacking constructs

deriving from them. Modernist poetry's struggle with tradition in order to legitimise its existence mirrors the individual's subjection to the 'law of the father'. Individuation is achieved by mutilation; the return to imaginary wholeness preceding it, although utopian goal, remains impossible; it appears in poems as self-destruction. The economy of modernist poems shows their fight against expenditure, creation of artificial value through symbols, eventually a *reductio ad absurdum* in poems producing only themselves in reification. Work and subject become borderlines when reality shifts into the text altogether and the signified is eliminated.

Language philosophy reproduces the positions of modernist poems towards reality, admitting the separation of language and objects: Nietzsche in disqualifying truth, Wittgenstein uncovering language's impotence. Again the excluded appears as the mystical which Heidegger re-integrates by setting up language as reality's creator and receptacle of Being. The nominalist upside-down turn of his linguistic universe is analogous to modernism's myth of itself. Adorno criticises the closed nature of works as statements and advocates a 'true' modernism in the fragmentation of the work and openness towards heterogeneity. Like Baudrillard, he stresses the riddle of art which permits its orbital position, neither detached from societal conditioning nor completely subjected to it, thus capable of unveiling the relativity of master-narratives. The 'true' modernist poem displays its tensions and 'sacrifices itself' in order to remind its reader of the damages of existence.

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I. Introduction: The Ends of Modernism

- end** n. 1. extreme limit, point beyond which a thing does not continue [...]
 2. surface bounding a thing at either extremity [...]
 [...]
 4. conclusion (of period, action, state, book, etc.; *end of the WORLD*, *WORLD without end*); latter or final part; result; destruction, downfall, death; ultimate state or condition.
 5. thing one seeks to attain, purpose (*to achieve this end*; *to what end?*); object for which a thing exists.
 [...]¹

'All talk these days is of endings', exclaims a review of books on postmodernism and postmodernity which is itself symptomatic of a problem it laments.² The term 'modernism' against which the 'post-modernism' so prominent in the critical debate of the last few years tries to define its position is painfully lacking in definition itself. As a concept, modernism hovers uneasily between modernity and avant-garde and becomes most dubious when it appears as 'classical modernism' in the description of an established canon of writers and artists. The impression is that the term modernism has too rapidly been transformed from a baffled description of a radically unsettling aesthetic trend to a safe critical category to be filled with content. An originally evaluative (and usually negative) critical attribute has become a normative category, albeit a rather empty one. The already mentioned review gives an example of this insecurity leading to relatively vacuous circumscriptions:

¹*The Concise Dictionary of Current English*, edited by J.B. Sykes, seventh edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, ¹1982) (henceforth referred to as *COED*).

²Anthony Giddens, 'Uprooted Signposts at Century's End', *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (17 January 1992), 21-22 (p. 21).

Modernism, if the word has any definite sense at all - and there are some who doubt this - concerns a particular set of cultural or aesthetic styles, discernible in the various realms of architecture, the plastic and visual arts, poetry and literature. Modernism, so the usual story runs, developed in conscious opposition to classicism; it emphasises experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind surface appearances.³

This does not mean that there have been no attempts to come up with models of what modernism is or what it is supposed to be. The most successful recent ones are Sanford Schwartz's *The Matrix of Modernism* and the even more convincing study by Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism*.⁴ Yet despite these attempts, there remains a gap between general concepts and artistic practice which becomes most poignant in the analysis of modernist works, especially in the field where artistic construct and underlying aesthetics display the closest affinities. If Wolfgang Iser is correct and poetry is indeed a paradigm of modernism,⁵ then it becomes essential to find out what this means in terms of the structure of poems. What goes on in poems that makes them modernist ones? This approach should procure more useful insights for the analysis of texts than 'external' approaches trying to define literary modernism by outlining the cultural and socio-economic conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which are themselves developments of the modernity that has

³Giddens, 'Uprooted Signposts', p. 21.

⁴Sanford Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, & Early Twentieth-Century Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1990). Eysteinsson's book demonstrates the structural links between Anglo-American, French and German modernism. The theoretical background of his study also covers Anglo-American, French, and German thinkers.

⁵Wolfgang Iser, ed., *Immanente Aesthetik, ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne*, Poetik und Hermeneutik, II (Munich: Fink, 1966). The German *Moderne* is used both for modernity and modernism, but the choice of textual examples in the volume shows that modernism is the target of investigation.

its own roots in the Enlightenment. These undoubtedly shape the texts, yet not in a direct mimetic way which - when naïvely assumed - denies modernism the relative autonomy gained in the arts much earlier, i.e. treats modernism as if it were in fact not modern.⁶

The 'internal' approach of this study will try to demonstrate the particular set-up, yet also the - often problematic - premises of rhetorical figures such as symbol, metaphor, and metonymy in modernist poems. They will be called and treated as structures rather than tropes, for one of the aims of this project is to show the internal connection between these constructs, a relation triggered off by important underlying problems which lead to strategies of coping with them. In order to arrive at a complete structural picture, both the most basic semantic unit, the sign, and the largest entity, myth, have to be included. The analysis of myth, which also presents itself as an origin of modernist poems, will display the circularity inherent in modernist aesthetics. This structural survey will be based on close readings of textual samples chosen from poets whose works employ particular structures in a prominent way: Hopkins for the sign, Yeats for the symbol, Eliot for metaphor and metonymy, eventually Pound for myth.

At this point, a problem of method presents itself. If a structural description of modernism is to be developed, then the choice of authors is already a determining factor. Which is to say that even the attempt to distance oneself from the normative restrictions of an established canon only ever leads to the setting-up of a new one. The

⁶The best studies (indeed far from naïve and providing important angles for a discussion) are still Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane, eds, *Modernism: 1890-1930* (London & Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, ¹1976) and Michael Bell, ed., *1900-1930, The Context of English Literature* (London: Methuen, 1980).

problem can, in fact, not be solved - it can only be admitted. Yet, as will become evident, this study shares Paul de Man's conviction that modernism is not so much the feature of a historic era as a recurring element inherent in literature itself. In his words:

The appeal of modernity haunts all literature. It is revealed in numberless images and emblems that appear at all periods - in the obsession with a *tabula rasa*, with new beginnings - that finds recurrent expression in all forms of writing. No true account of literature can bypass this persistent temptation of literature to fulfill itself in a single moment.⁷

The authors selected for this study are in fact established members of the critical canon - with the possible exception of Hopkins.⁸ Their varying positions with regard to the evasive paradigm modernism which will be outlined in the following analyses (Hopkins on the threshold; Yeats half in, half outside; Eliot fully immersed; Pound already on the way out) will help to draw the sometimes vacillating demarcation, the boundaries of the modernist 'project' in poetry.

For, after all, this study is concerned with the end of the latter. The title 'The End of Modernism in English Poetry' originated as a programmatic gesture against critical positions which claim that modernism does not come to an end, that it can perpetuate itself endlessly in an internal dialectic of productive self-criticism. Jürgen

⁷Paul de Man, 'Literary History and Literary Modernity', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, second revised edition, Theory and History of Literature, 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, ¹1971), pp. 142-165 (p. 153). Paul de Man uses the term 'modernity', but describes the features that this study will consider those of modernism.

⁸Although called a 'proto-modernist' by Bernard Bergonzi (in his *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978, ¹1977), p. 177), there is indeed a clear distance between his works and the modernism of the early 1920s. The posthumous publication of his poems in 1918 coincided with the first vogue for modernist poems, so his first appropriation was indeed both too enthusiastic and too naïve. Yet this does not exclude the possibility of structural links between his works and the later ones analysed in this study, links which explain his outsider status in Victorian poetry.

Habermas is the most noticeable of those who consider modernism a still incomplete project.⁹ It was also intended as an attack on mere obituarists of modernism who tragically enough fail to even notice that by institutionalising it they actually sign its death certificate. Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*, a misnomer, since it is a theory of 'classical modernism', is an example of this attitude.¹⁰

Very quickly, however, it will emerge that 'end' is also a central structural issue in modernist poems. It appears both as fetish and taboo, as silences and alternatively dissolutions that almost magically attract the texts, yet at the same time as something (or 'nothing'?) that the poems fight, against which they erect aesthetic barricades of various types. This makes the second half of this study necessary, a broadening of the view that permits an analysis of modernist poetry as *one* discourse of modernism whose features reappear, sometimes more easily discernible, in neighbouring or indeed overlapping disciplines. A structural outline of modernist poetry can present an apparently complete picture. But this is exactly where its problem lies. It too easily falls prey to modernism's tendency of self-mystification, to its seemingly unrestricted autonomy within its own sphere. This dubious autonomy of modernism - which also finds its expression in the very concept of a 'project' - will be demystified in this study. Therefore the recurring emphasis on impasses and paradoxes. This should not be confused with an anti-modernist position. Indeed the approach tries to honour modernism exactly because of its interior tensions, its

⁹Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project', translated by Seyla Ben-Habib, in Hal Foster, ed., *Postmodern Culture* (London & Sidney: Pluto Press, 1987, ¹1983), pp. 3-15.

¹⁰Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw, *Theory and History of Literature*, 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

attempts at creation even when forced to be a reaction. Yet a proper evaluation of modernism cannot afford to ignore the dangers generated by these internal oppositions either.

The poles of the internal tensions of modernism as uncovered both in its ends (as in aims) and its ends (as in limitations) will turn out to be the subject and its relation to objective reality. They determine the arrangement of the second half of this study. The problems of the constitution of the subject are pursued in the analysis of modernist poems through the concepts of psychoanalysis. In the terminology of this project, identity is that which controls the poems while being created by them. It is thus the equivalent of the psyche in psychoanalytic theories. The structures of this textual identity are connected with assumptions concerning subjectivity which is ultimately a philosophical concept. This identity is expressed in, misrepresented by and the controlling force behind voices, personae, and characters in the poems. Simple equations of either voice or identity or subjectivity and the authors of the poems must be avoided.

The interaction of this subject (or its absence or mutilation) with its outside (imaginary or objective) and the effects of this relation on the texts will be discussed in terms of economy. The problems of exchange and value will be in the centre of this section - and, once more, the dangers or opportunities of ends: retention or dissolution, frozen assets or unlimited expense, so to speak.

The final section of the second part of this study will then try to define more clearly what the problematic outside of modernist poems looks like. It will attempt to outline (in an admittedly condensed way) some radical philosophical positions towards language and its capacity to grasp reality and even truth. Nietzsche will act as a

prologue to a discussion which then moves on to two radically opposed philosophies of language, Wittgenstein's drastic reduction of its potentials in his *Tractatus* and Heidegger's seemingly antithetic view of language as the very home of Being. Sketches of their argument will be related to similar concepts in modernist poetry. The impasses of philosophical reasoning will present themselves as analogous to the ends of modernism in English poetry.

The concluding summary and evaluation of the discoveries of this study will be a final act of expansion while at the same time returning to its starting position. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and related writings will help to broaden the characteristics of modernism as detected by Paul de Man, its internal ruptures and self-destructive tendencies, into a larger framework in which, as a very fundamental and utterly unfashionable variant of the question of the possible end(s) of modernism, the truth or falsity of modernist poems will be the issue. Yet not in a traditional way which relies on external norms of right and wrong, but in a once more 'internal' assessment of their own logic, their own notions of truth. The question will thus be the one cunningly asked by the narrator of Thomas Mann's novel on modern art,¹¹ *Doctor Faustus*:

In a work there is much seeming and sham, one could go further and say that as 'a work' it is seeming in and for itself. Its ambition is to make one believe that it is not made, but born, like Pallas Athene in full fig and embossed armour from Jupiter's head. But that is a delusion. Never did a work come like that. It is work: art-work for appearance's sake - and now the question is whether at the present stage of our consciousness, our knowledge, our sense of truth, this little game is still permissible, still intellectually possible, still to be taken seriously; whether the work as such, the construction, self-sufficing, harmonically complete in itself, still stands in any legitimate relation to the complete insecurity, problematic conditions, and lack of harmony of our social

¹¹Mann's novel was heavily influenced by Adorno whom Mann consulted on questions of music. See Eysteinsson, *Concept of Modernism*, p. 39.

conditions; whether all seeming, even the most beautiful, even precisely the beautiful, has not today become a lie.¹²

¹²Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, translated by H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 175-176.

II. Problems of the Sign: The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins

1. A Poetry of Struggle

Hopkins' poetry is characterised by a series of contradictions which appear on - and between - all structural levels. Its imagery is essentially Victorian in his nature poems in which a reverence for natural phenomena untainted by human interference is linked with an almost aggressive condemnation of the effects of industrialisation (as in 'Binsey Poplars'). All the same, the deeply religious premises that visibly structure his works, their militant Catholic flavour, is understandably alien in the context of the still predominantly anti-Catholic British culture of the late 19th century.

The shape of his poems is traditional. There is no hint at *vers libre* or any of the avant-garde techniques that were to dominate English poetry only a few decades later. All of his lyric poems are rhymed, in most cases using simple rhyme-schemes. Yet within this unadventurous form a lot of formal exploration takes place: there are numerous internal rhymes, there are alliteration and assonance in abundance. Together with the often radically inverted and condensed syntax that is also a characteristic of Hopkins' verse, this frequently turns the poems into almost illegible formal knots whose difficulty is not at all reduced by being topped with Hopkins' own particular

concept of stressing syllables, his 'sprung rhythm'. A good example of this formal overcharge is the beginning of 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo':¹

How to kéeep - is there ány any, is there none such, nowhere
known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, láce,
latch or catch or key to keep
Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty,...from vanish-
ing away?
Ó is there no frowning of these wrinkles, rankèd wrinkles
deep,
Dówn? no waving off of these most mournful messengers,
still messengers, sad and stealing messengers of grey? --

The effect of all this artifice, an endeavour that W.H. Gardner rightly calls leading 'poetry forward by taking it back - to its primal linguistic origins'² is twofold. It creates an impression of precision through the introduction of manifold structural relations within a controlled form. On the other hand this formal precision is not at all mirrored by a simultaneous semantic exactness. On the contrary, the tension of formal overdetermination in Hopkins' poems creates blind spots of meaning, indeterminacies that the most ingenious interpretations have not been able to clarify.³

For this analysis, the problem of signification, more precisely, that of the sign that seems to be so dominant in Hopkins' works, will be of particular importance. The insights procured by this approach should then be checked concerning their applicability to a general poetics of modernism.

¹All quotations are from *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by W.H. Gardner & N.H. MacKenzie, fourth edition (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 1970).

²Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, edited by W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, 1953), p. xiv.

³Iser calls these gaps of meaning *Leerstellen*; *Immanente Aesthetik*, p. 371.

2. Signification as Appropriation

Hopkins' poems are expressions of a desperate struggle for adequate expression. The experiments undertaken in them, the radicalisation of accepted poetic standards, such as inversion, neologisms, and stress, drive his works towards such an extreme departure from the norms - not only of everyday language, but also of Victorian poetry - as to make them almost incomprehensible in parts. Yet it is questionable whether this is a desired effect of Hopkins' techniques. Experiment in his poems is never present for its own sake. Hopkins is not an early exponent of the *l'art pour l'art* position. As his painstakingly developed concept of 'inscape' shows, the notion that every object of Divine creation is characterised by a particular inherent quality that shapes its outward appearance is in the focus of his ideas and thus also a shaping force of his poetry.⁴

The origin of Hopkins' concept of 'inscape' has been subject to much critical attention. The traditional notion that it derives from Duns Scotus' concept of *haecceitas* ('thisness'), an impression prompted by Hopkins' professed admiration of the 12th century philosopher,⁵ is now no longer considered universally valid. Recent critical approaches stress the emergence of the notion of differentiation or

⁴W.A.M. Peters S.J. defines 'inscape' as 'the outward reflection of the inner nature of a thing or a sensible copy or representation of its individual essence'; in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Essay Towards the Understanding of His Poetry* (London et al.: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 2.

⁵Gardner, who also claims a direct relation between Scotus and 'inscape', stresses the importance of Hopkins' choice of this philosopher of individuality and personality in Hopkins' *Poems and Prose*, p. xxiii. See also Jerome Bump, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Twayne's English Authors Series (Boston: Twayne, 1982), pp. 38-41.

particularisation as a concentration of power within subject and object as a common feature in the discussion of the autonomy of the self from the eighteenth through the nineteenth century.⁶ This does not diminish the originality of Hopkins' idea, much less that of its artistic consequences, but it links it with contemporary aesthetic concepts by which Hopkins was certainly influenced. Bump stresses Hopkins' transition from a Keatsian regard of nature as beautiful surface to the conviction that intense observation and contemplation can reveal the unity within natural phenomena (and that includes man). This in turn is closely linked with Ruskin's concept of the deeply penetrating form that can be discovered in one 'fountain-like impulse'.⁷ In Hopkins' terminology the equivalent of this impulse is 'instress'.

What are the particular effects of the concept of 'inscape' on the signifying efforts of Hopkins' poems? Two - seemingly contradictory - consequences are easily perceptible: differentiation and fusion. The first stanza of 'Pied Beauty' illustrates these features:

Glory be to God for dappled things --
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced -- fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

The general argument of the poem, that beauty is to be found even (or particularly) in heterogeneous things, is illustrated by carefully chosen images. Directly or allusively, all the four elements are mentioned (air, water, fire, earth) as well as their

⁶See, for example, Walter J. Ong, S.J., *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, The Alexander Lectures (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 18. Alan Robinson sees a connection with Schopenhauer in *Poetry, Painting and Ideas, 1885-1914* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p. 8.

⁷Bump, *Hopkins*, p. 30.

inhabitants (finches, trout, the coal, the cow). The stanza closes - in typical Victorian fashion - mentioning man in charge of all creation, his endeavours and tools. Careful differentiation creates a well-organised imaginary map; the poem charts its signifying territory. A first act of appropriation of reality has taken place.

A look at the adjectives of the text and an examination of the way the stanza relates its elements reveal the same characteristic. The poem tries to connect and fuse dissimilar images. Its most prominent descriptive elements are compounds ('couple-colour', 'rose-moles', 'fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls') which attract attention because they are neologisms, but even more so because they join elements that are not commonly regarded as related, words belonging to distant paradigms. Their relation can be logically explained ('rose-moles', for instance, refers to the colour of the moles; 'fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls' to the resemblance of freshly fallen chestnuts to coals), but it is evident that the poetic fusion has taken away the steps preceding it. The effect of this condensed imagery is paradoxical. It is striking and original, but it is also alienating and disturbing. It creates the impression of precision, but the neological status of the images prevents their integration into established semantic units and thus creates an uncertainty that defeats the precision while creating it.

The tensions discovered within the signifiers of the stanza are paralleled by those created by the relations of its elements. There are three mechanisms of relating at work in the stanza: comparison, preposition, and parataxis. The comparison relates couple-coloured skies *to* a brindled cow; the preposition places rose-moles *in* stipple upon trouts. The parataxis eventually sums up the stanza's attitude of collecting and combining elements indiscriminately.

Even on the level of their basic elements, signs, Hopkins' poems display internal tensions. His concept of 'inscape' sets demanding rules for the creation of art. Together with another concept, that of 'selving', i.e. achieving the closest possible unity with one's self, the predetermined character given by God to every object and creature during the act of creation (in Hopkins' religious framework of thought), it makes poetic creation an almost impossible task.

The role of the poem in Hopkins' concept cannot simply be one of mimetic representation. This would neither meet the demands of 'inscape' nor that of 'selving'. The poems must gain an 'inscape' of their own, one that in its ideal form would be identical with that which the poem describes, its 'content'. This demand, however, generates severe problems. On the theological level, a poetry capable of creating its own 'inscape' would indeed take the Divine act of creation into its own hands. An apparent case of artistic hubris that Hopkins shuns as much as his poetic precursor George Herbert did. Not only are Hopkins' years of poetic silence after joining the Jesuits telling; the seduction inherent in man's capacities (especially his aesthetic ones) are directly mentioned in his poems. 'Morning, Midday, and Evening Sacrifice' is a discussion of the issue:

The dappled die-away
 Cheek and the wimpled lip,
 The gold-wisp, the airy-grey
 Eye, all in fellowship --
 This, all this beauty blooming,
 This, all this freshness fuming,
 Give God while worth consuming.

Both thought and thew now bolder
 And told by Nature: Tower;
 Head, heart, hand, heel, and shoulder
 That beat and breathe in power --
 This pride of prime's enjoyment
 Take as for tool, not toy meant

And hold at Christ's employment.

The vault and scope and schooling
 And mastery in the mind,
 In silk-ash kept from cooling,
 And ripest under rind --
 What death half lifts the latch of,
 What hell hopes soon the snatch of,
 Your offering, with despatch, of!

But not only the creative aspect of poetry turns out to be troublesome. Its aesthetic autonomy becomes a problem, too. As much as natural objects can distract the human mind from the contemplation of their creator, the aesthetic qualities of the poems themselves, so necessary to achieve 'inscape', can entangle their reader. Thus, poetry can easily do exactly the opposite of what it should do - according to Hopkins' doctrines.

The beginning of 'To What Serves Mortal Beauty' illustrates this problem:

To what serves mortal beauty '--dangerous; does set danc-
 ing blood -- the O-seal-that-so ' feature, flung prouder form
 Than Purcell tune lets tread to? ' See: it does this: keeps warm
 Men's wits to the things that are; ' what good means - where a
 glance
 Master more may than gaze, ' gaze out of countenance.

On the level of signification, the tension could be described as that of referentiality. Hopkins' poems indicate an overwhelming interest in phenomena outside the text. These need not be objects only; they can also be abstractions, such as Divine love, grace, etc. The existence of these phenomena seems unquestioned. They are the driving force behind the generation of the poems. Yet the material quality of the phenomena and that of the text appear to be very different. Hopkins' poems show an awareness that they are constructed of signs, because they constantly stress the discrepancy between their texture and that of their 'content'. Signs cannot achieve the

factuality of phenomena - unless, of course, these phenomena are themselves only aesthetic fabrications.

This leads close to a point that is rarely discussed in analyses of Hopkins' poetry, yet so dominant when one questions the *raison d'être* of his poems and the origin of their complexity, their tortured language. Is it so irrefutable that there are no doubts concerning the objective reality of nature in his poems? Are the poems discussing a struggle with faith always based on a firm belief or are they not rather the offspring of, the defence against, if one likes, severe doubts? These uncertainties can be related to the very nature of writing.

The technical difficulties of Hopkins' poems which often force them close to a semantic breakdown act as a safety-net. The poems know and discuss the dangers and pitfalls of signification, especially its aspect of appropriation. By naming, the texts take possession of phenomena, gather them in their own autonomy, and thus exercise their own act of creation which mocks the Divine one, because it is always subjective, personal, and thus inevitably egoistic. Read under these assumptions, a poem like 'Peace' gains rather different dimensions:

When will you ever, Peace, wild wooddove, shy wings shut,
Your round me roaming end, and under be my boughs?
When, when, Peace, will you, Peace? I'll not play hypocrite

To own my heart: I yield you do come sometimes; but
That piecemeal peace is poor piece. What pure peace allows
Alarms of wars, the daunting wars, the death of it?

O surely, reaving Peace, my Lord should leave in lieu
Some good! And so he does leave Patience exquisite,
That plumes to Peace thereafter. And when Peace here does
house
He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo,
He comes to brood and sit.

Yet, dangerous as it presents itself, signification is the only possible approach not only to natural objects, but also to the crucial aspects of faith. The sacramental element that, according to Jeffrey Loomis, permeates the whole of Hopkins' poetry stresses the necessity of actual signs which merge with the mysteries of faith.⁸ A poem like 'The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe' is a fairly harmless illustration of this necessity of signification. Its double edge is stressed in a more complex text, 'Spelt From Sibyl's Leaves'. This is a poem concerned with language and its influence on the formation of man's perception of reality on all levels, from its title to its very last line. It consists of various paratactic conglomerations that are so dominant as to eclipse the terms they are connected with completely. The first one is already a good example: 'Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, ' vaulty, voluminous, /...stupendous'; adjectives meant to describe 'Evening' which, once it has been mentioned, is instantly substituted by 'tíme's vást, ' womb-of-all, home-of-all/hearse-of-all-night'.

The sheer semantic dominance of the substitutions over the innocent term 'Evening' shows that not so much *a* description is in the focus of the poem, but the very act of describing, signification. Indeed, once let loose, the temptation of signification seems to become uncontrollable:

Waste; her earliest stars, earlstars, 'stárs principal, overbend
us,
Fíre-feáuring heaven. For earth ' her being has unbound, her
dapple is at an end, as-
tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; ' self ín self
steepèd and páshed -- quíte
Disremembering, dísmémbering ' áll now. [...]

⁸Jeffrey B. Loomis, *Dayspring in Darkness: Sacrament in Hopkins* (Lewisburg, London & Toronto: Bucknell University Press, 1988).

The effect of this anarchy on the subject is catastrophic: the lines illustrate its dissolution.

Paradoxically, the only defence left to the subject is to take part in the orgy of signification, to jump on the train hurrying towards complete annihilation and then to take - at least limited - control. How? By writing: 'Óur tale, O óur oracle!'. What can be read as a rather Manichean division of the world into good and evil, the saved and the damned, can - through its symbols black and white related to other give-aways like 'tale', 'skéined stained véined' (all three related to the appearance of writing on the page) and the ambiguous 'pen' - be interpreted as images of writing. This would explain the unorthodox equation black, white/right, wrong. Usually, black and wrong, white and right are associated. Here, white stands for the anarchic chaos of signification, the empty page that permits everything, because it contains nothing. It lacks the order of the right, written, black word. Writing introduces borderlines, a distance which is both temporal and spatial, within the act of signification. This distance seems necessary in order to escape its potential anarchy, its overwhelming power which is nothing but its tendency to become autonomous, i.e its own reality that knows neither an outside, much less transcendental values like faith, and - very important - no subject either. 'óur night ' whélms, whélms,/ánd will end us.'

3. Signification as Distancing

Writing creates distance. It introduces a temporal distance between its creation and its reception; it creates a spatial distance between author and work as much as between work and reader by the simple fact that it requires a material representation,

an artefact. Reading, on the other hand, abolishes this distance, but only through an act of simulation which is itself controlled by the forms of distance between artefact and percipient.⁹ But is there also an internal distancing process at work within the mechanisms of signification, an intratextual distance?

Hopkins' poems give a double evidence for this: they describe the necessity of distance for their speakers and they exercise distance in their imagery. The creation of imaginary maps has already been observed in 'Pied Beauty'. A closer look at the process of creating imaginary settings in the poems reveals that they all follow a movement away from the origin of the creation, the speaker. The very act of placing the images hides the creator of the imaginary units. The texts guide the reader's mental vision to the 'there', never to the 'here'. Even when the self of the poems is mentioned directly, the texts usually present the reader with metonymies (like 'my heart in hiding' in 'The Windhover') which, by mutilating the personae, create a self outside itself. The first stanza of 'The Starlit Night' is exemplary of this distancing technique.

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
 O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
 The brim boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
 Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves'-eyes!
 The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!
 Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!
 Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farmyard scare! --
 Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize.

The place adverb 'there' plays a crucial role in the process of distancing, also the time adverb 'then' and the demonstrative pronouns and definite articles so frequent in

⁹Peter Bürger regards this insight as the starting point of critical analysis: 'Scientific analysis of literature begins the moment one recognizes that the immediacy with which we perceive a poem as a poem is illusory (*Schein*)'; *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 4.

Hopkins' poems. I have italicised all these elements in an extreme example, the first stanza of the, already once quoted, 'Morning, Midday, and Evening Sacrifice':

The dappled die-away
 Cheek and *the* wimpled lip,
The gold-wisp, *the* airy-grey
 Eye, all in fellowship--
This, all *this* beauty blooming,
This, all *this* freshness fuming,
 Give God while worth consuming.

Demonstrative pronouns and definite articles, deictic devices of the texts, are related to the concept of 'inscape', too. They are indicators of the autonomy of the natural objects, their 'thisness' (the Scotist term even contains the demonstrative pronoun). Most of the more descriptive poems consequently exhibit fewer of these devices. There, adjectives and compound nouns fulfil the same function as definite articles and demonstrative pronouns. A doubling becomes unnecessary.

Yet this autonomy as the result of signification has a double edge, too. It always invokes its starting-point as well. 'There', 'then', 'this', 'that', 'the' always define the outside of something, here the speaker. The dangerous quality of sensuous perception as much as the inherent pitfalls of aesthetic creation (and the very act of organising dislocated impressions into imaginary units is such a creation) are countered by this outward movement, this distancing effect.

Occasionally, this produces rather awkward results, when the - seemingly unnecessary - bombardment of distancing elements has a distorting effect on otherwise harmless poems. 'The Bugler's First Communion' is an example of such a digression (which is, incidentally, also a form of distancing) achieved by demonstrative pronouns and definite articles. These are its first four stanzas:

A bugler boy from barrack (it is over the hill
 There) -- boy bugler, born, he tells me, of Irish

Mother to an English sire (he
Shares their best gifts surely, fall how things will),

This very very day came down to us after a boon he on
My late being there begged of me, overflowing
Boon in my bestowing,
Came, I say, this day to it -- to a First Communion.

Here he knelt then in regimental red.
Forth Christ from cupboard fetched, how fain I of feet
To this youngster take his treat!
Low-latched in leaf-light housel his too huge godhead.

There! and your sweetest sendings, ah divine,
By it, heavens, befall him! as a heart Christ's darling, dauntless;
Tongue true, vaunt- and tauntless;
Breathing bloom of a chastity in mansex fine.

Especially the prominent 'There', twice in exposed position (in stanza 1, line 2; and stanza 4, first line - here even with an exclamation mark), strikes the reader. It is very interesting that the two 'There's' have entirely opposed significances. The first one indicates indeed distance, a very 'real', because spatial one ('over the hill'). The second 'There!', however, is not distance, but presence: Christ's most actual presence in the Eucharist. An almost unbearable tension is expressed in this exchange of absence for presence - and eventually absence again, when the bugler is sent away towards his imaginary death. Away from the speaker: 'Let me though see no more of him'.

In Freudian terms, this stress on absence and presence, intimacy (and even possession) and distance, recalls the famous *Fort-Da* [Gone-There] game, the child's symbolic re-enactment of his mother's inexplicable absence followed again by her presence.¹⁰ According to Freud, this is an important model for future relationships

¹⁰Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Angela Richards & Albert Dickson, Pelican Freud Library, 11, (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973 ff.), pp. 269-338 (pp. 283-286).

as well as for the recognition of reality. Lacan sees it as the origin of desire. And desire is for him always also that for the completion of the self.¹¹

The relation of signification and self will be in the focus of the next paragraph. But - without reaching out too far already - one can easily recognise that the speaker's position in the poem hovers strangely between forced distance, pressed intimacy, and uneasy release. First introduced in an unimportant subclause ('he tells me'), the self gains dimension by the approach of the desired object. After a rather inappropriate 'us' that perhaps indicates the priest's status, the speaker is transformed into the ambiguous 'My late being' and 'my bestowing' through the bugler's begging, i.e. the establishing of contact. But only the connection to signification allows the speaker to present himself as 'I' in 'I say'.

The presence of the desired object is the fulfilment of desire, yet it also endangers identity.¹² Thus, when the bugler is finally 'Here' in stanza three, 'how fain I of feet'. The self can establish itself in an action even. Nonetheless, the frantic activity expressed in 'fain' also hints at a potential danger inherent in the situation. Only a daring step can save the delicate equilibrium: the projection of the union of the self and the object of its desire onto the sacrament of the Eucharist. By the invocation of Christ, the ultimate example of fulfilled existence, the poem finds the ideal sign, one that embodies presence and absence simultaneously. *De Imitatio Christi*, the title of Thomas a Kempis' famous tractate, gains a rather new dimension here.

¹¹Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror-stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 1-7.

¹²This is what so many descriptions of erotic bliss try to convey. The self forgets itself and thus ceases to exist - at least temporarily.

In Hopkins' most successful poems there is indeed a counterpoise of appropriation, the internalisation of impressions, and distancing, the externalisation of imagination. His most famous poem, 'The Windhover', starts with a verb that captures this ambiguity perfectly: 'I caught', here standing for 'took (imaginary) possession of' and 'perceived in the distance'.

'The Windhover' is an exercise in the control of imagery in both senses: the impact of images on the self, here represented by a speaker, and the speaker's distancing control of his vision, a vision that remains nonetheless - or just because of his achievement of distance - his own. The poem, viewed on a surface-level, describes the impression of the flight of a windhover on a speaker whose reactions become more and more ecstatic. The movements of the bird are convincingly modelled by a number of metaphors and similes (i.e. signification takes possession of the phenomenon). Yet none of the expressions used in the description has objective scientific exactness. They derive from manifold paradigms apart from falconry or ornithology. There are aristocratic terms like 'minion', 'dauphin', 'valour', 'pride', 'chevalier' and 'gold-vermillion', heraldic images like 'plume' or, somewhat hidden, 'wimpling'. Equestrian terms like 'riding', 'striding' and 'reign' contrast strangely with the image of the 'skate's heel', a paradigmatic deviation that predates later modernist techniques of associating inappropriate images. Matter-of-fact expressions like 'a bird', 'the thing' and prosaic images like the plough and the embers of the last stanza are accompanied by colourful attributes such as 'shine' and 'gash'.

Again, the poem's technique is 'spreading out'. Not only is its imaginary object placed in a distance, a 'there', the sky. The text also makes sure that this object, the windhover, does not take over. It creates a subtle transition from the bird

to Christ by the already mentioned paradigms (and by the windhover itself, one of Christ's traditional representations, as well as the biblical allusion 'kingdom of daylight's dauphin'¹³). Nevertheless, the poem does not ingeniously create yet another symbol of Christ. The windhover models Christ while remaining a bird. The distance remains between the *pictura* and the *subscriptio*, the two elements of the symbol. On the imaginary level, the bird does not leave the sky.

The curve of its flight hints at Christ's sacrificial death and the miracle of the resurrection. But it also indicates the simultaneous creation and destruction of meaning in the poem. At the point of greatest imaginary presence, preceded by a line containing no less than six unconnected nouns followed by Hopkins' usual expression of ultimate presence, 'here' ('Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here'), the meaning of the poem collapses in the more than ambiguous 'Buckle!'.¹⁴ Although the following lines seem to achieve a kind of restoration of semantic coherence, it is evident that the imaginary unity does not recover. Embers, to use the image of the poem's final lines, may indeed gash once more. But then they die. The imaginary self-destruction of the poem, this most radical act of achieving an internal distance, is indeed necessary to create a 'reality' within the poem that exists outside its structures, namely in their breakdown.¹⁵ The ultimate act of distancing within its act of signification allows the poem to come very close to Hopkins' ideal of 'inscape'.

¹³Luke 1.68-79.

¹⁴Ong regards 'Buckle!' as the description of the moment of 'instress'. If that is correct, then 'instress' presents itself as a phenomenon on the utmost borderline of language. Ong, *Self and God*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵In this I follow the excellent structuralist reading of the poem in the introduction of Michael Sprinker, '*A Counterpoint of Dissonance*': *The Aesthetics and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 3-19.

4. The Empty Sign: Signification and the Self

Apparently, a system of signification that consists of the binary poles of appropriation and distancing - or internalisation and externalisation - offers very little space for the representation of the organising force that governs the action between these poles. The self of the poems is suspended over the abyss between two forms of signification. It is in the position of a paradox, because it must theoretically reconcile the two irreconcilable forces, if it is not - like the eye of a hurricane - an absence. The sign of the self in Hopkins' poetry must either be self-destructive or an empty one.

Both of these possibilities are, of course, paradoxical in themselves. Language can never unwrite itself (even when Derrida uses crossed-out words, he does not present an absence, but a presence, indeed a double one: that of the original word and that of its crossed-out status). Neither is there a sign that is completely blank. The very nature of the sign demands that it must be perceived and that it can be regarded as - at least potentially - meaningful.

Nonetheless, a closer look at the representations of the self in Hopkins' poems reveals that most of them depict the self in exactly the paradoxical tensions just described. The poem that is generally considered to be the most difficult of Hopkins' works, 'the dragon in the gate',¹⁶ *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, which - not unimportantly - is also the first of Hopkins' mature poems, written after a long poetic silence, deals explicitly with this issue. Not only does it start with the line 'Thou

¹⁶The expression was coined by Robert Bridges, Hopkins' friend and posthumous editor. See Bergonzi, *Hopkins*, p. 157.

mastering me'; three of the ten stanzas of its first part begin with the problematic pronoun 'I'. The two central stanzas of this part are an elaborate discussion of these aspects.

4

I am soft sift
 In an hourglass -- at the wall
 Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,
 And it crowds and it combs to the fall;
 I steady as a water in a well, to a poise, to a pane,
 But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall
 Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein
 Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift.

5

I kiss my hand
 To the stars, lovely-asunder
 Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
 Glow, glory in thunder;
 Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:
 Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
 His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
 For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand.

Stanza 4 stresses the two seemingly contradictory basic experiences of the self: stasis and motion. The two conflicting states correspond to appropriation and distancing: the positioning of the self is the basic but profound form of taking possession of it; the stress on the simultaneous movement is the distancing aspect, for the movement is always a movement away from its starting point towards a new state.

The two dominant images of the stanza represent this contradictory motion within stasis or stasis within motion. The sand in the hourglass - seemingly static yet in a constant drift - and the water in a well - motionless yet subject to a pressure, a complex system of currents underneath a smooth surface. In both images, the self is represented by material associated with formlessness: sand (here even a symbol of

time, the most amorphous of all human concepts) and water. In both images identity can only be realised through the introduction of limitations, of form: the wall of the hourglass and that of the well (here even represented in anthropomorphisms).

The observation made in the analysis of 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves', the formless anarchy of mere potentials requires limits in order to arrive at signification, applies just as much - or even more intensely - to the representation of the self. It requires an outside to constitute itself. Here, this outside is formed once more by signs. Thus, the signification of the self is a double externalisation or - as will become evident in Foucault - a double mirror. Indeed, one notices that the closer Hopkins' poems approach their central issues, the more tightly they become entangled in the inevitable web of form. One could easily demonstrate that the externalising description of the self in part one of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* already takes place in the framework of a poem whose two parts represent exactly the internal and the external approach to the issue. And - not without reason - the externalising vision of stanza 4 (and stanza 5, too, as will be shown below) is positioned in that part of the poem that exercises the internal approach, i.e. in which the 'I' discusses itself. Yet another mirror is thus created.

Foucault describes the struggle of signification in terms analogous to Hopkins' techniques:

Perhaps there exists an essential relation between death, the endless quest for the self and the self-presentation of language. Perhaps the endless assembly of mirrors which opposes the black wall of death represents fundamentally every production of language, ever since language is no longer content to disappear without a trace. Even before writing was invented, language attempted to pursue itself *ad infinitum*, but not only because it did not want to die it decided one day to take shape in visual and unerasable signs. It is rather like the following: something beyond writing had to happen in a space in which it could expand and manifest itself, something whose original and at the same time symbolic shape was drawn for us by Homer; something that is for us one

of the few major ontological events of the utterance: its mirror-reflection beyond death and thus the constitution of a visual space in which the word finds unlimited opportunities for self-representation and can represent itself endlessly behind or beyond itself. The possibility of the linguistic artefact has its origin in this duplication.¹⁷

The notion of reality as a mere system of mirrors would, of course, be unacceptable for Hopkins. Although the mirror is a prominent symbol in the Victorian imagination (see *The Lady of Shalott* and numerous other examples), it took Nietzsche to actively embrace this radical thought. Hopkins, as has been shown, tries to arrive at the notion of a factual objective reality, a reality that gains its specificity by the interaction (the 'instress') of particular individual elements (the 'inscapes'). His poetry, however, the main tool for his endeavour, constantly undermines this aim. It remains, in Adorno's words, caught in the dialectic of mimesis and construction, and this entanglement - and the attempts to escape from it - transport his poems into the realm of the aesthetics of modernism.¹⁸

The problematic self that is - literally and metaphorically - in the centre of his poems, does not attempt its manifestations by externalisation only, by the 'thinking of the outside' in Foucault's terminology. It also directs its attention to the inside, towards the sensations through which the self reassures itself of its existence. These sensations are indeed physical in many of the poems. The 'inscape' of the self can be seen, felt, tasted, and heard like that of every other object - and even more intensely.

¹⁷Michel Foucault, 'Le Langage a l'infini', *Tel Quel*, 15 (Autumn 1963), 44-53 (p. 45) (my translation).

¹⁸Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno & Rolf Tiedemann, translated by C. Lenhardt, The International Library of Phenomenology and Moral Sciences (London et al.: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 65.

Hopkins, apparently very much a man of tastes and smells, describes this notion in his

Comments on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola:

And this is above all true of that inmost self of mine which has been said to be and to be felt to be, to taste, more distinctive than the taste of clove or alum, the smell of walnutleaf or hart'shorn, more distinctive, more selved, than all things else and needing in proportion a more exquisite determining, selfmaking, power.¹⁹

Thus, the expressions of psychological terror and suffering in the so-called 'Terrible Sonnets' must not only be read as metaphors. 'I am gall, I am heartburn', 'Bitter would have me taste; my taste was me', 'Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours' in 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day' must also be understood literally as the description of the self by the self.

Painfully intense as these sensations might be, it is nonetheless evident that by naming them again an externalisation takes place, this time within introspection. Even there, the self only ever succeeds in placing itself outside itself in its attempt to define its position. Hopkins' poems eventually devise two ways of breaking out of this vicious circle. One of the solutions is transcendental, the second one aesthetic.

In stanza 5 of the first part of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, the transcendental escape is beautifully illustrated. The stanza contains a two-way motion starting from the self and its ambiguous self-experience ('I kiss my hand') which is then directed first to the stars (i.e. towards infinity), then to the West, the direction of sunset. The sun is here, of course, the symbol of Christ and his sacrificial death. Only through the recognition of Christ can the self arrive at a definition of itself: 'For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand' (note the triple 'I' of the line).

¹⁹Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, p. 148.

Christ is the infinite present, the simultaneous presence of the Divine and the human, i.e. the absolute 'inscape'. Only this climax of presence is capable of filling the bottomless absence in the place of the self in the poems. Thus the 'tall nun' in the second part of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is capable of achieving spiritual fulfilment while she is physically destroyed. Stanza 28 of the second part of the poem describes the union of Christ and the nun - or rather Christ's take-over of the nun's self:

But how shall I...make me room there:
 Reach me a...Fancy, come faster--
 Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
 Thing that she...There then! the Master,
*Ips*e, the only one, Christ, King, Head:
 He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her;
 Do, deal, lord it with living and dead;
 Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph, despatch and have done
 with his doom there.

Its effect is indeed the disappearance of the self altogether ('despatch and have done/with'). Something in this ideal fusion does not quite seem to work. The poem does not end with this stanza either. Interestingly enough, it continues not only with a rather unnecessary praise of the nun's endurance, but also with a description of its own textual nature and even a discussion of the relation of the production of language (which Hopkins, obviously in order to liken it to the important 'selving', names 'wording') and the described miraculous union. 'Read the unshapeable shock night/And knew the who and the why' is a description of the nun's experience, but it is apparent that it is also a description of the reading of the poem.²⁰

²⁰Hopkins read about the accident in *The Times* and the *Illustrated London News*. Still, his poem is indebted to the illustrations in the latter paper rather than to the newspapers' journalistic style. See, for instance, the sedate headlines of similar reports in the racier of the two papers, the *Illustrated London News*, reprinted in Leonard de Vries & Ilonka van Amstel, eds, *History as Hot News 1865-1897: The Late Nineteenth Century World as Seen Through*

Once more, the poem meets its most serious enemy in its own textuality. Reality and even Divine presence are not to be found outside of it; they are only ever produced by it. The rather apologetic allusion to the beginning of the gospel according to John in the next lines, 'Wording it how but by him that present and past,/Heaven and earth are word of, worded by? --', only leads to another absence, the dash. The exclamation of the following line sums up this fundamentally contradictory nature of writing: 'The Simon Peter of a soul!'. Peter is indeed the person to be bestowed with the continuation of Christ's mission, but he is also the one to betray Christ three times. Signification is the only way to express notions of the self, reality, and the Divine, but it will always be unfaithful to its task.

The 'Terrible Sonnets', written in the last years of Hopkins' life when he went through a particularly depressing exile in Dublin, deal with this notion of disappointment very frankly. 'Comforter, where, where is your comforting?/Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?' asks 'No worst, there is none [...]', while 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day' sums up the problem of Christ as the transcendental sign which is as close to the self in Hopkins' view as a sign can get, yet still infinitely far away: 'And my lament/Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent/To dearest him that lives alas! away'. The image of the dead letters is telling: neither does the addresser lack the will to make an effort nor is the address wrong; it is language that does not fulfil its task.

The only real alternative for the self is either to forsake manifestation, to exist in a space outside thoughts and language (an idea that Jacques Lacan formulated in

the Eye of 'The Illustrated London News' and 'The Graphic' (London: John Murray, 1973), p. 148 ('The Wreck of the Irex') & p. 156 ('The Loss of H.M.S. Victoria').

the 1960s²¹ expressed by Hopkins ninety years earlier). 'Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise/You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile/Elsewhere' advocates 'My own heart let me have more pity on [...]'. The very fact that this advice is itself expressed in language as a poem indicates how difficult - if not impossible - this abandonment proves to be.

The second option for the self and for the poem as a whole is the acceptance of their contradictory nature. What has been formulated fairly early in 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;'

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves -- goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

is radicalised in the surprisingly optimistic 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection' that follows the 'Terrible Sonnets':

I am all at once what Christ is, ' since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, ' patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

The tautological finale is much more than a dead end. It refers the poem back to itself, but it also multiplies the symbolic quality of its final image. It points outside itself while stressing that it is forever caught in its own material²² - just as much as the unceasing and undirected Heraclitean flux arrives at a strange, because poetic, symbiosis with the Divine scheme of order in the title of the poem.

²¹Lacan, 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud', in *Écrits*, pp. 146-178.

²²In the sense of Yuri Lotman who describes language as the *matériel* of literature, in *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, translated by D. Barton Johnson (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976), pp. 17-21.

5. Hopkins' Poetry and Saussurean Semiotics: Early Manifestations of a Modernist Concept of the Sign

Hopkins and Ferdinand de Saussure, although several decades apart, have much in common in the development of their respective crafts, linguistics and poetry. Both showed an interest in the mechanisms of language and both chose the same starting-point for their inquiries: etymology. Yet while Hopkins went on to construct language, Saussure attempted to analyse it, and their respective notions of its status seem almost completely irreconcilable.

The starting point of Saussure's linguistic theories is the definition of the sign, the smallest unit in the semantic network of meaning. In his terminology 'a *sign* is the combination of a concept and a sound pattern'.²³ He exemplifies this using the sign for 'tree' as an example. The concept of the tree (which he regards as a psychological phenomenon) is somehow similar to the universalist concept which includes all trees in their 'treeness' and can only become a linguistic phenomenon by its relation with a sound pattern (a physical phenomenon), i.e. in English the sound [tri:] (C 67).²⁴ Like the two sides of a single sheet of paper they cannot exist separately.

²³The status of Saussure's works is rather precarious, because of his habit of destroying the notes of his lectures. His seminal course is actually composed of notes taken by his students Bally and Sechehaye. Further references in the text as *C* are to the English edition: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Bally & Albert Sechehaye with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger, translated by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983).

²⁴Saussure is convinced of the primary status of speech. Writing is for him a secondary development.

Both concept and sound pattern gain their distinction by difference. The concept 'tree' is not that of 'horse'; the sound pattern of the word 'tree' is neither that of 'free' nor 'three' (C 102).²⁵ The interaction of differences gives rise to something that is 'positive in its own domain. A linguistic system is a series of phonetic differences matched with a series of conceptual differences' (C 118). Yet, '*the contact between them gives rise to a form, not a substance*' (C 111).

The notion that concept as well as its representation depend on differentiation corresponds closely to Hopkins' aesthetics (Saussure uses the word *signifié* and *signifiant*; in current theoretical usage the terms 'signified' and 'signifier' have become common, although Harris' translation prefers to use 'signification' and 'signal')²⁶. Indeed his very concept of 'inscape' can be seen as the ultimate expression of distinction through difference.

Still, Hopkins clearly defines 'inscape' as substantial and not merely as form. Yet, as the analysis of his poetry has shown, it only ever achieves an expression of 'inscape' through its form, either within it or in its breakdown. The dichotomy between signifier and signified is clearly there. It is ultimately the central problem of Hopkins' works. Evolving out of a traditional mimetic approach, they try to grant a power to themselves that transgresses the merely mimetic and uneasily strives towards a creation of their own. The adequate expression is the paramount aim of the texts, yet all they ever arrive at is the demonstration of the instability of the relation between signifier and signified. As the analysis of 'Pied Beauty' earlier in this study has

²⁵I have provided my own examples to avoid Saussure's French ones.

²⁶Compare the original edition, Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique général*, edited by Charles Bally & Albert Sechehaye with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger, Bibliothèque Scientifique (Paris: Payot, 1960), pp. 97-103.

demonstrated, there remains an irreconcilable discrepancy between the conceptual map of the poem, its construction, and its imagery, its attachment to the mimetic. Those two poles are an exact reflection of Saussure's matching of conceptual and phonetic (in our case logographic or ideographic) differences.

According to Saussure, the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary. That does not mean that it is subject to the free choice of the speaker, but that it is ultimately unmotivated. There is no intrinsic reason why the word 'tree' should signify the concept of tree. French has a different word for it and so has every other language. Only conventions (those of the 'linguistic community', a term that is not clearly defined by Saussure and could refer to speakers of the same language as well as to dialect and sociolect groups) govern its choice (C 67-69).

All the important structures of Hopkins' poems present themselves as almost manic attempts to fight this lacking motivation. By erecting ingenious and tightly knit internal networks of alliterations, assonances, rhymes and rhythms, but especially by the ubiquitous inflation of nouns and descriptive adjectives and adverbs, most prominently his poetic neologism, his compounds, the texts strive to arrive at least at an internal motivation.²⁷ Even in this attempt, Hopkins' poems conform to Saussure's discoveries: '*The sign may be motivated to a certain extent*', he claims, only to conclude that this motivation can only ever be achieved within the network of signs. His example: the arbitrary French *vingt* [twenty] versus the internally motivated *dix-*

²⁷See Michael Riffaterre's view of the poetic neologism as discussed in his *Text Production*, translated by Terese Lyons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 74: 'Far from arbitrary and anything but a foreign body in the sentence, the literary neologism is the most strongly motivated signifier that can be found in a text. [...] Coined expressly and created to meet specific needs, the neologism is the precise word par excellence.'

neuf [nineteen] which consists of two arbitrary signs which gain motivation only by their mathematical relation (*C* 130).

Hopkins' poems try to counter the arbitrariness of the signifier by inflation. If one wanted to adopt Lacan's radicalisation of Saussure's arbitrariness, his 'notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier',²⁸ one could argue that the function of Hopkins' rows of related nouns is to achieve at least momentary contact between representation and concept. His poems fit exactly Jakobson's definition of the poetic: the projection of the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic axis ('The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination').²⁹

Yet the underlying reasons for this procedure are not at all similar to the Formalists' aim of alienation. Hopkins' poems do not want to make language strange, they want to make it familiar, indeed so familiar as to help it break out of the limitations of its constituents. They strive to develop a stable relation between concept and representation; they desire a sign that is motivated, a perfect expression of God's scheme of creation. But they cannot find this sign in language, or rather they can only find it in three paradoxical forms: the empty sign (the absence, as in the description of the self), the breakdown of signification (the self-destruction of language) or the transcendental sign that cannot be questioned, because it cannot be rationally perceived (i.e. Christ, the vision of the Eucharist).

²⁸Lacan, 'Agency of the Letter', p. 154. See also Ann Jefferson, 'Structuralism and Post-Structuralism' in Ann Jefferson & David Robey, eds, *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* (London: Batsford, 1987, ¹1982), 92-121 (pp. 114-115).

²⁹Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in *Language in Literature*, edited by Krystyna Pomorska & Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 62-94 (p. 71).

All of these three consequences of the breakdown of the notion of a stable sign will reappear throughout the history of modern poetry as absence, self-destruction, and myth. Hopkins' poetry deserves the award to have illustrated their origin and consequences at a very early date. He gives the first examples of a poetry that exhibits an awareness that it has lost its outside. All its endeavours to establish contact with the concepts it tries to represent only ever end up in texts that are thrown back into their own structures. The compulsive internalisation that will be shown to be one of the characteristics of modernism displays its origin in the treatment of signification in his works. Its gloomy consequences for the self and its relation to reality are already vividly outlined there. Yet this is obviously not at all what Hopkins' poetry wants to achieve. Its radical failure propels it away from its Victorian roots towards the no man's land of modernism.

II. The Symbolic Approach and Its Limits: W.B. Yeats's Poetry

1. The Symbol: A Structural Outline

When Saussure claims that signs may be motivated to a certain extent, he thinks explicitly of the symbol (C 68). Within the textual network of signs, this particular form can achieve a special status, lose its arbitrariness by representing a peculiar relation between signifier and signified. Saussure's statement highlights his already observed notion that there is no real outside of language, a notion that - as the analysis of Hopkins' poems has shown - permeates the whole of modern poetry from its very beginnings.

Charles S. Peirce, the second founding-father of modern semiotics, developed a more 'objective' theory of the sign based on his triadic concept which includes an extratextual referent together with its representation and form (which he regards as the relation between percipient and sign). For Peirce, the symbol is consequently the least motivated of all signs. The icon - as a sign which resembles the object it represents - and the index - a sign in a real relation with an object (such as smoke indicating fire) - are the only motivated forms of signs for him. The symbol is in a relation to

an object only by an act of will, i.e. interpretation (which can also be a convention) and thus arbitrary.¹

Saussure's claim that there exists a natural bond between thought and *voice* and his denunciation of writing as external and corrupting led to Derrida's attack on his semiotics in *On Grammatology* in which it is interpreted as a symptom of Saussure's logocentrism, his indebtedness and submission to traditional reason.² For the present, it will suffice to take note of the fact that the motivation of the symbol is always the result of an intention or a convention. It is never inherent in the symbol, but provided by an underlying system which is either the personal symbolic system of the author or the symbolic system of convention. Usually, the two are closely related; i.e. the personal symbol is related to the conventional symbolic code by either conforming to, transforming or opposing the norm, while the norms of symbolic conventions are influenced and shaped by individual contributions. Thus, literary terminology knows the metaphysical conceit, the Romantic symbol, and also symbols particular to W.B. Yeats, the poet whose works will be in the focus of this chapter.

Like every other sign, the symbol can be described as having two parts: signifier and signified. The distinctive feature of the symbol is its unconventional use of a complex visual signifier, the *pictura* (Latin: 'image') in connection with an equally complex signified, usually that of an abstraction, the *subscriptio* (Latin: 'signature').³

¹Klaus Oehler, 'Grundzüge der Peirceschen Semiotik', in Martin Krampen et al., eds, *Die Welt als Zeichen: Klassiker der modernen Semiotik* (Berlin: Severin & Siedler, 1981), 23-26 (p. 23).

²For a discussion see Christopher Norris, *Derrida*, Fontana Modern Masters (London: Fontana, 1987), pp. 87-94.

³Jürgen Link, *Literaturwissenschaftliche Grundbegriffe: Eine programmierte Einführung auf strukturalistischer Basis* (Munich: Fink, 1985, ¹1974), p. 168.

The Greek root of the word symbol (*symbolon* = 'memorable sign') hints at its multiple functions. As a condensation, it acts as a shorthand for complex statements. Barthes, in his concise comparison of the variants of signs, drily states that 'in the *symbol* the representation is analogical and inadequate (Christianity "outruns" the cross)'.⁴ This inherent deficit will become important in the following discussion. The symbol's transgression of the language norm attracts attention to its form. Both functions permit the symbol to act as a rhetorical device which convinces easily because of its aesthetic appeal. A conventional example is the symbol of the rose for the concept of love. The complexity of the *pictura* contains visual beauty, pleasant smell, fragility, but also the presence of hidden thorns. It is fused with the abstract concept of the *subscriptio* love: love is a unique and beautiful experience, highly sensual, but also short-lived and potentially painful. Yeats's particular use of the rose symbol will be discussed below.

The organisation of symbols in a text can either associate them by their *picturae* or their *subscriptiones* or both. The semantic consequences in the first case are a coherent imagery with possibly conflicting and ambiguous associations (examples are to be found among certain metaphysical poems). The association of symbols by their signifieds, their *subscriptiones*, creates an argumentative unit but a probably unreal imagery (as in some surrealist texts which try to blast conventional symbolism by this method). Usually, though, symbols are organised by related *picturae* as well as *subscriptiones*.

⁴Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, translated by Annette Lavers & Colin Smith, Cape Editions, 4 (London: Cape, 1967), p. 38.

Organisations of symbols which contain their 'explanation' as a part of their construction are called emblems (Greek *émbλημα* = 'goldsmith's badge'). These were particularly common in the Renaissance and the Baroque. When an arrangement of symbols achieves a personified and anthropomorphic character which correlates to its particular social and cultural function, the complex is called allegory (Greek for 'different way of saying'). A prominent example is the blindfold woman holding scales as a representation of justice.

Naturally, there are also symbols whose signifieds remain ambiguous or obscure, but which can - usually by their context - be identified as symbols. In some cases, these are personal symbols of particular authors. Another peculiar form are the so-called 'Freudian symbols'. The term is a popularised construction deriving from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* in which dream images are shown to be representations of suppressed sexual and aggressive impulses.⁵ The term 'Freudian symbol' is usually employed to describe an image that can be taken to represent genitals or sexual activity.

2. Yeats's Early Poems: Symbols and Symbolism

Despite Northrop Frye's claim, not all poets speak the same symbolic language.⁶

Frye goes on to qualify his dubious statement by declaring that symbolism is inherited

⁵Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, edited by Angela Richards, Pelican Freud Library, 4 (London: Penguin, 1976).

⁶Northrop Frye, 'The Top of the Tower: A Study of the Imagery of Yeats', in *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society* (London: Methuen, 1970), 257-277 (p. 257).

by a tradition that is either consciously or unconsciously adopted. Yet if one asks for the roots of this tradition, one arrives very quickly at the insight that - while being a response to common experiences and problems - symbols are the reaction to conventions, and as such not determined by impersonal 'natural' forces, but by individual human actions. There are indeed 'archaic' symbols such as the sun, the moon, stars, the four elements, etc., but 'archaic' only refers to the fact that the phenomena that are transformed into the *picturae* of symbols are experienced in all cultures at all times, and it will be difficult to prove that their symbolic status does not vary between different cultures and - more striking - between individual artists employing them.

The reason for this mutability of the symbol is its intermediary position between the personal and the impersonal, the individual and the collective, or, when not seen as attached to the human sphere as in religion and magic, the mythical. Yeats himself, not usually very good at analysing the features of his own works, perceived this clearly when he defended the symbol against the allegory in his essay on Blake⁷ published in *The Savoy* in July 1896:

A symbol is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame; while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to fancy and not to imagination: the one is a revelation, the other an amusement.⁸

⁷That Blake rather than Arthur Symonds lies at the roots of Yeats's symbolism has now become critical consensus. See, for example, Robert O. Driscoll's excellent *Symbolism and Some Implications of the Symbolic Approach: W.B. Yeats During the Eighteen-Nineties*, New Yeats Papers, 9 (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975). The influence of French symbolism is also questioned in Hahn, *Die Krisis des Lyrischen in den Gedichten von W.B. Yeats und W.H. Auden* (Göttingen: Alfred Kümmerle, 1971), pp. 15-17.

⁸W.B. Yeats, 'William Blake and His Illustrations to The Divine Comedy: I. His Opinions Upon Art', in *The Savoy* (July 1896), p. 176; quoted in Giorgio Melchiori, *The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into Poetry in the Works of W.B. Yeats* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,

The symbol has a double function: it is determined by an impersonal force, but it can only be expressed through the individual (i.e. poetic) imagination by an act of revelation which is the poetic creation. Yeats's poetic work can be seen as suspended between these three poles. Their interaction is a problem from the very start of his poetic career.

The first poem Yeats chose to preserve for his *Collected Poems*,⁹ 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', starts with an allusion to the inevitable interplay with tradition that every symbolic creation enters: 'The woods of Arcady are dead'. This is the first of many death-claims of modernist poetry that will be encountered in this study as manifestations of its own problematic autonomy. The statement refers to a well-established fact, Arcady does not exist any more (if it ever existed at all), and to an artistic tendency, that of escapism. The easy poetic escape into the imaginary past is rejected. Or so it seems. For the rejection of the traditional symbolic system neither disqualifies this system completely nor does it lead to a ban on other symbolic concepts. Indeed, the very thing that has replaced Arcadian escapism, Grey Truth, a reference to the empiricism Yeats despised, is clothed in symbolic shape. It is presented as a painted toy that the world uses for her entertainment.

This world feeds on dreams, and dream-like and uncertain are all things according to the poem - save one: words. The dreaming world itself may be nothing more than a word, spoken or written by whom the poem does not say, though it goes on to fill its own realm with symbol after symbol. Chronos' cracked tune representing

1960), p.15.

⁹All quotations are from the following edition: W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982, ¹1950).

time has already made its appearance. It is followed by the warring kings of old standing for idle glory, and the star-gazers with their barren wisdom. Most important, though, are those symbols that represent that which the poem praises so highly, words. The sudden flaming word that is presented as the possible origin of the world is, of course, a biblical reference and alludes to the beginning of the gospel according to John.

The representation of creation as the word has strong links with the closed interiorising nature of modernist techniques observed in Hopkins' poems. The texts can only imagine their outside to be like their own texture - with the result that they themselves become their own cosmos. This phenomenon will be traced in all structural features of modernist poetry. It will be discussed in relation to psychoanalysis, economy, and philosophy in the second half of this study.

The central symbol of the poem is that of the 'twisted, echo-harboured shell' of its second stanza. It mirrors the lips of the addressee of the poem who by telling it 'his story' receives an echo of his words, his tale reworded - until it fades away. The final lines of stanza two and three explain the possible gain of the procedure: '[...] for this is also sooth'. The symbolic mirroring of experience does not give it any sense, much less truth, not even material permanence. Yet within its symbolic network, this act of symbolism fulfills the function of a dream. It gives release from the daily fight against contingency, the idle struggle for fame (the kings of old), learning (the stammering schoolboy) and truth (the star-gazers).

This central symbol also illustrates the uneasy position of the creator of the symbolic utterance. The humming sea and the echo-harboured shell are the

institutions that receive and mirror the message, his story.¹⁰ This story remains nondescript, but the remainder of the poem suggests that it tells of the loss of all certainties save one: the certainty of words. Yet by telling his story, the protagonist of the poem only adds it to the meaningless noises of the sea and shell. His message loses any possible meaning, no matter how much the poem insists that the shell rewords it. The symbolic utterance produces a nebulous signified, yet one that is potentially more powerful than ordinary words. The hints at a mirror-function of the shell, its description as lips (rather than an ear which receives the message) that double and touch those of the protagonist (with obvious erotic connotations) and the adjective 'echo-harbours' show that its own message is only a reflection of that of the story-teller. Helen Regueiro describes the importance of the relationship of man and nature in Yeats's poems as follows:

Yeats's poetry, like Wordsworth's, thus stems from a profound sense of the loss of the unity of being. But where Wordsworth defines loss in terms of the self's relationship to nature, Yeats couches it, at least initially, in mythological terms.¹¹

The world Yeats constructs is thus at the very outset doomed by the self-consciousness with which it is created. It is a world constructed 'in nature's spite' and ultimately inimical to the very idea of poetic creation.¹²

This paradoxical status of the symbols of the poem as starting-point and goal of poetic activity (if one regards the telling of one's life story as such), reappears in a more abstract symbolic concept of the poem, that of its speaker. As the title of the poem indicates, it is a song sung by the happy shepherd. The definite article is

¹⁰This is reminiscent of Wordsworth's image of the shell as a book in *The Prelude*.

¹¹Helen Regueiro, *The Limits of Imagination: Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 96.

¹²Regueiro, *Limits of Imagination*, p. 97.

important, for it makes this shepherd a special one, the representative of a particular symbolic context. He is part of Arcady. But this Arcady is dead, and the speaker even repeatedly refers to the symptoms of this death, finally and most drastically in the last stanza in which he talks about the grave of a dead faun, the impersonation of unreflected and undirected sensual energy, life in short.

When first published, this poem bore the title 'An Epilogue. To "The Land of Statues" and "The Seeker". Spoken by a satyr carrying a sea-shell'. Later, it was entitled 'Song of the last Arcadian (He carries a sea-shell)'.¹³ The transformation highlights some contradictory aspects of the use of symbols in the poem. Its speaker is part of a dead or dying culture, yet he is described as happy. He shows a possible deliverance from the contingencies of existence in the transformation of his life into poetry through the shell. This transformation can only be that into symbols; the echoes of the shell in their relation to the noise of the sea correspond to 'invisible essence', the 'invisible flame' described in Yeats's essay on Blake.

From a semiotic perspective, the meaningless echo within the shell is the noise of language in its entirety, *langue* (its relation to the thundering of the sea is not simply that of a mimetic echo, for everyone knows that we do not hear the sea when we listen to the sounds within shells). Out of this meaningless muddle of sounds, the speaker takes his pick. His choice is governed by his own story, i.e. his particular situation, but also his experiences, the norms and conventions that have shaped him and his use of language. The echo he receives is his experience clothed in signifiers,

¹³The poem was first published in the *Dublin University Review* in October 1885, then under the second title in *The Wanderings of Oisín* in 1889. See Alexander Norman Jeffares, *A New Commentary on the Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 3.

parole, but special signifiers: complex concepts topped with a concrete image. The interaction produces symbols.

Only by this act of symbolisation can human experience gain meaning. Yeats formulates an insight in this early poem that he will re-encounter in philosophical shape in Nietzsche's works later: all human history, be it individual or universal, is fiction and can only come to life and meaning in fiction. Thus, the 'last Arcadian' can be called happy despite the poem's veiled notion that his days are numbered. He has manifested himself and given meaning to his existence in the very utterance that is the poem.

Yet to leave it at that would be to overlook the darker aspects of the poem's symbolic message. Even this recently established identity is shown as doomed - it fades with the words that have helped to establish it. Furthermore, the constitution of identity through symbols is not entirely in the hands of the protagonist. The shell has an active part in it, too. In the poem that follows and complements 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' in Yeats's *Collected Poems*, 'The Sad Shepherd', the shell refuses to reword the shepherd's story - as does the rest of nature - and turns it into an 'inarticulate moan'. The consequence is that the shepherd's song, i.e. his existence, is forgotten. He vanishes from the symbolic stage of the poem so radically that he even ceases to be its grammatical subject. He is replaced by the shell which is too immersed in its 'wilderling whirls' to take notice of his song. A first hint at Yeats's gyres of the later poems, his own version of the modernist vortex, the symbolic form that leads to permanence within the flux of reality and history and brings with it impersonality. Thus the refusal of personal identity for the shepherd. It is the direct result of the take-over of the poem by its own symbolic system.

The two poems outline Yeats's model of symbolism. It requires inexplicable forces that determine the shape of the symbol, forces which choose their mouthpieces among men (a first hint at the élitism of Yeats's works, his notion of the artist as initiate). Yet it is up to the chosen prophet of these powers to provide the material of their echoing utterance out of his own life. The protagonist of this symbolising activity, the poet, supplies his own story as the raw material for the symbolic transformation. That does not necessarily mean events of his life only, but also thoughts and fantasies. In this interaction, both artistic artefacts and the identity of the artist are created.

Lacan calls this transformation the development from the imaginary to the symbolic stage and regards it as the most important step in the psychological development of the individual. It requires the clothing of impressions and sensations, also the perception of oneself, one's body (in Lacan's famous 'mirror stage') in words. It inevitably entails a loss as well, for the words can only ever be substitutes that represent unsuccessfully and incompletely what they stand for. This loss, however, is also a gain, because words give permanence to fleeting but 'whole' visions. It is a stage that must be undergone in the formation of the subject and leads to its identity. Loss and the consequent feeling of incompleteness are, according to Lacan, the origins of desire (Lacan takes up the old Platonic idea). They are the motivations for individual actions which all strive to overcome the fragmentation but never achieve this aim.¹⁴

¹⁴Lacan, 'The mirror stage'. On misrepresentation and desire see 'The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power', *Écrits*, 226-280 (p. 263). On the importance of the word in this symbolising activity see 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis', *Écrits*, pp. 30-113.

In Yeats's early poems, fragmentation as the consequence of symbolic representation is described in various forms. An objective symbolism shows objects and settings which either demonstrate lack and desire or its potential mastery, the latter usually in visions of successful love or the integration of the individual in particular historic, geographic, and mythical settings. Subjective symbolism represents the protagonist of the texts in various guises, masks or personae (a technique very prominent in Browning's poetry, later perfected by Ezra Pound).

3. Objects as Symbols

Throughout Yeats's long poetic career, the range of symbols employed by him remains remarkably small. For a poet so consciously immersed in symbolism, this economy of symbols must mean a deliberate restriction. There are two possible explanations for this, starting from the different poles of Yeats's concept of the symbol. In his conviction that symbols are given to the artist by an external force Yeats relied heavily on dreams and dream-like impressions to supply him with his material (later he added the consciously invoked visions of his spiritistic experiments and those of his wife to his store). He carefully noted dreams and visions (as can be seen in his *Autobiographies*) and used them over and over again in his works. The island symbol, for example, crops up in his early verse play *The Island of Statues* of 1884, reappears in the hero's quest through 'spice-isles' in the dramatic poem *The Seeker* (printed along with the former text), and in the three allegorical islands of *The*

Wanderings of Oisín, in poems like 'To an Isle in the Water' (in which the island stands clearly for a woman) and eventually in 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'.¹⁵

Economy of symbols means faithfulness to the source of poetic inspiration. On the other hand, Yeats's sparsity of symbols is directly related to his painstaking attempt to develop his own unified symbolic system. This explains the multitude of poems sharing the same protagonist ('He', 'The Lover', 'The Poet', 'Owen Aherne', 'Michael Robartes', 'Crazy Jane', etc.) and the groupings of poems under the heading of the same symbol. The most important of these in Yeats's early poems is the rose.

The rose stands for a variety of things. First of all, it represents love, even a particular love, Maud Gonne, whom Yeats met for the first time in 1889 and who became the object of a tragic, because unreciprocated passion. Yet the rose also represents spiritual principles. It is the central symbol of the Order of the Golden Dawn which Yeats as well as Maud Gonne joined (Yeats in 1890). Its Rosicrucian symbolism uses the image of a rose with four leaves on a cross as the representation of a mystic marriage, both sexual (the rose representing the vaginal, the cross the phallic) and spiritual. Finally, the rose is a symbol of Ireland, used, for instance, by poets like Aubrey de Vere and James Clarence Mangan whom Yeats mentioned as his symbolic precursors in *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* of 1892 in which the poem 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time' first appeared.¹⁶

¹⁵For a psychoanalytic evaluation of the islands in Yeats's works see Brenda S. Webster, *Yeats: A Psychoanalytic Study* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 4-37. She regards them as 'an alternative form of escape and Yeats's first attempt to work his fears [of women and sex] and guilt feelings [about oedipal urges] into a traditional framework' (p. 8).

¹⁶On the rose as a symbol see Jeffares, *New Commentary*, pp. 20-24 (p. 21). The Rosicrucian symbol was also used as a cover illustration for the first edition of *The Rose* (1893). A reproduction is on the front page of Driscoll, *Symbolism*.

What makes the rose such an attractive symbol is obviously its multiple meaning. Since it belongs to various symbolic systems, its use brings a great complexity into relatively condensed poems. Its attraction is thus also one of poetic economy. At the same time its polysemy offers a convenient screen for daring utterances. Passionate declarations of love can thus be passed off as philosophical or mystical speculations or patriotic fervour (the latter particularly successful with Maud Gonne). But also dubious and rather exotic Rosicrucian teachings can be disguised as love poetry (which always has a right to be irrational) or veiled political utterances. The procedure works in turn equally well for exclamations of Irish patriotism.

The rose is an ideal symbol. Yet it is used in the same manner as all the symbols hitherto analysed. It indeed proves so powerful that it has to be restrained. In the first and central rose poem in the collection *The Rose* of 1893, the already mentioned 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time', this ambiguous attraction is fully illustrated. The speaker - in the guise of a Celtic bard - invokes the rose of his days (his love perhaps, or his faith, or both) while he sings of Irish legends. Through this rose he hopes to find eternal beauty, to cease being 'blinded by man's fate' (i.e. human contingency), and to see things with new eyes. But when the rose approaches (and the triple 'Come near' of the second stanza gives that impression), the speaker suddenly wants to keep his distance: 'Ah, leave me still/A little space for the rose-breath to fill!'.

What he is afraid of is the loss of - interestingly enough - his hearing. Apparently, if the rose joined him he would only ever be able to hear eternal truths ('the strange things said/By God to the bright hearts of the long dead') and no longer the noises of real life. More important still, he would lose his ability to sing in a language comprehensible to men, he would 'chaunt in a tongue men do not know'.

Once more, the perfect symbol would be the one to make the poetic utterance cease.¹⁷

The difficult tension which forces the poet to refine the symbols he cannot do without yet at the same makes it clear that a take-over of the poem by a perfect symbol would mean the collapse of the poetic identity, thus of the poem itself, will be shown as a dominant problem in Yeats's later poems. There, two forms of dissolution will offer themselves as the only escapes out of this structural impasse. The very illustration of this dead end in Yeats's poems, their awareness that the control of their textual mechanisms brings them close to their downfall, should be noted as a feature that places them within the structural canon of modernism.

4. The Self in Symbols

The observation made in the analysis of Yeats's objective symbolism applies to his symbols of the self, his subjective symbolism, too. The range of representations is limited and well-organised. The symbols used exhibit various degrees of imaginary distance: there are mythological figures as far removed and anonymous as the Arcadian shepherd or geographically distant like the Indian characters of the earliest poems. These, however, are soon replaced by equally mythical, but less imprecise figures, such as characters from Irish mythology, King Goll, Fergus, Cuchulain, and

¹⁷On the rose as a symbol of inspiration and its dangers see Ernst Hessenberger, *Metapoesie und Metasprache in der Lyrik von W.B. Yeats und T.S. Eliot* (Passau: Andreas Haller, 1986), pp. 42-45. Also Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 110-112.

Oisín. Their nature is at least partly determined by the tales spun around them. The symbolic system they inhabit shapes the nature of these symbols.

All of these characters are related by some common features. They are tragic figures connected with loss and madness as well as quest and fight. Yet this intertextual determination does not disqualify them as parts of Yeats's idiosyncratic system. All of his symbolic protagonists share a close resemblance; one could argue that one of the characteristics of Yeats's work is its attachment to one self.¹⁸ This self is scrutinised and illustrated in its various aspects by the use of carefully chosen personae.

The multiple aspects of a single character can also be detected in the polarised personae of some poems. Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne are, for example, representations of proud intellect and unrestrained emotions. The traditional Platonic division into mind and body is driven even further and to Victorian proportions in the characters illustrating spiritual and physical love, the lady and the chambermaid. Yeats's almost pathological disgust of genitals and sexual activity is discussed by Brenda S. Webster.¹⁹

Symbolically, the division into pure and distant love object and soiled sexual partner is indeed only overcome when Crazy Jane, a prominent character in Yeats's later poems, comes up with a Blakean statement in her discussion with the Bishop, the representative of abstract spiritual values. 'Love has pitched his mansion in/The place

¹⁸Thus the title of Richard Ellmann's biography, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965, ¹1961).

¹⁹Webster, *Psychoanalytic Study*, pp. 15-16.

of excrement', she states in 'Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop', thus formulating the source of disgust.

This love in all its aspects (as shown in the rose symbol) is in the focus of most of Yeats's poems. This is self-evident in his early and middle period, yet even his later and last poems circle around the issue, although the treatment is now a different one, and the poems try to envisage love in connection with universal laws and forces located outside the individual.

If we have to imagine Yeats's personae as lovers, some other facets shift into the focus of attention. The lover can be represented as a plant, a tree (in 'The Two Trees'), more often as an animal, the hound with the phallic red ear in 'He Mourns for the Change [...]'. Or, more prominently, he can be depicted as a bird, one of the white birds of the poem with the same title or a swan, the symbol that Yeats employed so frequently.²⁰ In 'The White Swans at Coole' the symbolic equilibrium is so delicate that Yeats himself saw only the description of an actual observation in the poem. Yet it is obvious that the image of 'nine-and-fifty swans' paddling peacefully 'lover by lover' contains the apparent symbolic reason for the speaker's sore heart. There is one solitary swan left over with whom the speaker of the poem implicitly identifies his own situation.

Overt symbolic representations of the lover are, of course, the lover and the poet of the early poems, as well as the 'He' of so many poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* of 1899. Although only the most basic grammatical representation of identity, the latter, too, is a symbolic shape. It is more narrowly defined than other personae

²⁰On bird symbolism in Yeats see George Brandon Saul, 'The Winged Image: a Note on Birds in Yeats's Poems', in *In...Luminous Wind*, Dolmen Press Yeats Centenary Papers, 7 (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1966), 245-256 (p. 246).

because it lacks description. At the same time it is potentially unlimited because of this lack. In Lacan's system it is the purest and most radical symbolisation of the ego.²¹

The poet and even the lover are in a greater distance to the issue of love. Both discuss the way in which they perceive it rather than their love itself. The poet is indeed more concerned with his artifice than with the beloved object. In 'A Poet to His Beloved', the poet's activity forms the frame of the text. The object that it describes remains little more than the 'white woman' (i.e. pure spiritual love, despite its contradictory description as 'worn with passion [...] as the dove-grey sand'). In this respect, she is also the white page, still uninscribed by the poet. Physical love and poetic creation are equalled. This equation will reappear in Yeats's later poems, most prominently in 'Leda and the Swan'.

The lover, though already more direct in his address (i.e. he does not talk about what he says, but talks to his beloved) is still concerned with the mechanisms of his affections rather than with the object of his love. In 'The Lover Asks Forgiveness Because of his Many Moods' the hurt loved one is merely the puppet of the speaker. Her actions, meant to be a remedy against the lover's moods, are prescribed by exactly those moods. Not even the grammatical subject of the poem is clear in places. Although it must be the insulted woman, it always remains very visibly the speaking lover who never ceases to be in symbolic control of the scene.

²¹Still, the radical constitution of the subject by naming itself remains a misrepresentation. In Lacan's words: 'It is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak'; 'The agency of the letter', p. 165.

Love that is self-aware loses sight of its object and becomes self-possessed, i.e. narcissistic. That seems to be the implied message of the poem. It can also be applied to the symbolism of Yeats's early poems. A symbolism that is completely in control and functions unproblematically does this only within a hermetic textual closure. The texts thus created are incapable of envisaging and reacting to phenomena outside themselves, because the addition of their ill-defined signifieds produces a universalist 'fog' of meaning, one big indeterminacy that wraps their entire perspective. Even in seemingly traditional love poems, Yeats implicitly formulates this modernist crux. He dramatises the problematic role of the symbol in poetic imagination even more drastically in his later poems.

The alternative to a controlled symbolism is the unrestrained flow of symbols. This is what happens when the symbols take control of the poems rather than being employed within a strictly defined symbolic network by a controlling identity. Some of the most powerful poems in Yeats's oeuvre are the result of this toppling of poetic hierarchies. 'He Mourns for the Change that has Come Upon Him and His Beloved and Longs for the End of the World' is one of the examples. It is a poem filled to the brim with symbols, some of them deriving from Irish myths, some Christian, others allegorical. The clash of the complexities that these symbols bring with them prevents the poem from establishing a clear message. What remains is the impression of sheer visionary force, all of which is directed towards the apocalyptic dissolution of its finale - in which the mythical boar of Irish legends brings about the end of the world. This end of the world is clearly analogous to the end of poetic identity. The collapse of symbolism, here paradoxically initiated by a symbolic overcharge, catapults the poem out of its symbolic system back into the vagueness of the imaginary. One of the

possible structural consequences of the breakdown of symbols is the metonymy or the metaphor. This means that the dissolution does not automatically lead to meaninglessness. Here, the breakdown is connected with the very issue of the poem, thus completely functional. It is even the creator of a kind of joy, a joy of breaking down that can be seen as a precursor of the Nietzschean tragic gaiety in a poem like 'Lapis Lazuli'. It can also be associated with Barthes' *jouissance*, the pleasure of texts.²²

'The Valley of the Black Pig' is another example of a double surrender to the forces of dissolution. This valley is the setting of an apocalyptic prophecy in Irish mythology; thus the expectation of destruction expressed by those 'weary of the world's empires' in the poem.²³ Yet the poem itself presents this surrender already symbolically in its uncontrolled gathering of dreams that do not even stop when the speaker of the poem opens his eyes.

The speakers of Yeats's poems, the personae created out of symbols, seem to yearn for their own destruction. They beg for release from the symbolic settings that shape and control their existence and long to immerse themselves in a broader, because unrestrained imaginary wisdom (the imaginary stage of Lacan's psychological theories). In 'Fergus and the Druid', it is Fergus, King of Ulster, who demands release from his kingship, his symbolic chain. He is granted his wish and sees his life (or lives rather, for his vision is that of a succession of rebirths) float by in various images. But this imaginary knowledge leads to a destruction of his symbolic identity:

²²Exemplified in Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975).

²³Jeffares, *New Commentary*, pp. 59-61.

'But now I have grown nothing, knowing all'. Man cannot endure the loss of his symbolic identity, even though it brings with it eternal restriction and lack. 'Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow/Lay hidden in the small slate-coloured thing!' [the druid's bag of dreams], cries Fergus.²⁴

The second and more implicit message of the poem is that only the initiate are in control of the border between imagination and symbol. For Yeats, these are the magician and the poet. Yet this control is never complete and brings with it not only perils for their identity but also an awareness that is hard to bear. Yeats's middle and later poems illustrate some of the difficulties evolving out of the interaction of imagination (i.e. the visionary conception of the poet - whose origin Yeats believes to be in an invisible transcendental reality outside the human sphere) and poetic control through symbolism.

5. History and Symbols: An Uneasy Marriage

The intermediate position of the symbol between invisible unchangeable essence and the poet who is subject the contingencies of existence, puts the symbol in a tension from its very conception. It can only function within a symbolic system which is by its very nature slow to change, in its ideal form (for Yeats, for instance) even immutable. Yet as the personal poetic utterance of a particular poet it is also subjective, closely attached to its temporal context and thus prone to transformation. The conflict can seemingly be reconciled if the symbolic system becomes a closed one

²⁴On the loss of the coherence of speakers in Yeats's poems see also Bloom, *Yeats*, pp. 110-112.

that even includes its creator. The result is ahistoricism. Already some of Yeats's early poems, such as 'The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland', express the suspicion that the escapism of a hermetic symbolism is eventually unsatisfactory. There seems to remain something outside the poems that a hermetic symbolism is unable to grasp. The early poems suspect that it is life itself, the ever-changing life of the individual as well as the people, both of which are shaped by history.

One of Yeats's first poetic attempts to come to terms with history, 'Easter 1916', consequently exhibits a rather derogatory attitude towards its own material, language, the source of symbols. 'Polite meaningless words' it calls its speaker's direct reaction to the protagonists of this particular Irish drama, the Dublin Easter Rising. 'A mocking tale or a gibe' is all that this speaker can think of in such dramatic times. He is not part of the struggle, but removed in the bourgeois safety of his club. Yet not even there does he remain untainted by the events. He feels that the people involved in them and he belong to the same culture. And this is exactly the point where symbols enter the poem once more. Without them, it seems, neither the position of its speaker can be described in a more than materialist context, nor can he react to the events with more than 'meaningless words' or the grey truth of an empirical description. Complete change and transformation are his impressions. The symbol he chooses for the event is the birth of a terrible beauty.

The oxymoron describes the ambivalent aspects of the Rising. It was utterly stupid, yet heroic. The deaths brought about by it were cruel and shocking, but they had the splendour of mythical heroic sacrifice. Even the hopes and fears connected with the outcome of the Rising were ambivalent: aspirations for any direct political change were completely shattered; nonetheless, the dead of the Rising were instantly

transformed into martyrs, and their memory kept the revolutionary spirits alive for a long time.

A pure universal symbol would have been strange for Yeats. Even his symbols representing a historic event must be connected to the personal level. In the second stanza of 'Easter 1916' the change that is the poem's central theme is attributed to Constance Gore-Booth who, according to Yeats, was transformed from a beautiful girl to a shrill political fanatic by the turn of events. His description permits a glimpse of his basically misogynist concepts that still saw women in the true Victorian fashion as decoration and household inventory, lovers and mothers.

On another level, the stanza describes a more basic loss than that of a girl Yeats once admired. It laments the intrusion of history into the personal sphere. Change brought about by historic events (or, more generally, time) interferes with the well-organised symbolic system of one's personal life. Yeats's decision to write about these external events is shown as a not altogether altruistic one.

But if this change intrudes from outside, it is nonetheless also at least partly generated inside the personal realm. The protagonists of the historic drama of 'Easter 1916' were driven by an 'excess of love'. Political visions have the same origins as poetic ones. What applies to poetic works also applies to political actions: it is the responsibility of the executors to shape their vision. An escape into the apologetic evocation of transcendental powers, fate, Heaven, etc., is more than dubious: 'That is Heaven's part, our part/To murmur name upon name [of the victims]'. If excess of love hardens hearts, then excess of imagination probably paralyses the mind. At least it prevents action. 'I write it out in a verse -' is not a safer undertaking than the actions that become the material for this verse. Nietzsche's notion that history is

always a subjective vision (a concept which Yeats knew) is important in this context.²⁵ This idea burdens poetry with a responsibility that cannot be met with visions of fairyland.

History can only be grasped in symbolic form if the poems take account of their position in the tension of impersonal and personal forces. 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' is another attempt to connect factual history, namely the Black and Tans' violence, and symbolic concepts. Once more, the topic of the poem is loss, but this time the examples of the disappearance of culture are not Irish, but artefacts of Greek civilisation. The particular Irish events are projected onto the matrix of the whole of Western culture. They are integrated in a historical concept that much surpasses their geographic boundaries and their temporal location. But that does not only increase their importance as a symptom of decline. Even the lost Greek artefacts are shown to be of diminished value when they are put in the context of the 'pretty toys' the speaker had when he was young.

Historic loss is the inevitable price that has to be paid for cultural adulthood, just as much as symbolic loss is the price of personal identity. The prospects of this growing-up, however, are rather bleak. The vision of the poem is pessimistic. It denies historic progress, and - when naming the reason for its absence - even lapses into ahistoricism: 'rogues and rascals' are to blame. The anonymous forces described in archaic terms hint at the poem's deterministic and mythical outlook. 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' illustrates the destruction of its historic ideal with images from

²⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Geschichte für das Leben' [Of the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life], *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, edited by Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), i, pp. 243-334.

a vague past, cannons, parliament, king, trumpeters, and guardsmen, and eventually takes recourse to biblical prophecies (Isaiah 2.4 in the image of the transformed ploughshare²⁶ and finally the apocalyptic vision of the dragon from the Revelation 12.1-12). The latter is merged with the folkloristic images of demon riders and finally the realistic image of the riders of the Black and Tans. The subtlety of the transition makes it almost an equation. By putting signs from different backgrounds on top of each other, the poem creates myth. Again, the text is not content with factual historic events. They have to be put into a universal frame.²⁷

Intellectual escapism, thinking within closed symbolic concepts, is condemned at the end of the third stanza of the poem for its mistaken view that it is exempt from the turmoil of history and the brutality of men. Yet the central concept of history in the poem once again puts symbols in the focus of historical understanding. The knowledge of history demands the reading of 'the signs', an understanding of its symbols. Once more, this intellectual capacity is equalled to sexual potency. Only the chosen fulfill both qualifications. The vision that is granted to them is one of radically pessimistic Romanticism: everything is vain - except the true work of art. This true work of art is the perfect symbol, one that keeps the balance between individualistic symbolism, the closed fairyland of the egotistical poet, and the realm of the visions that dissolves all meaning in its imaginary flux. The chosen artist is a modern Daedalus, elevated, lonely, and constantly in danger. His eventual destination is extinction, for all his power derives from his passion: 'Man is in love and love what

²⁶Jeffares, *New Commentary*, p. 230.

²⁷Johannes Kleinstück, *W.B. Yeats oder Der Dichter in der modernen Welt* (Hamburg: Leibniz, 1963), p. 140.

vanishes./What more is there to say?'. The famous lines indicate the hopelessness of the situation.

Nonetheless, the poem has more to say. Man's inevitable failure is seen in a larger context, one provided by Yeats's own model of repetitive decline and rise in *A Vision*, the Platonic Year.²⁸ Incomprehensible and therefore barbaric forces determine historic rise and fall - and thus also the fate of the artist and his works. Yet all there is to do for the individual is to participate in this seemingly chaotic and yet so well-organised tumult: 'All men are dancers and their tread/Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong'. Individual existence, the symbolic creation of coherence and thus also poetic creation is only the attempt to participate in a larger concept, that of myth. This is the second direction of the radical symbolism that Yeats's poems hint at.

The third part of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' consequently symbolises poetic creation (hitherto absent from the list of artistic works mentioned in it) as the flight of a swan, one of Yeats's favourite symbols.²⁹ The swan image undergoes a transition from comparison to myth marked by the repeated use of the word 'Satisfied'. When immersed in a universal system, that of myth, the deficient symbol is no longer experienced as lacking and can become an ideal mirror, here of the soul. The swan's preparation for his flight is the stage preceding artistic creation. The dark powers of the approaching night, the formless muddle of the unconscious, are subject to his control; he rides on or plays with them.

²⁸W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986, '1937), pp. 243-263.

²⁹The poet mentioned explicitly in line one is, therefore, rather Yeats himself in ironic representation than Shelley, as Jeffares suggests in *New Commentary*, p. 233.

The insight into the relation of artistic creation, personal fate, and impersonal forces does not automatically lead to an escape from their tensions. The second and third stanza of part three of the poem remind of the two pitfalls of symbolism already observed several times: that of isolation and dissolution. None of them is a viable alternative, and neither permits an escape from man's troubled existence and his subjection to death.

Still, neither taking part in the brutality of the world (as suggested in part four) nor mere ironic distance (as illustrated in part five) will suffice as an adequate reaction to man's difficult position. Its inexplicable tensions and paradoxical developments have to be accepted. Actual destruction as well as cultural creation must be seen as expressions of universal concepts. In this respect, the 'terrible beauty' of 'Easter 1916' crops up again, this time in the image of the strange beauty of the violent horses of the Black and Tans. They represent actual event as well as aesthetic spectacle, anarchic chaos *and* universal order (since their running in circles corresponds to the eternal cycle of the Platonic Year). The question whether evil originates from the destruction of beauty or beauty is the result of destruction cannot be answered by the poem.

On a more personal level, the inextricable connection of creation and destruction in one's own emotional and sexual impulses shifts into the focus at the end of the poem. The 'daughters of Herodias', spirits that unwillingly harm men who fall for their beauty, and Lady Kyteler with her incubus-lover Robert Artisson as the representative of all those who suffer and destroy driven by the insatiable need to be loved illustrate the root of violence and destruction in individual passion.³⁰ Yet from

³⁰For the legendary sources of these images see Jeffares, *New Commentary*, pp. 234-236.

this root derives also the power of creation. Its urge is founded on the same lack and desire that leads also to its very opposite. Yeats's poems try to reconcile these contradictory impulses by illustrating two symbolic alternatives: the dissolution of deficient symbolism in an imaginary flux and its incorporation in a universal myth. None of these choices can convince before it tackles the very root of this problematic symbolism: the poetic imagination.

6. The Limits of the Symbol: Imagination

If history threatens the symbol from its outside by highlighting the static nature of its concept, the internal limits of the symbol are foregrounded by the failure of one or more of its constituents. This can happen in the collapse of overdetermination or - rarer in Yeats's works - the fading away of symbolic interrelations which leaves the symbols as isolated metonymies. A third form of dissolution is its complete integration into myth: once the symbol becomes part of a truth, it loses its status as a deficient sign, because it achieves identity with itself.

In this final section of the discussion of the symbol, the problem of its source will be analysed. Imagination describes the relation between poetic identity and the origin of its images. In Yeats's own imagery it is visible in the connection of, for instance, shepherd and shell in two of the early poems. For him, as we have seen, the source of symbols is transcendental, a different mystical reality. Its spokesman, the artist, is chosen to provide the material for the symbol whose final shape is determined by this interaction.

Yet throughout Yeats's works contradictions appear as to whether the control of symbols is in the hands of the artist or his external source. Texts like the 'Shepherd' poems see the transcendental origin of symbols as controlling forces. Other poems, especially those in which the protagonist appears as magician or explicitly as artist, put man in control of his symbols. An early example is the poem 'To a Shade', a more elaborate and much later one 'The Tower'.

Important enough to provide the name for the collection *The Tower* of 1928, the volume of poems which initiated the later phase of Yeats's career, the poem is a complex discussion of old age and death, two issues that became more and more important to Yeats - at that time already sixty-three years old. From the point of view of the symbol, old age threatens the artist's power to shape it, since poetic power is closely linked with physical, especially sexual potency, both of which are doomed to fade in old age. Death is an even more radical threat, because it unveils the ultimate limits of the symbol. As we shall see, it is easily possible to symbolise death. Still, every representation of this ultimate absence automatically gives away its inadequacy. The same applies to afterlife that can only ever be illustrated in images taken from actual life. The symbolisation of a counter-reality proves to be impossible.

Old age, however, is fairly easy to conquer symbolically. The beginning of 'The Tower' externalises the issue by presenting it in images like 'A sort of battered kettle at the heel'. The speaker of the poem is shown as a mistreated dog to whose tail this object is attached by an unmentioned force. This speaker tries hard to demonstrate that old age is only an external phenomenon for him, a physical misfortune that his body

suffers. His imagination, he is keen to stress, is more lively than ever, and as if to prove that he indulges in an idyllic vision of his childhood days.³¹

The poem's second part then shows the vision as what it is: poetic artifice. The speaker is shown as a magician on top of a tower, calling for visions. The tower, whose importance is stressed by the title of the poem, recalls the élitist position of the chosen artist, his capacity for generalising judgments, but also his isolation. It is also a phallic symbol, equating once more poetic and sexual potency.³² Furthermore, it implicitly hints at the danger of the artist's symbolic vision: the view from the tower is an overview of its surroundings but hardly a glance at its own construction. The successful symbolic system remains blind towards its own devices.

The desired visions do indeed appear, and it is not difficult to explain why: the speaker has never left the realm of the imagination; his visions are memories.³³ All those fantasies stress the importance of perception over reality. Imagination inevitably transforms impressions, thus perception is never objective. And it must not be, because only imagination is capable of uniting dislocated impressions into the symbolic unity of fictions. This is the importance of the in themselves insignificant anecdotes of this section of the poem.

³¹This vision contains elements with erotic overtones: the rod, the worm (used as a symbol for the penis in 'The Chambermaid's Second Song'), and the ambiguous 'spend', a Victorian euphemism for ejaculation. No matter how important one takes these connotations to be, it is apparent that physical vitality and sexual power are connected.

³²See Alexander Norman Jeffares, 'Poet's Tower', in *The Circus Animals: Essays on W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 22-46 (p. 30).

³³A similar view expressed in opposite terms is 'the extreme openness of Yeats's concept of reality'; Theodor Klimek, *Symbol und Wirklichkeit bei W.B. Yeats*, Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik- und Literaturwissenschaft, 45 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1967), pp. 125-126.

Yet an absolute command of this imagination leads to a loss of objective views. The blind poets Homer and Raftery are impersonations of this principle. Absolute imagination, the triumph of the poet, is a tragedy, its result is nothing but madness (even though the poet himself seems miraculously exempt from the tragedy he creates). An ideal fusion of subjectivity and objectivity remains a paradoxical endeavour, as is shown in the symbol of the 'One inextricable beam' of moon- and sunlight. But it is not an objective state of unity that is desired, but again an imaginary one, as the verb 'seem' and the symbol as an illustration of the concept show. Yet this emphasis on perception rather than objective reality³⁴ does not resolve the tension created by the overwhelming imagination of the poem. Even the control of the poem's speaker is only based on an identity that is itself symbolic (the magician).

The end of the seventh stanza of the second part of 'The Tower' shows what happens when imagination takes over completely. Hanrahan (here in the position of the magician which is also that of the poet) transforms a pack of cards into a hare and hounds. The card game mirrors the text with the cards as its symbols. When these symbols take over, the structure of the text is disturbed; the result is mad discourse, the violation of rules, the end of the game. The little anecdote illustrates this danger, but threatens to become dangerous itself by growing out of proportions and has to be stopped. This can only be done by forgetting, i.e. countering the symbolic permanence.

The poem's third part then tries to achieve a balance between the necessary manifestation of the identity of its speaker through his recollections and the dangerous power of his imagination. Its technique is to juxtapose stock phrases and images from other Yeats poems with a great degree of pathos in what is declared to be the

³⁴Bell, 'Introduction: Modern Movements in Literature', in *1900-1930*, pp. 1-93 (p. 35).

speaker's will. Yet all he manages is to prepare 'his peace' with 'Poet's imaginings/And memories of love' again. The symbolic process offers no escape. Its orientation is towards myth, here the personal myth, the 'superhuman/Mirror-resembling dream'. After trying to break out of the symbolic structure, the poem has arrived full-circle at its beginning in the imagination again.

Consequently, the final part of the poem can only offer a pseudo-alternative. The jackdaw that builds its nest out of stolen material representing the poet and his use of eclectic material (in what Lévi-Strauss calls *bricolage*) is the materialist one. But never content with grey truth, Yeats also offers a transcendental escape which is a paradoxical turn against the rest of the poem: 'Now I shall make my soul'. The mechanisms of imagination shall be grasped with imagination. This is wishful thinking, and the poem is aware of it. It does not even try to present its reader with a symbol of this miraculously achieved state of permanence capable of countering old age and approaching death.

As 'Sailing to Byzantium' shows (not unimportantly the first poem in *The Tower*), any attempt to symbolise transcendental permanence is doomed to fail because of the structure of the symbol. It is always based on actual phenomena (the source of its *pictura*), and its construction already requires an identity that cannot catch itself in its own net. This is the reason why the golden bird of 'Sailing to Byzantium' fails in its purpose. It also explains why 'The Tower' leaves the reader with the naked 'soul' of its speaker.

Symbols cannot grasp phenomena outside human experience (thus death, for instance, can only be shown in its physical manifestation, not as its nature as an absence). Transcendental concepts like the soul can only be depicted in materialist

reductions (even if these are clever ones like the deliberately imprecise 'Shade more than man, more image than a shade', 'death-in-life and life-in-death', and 'Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,/More miracle than bird or handiwork' in 'Byzantium', Yeats's second attempt to envisage afterlife), in reifications.

The modernist crux concerning the symbol is the insight that it is indispensable in the constitution of the systems that create our notions of reality, history, and identity. At the same time it brings with it closure and paralysis (as the stone sculpture of the Chinamen in 'Lapis Lazuli', representing - of all things - life, shows).³⁵ When symbolic coherence is blasted, the result is the collapse of semantic structures, mad and chaotic discourse in which the remnants of the symbols function as metaphors and metonymies.

In his last poems Yeats laments the loss of securities (especially that of poetic inspiration) which is always the consequence of the abandonment of coherent symbolic systems.³⁶ A poem like 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' illustrates this loss; the connection between the source of visions and the poet has vanished: 'my ladder's gone'. What is left are the now disconnected symbols of a poetic career. Yet slyly Yeats tries to preserve one last intact symbol, that of the heart. But even this is now in a rather sad state ('the foul rag-and-bone shop').

The second alternative for an inadequate symbolism is implied in another very late poem, 'The Long-Legged Fly'. It, too, consists of fragmented images that were

³⁵On the danger of sterile and petrified symbols see Bernard Levine, *The Dissolving Image: the Spiritual-esthetic Development of W.B. Yeats* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), pp. 21-22.

³⁶Bloom puts it this way: 'The poet is in despair for the lack of a theme, but he has gone beyond the possibility of finding a fresh one', in *Yeats*, p. 457.

once part of Yeats's symbolic system. Yet the fly of the poem's title, although not really a fully-fledged symbol itself, at least knows how to react in the face of all this chaos. It stubbornly keeps its position on the stream whose pace and currents it can ignore. Its mind is fixed on silence.

The path is cleared for the ahistorical modernist myth, capable of integrating the fragments of a shattered Western culture. As will be shown below, myth feeds on dissolved symbolic systems and thus gives them a new meaning within its own concept - which knows nothing of the dangers that threaten the symbol. Like a completely closed symbolic system, yet much more universal and untroubled by problems of concepts in its in-built blindness towards itself, it fills the silence left behind by the crumbling of symbolic certainties with its own mighty voice.

IV. From Metaphor to Metonymy: T.S. Eliot's Poetry

1. The Birth of Modernism: *La Machine Célibataire*

T.S. Eliot is the first poet in this study whose works leave no doubt which tradition they are part of. His works are icons of modernism. They exhibit the structures that have become associated with the modernist tendency of responding to the 'fragmented reality' so particularly poignant in the years between the two world wars. Two of these features, metaphor and metonymy and their relation and role within the development of the aesthetics of modernism, will be discussed in this chapter.

Eliot's poems also mark the beginning of what is conventionally considered to be 'classical modernism' (in itself an oxymoron, since modernism can be defined as anti-classicism). They constitute a break in their relation with the preceding standards of English poetry, a radical rupture. In this they reflect the modernist tendency of denying any indebtedness to past traditions. This denial of its status as just another development in the history of literature is a new phenomenon in its radicalism. Modernism tries to present itself as generated out of itself, as a *machine célibataire*.¹ This tendency of presenting itself as father- and especially motherless

¹'Celibate machine' is a central term in Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem & Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984); see esp. pp. 16-22. It stands for the seeming production of

(the latter has implications on modernism as an exclusively male project, an issue that will be discussed in the chapter on psychoanalysis and modernist poetry), as a paradoxical production out of its own pocket, shows modernism's roots in the Enlightenment, the first movement in Western intellectual history to give itself its own rules and premises. The modernist myth of its own 'immaculate conception' is thus also an echo of the dominance of industrial capitalism which evolved out of Enlightenment ideas. In a world in which everything becomes a commodity, even one's history is no longer a matter of fate, but of acquisition. This influences modernist poetry on various planes. Yet it remains a simulation. Modernism is indeed infatuated with tradition; one of its characteristics is the use of traditional structures in montage and collage techniques, as quotations that is.

In that respect, it is particularly interesting that modernism with its stress on the threatened role of subjectivity actually shows this subjectivity in almost unlimited control. It is presented as capable of drawing a line where it would like to see its own limits of manifestation. This tendency of strengthening the role of the subject while showing it as endangered will reappear in the course of this study and will eventually help to delineate one of the limits of modernism.

Modernism's view of itself as a *machine célibataire* has severe implications for its self-reflective potential. Here, its loss of a history, a tradition, eventually every form of reality outside the texts which could act as a point of orientation is progressively turned into a denial of an outside altogether. One of the basic failures of modernism is transformed into its primary achievement. Its virtue is that of

the subject by or its confusion with the 'desiring machine' which represents libidinal urges (p. 17).

blindness: modernism is constantly in danger of losing control because of its limited self-criticism which, paradoxically enough, is brought about by an over-emphasis on self-reflection, by its fixation on its material, its constructive aspect. This explains in part the drift of so many modernists towards fascism. This fatal weakness is only the most drastic result of a universalism that sets in when any means of comparison have vanished. Lyotard would say that modernism with its restrictions to its very own structures is the prototypical example of a meta-narrative which inevitably becomes totalitarian and eventually terroristic.²

This seems to be a rather radical claim when it comes to Eliot's oeuvre. Obviously, here is a poet who is concerned with very personal failures that correlate with a hostile and fragmented reality, a writer of 'reflections from a damaged life' - to use the subtitle of Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. It remains to be seen if out of the personal achievements of his works more general features of modernism can be extracted.

2. The Metaphor: Its Structure and Impact

The question of the role of metaphor is as old as the human concern with language as man's most developed means of manifestation. The particular problem concerning the metaphor is that it is not only a figure of speech, but also a considerable cognitive force.

²Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington & Brian Masumi, *Theory and History of Literature*, 10 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); see in particular 'Narratives of the Legitimation of Knowledge', pp. 31-37.

From a purely linguistic point of view, the metaphor is a displacement of signifiers. But - unlike the symbol - this displacement is not a substitution, but a synthesis. The metaphor merges the associations of two signifiers, their paradigmatic fields. For instance, the sentence 'He is a lion' takes the associations of majesty and strength that the signifier 'lion' conventionally contains and places them on a particular person. The merger is motivated by a semantic similarity (the Greek word *metaphora* even means 'translation').³

This union, however, also has an impact on the way in which the objects from which the signifiers derive are perceived. A lion as well as the person described by the metaphoric statement achieve a new status through their metaphoric coupling. Eva Feder Kittay remarks in her comprehensive study of the metaphor that this cognitive aspect was already noticed by Aristotle. She summarises his ideas in his *Topics* as follows:

as argumentation, metaphorical expression is always obscure because metaphor results in the same object being placed in two different genera, neither of which includes the other. If a genus is regarded as a perspective upon an object, metaphor results in the placing of an object in two perspectives simultaneously. From this juxtaposition results a reconceptualization, sometimes permanent, more frequently transient, in which properties are made salient which may not frequently have been regarded as salient and in which concepts are reorganized both to accommodate and to help shape experience.⁴

Thus, metaphor not so much depicts a similarity of objects, but creates this similarity.

'Eliot was not comparing anything to anything when he promised to show us fear in

³Link, *Literaturwissenschaftliche Grundbegriffe*, p. 149.

⁴Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*, Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 4.

a handful of dust’, writes David A. Cooper.⁵And Kittay claims that ’the opening to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", as much as any metaphor, creates a similarity rather than record an antecedent one’.⁶

Kittay suggests the following structural outline of the metaphor, using as her example the ’Bees of England’ from Shelley’s poem ’Song to the Men of England’:⁷

TERM:	/bi:z/
	the concept of bees
referent: some actual bees in the world	
METAPHOR:	
the TERM ’bees’	/bi:z/
	idea of bees and their social hierarchy
the idea of workers (and their social and economical hierarchy)	

In the analysis of modernism, this construction of new similarities is a central aspect. All discussions of modernism as a mere mimetic depiction of a fragmented reality tend to ignore this creative potential. In the analysis of the ambiguous role of personality in modernist poetry, the treatment of the metaphor can indeed give some of the most central answers. Still, it remains to be seen whether there is a particularly modernist way of employing metaphors. The title of this chapter hints at the suspicion that the role of the metaphor is a threatened one in modernist poetry, that its status is

⁵David A. Cooper, *Metaphor*, Aristotelian Society Series, 5 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 184.

⁶Kittay, *Metaphor*, p. 18

⁷Kittay, *Metaphor*, p. 29.

liminal and eventually shifting towards a related, though different structure, the metonymy, whose outline will be drawn after the discussion of the metaphors of Eliot's early poetry up to *The Waste Land*.

3. Metaphors in Eliot's Early Poetry

One of the most striking features of Eliot's poems in *Prufrock and Other Observations* of 1917 is the dominance of what Jürgen Link calls the 'daring metaphor'. According to his structuralist model, daring metaphors fuse two images of such remote origins as to make the area in which they overlap almost empty of mutual associations (when it is completely empty, he calls the structure an 'absolute metaphor').⁸ The famous opening lines of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' contain the most renowned example of this technique in Eliot's works:

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;⁹

The lines contain one straightforward metaphor, the term 'spread' applied to 'evening', and a simile that compares this evening to an anaesthetised patient. Yet, as Kittay rightly remarks,

In simile, the 'like' is itself a metaphor. Thus metaphor is not merely one 'among endless devices'; it is the pragmatic device for pointing out analogies and making comparisons which cross the bounds of our usual categories and concepts. This is what gives import to Black's contention that metaphors do

⁸Link, *Literaturwissenschaftliche Grundbegriffe*, p. 150.

⁹All quotations derive from T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1985, ¹1974).

not describe pre-given similarities', but rather create the similarities which they bespeak.¹⁰

One of the features that distinguishes the simile from the metaphor is the fact that the simile foregrounds the textual identity that creates it whereas the metaphor, although created by the same identity, hides its origin. In this respect, the similes in Eliot's early poems are connected with the poems' preference for coherent, but ironically disfigured narrators.

The lines just quoted actually contain a double metaphor. Its effect is highly convincing as a rhetorical device. The reasons for this are easy to see: the daring metaphors correspond to the perception of reality by the modern mind as an arrangement of non-compatible sensations and impressions. The poem delivers us the modern head 'brought in upon a platter' (to use the allusion to the biblical story of Jochanaan in 'Prufrock'). Yet this should not deceive us about the status of these images: they are not so much mimetic (i.e. they do not represent reality) as cognitive (in the same way as 'He is a lion' does not point out an actual physical similarity, but the way in which the person is perceived). They represent mental states, but these mental states are also in turn created by their depiction in the structures of Eliot's poems.

This feature, the creation of mental landscapes which are often expanded into themes and are taken by many critics to represent directly the turmoil of either the Great War or the inter-war years will crop up again and again not only in Eliot, but also in Pound's works. It is important to keep this interrelation between perception and

¹⁰Kittay, *Metaphor*, p. 19.

artistic creation - or rather the blurred borderlines between the two - in mind for an evaluation of the modernist treatment of tradition.

In Eliot's 'Prufrock' these clusters of metaphors can be interpreted as symptoms of a universal development. They illustrate the growing autonomy of the world of objects which in turn leads to a questioning of the autonomy of the subject which constitutes itself with the help of the objects that surround it and form its *Lebenswelt* [the world one lives in], to use a term important in modern philosophy, especially for the phenomenologists, the theorists of the interaction between subject and objects via perception.

The evening becomes anthropomorphised at the beginning of 'Prufrock', only to be instantly declared to be passive, drugged, and helpless, the very image of human subjectivity threatened by the growing dominance of the objects that surround it. These objects, like the 'certain half-deserted streets' that become '*muttering* retreats' and 'Streets that *follow* like a tedious argument' (my emphases), gain a life of their own. They are suddenly filled with malicious intentions. Their 'insidious intent' forces the speaker of 'Prufrock' to an overwhelming question which is apparently central to the poem, since it crops up at various strategic points of the text.

Balachandra Rajan claims that it is related to a very general theme in Eliot's works, his 'life-death ambiguity', as he calls it. True living presupposes the acquisition of knowledge through experience. Yet this knowledge is shocking.¹¹ Rajan does not go on to explain the reason for the shocking nature of knowledge. But from what has been said so far, it is easy to guess that the shock lies in the insight that all the efforts

¹¹Balachandra Rajan, *The Overwhelming Question: A Study of the Poetry of T.S. Eliot* (Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 8-9.

of the subject to constitute itself via actions and objects only ever prove that it remains attached to the world of objects and cannot attain true autonomy. The most elaborate attempt to become a fulfilled subject, i.e. to live, only leads to the ultimate dissolution in death. Death and also forms of losing consciousness and thus control in sleep, anaesthesia and sexual activity prove that subjective autonomy remains a fiction. In his later works, Eliot turns this knowledge of the fictionality of the subject into the basis of a religious framework which ultimately helps him to overcome the serious lack of subjective autonomy.

In his early poems, however, there is no remedy for this deficiency which seems to derive as much from external factors as from internal failures of the protagonists of the miniature dramas of Eliot's poems. 'Do I dare?' is the continual question of the speaker in 'Prufrock', but his question is related to very physical manifestations of bodily decline - like thinning hair. Again, perception unites psychological dispositions and physical reality, and in this respect it becomes clear that it is not important whether the speaker in 'Prufrock' is indeed ageing or just a hypochondriac. The images he employs to describe his position are indeed metaphors, even if their status often remains hidden:

Time to turn back and descend the stair,
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair--
 (They will say: 'how his hair is growing thin!')
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to my chin,
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin--
 (They will say: 'How his arms and legs are thin!')

These lines could be seen as a rather realistic self-description of the speaker. They are indeed a fairly complex metonymy, too. But a closer inspection will show that most of the elements of the description exhibit exactly those features that constitute the problem of the growing autonomy of objects: the hair is growing thin

(a very subtle pun), the collar is mounting. And nowhere is any trace of an active interference of the subject with these objects which so apparently constitute it to be found. The objects are in control. Even worse, the constitution of the subject is only possible through the comments of the onlookers who are not judging its particular values but only its external appearance in objects (the arms, the hair).¹²

This interference of objects with the life of the subject finds its most drastic expression in the line 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons', although here, for once, the subject appears to be in control. This control, however, is only fictional, since what is taken control of cannot be controlled. It is time that the line is concerned with. This time, according to the philosophy of Bergson, whose lectures Eliot attended in Paris, is only conceivable as space for a mind raised in the Western metaphysical tradition. This space again has all the qualities of the dominant object.

The recurring images of time in its various shapes, the 'fulfilled time' of the biblical *Ecclesiastes*, the 'unfulfilled time' of mechanical repetition, as well as the potentially fulfilled time of individual existence depicted in the images of walks, visits, stairs, all co-exist in 'Prufrock'. Yet this co-existence is not a harmonious one, but creates tension. Since there is no hierarchy of concepts of time, all of them strive to become dominant. Indeed, it is not always easy to judge which concept of time each action represents. Is the walk suggested at the very beginning of the poem (but never actually undertaken) an example of fulfilled time? Certainly not. But could it hint at potential fulfilment - just like the overwhelming question - or is it only an

¹²There is a recurring association of hair and arms (and also hair on arms) with eroticism in Eliot's poems (as in 'La Figlia Che Piange'). The use of arms and hair in such a derogatory description in 'Prufrock' can thus be read as a hint at the speaker's (imagined) loss of erotic attraction.

endlessly recurring ritual utterly devoid of meaning? The poem gives no answer to this question, and that is its most tragic aspect.

For the metaphors in a poem like 'Prufrock', the instability of the time schemes creates problems on a structural level. Metaphors seem to exist outside time, since they are a fusion of paradigms which coexist simultaneously and know no distance on the syntagmatic axis. Yet if objects that form the sources of metaphors necessarily exist within time, and this time even becomes an object itself, the notion of a timeless realm (which is reminiscent of Yeats's 'timeless moment') becomes highly dubious. Time itself enters the ranks of objects, but by doing so it at least partly robs the texts of their potential to depict perceptions in metaphors, because it introduces an internal spatial distance within metaphors that drives them closer to metonymies. The observation made in the self-description of the speaker of 'Prufrock' recurs throughout Eliot's works.

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?...

ask some lines in 'Prufrock' that describe this dilemma. The images strive to become a metaphor (of loneliness, hopelessness, perhaps even decay and exploitation, the de-humanisation of modern life), yet they remain a metonymy, even one that stresses that - in spite of its description of subjectivity as endangered or indeed absent - it is still the manifestation of such a subjectivity. It is the fiction of a speaker. The modernist crux concerning personality and impersonality will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on Ezra Pound.

4. Metonymy: Fragmentation as Chance and Defeat

Metonymy means the displacement of signifiers on the syntagmatic axis of texts. It can either describe the relation of fragmented parts of an image or a figure of speech that crop up in various parts of a text or a fragmented image that represents something more complex than itself (as in the *pars pro toto*). The Greek term *metonymia* translates as 'exchange of names'. The effect of the metonymy on the reader can be twofold: a consistent metonymic structure creates the impression of a tightly-knit argumentative unit, a kind of organic coherence of the text, whereas incoherent, far-fetched, or too radically reduced metonymies produce ambiguity, obscurity, or even illegibility.

In all cases, the reader is forced to supplement the missing syntagmatic links. In the case of the coherent metonymy, this supplementation results in a near-perfect simulation of coherence. In all other cases, there are either semantic overlappings (creating ambiguity), gaps in the semantic network (creating obscurity) or even doubts concerning the adequacy of the applied code of translation (leading to the illegibility of a text).¹³

In Eliot's oeuvre, there is a tendency for metonymies to become more and more radical, until - in a poem like *The Waste Land* - the metonymies actually become the most important structural feature of the text and the whole poem can be regarded

¹³Riffaterre, *Text Production*, pp. 9-12.

as an extended metonymy. In his earlier poems, metonymies are employed in order to give a pattern, even a temporal structure to the texts ('Rhapsody on a Windy Night' is the finest example).

In 'Prufrock', the structuring metonymy is that of the street scenes which crop up again and again depicting various times of the day (again, time is clearly related to space in the manner of Bergson's theories). In 'Portrait of a Lady', the seasons of the year form this pattern, each one with an attribute that is itself a recurring image in Eliot's works: the winter of its beginning is linked to the familiar smoke and fog, the spring of its second part to lilacs (which, like many flowers in his poems, hint at eroticism), summer - also in part two - to the sound of a broken violin, music representing memory and potential fulfilment, yet here 'out-of-tune'; eventually the autumn of its third part to the image of the walk.

In 'Prelude' once more the times of the day are depicted in varying street scenes or voyeuristic glimpses into houses. In this poem, the clearest representation of time as object - which is then in turn anthropomorphised - can be detected: 'The winter evening settles down' (the first line of part I) and 'Morning comes to consciousness' (the corresponding line of part II). These are then mirrored by the corresponding third and fourth part of the poem which thus achieves a perfectly symmetrical shape. Here it is a woman and a man who are described in exactly the same positions as the preceding evening and morning. Eliot's poems not only turn the perception of modern reality into psychological landscapes, they also function in a diametrically opposed way and transform individual psychology into objective states.

Eliot's own theory of the 'objective correlative', the linking of intellectual notions with images from life or memory, should thus be taken as somewhat more

radical than Eliot himself would have believed. He defines the term in the following way:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words a set of objects, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.¹⁴

What his concept neglects is that not objects or events, but only their representations in signifiers appear in works of art. This representation and the choice and meaning of signifiers is already governed by conventions which are not only personal but also collective. Still, these signifiers do not automatically relate to any given reality (not even a psychological one), but they form this reality which in turn influences their shape and choice. They are metaphors and metonymies, and like those both visual and cognitive. Yet, for all its shortcomings, Eliot's 'objective correlative' remains a splendid example of the growing awareness of the importance of objects in the formation of subjective identity.

If the metonymy acts as a structuring and organising device in Eliot's early poetry by relating time and space, it fulfills a rather different function when it comes to the representation of individuals. Here, the metonymy prevents characters from achieving coherence. Indeed, it very often keeps them in a state in which one can hardly call them personalities at all, where they are the battered victims of a reality that does not know and much less permits fulfilment. What interferes with any possible development towards 'whole' personalities are not only objects, but also -

¹⁴This is the famous passage from Eliot's essay *Hamlet* of 1919, reprinted in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, edited by Frank Kermode (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1984, 1975), pp. 45-49 (p. 48).

equally turned into objects, reified that is - other people. '*L'enfer, c'est les autres*' [hell is other people], Sartre's famous statement, also applies to Eliot's works.

One of the reasons for this has already been observed in 'Prufrock': the constitution of identity is only possible through the observations and value-judgements of others. Yet these others are just as fragmented as the individual that relies on them - and they in turn rely on the perception of others, including the incomplete individual at the beginning of the chain. This correlates with Lacan's concept of desire as the continual displacement on the chain of signifiers. There is no fulfilment to be found in 'the Other', yet this other remains the necessary point of orientation for the constitution of the individual self.

On a structural level, this tragic incompleteness of characters is depicted by the metonymy in Eliot's poems. The speaker of 'Prufrock' is represented by his thinning hair, his pathetic arms and legs, in the passage already quoted. Women (the favourite 'Other' in Eliot) are presented as their hair, their arms (sometimes full of flowers - a further displacement) or - usually a derogatory gesture - their smell. A poem which depicts this struggle of two identities in their mutually exclusive constitution very drastically is the rarely discussed 'Hysteria', Eliot's only collected prose poem.

In 'Hysteria', a male speaker describes his feelings when faced with the laughter of the woman who has accompanied him to a restaurant or tea-room. This woman is presented as an extended metonymy: 'her laughter', 'her teeth', 'her throat', 'her breasts'. In what can be read in Freudian terms as a prototypical description of castration anxiety, the speaker imagines himself swallowed up by the laughter of the woman and then undertaking a masochistic journey through 'the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles' in the first two sentences of the piece.

The structure of these sentences, the first consisting of two long parts, the second of four short ones, corresponds to the structure of violent laughter as well as to that of sexual intercourse. In this respect, it is interesting that a particular stress is placed on the special talents of the woman's teeth (thus creating the image of the *vagina dentata*, the vagina with teeth, one of the most powerful allegories of male fears), and also on the transformation of the speaker's 'I' in the process. It moves from being 'aware' via 'becoming involved', 'being part', being 'drawn in', 'inhaled' to being eventually 'lost' and 'bruised'.

This is the perfect description of the most radical failure of the constitution of the self, a failure that is even more devastating since it occurs in connection with the one activity that should ideally represent the perfect way of affirmation for the self, its relationship with others, here even with that special other, the partner in a sexual relationship. The failure happens because this partner is perceived as fragmented; not as a subject, but as a succession of objects which do not form a whole, but merely an abyss.¹⁵ The speaker himself is not presented as a subject either, but becomes more and more objectified in the course of events.

When the poem returns from the psychological landscape of its first two sentences to a realistic description of the setting, there are still reverberations of the process just undergone. The waiter who tries to usher the two embarrassing guests into the garden, he being the only other male character of the poem and the only one

¹⁵Ruth Nevo's remarks on *The Waste Land* fit equally well as a description of the structural attitude of 'Hysteria': '[...] disunification, or desedimentation, or dissemination (to use Derrida's terminology) is the *raison d'être* of the poem; [...] in it the strategies of self-consumption, *mise en abyme*, and influence anxiety can be inspected at large'; 'The Waste Land: Ur-Text of Deconstruction', *New Literary History*, 13 (1982), 453-461 (pp. 454-455).

described in his physical appearance, is elderly and has trembling hands. The poem's images of masculinity are as negative as its descriptions of the feminine.

The final sentence of the text which shows the speaker again in ironic control of the scene nonetheless states that the effect of the occurrence is not merely restricted to the speaker's psyche, but also influences his perception of reality: it is shattered and lies in fragments. The very last subclause of the poem sheds a self-reflective light on its constitution: the poem itself is indeed nothing but the subtle attempt to gather the fragmented impressions of an event (and it is not important whether this event is fictional or not, since it is a psychological one) into a coherent shape.

If Freud's descriptions of hysteria are to be trusted and hysteria results from libidinal impulses prevented from reaching their goals,¹⁶ then this short poem is indeed the description of an unusual, because masculine, hysteria of its speaker (the term 'hysteria' derives from the Greek *hustera*, meaning 'womb'). His desire is at the same time sexual and directed towards his partner as it is pointed towards the establishment of his own identity. Both fail, primarily because their means of manifestation, language, intervenes. The metonymy which can be an adequate or indeed the only way of coming to terms with a fragmented reality brings with it serious implications for the establishment of identity. The inevitable interrelation of a notion of reality and a concept of the self via metonymic descriptions is brought to its utmost refinement in what is generally regarded as Eliot's most radical poem, *The Waste Land*.

¹⁶Compare the case study of 'Dora' in 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria', in Freud, *Case Studies I*, edited by Angela Richards & Albert Dickson, The Pelican Freud Library, 8, pp. 31-164.

5. Absence as Structure: *The Waste Land*

As an elaborate and repetitive device, the metonymy fulfills two functions in modernist poems. It depicts a fragmentation of perception (which can in turn be related to a fragmented reality which it in part constructs as well), but it also creates a new coherence, one that is unlike the linear structure of conventional narratives, but rather resembles a network or - to use a post-structuralist concept - a rhizome. One of the central problems of modernist poetry is indeed its attempt to overcome the traditional narrative, the epic tradition which brings with it a coherent notion of characters and personalities (easily visible in the epic heroes) as well as a linear view of history. Both of these notions had been made oblivious by the experience of the ever-increasing speed of modern life in a late industrial society as well as by the culmination of the dissolution of these traditional certainties in the most radically unsettling experience in history so far, the Great War.

Still, the abandonment of the epic tradition proved much more difficult than the early attempts of the modernists suggested. Imagism, for example, had thought to overcome the traditions of its poetic predecessors by simply refusing to develop coherent arguments. A single image was meant to be sufficient, and narrative was to be avoided at all costs. Yet the price that Imagism had to pay for its radical reduction of poetic technique was its inability to make statements. As its name implies, images were all it produced, and these in turn displayed tendencies to become merely ornamental.

Mere ornaments were not acceptable for the modernists who were all too keen on promoting their views of history and culture, in some cases religion as well. New techniques of writing epic poems had to be developed which would avoid the pitfalls of traditionalism, since the defeat of tradition was programmatically taken to be the offspring of the modernist movement. In this struggle, the metonymy proved the most reliable ally.

In Eliot's *The Waste Land*, metonymies are the structural bases of the three dominant underlying textual layers of the poem: its landscapes, its characters, and its quotations. The landscapes of the poem are the desert (already implied in the name of the poem), the garden (the antithesis of the desert), the city, the river, and the sea, all of which appear in various connections. It proves difficult to point out exactly which scenery is connected with which part of the poem, for all of them display various settings - with the notable exception of 'Death by Water', the shortest part and the only one that features one scenery and one protagonist only.

The other four parts contain recurring images of sceneries in various combinations. Not unlike props in a theatre production, they crop up again and again and are given new semantic importance by their ever-changing combinations. In part I of the poem, 'The Burial of the Dead', the desert scene of its very beginning is followed by a reminiscence set in a restaurant in Bavaria. This in turn is replaced by another desert scene, followed by the prototypical garden scene of Eliot's early poems, the one featuring the woman with flowers in her arms, the 'Hyacinth girl'. The last two paragraphs of this part take place in a nondescript setting for Madame Sosostris and a city scenery that already contains hints of the important image of the river (London Bridge is mentioned and the verb 'flowed' is used repeatedly). The very end

of its last part, however, returns to the images of the garden and the desert which it manages to link in the potent image of the planted and flowering corpse.

The effect of this metonymic creation of settings is twofold and seemingly contradictory. The poem refuses to create a coherent realistic setting. There is no landscape that could possibly fit its description. Yet at the same time the text manages to build its own reality, one that is by various hints shown to be a mental one: 'Unreal city', the 'mixing' of 'memory and desire'.

At the same time, the elements of this psychological landscape also have clear symbolic value. As indicated by the rather funny sequence featuring Madame Sosostris, there is an underlying significance to all of these settings. Her cards show for the first time the Phoenician sailor who reappears in 'Death by Water'. The 'Lady of the Rocks' called 'Belladonna' (literally 'beautiful woman', but also a poisonous plant) is related to the ambiguous descriptions of women as desirable but also potentially threatening. The crowds of people walking round in a ring correspond to the anonymous masses flowing through London as well as to all characters in the poem engaged in repetitive activities without clear goals (the most drastic ones certainly the typist and the carbuncular young man engaged in their dreary love-making).

Thus the landscape metonymies of the poem are interrelated to form a symbolic landscape peculiar to the poem itself. They also create the mental landscape of the text that can be seen as connected with the modern mind as well as the mental state of its creator, Eliot. Furthermore, the metonymies of the poem's setting also establish connections with the characters that inhabit them, and these connections in turn create new semantic structures with potential symbolic values. The fragmentation

brought about by the excessive use of metonymies leads to the development of a highly complex semantic network.

The same observation can be made in the analysis of the characters of the text. There are plenty of them who only crop up once and are then seemingly forgotten (like the speaker at the beginning of 'The Burial of the Dead', called 'Marie' by her cousin; Madame Sosostris; the character named 'Stetson'; the hysterical woman in 'A Game of Chess'; the pub characters of its end (Bill, Lou, May); Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant; Elizabeth and Leicester). There are others that reappear, either clearly identified or thinly disguised, such as the Phoenician sailor, the Fisher King, Tiresias, and Christ. Still, despite Eliot's claim in the 'Notes on the Waste Land', there is no central character of the poem. Like the settings, the characters are metonymic figures whose interrelation establishes their semantic potential.

Tiresias - whom Eliot himself believes to be the central character - is not only blind but also androgynous. The Fisher King, so popular with critics who see the poem as an elaboration of the Grail legend, does not crop up in parts two and four of the text.

The unidentified voice who is the dominant narrator of the poem does not seem to belong to any identifiable character, but keeps hovering between all characters. Its in-between status makes it the expression of the network of metonymic interrelations rather than any particular part of this network. In this respect, it corroborates Michael Beehler's claim that one of Eliot's main achievements is the expression of the relational status of points of views in his works:

For Eliot, 'facts are not, in the realist sense, given; they are produced by ... a "system"' or by an ineluctable non-neutral, situational point of view. The conditions of that point of view are, according to Harold Joachim, unexpressed and yet implied, and are acknowledged by Eliot to be 'irreducible'. What

Michaels emphasizes about Eliot's pragmatism is the understanding of facts, of the universally and immanently real or basic, as 'determined by local "conditions" whose "transcendence" involves not their theoretical absorption into a higher whole but what might instead be called a lateral movement from one set of local conditions to another,' with each locality being 'in no way more self-conscious, no more able to be reflective about its subjectivity' than any other.¹⁷

A similar observation can be made concerning the third dominant metonymic structure of the poem, that of intertextual references, its literary allusions. They also crop up again and again, form patterns, but no identifiable statements, much less a fixed 'meaning'. Their foremost function is the development of a common cultural basis between poem and reader, the notion of a shared cultural background. They thus fulfill the functions of cultural clichés in Riffaterre's terminology.¹⁸ In the case of *The Waste Land*, the reader-controlling function of allusions is closely connected with the poem's theme of cultural fragmentation and decay.

Maud Ellmann calls the poem's attitude towards its cultural heritage 'blasphemy', which she defines as 'affirmation masked as denial'.¹⁹ This indeed makes sense when one recalls that the poem exerts an ambiguous influence on its material, language (the medium which transfers cultural heritage into the text). Its reliance on the metonymy fragments the sources it uses. At the same time the poem creates new relations between the fragments, its own semantic network - or rather it tempts its reader to perform this act of creation. This explains why *The Waste Land*

¹⁷Michael Beehler, *T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and the Discourse of Difference* (Baton Rouge & London: Indiana State University Press, 1987), p. 16. (Beehler is referring to an article by Walter Benn Michaels, 'Philosophy in Kinkaja: Eliot's Pragmatism' in Samuel Weber & Henry Sussman, eds, *Glyph 8* (Baltimore, 1981) in this quotation.)

¹⁸Riffaterre, *Text Production*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁹Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 95 (henceforth quoted in the text as *PI*).

has indeed become a prime example of a text hardly visible under the heap of interpretations it has engendered. Again, the poem creates the loss it laments (here: the loss of Western civilisation).²⁰ At the same time it counters this loss by the creation of its own reality. Harriet Davidson describes this ambiguous effect as follows:

First, the poem makes the reader experience the absence of expected connections. This reader-response observation capitalizes on the existential confusion which readers may feel and does not necessarily lead beyond the state of subject confronting object. Secondly, and more profoundly, the poem discloses absence ontologically as a state of the world, not as the state of a consciousness trying to know a world.²¹

This reality of *The Waste Land* derives much of its power from the ingenious linking mechanisms at work between its various layers of metonymic structures. All of its main forms of discourse, the intertextual one of references and allusions, the lyric one of landscapes and other settings, and the dramatic one of vivid characters not only form independent patterns of their own. They also melt into one another, so that the network thus created becomes very dense. The second part of the poem, 'A Game of Chess', provides a striking example: it starts with the lyric description of a boudoir into which suddenly the intertextual allusion to the myth of Philomel enters. This in turn is replaced by a dramatic sequence (although it consists most likely of a

²⁰Anthony L. Johnson takes the famous line 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins' to be a sign of this attitude: 'The line [...] is itself paradoxical. Nothing fragmented normally props up anything, least of all 'ruins'. The truth of the matter, surely, is that this is a case of reversed representation - representation by an opposite, in Freudian terminology. A true innuendo could be unscrambled if we reconstructed: 'I have used these fragments to break up my world picture'; in '"Broken Images": Discursive Fragmentation and Paradigmatic Integrity in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot', *Poetics Today*, 6, no. 3 (1985), 399-416 (pp. 413-414).

²¹Harriet Davidson, *T.S. Eliot and Hermeneutics: Absence and Interpretation in 'The Waste Land'* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 3 (henceforth quoted in the text as *E&H*).

monologue of the woman countered by the thoughts of her male partner). This dramatic outburst is followed rather abruptly by a very different allusion, this time to a music hall song, the 'Shakespeherian Rag', which then blends into a, once more dramatic, scene in a pub. The very end of this pub scene then very subtly becomes another literary quotation, the last words of mad Ophelia in *Hamlet*.

The merging of the various forms of discourse at work in the poem can be related to its inability to draw a borderline between an interior of the text and a 'reality' outside it. It functions like the mind of a neurotic, incapable of differentiating between fiction and reality; thus the egalitarian status of quotations, lyric reflections and realistic dramatic scenes. On the textual level, this corresponds to the extraordinary density of the mosaic of metonymies in the text whose overlappings create knots of meaning as well as serious gaps, the *Leerstellen* in Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader-response.²² These gaps derive from the combination of very distant fragments and signifiers as well as from their displacement all over the wide space of the text. *The Waste Land* has, as its title implies, indeed epic ambitions, although these are pursued in an unorthodox structural way. Johnson assesses it in the following way:

The path to be followed by the reader is not the discursive one of plot development, but that of a vertical ascent-descent through the text's stratification till resonance between identical signifier poles is set up.²³

²²In claiming that the metonymy is capable of forming coherent semantic networks I contradict Anthony L. Johnson's otherwise excellent article "'Broken Images'". He tries to demonstrate a polarity between paradigmatic integrity and syntagmatic fragmentation in the poem. This explains perhaps why he never uses the term metonymy in his essay, since it already implies that elements dispersed on the syntagmatic axis can also form coherent structures. Yet he also eventually arrives at the insight that the only true continuities of the text are to be found in its gaps. See in particular pp. 403-404.

²³Johnson, "'Broken Images'", p. 407.

A short example of the creation of semantic networks with metonymies will illustrate this claim: the episode featuring Elizabeth and Leicester in a barge gliding down the Thames in 'The Fire Sermon'. First of all, the episode is a reference. It derives directly from a sixteenth-century manuscript.²⁴ Yet its presentation takes the form of a lyric poem. The scenery evoked in the passage is the river, but it refers to the city as well (and a very modern city as can be glimpsed from the description 'The river sweats/Oil and tar'). The scene is familiar: the unsuccessful attempt to establish a functioning relationship between the sexes. It is set on the river (embodying time) in a barge (the fixed form, perhaps of the restrictions of society). Additionally, the sequence is interspersed with the refrain 'Weialala leia/Wallala leialala', an allusion to Wagner's *Ring der Nibelungen* where it is the song of the Rhine daughters.

The little sequence contains a metaphoric construction employing the three familiar forms of discourse, lyric, intertextual and dramatic (although here the interchange is silent, it is not less powerful). This construction is then metonymically linked with other parts of the poem. The frustrating sexual relationship, for instance, corresponds to the one in 'A Game of Chess', the love-making of the typist and the young man, and the rape also to be found in 'The Fire Sermon'. In this respect, it is perhaps not unimportant to note the ambiguous 'brisk swell' and 'Rippled' reminiscent of the masochistic fantasies in 'Hysteria'. The theme of the polluted river is connected with the flow of people in the 'brown fog of a winter dawn' in 'What the Thunder Said', more obviously with the description of the river at the beginning of 'The Fire Sermon' itself, bearing (significantly, since here the negation evokes presence in a

²⁴See Eliot's note to line 279 of *The Waste Land*: 'V. Vroude, *Elizabeth*, vol. I ch. iv, letter of De Quandra to Philip of Spain', *Collected Poems*, pp. 83-84.

very Freudian way) 'no empty bottles,/Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/Or other testimony of summer nights' (meaning, most probably, condoms) [my emphasis]. The Wagnerian interlude in turn relates the episode to the beginning of the poem where a quotation from *Tristan und Isolde* introduces the theme of unfulfilled desire.

Yet there are also the inevitable gaps in the metonymic network visible in the same sequence. The theme of social constraints entering as an obstacle into a relationship, evoked by the story of Elizabeth and Leicester, does not crop up anywhere else. Neither does the image of boats which master water, the important symbol of dissolution but also redemption in the poem.

The Waste Land combines the metaphoric approach (the first and constantly dominant metaphor is indeed its very title²⁵) with the metonymic and creates its discursive strategy out of their interactions and the tensions between them. The poem has indeed many different meanings in the sense that it is an open invitation to interpretation. But it is more than just an open, polysemic text. As Harriet Davidson points out, 'the poem seems to expose the conditions for the possibility of all interpretations of this text and any text' (*E&H* 5). It questions the very nature of

²⁵Calvin Bedient explains its function as follows: 'Already, as an allusion to the devastated land of Arthurian Grail romance, it distances us from the putatively actual, secular, if hardly less mythic city of Eliot's poem, with its London Bridge, Saint Mary Woolnoth's, honking horns, drying combinations, gramophones, cigarette ends, Shakespeherian Rag (an import from the *Ziegfeld Follies*), etc., etc. This presumptive metaphoricity continues within the body of the poem itself, holds sway there - so that, for instance, the phrase "A heap of broken images" anticipates by many lines a "naturalistic" itemization of the contents of the secular realm. Throughout, the metaphors act like preventive medicine, giving us a measure of immunity in advance to everything abject (which in this poem is everything we ordinarily think of as real)'; in *He Do the Police in Different Voices: 'The Waste Land' and its Protagonists* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 1.

interpretation and thus the relationship between text and reader and their status as interdependent object and subject.

The poem creates an almost musical sense of movement (which will be re-encountered in even more elaborate form in *Four Quartets*), yet it refuses to name, outline, or even support the belief in a goal of this movement. If it is a quest myth, it is

indeed that of interpretive being. The fertile land is created from the waste by the quest, but, as is evident from Jessie Weston's book, the quester in the myth generally does not know how to reach the object of the quest, certainly does not know how to reach the goal, and is usually unaware of what he has done to bring fertility to the land. Often asking questions is enough to fight the barrenness - no answers are necessary, because none are available. (*E&H* 113)

Its dislocation of firm expectations which are usually part of the reading-process, its questioning of the subject-object relation which underlies reading, takes away or rather lays bare the constitutive subjective basis of the reading-experience. It thus creates what Davidson calls a 'hermeneutic universe' (which corresponds to Heidegger's 'linguistic universe') (*E&H* 7), a world which is governed and created by interpretation rather than any firm transcendental ontological basis.

In doing that, it foregrounds and questions the conditions of its own production, and this makes it a milestone of modernism, indeed a crossroads from which the way leads either to the acceptance of this lack as the starting point of a new aesthetic, or to attempts to fight this lack with the means that have remained in the control of the artists, the reliance on their material, the retreat into the closure of their linguistic and hermeneutic world.

The threat of a poem like *The Waste Land* remains, no matter which traditions artists and critics have chosen to follow after it. It unveils the basic paradox of the determining forces of modern reality:

if the self is determined by language and language is determined by culture and culture is surely a human creation, then there is a lack of groundedness here - a continual deferral of the origin of meaning. (*E&H* 33)

The human world is created in the desire to escape the absence defining our existence. The symbols, myth, art, and all of society attempt, in the endless elaboration of a relational linguistic world, to cover the absence. Lacan identifies this human activity as the 'metonymy of desire,' which reveals our lack of wholeness and sufficiency even while it tries to hide this lack. Human life is a constant conjunction of death and desire to escape death. (*E&H* 103)²⁶

The transition from metaphor to metonymy in Eliot's works is a symptom of this attempt and the paradoxes created by it.

6. From Network to Pattern: *Four Quartets*

If 'Gerontion' marks Eliot's move from ironically relativistic characters to dislocated voices, or 'areas of consciousness', as Anthony L. Johnson prefers to call them,²⁷ and thus an important transition from metaphor to metonymy in his poems which eventually culminates in *The Waste Land*, then 'The Hollow Men' and *Ash-Wednesday* can be regarded as stages in the development from metonymic fragmentation to a new symbolic unity - whose nature will be analysed in this concluding section. Both 'The Hollow Men' and *Ash-Wednesday* exhibit two related

²⁶The reference attributed to Lacan actually derives from an article on Lacan by Jean Laplanche & Serge Leclaire, 'L'Inconscient', in *Les Temps Modernes*, 17 (July, 1961), 81-129.

²⁷Johnson, "'Broken Images'", p. 403.

features which become dominant in the symbolically most coherent of Eliot's poems, *Four Quartets*: repetition and self-reflection.

'The Hollow Men' surprises by the relative coherence of its narratorial voices. Although the visions of these voices are very similar to the fragmented reality of *The Waste Land*, the speakers are not only capable of naming themselves, they can also describe their position and their relation to the reality that surrounds them. Although their outlook is deeply pessimistic (and even apocalyptic, as the end of the poem demonstrates), they show an intact subject-object relation, something that is completely absent from *The Waste Land*. The reason for this restoration of subjectivity is twofold. On the one hand, subjectivity in the poem establishes itself *ex negativo*. It defines itself through its own destruction. On the other hand, it creates itself in the ritual, by repetition.

Repetition and anaphora abound from the poem's first lines onwards. Its monotonous rhythm supports its ritualist aspect.

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men

[...]
This is the dead land
This is the cactus land

[...]
The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley

The various ways of introducing repetition are ingenious. There is, for instance, the parody of the well-known children's rhyme 'The Mulberry Bush' at the beginning of part V:

*Here we go round the prickly pear
 Prickly pear prickly pear
 Here we go round the prickly pear
 At five o'clock in the morning.*

But the playful ditty with its more or less innocent connotations of old fertility rituals has been replaced by a very personal evocation of sexual frustration.²⁸

It is followed by one of the most intense passages in Eliot's poems, containing a minimum of words which are repeated over and over again. The central noun 'shadow' ends all stanzas. It questions the reality of the discussed concepts (idea, reality, motion, act, conception, creation, emotion, response, desire, spasm, potency, existence, essence, eventually descent) and unveils them as nothing but words, signifiers. This corresponds to the repeated 'Between' at the beginning of lines which is exchanged for the mere paratactic 'And' and eventually for 'Falls'. This is a concise description of the deconstructive attitude of Eliot's poems. Meaning is only established 'between' signifiers, through their connection ('And'), either on the paradigmatic or the syntagmatic level. Yet increasingly this connection fails, the result are mere gaps, absences into which the meaning of the texts together with their textual identities 'falls'.

That this ritual of negation is interspersed with excerpts from the liturgy throws an ambiguous light on the development of Christian concepts in Eliot's works. In the absolute lack that these lines depict, the repeated line 'Thine is the Kingdom' has obscure referents. Traditionally a reference to God, it represents the orthodox Christian hope for redemption in an afterlife which is not of this world. But in connection with the absolutely negative images of the text, the address can also be seen as an attack

²⁸See Grover Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*, second edition (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 106-107.

on Christian values - if the 'Kingdom' is regarded as just one of death's kingdoms in the poem. In both cases, the recourse to the absolute (whether it is God or death) is necessary to complement the enormous absence of meaning created in the text.²⁹

In *Ash-Wednesday*, repetition is even more dominant, and again this seems to be connected with a clearer focusing on a narrator. Its first part contains no less than eleven lines beginning with 'Because'. There are six cases of anaphoric doublings of first words in subsequent lines and even two examples of triple anaphoras. Part VI of the poem contains a similar cluster of anaphoras.

Its other parts highlight the second reason for the symbolist appearance of this poem. It contains metonymies which are not only repeated over and over again, but which can also be linked with symbolic concepts, and thus inhabit an intermediate realm between metonymy and symbol. The Lady of part II becomes associated with Dante's Beatrice, the speaker relates his own state to the sacrifice of Prometheus.³⁰ These are by no means all intertextual references or invitations to discover such cross-references similar to the allusions of *The Waste Land*. Yet what makes these metonymic patterns different from those of an open text like *The Waste Land* is exactly their underlying symbolism. They are all related to the now overtly Christian concepts of submission, sacrifice, humility, and redemption.

The transition from metonymic fragmentation and openness to a new symbolic unity is achieved through the vertical arrangement of metonymic structures. Their

²⁹See the discussion of the philosophical equivalent of the problem in Odo Marquard, 'The End of Fate? (Some Observations on the Inevitability of Things Over Which We Have No Power of Disposition', in: *Farewell to Matters of Principle: Philosophical Studies*, translated by Robert M. Wallace, Odéon (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 64-86 (p. 69).

³⁰See Grover Smith, *Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, pp. 136-139.

paradigms thus establish relations which - when the metonymies are carefully selected to fit this aim - form a unified message, eliminate overhanging and unconnected semantic elements and leave no more gaps of meaning. This explains why a poem like *Ash-Wednesday* seems more pleasant to many readers than *The Waste Land*: a poem with a re-established symbolic coherence created out of discursive fragments relocates the position of the reader and frees him from the exhausting task of positioning himself constantly. It no longer questions his role in the reading-process, his subjectivity and autonomy. In Roland Barthes' terms, it becomes a classical *readerly* work again - and is no longer a *writerly* one that lays bare the problems of its own constitution.³¹

In *Four Quartets* this shift from metonymic fragmentation to symbolic coherence is accomplished in an even more ingenious way. The text not only discusses the procedure, but tries to justify it at the same time. It starts with a philosophical discussion of time which sets the tone for the dominant theme of the poem, that of universal and individual history, their connection, and the consequences for the life of individual, nation, eventually mankind. Yet the problem of synchronising universal and individual history, the two time schemes already familiar from Eliot's earlier poems where they often appear in images of the ocean and the river, is also related to the problem of integrating dispersed metonymic structures into a coherent symbolic unity.

Semantically open dislocated metonymic structures which form rhizomes and networks with areas of higher semantic density but also gaps of meaning and thus

³¹Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), especially division I, 'Evaluation', pp. 3-4.

oscillate in the reading process (like those in *The Waste Land*) can be brought to a standstill when they are carefully superimposed onto one another and form a stable pattern of internal relations. The pattern resembles the symbolic systems analysed in Yeats's poetry. Still, the main difference between traditional symbolism and the symbolism in Eliot's later poems is that the latter is only internally motivated whereas the former derives its authority from its origin in transcendental extratextual concepts.

In his article on time in *Four Quartets* Ole Bay-Petersen describes the procedure as follows:

In *Four Quartets* the theme of time is associated throughout with the concept of a pattern which - like the still point - unites the temporal with the eternal. We have already glanced at the aesthetic pattern in which 'words or music reach/The stillness...' ('Burnt Norton'). This pattern is analogous with the external pattern. As Eliot writes in 'Burnt Norton': 'The detail of the pattern is movement...'. This implies that the pattern itself is still, and events that unfold in human time form tiny details in a pattern which attains significance and completeness only *sub specie aeternitatis* [...]³²

The time scheme thus created through mere internal motivation is indeed the traditional pre-modern one. Foucault calls it the belief in 'linear succession' and describes it in the following way:

[...] beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they [the historians] were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events.³³

³²Ole Bay-Petersen, 'T.S. Eliot and Einstein: The Fourth Dimension in *Four Quartets*', *English Studies*, 66, no. 2, 143-155 (p. 148).

³³Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, World of Man (London: Tavistock, 1974, ¹1972), p. 3.

The musical analogy evoked by the title of the poem corresponds to the notion that both past and future are contained in the present moment. Individual history is only a point on the axis of universal history located in a particular space (thus the titles of the four quartets: places of particular importance for Eliot; and the concentration on the interaction between place and personality in 'East Coker'). The notion that all of the quartets are linked and interact corresponds to the semantic congruences between the vertical layers of metonymic discourse within them. A stability and permanence is created that is reassuring, but at the same time isolated or even frigid. 'Love is itself unmoving' says a line in 'Burnt Norton' which describes this ambiguity.

The quasi-archaeological examination of the layers of history that form the history of mankind, a nation, and the individual eventually leads to a circular fatalistic view. 'East Coker' demonstrates the necessity of death and renewal for the continuity of life in its images of food and excrement, procreation and death as the sources of new life. An impersonal viewpoint is created which eventually strives towards a Nietzschean superhistoricism.

With 'The Dry Salvages' an even more cosmic tone enters the poem. In its evaluation of the qualitative nature of the continuity of the human race, a very pessimistic outlook is developed. Civilisation is depicted in the taming of streams (again the symbol of individual human life, here as an allusion to youth via the reference to Mark Twain's Mississippi). Its origin, however, and its eventual end are illustrated by the image of the sea, the great formlessness that also stands for universal time. The river as the individual text of life originates from and is eventually absorbed into the universal unity of dissolution, *parole* becomes *langue* again. Yet by outlining

this most universal concept of language, history, and reality, the text counteracts its very argument. It does not demonstrate a dissolution, but a constitution, that of a symbolic system.

That this symbolic system not only lacks motivation by any external force, but also exhibits a complete closure becomes evident in the final quartet, 'Little Gidding'. It is a deliberately retrospective summary of Eliot's entire poetic career, an evaluation of all the influences that have shaped his own poetic voice. The identity of 'Little Gidding' creates its own ghostly mirror-image in its dialogue with its *alter ego*, its compound other self. It thus attempts to counter the loss undergone in Lacan's 'mirror stage' by re-enacting and reversing the inevitable fragmentation of the self when entering the symbolic stage.

Although this process is constantly connected with the Christian notion of humility - which in turn derives from the insight that the seemingly permanent can easily turn out to be very transient indeed (an impression certainly influenced by the impact of World War II) - it is ultimately the expression of the same hubris that produced Yeats's line 'Now I shall make my soul'. The attempt to rescue a stable identity out of the fragmented reality of experience is one of the central aims of modernism. It ultimately leads to a closed system of poetic thought, one that, although it can appear in many shapes - such as the almost hysterical stress on the youthfulness of the imagination despite its losses in Yeats, or, in Eliot's case, the disillusioned humility of an ageing self that renounces something it never had or appreciated, desire and love - generates similar structures. All artistic attempts of the modernists which refuse to accept the irrevocable fragmentation of existence, the loss of firm points of reference, inevitably end up in concepts which, although only internally motivated,

become universalist and totalitarian. Thus the replacement of 'here' by 'England' in 'Little Gidding', of free verse by the traditional metre of *Piers Ploughman* in 'The Dry Salvages' and the echo of its beginning in 'Little Gidding'. The exchange of fragmented 'areas of consciousness' for a coherent speaker, in spite of his humility when faced with the fragmentation of reality, only disguises the arrogance of this constitution of a paradoxical identity of the text and a subjectivity within it *ex negativo*.

The transition from 'open' metaphoric and metonymic text to a 'closed' symbolic one can be detected *in nuce* in the beautiful opening lines of 'Little Gidding':

Midwinter spring is its own season
 Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
 Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.
 When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
 The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
 In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
 Reflecting in a watery mirror
 A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
 A glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
 Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
 In the dark time of the year. Between melting and freezing
 The soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell
 Or smell of living thing. This is the spring time
 But not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow
 Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom
 Of snow, a bloom more sudden
 Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
 Not in the scheme of generation.
 Where is the summer, the unimaginable
 Zero summer?

Already its very first term, 'Midwinter spring', confronts the reader with a metaphor which is both immediately convincing and immensely complex - whose metaphoric status is even discussed in line three: 'Suspended in time, between pole and tropic'.

It sets the tone for the paradoxical and yet complementary imagery of the section: the contrast between extreme cold and intense brightness and heat. It also already implies the notion of timelessness so crucial to the whole of *Four Quartets* which M.L. Rosenthal rightly calls 'the immanence of eternity'.³⁴ Timelessness can be achieved by the metaphor alone. Yet eternity requires transcendental prerequisites that place the temporary poems into a larger framework. Thus the expansion of mere apparition into epiphany: not merely 'sun flames on ice', but 'pentecostal fire'.

Individual anxiety, 'windless cold that is the heart's heat', is extended into the impersonal (and already vaguely Christian) image of 'soul's sap quivers'. Indeed both the individual and empirical reality are ushered out through the back door: 'There is no earth smell/Or smell of living thing'. The poem clears the space for a vision with clear biblical overtones: the miraculous blossoming of a hedgerow in winter (reminiscent of apocryphal stories of Mary and the flight to Egypt). Rosenthal describes the effect of the line accurately when he claims, 'The passage is more deceptive than the illusion it describes - an act of incantatory magic' (*SitU* 47). It creates a symbolic reality outside the text by linking its metaphors and metonymic images to established, namely religious, symbols, thus supplying them with an aura that is itself symbolic. The effects are impersonality and anti-realism - and this exempts the passage from rational scrutiny and closes it to interpretation. Rosenthal's correct yet almost entirely positive view of the poem supplies attributes whose quality appears more questionable in the context of the structural assessments of this study:

³⁴M.L. Rosenthal, *Sailing into the Unknown: Yeats, Pound, and Eliot* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 197 (henceforth quoted in the text as *SitU*).

Eliot's genius, in large part, lies in his ability to combine the language of the most evocative immediacy with hints of deep mysteries rooted in the subtlety of his own mind. He writes in *clear* riddles. (*SitU* 45-46)

The importance of the oxymoron (what is a 'clear riddle'?) will become evident in the evaluation of modernist poetry as a whole in the conclusion of this study. Other, less striking characterisations of this crucial part of *Four Quartets*, such as 'illusion', 'visionary joy', and 'efforts [...] to restore presecularist modes of thought' (*SitU* 46-49) - when seen in connection with Thomas Mann's critical questions concerning 'seeming' in modern art - show that the aesthetics of *Four Quartets* are in reverse gear. Back from modernist dissociation and fragmentation to a renewed mystical integrity which makes the drastic request for salvation possible that concludes this section of 'Little Gidding': 'Where is the summer, the unimaginable/Zero summer?', and supplies the authority for the didactic finale of the entire poem.

V. The Tensions of Modernism and Myth: Ezra Pound's Poetry

1. Magic or Deceit: Myth as Frame and Supplement

In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer claim that magician and trickster are the two positions left to man after his discovery of the autonomy of language. The magician tries to reconcile language and objective reality, the trickster accepts the rupture between word and reality and exploits the resulting possibilities to their utmost.¹

Michel Foucault develops a different, though not contradictory model of the history of the relation between language and reality. In *The Order of Things* he distinguishes three stages in the development of the sign. Phase one (from the Stoics to the Renaissance) is characterised by a tertiary structure of the sign which connects signifier, signified, and, thirdly, the *conjuncture*, their relation. The Renaissance fuses these three elements by stressing the aspect of relation which becomes associated with similarity and thus assumes aspects of both signifier and signified. This muddled, but still tertiary structure is then superseded in the classicist age (i.e. the 17th century) by

¹Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cummings (London: Verso, 1979); 'Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment', pp. 43-80 (pp. 60-62 (deception) & pp. 69-72 (magic)).

a binary concept deriving from clear notions of identity and difference.² This is the by now familiar compound of signifier and signified encountered in Saussure.

Derrida is one of many theorists who claim that the sign has undergone a further structural change in what could roughly be seen as analogous to the shift from modernity to modernism, i.e. in the process of the questioning of rationality by this very rationality. The signified has disappeared and left only the signifier.³

The consequences of these shifts are thorough. From being a mere mark attached to all things like a stigma, i.e. from being only material, language creates two new layers around itself by the introduction of the concept of similarity. One of those layers is the commentary created 'on top' of language by rearranging the given signs. The other is the text that is now postulated 'underneath' the signs as their origin and creator.⁴

Foucault goes on to explain that although the mysterious, quasi prelapsarian nature of language has continued to shine through its use, it cannot possibly be reconstructed. Although he tentatively grants literature at least the capacity to remind us of this nature, he is careful to point out that neither a hermeneutic nor a materialist (i.e. semiotic) approach to language and literature can avoid falling into either the

²Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, translated from the French, World of Man (London: Tavistock, 1970), pp. 42-43.

³Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 278-293 (pp. 280-281).

⁴Foucault, *Order of Things*, pp. 40-41.

category of the commentary or what he later labels the critique of texts. Every form of interpretation is caught in the classicist position.⁵

Seen in the light of these theorems, the endeavours of modernist poets can be put in either of Adorno's and Horkheimer's categories. The ritualist repetitions of Eliot's poems become evidence for a magical approach. They try to generate their own magical logic which is eventually designed to re-establish the connection between the text and the increasingly fluid and evasive - and thus threatening - reality outside it. The finale of *The Waste Land* is the most overt example. It functions as a magic spell with all the qualities of the latter: 'Shantih Shantih Shantih' is foreign, i.e. its meaning is only known to the initiate; the triple repetition is a standard device in magic and rituals (perhaps the traditionally masculine character of the number three is not unimportant in a ritual devised to fight, among other things, fears of impotence); eventually the poem tries to achieve 'Shantih', 'peace', with this ending.⁶

Still, as the further development of Eliot's poetry shows, a mere reliance on ritual and magic does not suffice when the issue at stake is the proper and permanent recovery of the connection between text and an extratextual reality. The mere evocation of concepts from other cultures and in foreign languages only gives a surface-authority to the texts. This throws a rather different light on the cosmopolitanism of many modernist texts: it is not so much an achievement as a necessity. The fragmented cultural background from which the texts are generated is

⁵Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. 43.

⁶The ritual is indeed incomplete and thus ironically 'impotent' too; see K. Narayana Chandran, 'Shantih in *The Waste Land*', *American Literature*, 61, no. 4 (December 1988), 681-683.

stabilised by the authority - and also the glamorous surface and the élitist seduction - of fragments of foreign cultures.

The piling-up of layer upon layer of meaning manages to form coherent and convincing texts, but no more than texts. The nature of the material used remains too obviously textual, thus fictional, and it throws the texts back into their closed sphere. This is one of the vicious circles of modernist poetry: it is generated out of the desperation over the monadic state of language and fuelled by the horror of its isolation, yet all its endeavours only ever confirm its hermetic closure.

The way out of this circle always leads through the imposition of symbolic systems onto and into the texts. History and Christianity combined provide this necessary framework for Eliot. In Yeats's case, it is his own esoteric view of cultural history. For D.H. Lawrence, whose poetry is not discussed in this study, the organic coherence of primitive human instincts serves the same purpose. It is, of course, arguable that all of these seemingly extratextual points of reference are equally fictional and their connection with the poetic output of the mentioned authors is structurally not at all different from the mere inclusion of fragments of foreign cultures, different cultural discourse.

A poet who is not only aware of this dead end, but devises a way out of it that in itself radicalises or, as he would have preferred, purifies some of the structural traits already discovered in other modernist texts, is Ezra Pound. He is thus both magician and trickster according to the above model. This makes an evaluation of his poetic development concentrating on his use and treatment of myth indispensable for the completion of this exploration of the structures of modernist poetry.

Although it now means admitting defeat by classicist norms, it should be clear that when talking about myth, this study concentrates on myth as a form of narrative, an underlying and pervasive or exploited structure, a text that forms part of other texts. As a textual category myth fulfils a double function: it provides a framework inside which utterances gain a position of legitimacy and authority, and it supplements these utterances in their logical make-up. As a framework, myth is similar to the symbolic network, yet with the crucial difference that symbolism remains attached to a personality and a particular historic position. Myth is by definition both impersonal and ahistorical. This becomes evident even in studies which try to connect symbols and myths (as, for instance, in the works of C.G. Jung in which a theory of archetypical symbolism is developed). The structural reason for myth's denial of its origins are elaborated in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*. His concept of myth shows it as a meta-language imposed on an original utterance (which he calls 'object-language'). The graphic shape of this concept looks like this:⁷

Language	[	1. Signifier	2. Signified	
		3. Sign I. SIGNIFIER		II. SIGNIFIED
		III. SIGN		
MYTH	]			

The similarity between Barthes' model and the concept of metaphor outlined by Kittay is striking. One could argue that the position given to the sign in Kittay is held by a complete utterance in Barthes. Myth transposes a complete portion of discourse into another sphere which is not merely metaphoric, but metalinguistic as well.

⁷Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and translated by Annette Lavers (London et al.: Paladin, 1989, ¹1973), p. 124.

The consequences for the 'processed' utterance with regard to self-reflection, integration into established norms, not only of linguistics, but more complex - of politics and ethics - are enormous. The close relation between myth and ideology is merely alluded to by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his *Structural Anthropology*:

[...] what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics.⁸

Barthes formulates it more sharply by calling myth a theft of language and a transformation of history into nature, thus an affirmation of the historic *status quo*.⁹

The problems that evolve out of myth's denial of its linguistic origins are even more complex. Paradoxically enough, they become visible when this denial is so absolute as to hide the presence of myth altogether - as in philosophy. The German philosopher Karl Jaspers argues that the hostile relationship between philosophy and myth can be described in the following way:

Philosophy saw in myth an adversary insofar as it paralyses the transformation from narrative into a term by its overwhelming power. Myth became one of philosophy's objects which wants to be understood by it as an alien, but indispensable attire of truth. It eventually remains the borderline of philosophy, for when philosophy shipwrecks in its thinking, it still hears the language of myth. Thus myth becomes a momentum of philosophy itself, which, in its own thinking, although in vain, creates myths. It is the other way round. The

⁸Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, translated by Claire Jacobson & Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York & London: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 206-231 ('The Structural Study of Myth') (p. 209).

⁹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, pp. 135-136 & p. 140: 'We reach here the very principle of myth: the transformation of history into nature'.

content of myth is an origin of philosophy. If philosophy translates that into its thinking, it cannot replace the mythical language.¹⁰

Derrida is more aggressive in his essay 'White Mythology':

By an odd fate, the very metaphysicians who think to escape the world of appearances are constrained to live perpetually in allegory. A sorry lot of poets, they dim the colours of the ancient fables, and are themselves but gatherers of fables. They produce white mythology.¹¹

If the use of myth has these serious implications, why has it proved so influential on poetry in an age that can hardly be regarded as attracted to traditional norms and certainties? Why is myth the magnetic force towards which most modernist poetry seems to drift? The recourse to myth is a survival strategy. As Adorno points out, art disavows myth in order to come into being, yet in order not to be wiped aside by a now almost all-powerful rationality, art has to point out the limits of this rationality and this is achieved by a renewed recourse to myth.¹² In an environment characterised by an ever-increasing speed of life, an evasive fluidity of reality, neither the language of poetry seemed adequate, nor could the position of any narratorial voice be legitimised. Poetry itself seemed at the very verge of becoming an obsolete art form. This was clearly perceptible at the time when the development was still in progress. Compare Edmund Wilson's assessment of the future of literature:

As language becomes more international and more technical, it will become also less capable of supplying the symbols of literature; and then, just as the development of mechanical devices has compelled us to resort to sport in order to exercise our muscles, so literature will survive as a game - as a series of

¹⁰Karl Jaspers, 'Umgang mit dem Mythos', in *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 191 (1964), 1-13 (p. 7) (my translation).

¹¹Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 207-271 (p. 213).

¹²Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 79-80.

specialised experiments in the domain of 'symbolic expression and imaginative values attained through the free combination of the elements of language.'¹³

The position that has to be adopted is neatly described by the analyst of the final phase of the process, Marshall McLuhan, when he illustrates the strategy of his first study of contemporary culture:

As this method was followed, *A Descent Into the Maelstrom* by Edgar Poe kept coming to mind. Poe's sailor saved himself by studying the action of the whirlpool and by cooperating with it. The present book likewise makes few attempts to attack the considerable currents and pressures set up around us today by the mechanical agencies of the press, radio, movies, and advertising. It does attempt to set the reader at the center of the revolving picture created by these affairs where he may observe the action that is in progress and in which everybody is involved. From the analysis of that action, it is hoped, many individual strategies may suggest themselves.¹⁴

If one swaps 'reader' for 'poetic identity' one arrives at an accurate description of the position of modernist poetry. The most important strategies of coping with this position in Pound's poetic oeuvre will be discussed below.

2. I am Another: Mythical Implications of the Personae in Pound's Early Poems

On His Own Face in a Glass

O strange face there in the glass!
O ribald company, O saintly host,
O sorrow-swept my fool,
What answer? O ye myriad
That strive and play and pass,
Jest, challenge, counterlie!
I? I? I?

¹³Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*, The Fontana Library (London: Collins, 1961; ¹London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 225.

¹⁴Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. v.

And ye?¹⁵

Ezra Pound's early poetry abounds with examples of first person narrators who are - explicitly or implicitly - identified as anything else but a modern poet or even Ezra Pound himself. Franz Link divides these poems into metamorphic ones (those that use a non-human speaker - like the various tree poems - in the tradition of Ovid) and those that employ personae (i.e. 'masks', other characters that give to the poems their voice and, more important, their history).¹⁶ Both concepts are by no means unproblematic, and their underlying theoretical uncertainties are indeed similar. What lies behind the mask, or, what is the starting point of the metamorphosis? Is it, in the New Criticism tradition, the author, i.e. a historic consciousness, or - as Wolfgang Iser puts it - an 'implied author' (a term that provokes exactly the same questions and thus acts as just another mirror in the cabinet)? The important aspects for this study have to be: what is the function of metamorphosis and the personae (both of which will from now on - and in violation of the etymology of the latter term - be treated as 'personae')?

Link draws the connection between persona and myth quite clearly in his discussion of the metamorphic tree-poems 'The Tree', 'La Fraisine', and 'A Girl'. In all these cases he sees a mythological subtext that forms the basis and point of reference of the texts. In 'A Girl' this subtext is the myth of Apollo and Daphne, more

¹⁵All quotations from Pound's poems (excluding *The Cantos*) are taken from his *Collected Shorter Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984, ¹1968). The original title of the first edition of the collected poems published in 1952 was - characteristically - *Personae*, although this caused confusion with his collection of poems of 1926 with the same title. Obviously, Pound wanted to stress the importance of the persona technique.

¹⁶Franz Link, *Ezra Pound*, Artemis Einführungen, 15 (Munich & Zurich: Artemis, 1984), pp. 13-31 (henceforth quoted in the text as *P*).

precisely, Ovid's version of the same in his *Metamorphoses*. The reference is thus an intertextual one. In 'La Fraisine' the subtext is that of Celtic myths. The explicit reference is the pseudo-Celtic place name 'Mar-nan-otha', the implicit one the symbolic meaning of the ash-tree (that is what 'La Fraisine' means) in Celtic and Germanic mythology, and one could add the stylistic similarity of the poem to some of Yeats's who constantly employs Celtic mythology (*P* 14-23).

After this convincing analysis, Link's explanation that myth acts as frame for the identification of an individual experience (*P* 21) seems weak, his later statement that the mentioned poems are about actually experiencing a myth seems even slightly absurd (*P* 23). Paul Smith argues, more convincingly, that Pound's use of personae is closely connected with his 'reflexive' method which Smith characterises as an awareness and discussion of the position and conditions of the production of the poetic utterance, the 'recurrent positioning of the poet in relation to his material'.¹⁷ The use of personae as a self-reflective or even metapoetic device explains why the subtext that provides the personae in the early poems never appears to be an unproblematic one. Even the simplest of the mentioned metamorphosis poems, 'The Tree', exhibits discrepancies in its intertextual nature. Its form refers to Yeats, its content to two Greek myths, that of Apollo and Daphne and that of Philemon and Baucis (the combination is in itself contradictory, since the first is an example of unfulfilled, the second one of fulfilled love). Its language, to add to the difficulties, is a mixture of Yeats's and a pseudo-archaic English that has no relation to either Yeats or the

¹⁷Paul Smith, *Pound Revised* (London & Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 8 ('poet' stands here for the poetic persona).

mentioned myths - and is even in internal contrast with the colloquial final line and its 'rank folly'.

In 'A Girl', these discrepancies are even more radical, because they extend to the realm of the poetic persona and split it up into two, or actually three different ones. Its first stanza describes the experience of metamorphosis, the second one comments on the metamorphosis from outside, and its final line is eventually a self-reflective statement that classifies both the experience and its poetic description as 'folly'.

'La Fraisine' goes even further by not only introducing several themes and planes of reference (again the classic one of tree-metamorphosis, once more Yeats, this time his railing against old age as in many poems in *The Tower* and later, but also the troubadour topic of madness brought about by unhappy love, whose importance is highlighted by the Provençal title of the poem). It also illustrates the consequences of these clashes in its language which oscillates between traditional poetic form and metre (as in the first stanza - which could almost come straight out of Yeats) and its continual dissolution leading to complete fragmentation in stanza eight which contains only one complete sentence among six incomplete ones. This fragmentation is only partly overcome in the final lines of the poem. These are more like a hurried summary of what has been said before than a proper conclusion. Thus the language of the poem mirrors exactly the situation of its speaker; its representation is a situational rather than a mimetic one, i.e. it does not draw the image of a speaker, but it gives the reader a glimpse of one particular moment of this speaker's existence - and withdraws the speaker with the end of his utterance. This is the main difference between the tableau-like presentations of poetic personae in the works of Pound's most influential

model, Browning, whose speakers gain a life of their own, but not a life in the sense of an immediate presence, and Pound's transient and contradictory, yet immediate voices.

The reasons for this discrepancy are easy to see, because they are inherent in the poetic methods of the two authors. While Browning chooses personae to express particular events and sentiments that would be unsuitable if verbalised by a contemporary in his Victorian surroundings, Pound employs them not in order to legitimise a particular utterance, but as a justification for any poetic utterance. His personae are more than devices, they are necessities. This explains their transient status, the apparent lack of control that makes them change shape within a single poem and fragments their messages.

The problematic status of the speaker in Pound's poems corresponds to his preference of personae from a troubadour background, professional outcasts whose fortunes depended on their protectors as much as their work was subject to the favours - imagined or otherwise - of its chosen object, usually - since love is the dominant subject of troubadour poetry - the adored woman.¹⁸ Two aspects of the troubadour existence offer themselves particularly as analogies of the situation of all modernist authors: the need to identify themselves in their works (troubadour poetry is one of the first examples of post-antique literature that places an emphasis on its authors) and the problem of defining oneself in terms of status and position. The biographic parallel plays an important part, too. All the poets gathered in this study are in a way exiles:

¹⁸Yet troubadour poetry also encompasses religious and political verse - and among the more than 450 known troubadours there were at least twenty women, the best-known Beatriz de Dia. See Hans Gerd Tuchel, ed., *Die Trobadors*, Sammlung Dieterich, 104 (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1985, ¹Bremen: Carl Schünemann, 1942), pp. 11-30 (p. 11).

Hopkins through his faith (and in his later life in Ireland), Yeats by being Irish in a dominantly English cultural background (and paradoxically also the other way round, being an English speaker in Ireland), both Eliot and Pound by being Americans.

Pound stresses this in-between status by setting his best-known troubadour poem in 'the open road'. 'Cino' thus also manages to allude simultaneously to Browning (through its opening line) and Whitman (and his 'Song of the Open Road'), while the theme ('I have sung women in three cities/But it is all the same') refers to Symons.¹⁹ Through its intertextual references the poem manages to outline its own genealogy. But it does more than merely position itself in a poetic tradition. It also shows why it also breaks with that very tradition. This break does not lie in the outspoken refusal to sing of women any more, but in the shift of the emphasis from the struggle with a love-object to a struggle with its own poetic form. The interest of the poem is not its theme, but how to leave that theme behind. It drifts towards pure self-reflection, and that is its modernist aspect.

The speaker of the poem, similar to the one in 'La Fraisine', only constitutes himself by his failure. Indeed rather than not singing about women, the only descriptions we get of him are those by women:

They dream us-toward and
Sighing, say, "Would Cino,
Passionate Cino, of the wrinkling eyes,
Gay Cino, of quick laughter,
Cino, of the dare, the jibe,
Frail Cino, strongest of his tribe
That tramp old ways beneath the sun-light,
Would Cino of the Luth were here!"

They are characteristically contradictory:

¹⁹K.K. Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's 'Personae' (1926)* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 49-51.

Once, twice, a year--
 Vaguely thus word they:
 "Cino?" "Oh, eh, Cino Polnesi
 The singer is't you mean?"
 "Ah yes, passed once our way,
 A saucy fellow, but...
 (Oh they are all one these vagabonds),

The technique is similar to that of Eliot's 'Prufrock' whose speaker also depends on the judgement of others (and again these others are women). But while their comments are merely negative (or interpreted as negative) in Prufrock's case, the contradictions of 'Cino' leave the speaker of the latter in a void, a metaphorical 'open road' with only memories as an orientation ('...eh?...they mostly had grey eyes') and a rather dubious direction for the future ('I will sing of the sun').

This future orientation must be taken seriously, although it is instantly ridiculed in the doggerel verses to Phoebus Apollo ('Pollo Phoibee, old tin pan'). The song to nature and its deities is, of course, as worn-out as the praise of women, and the irony of the poem is aware that breaking out of a tradition only ever leads into another one. Yet the three final lines of the poem, at first glance nothing but a repetition of its pervasive theme ('I have sung' versus 'I will sing' as the description of the position of poetic identity), hint at a possible new direction in Pound's poetry, that of his short-lived Imagist period. The need for a mythical base as the starting-point of the poetic utterance is unveiled as the addiction to tradition, and from this discovery onwards Pound's poems are characterised by a highly ambivalent attitude towards myth, one that is destructive and reconstructive at the same time.

His assemblage of styles and traditions hints at the fact that coherent mythical settings are no longer available. In spite of the multitude of points of reference that seem accessible, none of these represents a coherent text, a mythical frame for the

poetic utterance inside which both a narrative and a coherent narrator are possible. Instead, the speaker of the poems juggles with fragments of narratives (and by no means all of them are actually his; what does Phoebus Apollo mean to an Italian troubadour of the late 13th century?; the Victorian assurance concerning the free availability of culture has become very frail indeed) while constituting himself out of these very fragments in the process. He appears like the image produced by a kaleidoscope: the impermanent fragile pattern produced by the delicate equilibrium of colourful little fragments whose ultimate connection is merely their being gathered in the same vessel, the poetic form. But even that displays widening cracks - as the fragmentation of Pound's early poems shows.

Nonetheless, the very existence of nameable speakers and especially the use of irony - this universal glue of modernism which by creating critical distance at least simulates a detached point of view - demonstrates that, although questionable, poetic identity has not yet been shattered in Pound's early poetry. This leads to a coherence in spite of their fragmentation, but it eventually condemns the poems to remaining within a tradition that they have exposed as dead. Pound's later rejection of some of his early works as 'stale creampuffs' is a hint in that direction.²⁰ More revealing is a remark on the poem 'Cino' in a letter to W.C. Williams of 1908: "'Cino" - the thing is banal. He might be anyone. Besides he is catalogued in his epitaph'.²¹ Pound criticises his poem for containing a speaker who is both impersonal and a distinct

²⁰The famous remark appears in the foreword of a reissue of his earliest poetry *A Lume Spento and Other Poems* (New York, 1965), p. 7. See William Harmon, *Time in Ezra Pound's Work* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 66 (henceforth quoted in the text as *TiP*).

²¹The letter is quoted in Ruthven, *Guide*, p. 49.

person. The contradiction unveils an essential impasse of modernism: both complete anonymity and a traditional personality are unacceptable. The former leads to a text without a centre, the latter to traditionalism. The assemblage of fragments, mythical or otherwise, creates either an unconvincing mess or a seemingly coherent image that remains, however, as dead as a tin pan Apollo. The simple use of dead myths does not lead to a living one - at least not as long as their gathering takes place within established forms. The personae cannot be manipulated as easily as the early poem 'Histrion' tries to make its reader believe:

No man has dared to write this thing as yet
 And yet I know, how that the souls of all men great
 At times pass through us,
 And we are melted into them, and are not
 Save reflexions of their souls.
 Thus I am Dante for a space and am
 One François Villon, ballad-lord and thief
 Or am such holy ones I may not write
 Lest blasphemy be writ against my name;
 This for an instant and the flame is gone.

'Tis as in midmost us there glows a sphere
 Translucent, molten gold, that is the "I"
 And into this some form projects itself:
 Christus, or John, or eke the Florentine;
 And as the clear space is not if a form's
 Imposed thereon,
 So cease we from all being for the time,
 And these, the Masters of the Soul, live on.²²

Its later deletion from the canon by Pound is a sign of his disillusionment with the simplistic use of personae.

²²The poem appeared in *A Quinzaine for this Yule* and is reprinted in Link, *Pound*, p. 24.

3. Fragments: There, not Gone

The problem of time, of history, the generation and loss of culture are central to Pound's poems. The unreality of historic time, the need to define one's own position via one's cultural background and the difficulty to do so - since all the elements of one's culture and history are inevitably dead - surface in many of his early poems. The problem eventually culminates in *The Cantos* (TiP 3). In *Guide to Kulchur* Pound summarises the dilemma:

A man does not know his own ADDRESS (in time) until he knows where his time and milieu stand in relation to other times and conditions.²³

Yet, as he had pointed out earlier in *The Spirit of Romance*, history - and even one's own individual history - could no longer be regarded as 'linear, sequential, segmental, homogeneous and continuous' but must be perceived as 'non-linear, non-sequential, unitary, multiform and discontinuous'²⁴:

It is dawn at Jerusalem while midnight hovers above the Pillars of Hercules. All ages are contemporaneous. It is B.C., let us say, in Morocco. The Middle Ages are in Russia. The future stirs already in the minds of the few. This is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent, and where many dead men are our grandchildren's contemporaries, while many of our contemporaries have been already gathered into Abraham's bosom, or some more fitting receptacle.²⁵

²³Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938), pp. 82-83.

²⁴These are the word of Max Nänny who summarises Pound's attitude in his *Ezra Pound: Poetics for an Electric Age* (Bern: Francke, 1973), p. 18.

²⁵Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London: Dent, 1910), p. 8; quoted by Harmon, *Time in Pound*, p. 4.

The problem is obvious: where in this flux can the individual find a position for a personal - poetic - utterance? Where is the material of this utterance, and what is its shape? The first question puts the finger on the significant void between the 'I have sung' and the 'I will sing' of earlier poems like 'Cino'. The second one leads directly to Pound's technique of fragmentation.

The notion of the self as a screen onto which, for some timeless instant, the reflections of some great souls are projected (as elaborated in 'Histrion') can be regarded as the justification of the experimenting with manifold personae. And not so much their personalities count in the emulating experiment, but their experiences. One is tempted to use the words of Max Frisch's anti-hero in *Mein Name sei Gantenbein*, his novel on identity: 'I try stories on like clothes'.²⁶ Yet the attempt to project other people's experiences onto a contemporary speaker leads to two problems: the experiences are mutilated in order to fit into the new form; and they remain distant, their historic remoteness can never be fully overcome.²⁷ Both effects add up to fragmentation. The poem 'The Picture' describes technique and effect:

The eyes of this dead lady speak to me,
For here was love, was not to be drowned
out.
And here desire, not to be kissed away.
The eyes of this dead lady speak to me.

Interestingly, the immediate effect of the artefact, a picture by Jacopo del Sellaio, as a footnote to the poem informs the reader, is countered by the apparent

²⁶Max Frisch, *Mein Name sei Gantenbein* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 30 (my translation).

²⁷This is not a contradiction to the immediacy discovered in the analysis of Pound's personae. The access to a past experience does not automatically transform it into a contemporary one. Thus its value must remain limited.

message of the poem. It talks about things past: 'For here was love [...] And here desire'. Even in the sly indirect reference to what is perhaps the present of the poem, it is concerned with loss: obviously there is - in contrast to the love depicted by Sellaio - a love that can be drowned out, a desire that can be kissed (perhaps has already been kissed?) away. And yet the subject of the poem is doubly remote since its production took place 400 years ago (the footnote gives 1442-1493 as the dates of Sellaio's life) while its subject is even older, namely mythical: the goddess Venus.

The poem that follows 'The Picture' in Pound's *Collected Shorter Poems*, 'Of Jacopo del Sellaio', is a further elaboration on the same subject, and even more explicit about the internal and external problems of Pound's retrospective method. Internally, the suspicion raised in 'The Picture': the present can never be as perfect as the past; paradoxically enough, it cannot last as long as that which has already become history, is confirmed by the lines 'And here's the thing that lasts the whole thing out:/The eyes of this dead lady speak to me', which devalue the preceding statement 'And now she's gone, who was his Cyprian,/And you are here, who are 'The Isles' to me'. It is important to note that both Sellaio's Venus and the person addressed by the speaker are removed from the temporary context of the poem by their epithets 'Cyprian' and 'The Isles' which are synonymous references to islands where Venus was worshipped.²⁸ The status of the mentioned women is that of a mythological quotation.

The dilemma in which Pound found himself as a consequence of his attempt to create a present through the use of fragments of the past is laid bare by two of his contemporary critics. Yeats, a friend of Pound's, puts him in 'Phase 23' of the historic

²⁸Ruthven, *Guide*, p. 186.

cycle of his *A Vision* and makes him a representative of the man of the moment. Wyndham Lewis, less amicably, states in *Time and Western Man* that 'His field is purely that of the *dead*' (*TiP* 6).

There are frequent examples in Pound's early poems of a rather uncertain appreciation of the present, one that only works by turning the present moment into a thing of the past. In Adorno's terminology, this would be called a reification of experience, its transformation into an objective state that can be recalled and modified, but also - perhaps even more importantly - evaluated against other moments and experiences which are obtainable as memories (if they belong to the subject of the texts) or as other texts (if they belong to others). This reification always leads to mutilation. Adorno's views on the 'deadly' quality of art will feature in the conclusion of this study.

An early poem on the subject of the happy hour of love, 'Horae Beatae Inscriptio', describes this ambivalent attitude. The present is only cherished because of its potential value as memory. The 'Inscriptio' of its title hints at the explicitly textual nature of the transformation. 'Erat Hora' is another poem on the same subject, the reification of experience. Its first lines read:

Nay, whatever comes
One hour was sunlit and the most high gods
May not make boast of any better thing
Than to have watched that hour as it passed.

The inventorising of experience as a 'thing' and the stress on the past tense in 'passed' are proofs of the observed tendencies.

It is not experience which only ever offers itself *a priori* in a fragmented form (this is what the common superficial notion of the fragmentation of modern experience

suggests), but this fragmentation is consciously brought about in modernist poetry. It is the same attitude as the treatment of cultural heritage in *The Waste Land*. Yet Pound's poems no longer lament the fragmentation that takes place in them; as a later example will show, they even revel in it. What remains the same in Eliot's and Pound's poetry are the underlying reasons that make fragmentation a necessity. In both cases it is not a willingly adopted manner of an ego so strong that it can accept its own mutilation. Although one may suspect that the textual identity is stronger in Pound, because it is at least devoid of obvious internal contradictions, even in his works fragmentation is a rescue-mechanism.

If a poet like Hopkins has to distort language, invert syntax, and pile signifier upon signifier in compounds and lists in order to grasp single sensual and/or emotional experiences, Pound's task is even more enormous. Although he, too, deals with moments of individual experience, these are only ever employed to create a larger entity, a story or even history. The fragments he manipulates are not those of direct sensual experience, they are pieces of other stories and histories; they are mythological fragments according to Odo Marquard's definition of myths as means of making truths accessible and bearable in life:

Rather, the mythical technique - the telling of stories - is something essentially different - namely, the art of bringing available truth within the reach of what we are equipped to handle in life. For the truth is, as a rule, not yet there when it is either (like the results of the exact sciences, as, for example, formulas) too abstract to connect with or (for example, the truth about life, which is death) unlivably awful. In such cases, stories - myths - not only can but must come forward in order to tell these truths into our life-world, or to tell them, in our life-world, at the kind of distance at which we can bear them.²⁹

²⁹Odo Marquard, 'In Praise of Polytheism (On Monomythical and Polymythical Thinking)', in *Farewell to Matters of Principle*, pp. 87-110 (p. 90).

In this respect, Pound's mythological *bricolages* are not so much means of conveying a particular message³⁰ as expressions of the basic dilemma already encountered in Yeats's works: what is the status of art and the artist in an ever-changing and destructive world? While for Yeats the dilemma emerges out of the experience of the artist's own physical decline and fears of mortality, Pound's poems show it as a challenge that affects not only the individual artist but the entire profession. As Harmon observes in his discussion of the *Cathay* poems: 'Again and again in *Cathay* the relatively peaceful poetic surface is set against the turbulence of some kind of temporal transition' (*TiP* 75).

Relief can by no means be found in an 'increased attention to his [the artist's] immediate surroundings and his own powerful art', as Harmon claims for the poet Rihaku in 'The River Song' (*TiP* 74), for even this speaker is aware of the inextricable connection of the delight in his potential with its impermanence:

But I draw pen on this barge
 Causing the five peaks to tremble,
 And I have joy in these words
 like the joy of blue islands.
 (If glory could last forever
 Then the waters of Han would flow northward.)

The poem knows no real stability. It talks of vanished kings in the same way as it describes the present Emperor (who, characteristically, 'inspect[s] his flowers', the frailest of organisms). It abounds with wind images and bird songs, symbols of impermanence. Eventually the poet identifies his own utterance - a melody played on a flute - with the sound of the new nightingales in the gardens at Jō-rin. The image

³⁰This is what Harmon claims for the early poems by stating that they exhibit four 'positive qualities that deserve preservation throughout time: fame, magic, art, love', in *Time in Pound*, p. 65.

shows his own position as that of a replaceable ornament, in fashion today, outdated tomorrow, and recalls the preceding line which describes the poet moping 'in the Emperor's garden, await-/ing an order to write!' which is already connected with the image of five-score nightingales aimlessly singing in the same stanza.

The only artistic artefact of lasting value in the poem is not the boat so meticulously described in its first lines. It is drifting 'with the drifting water'. It is a song by Kutsu (the Ch'u Yuan of Pound's 'After Ch'u Yuan'³¹), characteristically the same medium as the poem itself (which is also described as a song in its title). Yet even the position of this song is odd: it 'Hangs with the sun and moon'. The image evokes both the classical idea of worthy persons and objects being elevated to the status of celestial objects (as, for instance, Castor and Pollux), thus the attainment of mythical status by the perfect work of art (Yeats's 'artifice of eternity'). Yet at the same time the verb 'Hangs' as well as the described paradoxical position of the song 'with the sun and moon' (recalling Yeats's image of sun- and moonlight as one inextricable beam in 'The Tower') show the desired mythical position as impossible and again deadly.

If Pound's early poems make a statement about art, it is the very pessimistic one that perfection is no longer attainable, that it can only be recalled imperfectly in fragments and translations. Translation is a similar form of acquisition of stories and histories, again with an inevitable effect of mutilation, but on the positive side the creation of a bridge between distant texts (either removed in time or place, i.e. culture and language) and the present in which these texts gain a new, albeit transformed life.

'The Song of the Bowmen of Shu' as well as 'The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter',

³¹Ruthven, *Guide*, p. 207.

'Lament of the Frontier Guard' and other poems in *Cathay* share the same fictional background: laments without clear hopes of being heard. Their fictional survival provides a hope for poetry.

Yet the two-step of searching the archives for material whose transposition into a more contemporary poetic language provides both a subjective platform for the utterance and the assurance of possible survival (and thus an in-built justification of the action itself) does not automatically solve the two basic problems that provided the starting point for the fragmentation technique and its discussion in this study: where is the poetic ground on which the assembly of fragments is produced, and what happens when the use of alien texts brings with them - virus-like via their personae - an alien discourse that threatens the identity it is supposed to create?

A poem like 'Papyrus' which radicalises both the fragmentation and the translation aspect represents one direction in which Pound will explore the possibilities of reducing both the narrative side of his poems and the ornamental aspects of their language.

Spring.....
Too long.....
Gongula.....

One could argue that the poem consists more of absences, of dots, than words. But it is indeed a transcription from an existing document, even though the licence taken by Pound in his rendering of the text is considerable.³² It is a Sapphic fragment, and Pound uses this connection to transform it into a love poem that is in

³²The fragment that provides the basis of the poem is actually parchment, as Kenner points out, and - to Pound's honour - his free translation is not half as fanciful as that by some classicists. See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 54-55.

essence Imagistic. It is also completely impersonal - or would be, if it were not connected to the stories surrounding Sappho and her pupils/lovers which are evoked by the name 'Gongula' (which appears in Suidas as that of one of Sappho's disciples³³). Even in its most radical reduction, the use of fragmentation does not permit impersonality, since the fragment as a *pars pro toto* always evokes its context which then interferes with the attempt to create something new. Only Imagism whose reductionism is non-fragmentary holds these opportunities, but at a different cost. It will be discussed below.

The second impasse, that of the personae transported into the new discourse by translation, is discussed in poems like 'Villanelle: The Psychological Hour'. Harmon calls it 'the piercing of artificial persona' (*TiP* 78), and indeed it seems that this poem with its description of the growing insecurities of a speaker eagerly awaiting fictional guests is a giving-in to the insight that one's own position is not made more secure by the construction (or re-construction) of a seemingly similar point of view in an imaginary other. What Foucault shows to be at work in Velázquez' painting *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things*, a picture that places its percipient in a position that is already occupied by other viewers (shown in a mirror in the picture), succeeds in a medium that by its nature as a visual artefact can be perceived even when it is a *trompe l'oeuil*. It does not work so easily in a text that only becomes one if both its reader and the message that awaits him are granted a position, so that an interchange becomes possible. The character of language as representational in its function but not in its nature gets in the way.

³³Ruthven, *Guide*, pp. 190-191.

The attempt to introduce increased authenticity through a persona, or various personae, is brought to a deliberate collapse in 'Near Perigord'. In a splendid example of deconstruction *avant la lettre*, the poem first subverts the traditional arrangement of the strata of personae and then busts the form completely by leaving its initial questions and topics aside to concentrate on its own formal problems - which are thus laid bare. The conventional concept would be: the speaker of the poem tries to see things through the eyes of another (earlier) person (the persona) who in turn tries to get access to an even earlier experience by yet another character. As in a system of optical lenses, the perspective narrows the closer one gets to the present (i.e. the 'natural' time of the poem). The 'original' experience that forms the goal of all these arrangements retreats into the background and is only present in a fragmented form. Here it is the question how Bertran de Born, the Provençal poet, could allegedly be responsible for many of the political upheavals of his day and at the same time write love poems.³⁴ The arrangement is that of Barthes' concept of myth with the original experience as the object-language which is appropriated and transformed by a secondary system, here the poetic utterance.

However, what 'Near Perigord' does is rather different. It disclaims the older poet's right to greater authenticity. In fact the speaker of the poem, after invoking a persona named Cino in order to solve this historical problem, finds his helper insufficient. This is hardly surprising, since he does not get any answers from him. Not even bringing in another possible source of help, the 'biographer' of the

³⁴An elaborate explanation of the poem's background is in Ruthven, *Guide*, pp.177-184.

troubadours, Uc de St. Circ, helps.³⁵ Eventually, the speaker takes over completely, first implicitly by speculating about the case himself (and thus demonstrating that, as a historian, he probably knows more than the original characters involved in the case), then explicitly in part II: 'End fact. Try fiction.' This is the poem's claim for autonomy.

Yet at the same time it presents itself as a farewell to the false mythical authority produced by the use of personae. These are unveiled as what they are: puppets controlled by a traditional poetic identity. For suddenly Cino replies, yet characteristically he does not answer the speaker's question but reflects on the very position of this speaker (another evidence of the essentially metapoetic character of the personae in Pound): 'I am an artist, you have tried both métiers' (i.e. Cino claims that the speaker of the poem tries to be artist and historian, both factual and the creator of fictions). When it finally comes to the question that concerns the right to use other people's points of view in order to support one's own (or to make it possible), Cino's answer is "'Do we know our friends?'". The poem remains inconclusive on the dominant problem of the personae: the dangers of the appropriation of the discourse of others. 'Or take En Bertrans?' is the circular ending of its second part. Its final third part then indulges in the visualising of Bertran's experience, i.e. in accordance with the motto 'End fact. Try fiction' it freely appropriates his perspective. The end of the part (which is actually a discussion of Bertran's image of a particular lady) sums up the effect of the use of fragmented experiences of others - and is both the antithesis of the image drawn in the poem 'On

³⁵Which, again, is not astonishing, since his 'knowledge' of the lives of the troubadours is mainly fictional. See Tuchel, *Trobadors*, p. 29.

His Own Face in a Glass' and its supplement. It creates 'A broken bundle of mirrors...!'.

4. Tricky Things: Imagism as Anti-Mythical Mythopoeia

Imagism is essentially a radical poetic reduction technique. Its attempt to arrive at a 'direct treatment of the thing', the elimination of merely ornamental aspects of the poetic utterance (i.e. unnecessary adjectives and meaningless rhythmic conventions), and - most importantly - the rejection of both an explicit and identifiable speaker and a narrative setting are the means of this structural restriction.³⁶ This restraint tries to do away with the metaphoric aspect of the utterance, i.e. it tries to reduce the paradigmatic axis of Jakobson's model. The terms employed in an Imagist poem are meant to be neither metaphors nor symbols. But the rejection of narrative also mutilates the syntagmatic side of the text.

While the desire for greater austerity is a recurring phenomenon throughout the history of literature, Imagism deserves a special status, because its restraint is directed against the very poetic nature of language. It is a self-destructive, an anti-poetic poetics. Not only does it attempt to eliminate epic elements from its texts, it tries to force language back to its referential aspect. It cannot accept what Saussure discovered

³⁶The often quoted Imagist 'rules' given by F.S. Flint in *Poetry* of March 1913 (they are actually an excerpt from a larger corpus) are:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase not in sequence of a metronome.

They are reprinted in Peter Jones, ed., *Imagist Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, ¹1972), p. 18.

to be the basic feature of language: its arbitrariness. Pound states this programmatically in *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* of 1914: '*Nomina sunt consequentia rerum*'.³⁷

The products of this poetics of austerity are mainly short poems, often no longer than one stanza. Most of them are either syntactically incomplete or semantically incoherent. The Imagist movement, if it can be called one at all, was short-lived and its output varied enormously in shape and quality. Still, one can argue that Pound's Imagist poems are the most radical ones in that they adhere most closely to the Imagist doctrines. A poem like 'L'Art, 1910' can be seen as approaching the ideal:

Green arsenic smeared on an egg-white cloth,
Crushed strawberries! Come let us feast
our eyes.

It certainly contains no coherent narrative, neither is there a word that is merely ornamental, i.e. that could be left out without altering the meaning of the text.

The poem obviously plays on various oppositions: that between colours (green, egg-white, and (implicitly) the red of strawberries), between wholeness and destruction ('smeared' and 'crushed' versus the cloth which is not only white, but 'egg-white', thus evoking the frailty and perfection of an egg), between the edible and the poisonous (egg and strawberries versus arsenic), eventually between two sensual activities, eating and seeing (in 'feast our eyes'). In doing so, the poem demonstrates quite convincingly the process of the generation of images as Pound saw it. In his essay 'As for Imagism' of 1915 he describes his concept of the nature of the Image:

³⁷Quoted from the 1960 reprint, p. 92, in Kenner, *Pound Era*, p. 146.

The image can be of two sorts. It can arise within the mind. It is then 'subjective'. External causes play upon the mind, perhaps; if so, they are drawn into the mind, fused, transmitted, and emerge in an Image unlike themselves. Secondly, the Image can be objective. Emotion seizing upon some external scene or action carries it intact into the mind; and the vortex purges it of all save the essential and dominant or dramatic qualities, and it emerges like the external original.³⁸

Yet it also shows the crucial problem of this concept. Its inability to draw a clear line between the subjective and the objective, between external reality and internal sensation. The 'thing' in Imagist poetry is not at all an actual object, it is a state of perception. There is no real difference between a perceptual and a conceptual image (*P* 53). Is it the objective reality of a stained cloth that produces the impression, the Image of 'L'Art, 1910', or is it the observer (who classifies the green as arsenic, the cloth as egg-white, the whole scene as a feast for the eyes) who creates this objective reality by naming it?

Wolfgang Iser takes this as a proof for his idea that the Imagist reduction is not a simple return to an origin. The image is neither to be found in the object(s) referred to nor in the perception of the reader. It oscillates between the two poles and thus creates Pound's 'apparition' which is so successfully described in the master-poem of Imagism, 'In a Station of the Metro':³⁹

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Pound actually accepts and endorses the notion of the in-between status of the Image, its evasive nature:

³⁸The essay appeared in *The New Age*, 16, no. 13 (1915). Quoted in Link, *Pound*, p. 53.

³⁹Wolfgang Iser, 'Image und Montage: Zur Bildkonzeption in der imagistischen Lyrik und in T.S. Eliots *Waste Land*', in *Immanente Ästhetik*, 361-393 (p. 369).

An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time [...] It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.⁴⁰

This liberating aspect of the image leads back to its relation to myth. For what the reduction of the Imagist technique tries to achieve is precisely a freedom from historic constraints, a freedom from empiricist restrictions in the perception of reality. As Iser puts it, it rejects the division into primary and secondary qualities of things (as advocated by Locke). Perspective becomes a component of reality, its ordering scheme. The Imagist image suggests that reality emerges out of a plurality of perspectives. Each singular definition is unveiled as illusory. Eventually the individual shape of an image foregrounds a constitutive imagination which is in an unconstrained relation with objective reality. It thus leads to a reshaping of experience and creates a new model of perception.⁴¹

In textual terms the freedom from conventional perception which is also a freedom from established (coherent and linear) notions of history and personality is a de-automatisation of the reading process. Yet both Pound's term 'purify' (which derives from Mallarmé) and Iser's critical statement that this de-automatisation is not an alienation⁴² hint at a basic ambiguity of the technique that also pervades its relation to history and myth. The de-automatisation of a process does not abandon the

⁴⁰*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 4; quoted in Link, *Pound*, p. 53.

⁴¹This is a summary of Iser's four major statements concerning the poetics of Imagism in 'Image und Montage', pp. 371-372.

⁴²Iser, 'Image und Montage', pp. 374-375.

process but highlights it. The reduction of language in order to stress the complexity of a phenomenon and thus make it more accessible still has to deal with two given entities: the nature of language and the reality of objects. Pound's formula 'make it new' captures the impasse in its grammatical object 'it': it stands for the oscillating phenomenon created by the interaction of language and perception, for the apparition created by a text. Yet the remaking of a traditional object only ever reproduces this object in a modified shape.

Iser points out one of the reasons for this limitation of the Imagist technique. It remains analogous, i.e. the poetic construction strives towards some kind of mimetic correlative, for instance in its use of the term 'bough' for tunnel, 'petals' for faces in 'In a Station of the Metro'. The image does not alter the role of the creative subject despite its attempt at impersonality. Neither does it overcome its attachment to history. It merely replaces its historic limitations by a superhistoricism that is eventually mythical again. The position desired by the identity of imagism is that of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the superman.

Access to this elevated perspective is sought in the perfect work of art. Here Pound is in accord with Yeats. But what is the perfection of the most elaborate work of art for Yeats (the golden bird of the 'Byzantium' poems) is, at least theoretically, the most spontaneous product for Pound. His stress on the instantaneousness of the creation of images tries to arrive at a quasi archetypal situation of artistic production. This shifts the perfection from the product to the artist and makes Pound's élitism both more poignant and more dangerous than Yeats's.

Barthes calls this tendency of modernist poetry its desire to become substance rather than remaining a mere attribute.⁴³ Yet this desire is undercut by the very instability of language itself. Language does not permit an unambiguous representation because of the continual shifts of meaning within its structure. Even an attempt to overcome tradition and conventional history by a direct treatment of 'the thing' brings back the mythical in the shape of the authentic unmediated experience which assumes the role of the original, the object-language which the poetic text transforms into a nuclear myth. A truly new poetic must consequently be concerned with the basics of language, not merely with the complexities of its usage. Pound realises this when he abandons Imagism in favour of Vorticism which stresses the metaphoric drive behind poetic creation in a way that will be re-encountered in Nietzsche below. Yet only a much more radical assault on language, his ideogrammatic method, managed to actually overcome the limitations imposed by the still present signified through which personality and history enter the texts. Its structural implications and its ambiguous use in the culmination of Pound's poetic career, *The Cantos*, will be discussed below.

5. Writing (One's) History in Other People's Words: The Way to and through *The Cantos*

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries
Of the inward gaze;
Better mendacities
Than the classics in paraphrase!

⁴³Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, translated by Annette Lavers & Colin Smith, Cape Editions, 3 (London: Cape, 1967), pp. 48-49.

The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,
 Made with no loss of time,
 A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
 Or the "sculpture" of rhyme.

As this second part of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* shows, Pound was well aware that neither the persona technique with its epic overtones nor the radical anti-narrative strategies of Imagism and Vorticism had succeeded in creating a poetry that was more than a plastercast of the moment of its conception. It was outdated as quickly as it was produced and its value questionable from the start. Apparently, poetry had lost its status as a monument of the times, an approving or critical commentary on some of the aspects of the present. If it was not to lose its justification completely, radical new forms were needed which could incorporate the vital characteristics of the new age which Max Nänny calls the 'Marconi era' in opposition to the 'Gutenberg era' preceding the modernist age.⁴⁴

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is Pound's self-conscious coming to terms with the past, with dead poetic traditions that his early poems had in various aspects been part of, too. The poem - or arrangement of poems - works by dialectically contrasting voices which are in the process unveiled as equally threatened identities (or aspects of a single identity) which lose as much in the process as they depend on it for their constitution. The theme of the sequence is the impasses and consequently the death of traditional poetry represented by the fictional character Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. The first part, however, is declared to be an ode for the sepulchre of E.P. The initials are, of course, Pound's. This is not so much a gesture that proves Pound's detachment from the problems described in the sequence as a - jocular, but also serious -

⁴⁴Nänny, *Poetics for an Electric Age*, p. 18.

admission that he is not at all exempt from them, that the personal identity of the poet, the identity of his texts and the personae representing this identity (Mauberley or E.P., for instance) are inextricably connected.

Mauberley, the failed poet, is characterised as an artist whose attachment to realism forms the basis of his art as well as the main reason for his failure ('His true Penelope was Flaubert'). This is, of course, just as much applicable to Pound's early poetics (a hint at that is the description of the sequence as a farewell to London in the footnote to the title page of the poem which links the theme of abandonment of the text with Pound's biography). As the discussion of Imagism has shown, its reliance on 'the thing' or its 'apparition' with its overtones of originality and authenticity is in structural terms nothing but a more complex form of realistic mimesis.

Mimesis, however, only co-existed with construction in a problematic tension in the new age. The descriptions referring to the altered state of things are unambiguously negative. The 'grimace' of part one is the first indication that *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is more than a farewell to old standards, it is a lament. Part III is almost a list of reproaches of the new age which is accused of diluting and perverting the strengths of what appears to be a rather hazy classical period. The 'before and after' list reads - in a very Nietzschean fashion: classical beauty - modern ornament; original art - its mechanical modern parody (embodied in the pianola); Dionysos - Christ; the phallic and ambrosial - homoeopathic dilutions; sensuality and ecstasy - its cheap simulation in the popular media. The summary of these damnations is to be found in the centre of the part:

All things are flowing,
Sage Heracleitus says;
But a tawdry cheapness
Shall outlast our days.

Paul Smith regards these features as a hint at what later becomes 'Pound's vehemently restorative politics' emerging out of the notion that 'contradiction is ultimately a threat, or treated as something accidental or transient which could be rectified or repaired.'⁴⁵

Yet even though the lost tradition is lamented, the poem is aware that it will not be resurrected. The reasons for that are outlined in the fourth and fifth part of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. The shock of the Great War with its profound decimation of both the younger generation and the faith in established norms had also shattered any possible aesthetic consensus. This radical break, however, did not itself produce a new aesthetic. It merely left a void that created nostalgia which in turn trapped any attempt at new forms into obsolete ones. The following two parts of the poem are mere reminiscences about the radicals of the last generation. Self-consciously this activity is criticised in the protagonist of the second poem, M. Verog, 'out of step with the decade'. It is pure mythopoeia.⁴⁶

The aggressive overtones of the reminiscences eventually take over in the following parts of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* which attack current literary attitudes. Their first victim is characteristically a Jew. He is criticised for denying his cultural heritage. The second one is a literary opportunist, the third an esoteric stylist. The charges are thus directed against every form of neglecting one's history, one's belief, eventually the demands of life. This central concern of Pound's early poems is still dominant, and it cannot be satisfied in 'soft' poetry which succumbs to the

⁴⁵Smith, *Pound Revised*, p. 30.

⁴⁶This is even apparent to a mere searcher for keys and hidden identities in Pound's poems. Compare Ruthven, *Guide*, p. 135.

psychologising and ornamentalising tendencies of which so many contemporaries of Pound - and he himself - were guilty. Eliot especially comes to mind in poem XII which is reminiscent of his 'Portrait of a Lady'. Such poetry must remain 'snapping at empty air', an image which first appears in the Ovidian epigraph of the second half of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and then again in the second part of this second half.

The circular movement of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is evident. The complaint of the first half reappears in the second one, hardly disguised, since 'The Age Demanded' actually bears the subtitle 'Vide Poem II. Page 188'. The text is aware of its uncomfortable closure, its inability to break out of the formal constraints that it criticises. Although it manages to discuss these problems in an exemplary dialectic fashion, a solution for them is not in sight. Indeed, the very fact that these issues are dealt with in a poetic text devalues them somehow (as the ironic use of inverted commas for 'The Age Demanded' in part two of the poem indicates). Pound's footnote to the entire poem that offers the reader the freedom to skip the text completely shows his realisation that even a criticism of one's own tradition ends up as an eventually empty mythologising of the past.

6. Solid Fare for Degenerate Stomachs: The Materiality of *The Cantos*

Like so many major modernist works, *The Cantos* came as a surprise in Pound's oeuvre. Although there is evidence that he started planning them as early as 1909⁴⁷ and although undoubtedly many of the features of *The Cantos* are radicalised

⁴⁷And perhaps conceived the idea for them as early as 1904 or 1905 in a conversation with his Anglo-Saxon teacher, Professor Ibbotson. See Kenner, *Pound Era*, pp. 354-355.

versions of characteristics of his earlier works, their sheer length together with their organic growth connected with the life of their author, their highly complex, if not chaotic character, their use of many forms of cultural discourse which by far exceeds Pound's usual strategy of blundering the lives and works of other poets,⁴⁸ last not least the impossibility of finding a central message of *The Cantos*, an organising principle, accounts for the special position of this text, not only in Pound's works, but in the history of modernism.

In their relation to myth, *The Cantos* employ a difficult double strategy. On the one hand, the poem abounds with mythical fragments. It starts with a reference to the Odysseus myth which remains a central topic throughout the poem. It comes across many others in the course of its creation. Yet - unlike Pound's earlier poems - *The Cantos* do not transform the fragments they incorporate into their system. These are left remarkably unchanged, which often accounts for radical clashes in their montage. Even the translations of fragments from other languages remain faithful to their originals, very dissimilar to Pound's earlier 'translations' which hijack the original texts and force them into a new contemporary frame. The organising principle of *The Cantos* is that of contrast. It can be detected in the radical break between the end of canto I which is concerned with Aphrodite and ends with the line 'Bearing the golden bough of Argicida. So that:' and the beginning of canto II: 'Hang it all, Robert

⁴⁸A tendency that provoked once more Wyndham Lewis's criticism in *Time and Western Man* (pp. 85-86):

Pound is that curious thing, a person without a trace of originality of any sort. It is impossible even to imagine him being anyone in particular of all the people he has translated, interpreted, appreciated [...] Ezra is a crowd; a little crowd.

Quoted in Ellmann, *Poetics of Impersonality*, p. 137.

Browning.⁴⁹ Not only the subject-matter of the succeeding lines is entirely different, also the nature of the utterances is incongruous (lyricism versus drastic direct speech). Such examples of radically contrasting discourse appear throughout *The Cantos*.

The Cantos try to maintain the 'solidity' of the discourses they employ by refusing to integrate them into a new harmonic poetic unity. Their method is paratactic. This purges the text of a conventional identity. It also prevents the poem from creating new myths out of fragments, at least at first glance.

The most radical attempt to achieve solidity is the use of ideograms. They emphasise the main driving force behind Pound's poetics: the concern for proper expression. The Chinese character *cheng ming*, introduced in canto LI, stand for this concept. It signifies 'correct name(s)'. Pound's etymology of the term claims that the character derives from those of 'governor' and 'waning moon over the mouth' and thus has ideographic connections with its signified. This is highly dubious, not only because the history of the development of the Chinese written language is rather different from what Pound and his source Fenollosa believe.⁵⁰ The term 'correct name(s)' refers to abstractions without ideographic equivalents.

The contradiction unveils the central problem of *The Cantos*: how can they deal with their central issues of language, culture, and history without 'diluting' the issues by the use of inappropriate terms? The problem is defined by Pound in economic terms as usury. But it soon becomes evident (especially in cantos XLV and

⁴⁹All quotations from *The Cantos* are from Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987).

⁵⁰Hugh Kenner repeats the dubious etymology of the term *cheng ming* in *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (Milwood, N.J.: Kraus Reprint Co., 1974), p. 38. A more critical view can be found in Hwa Yol Jung, 'Misreading the Ideogram: from Fenollosa to Derrida and McLuhan', *Paideuma*, 13, no. 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 211-27.

LI) that the term has a much wider application: 'Usury kills the child in the womb'; 'Usury is against nature's increase' (both in canto LI). It becomes a universal concept of substitution, devaluation, and betrayal. And as such it refers to the distinction between phallic strength and anal laxity that has been an undercurrent in Pound's early poems and now becomes prominent, explicitly in the so-called 'Hell Cantos' XIV and XV.⁵¹

But the problem also reflects back on Pound's poetics where inflationary trickery, the exploitation of language's autonomy and arbitrariness, are condemned as the first step towards the decline of literature, then culture, eventually - full circle back to the beginning of the chain - nature. For, despite all the radical metonymies of *The Cantos*, their brutal contrasting of distant discourses, their underlying model of thought is still organic. A.D. Moody describes Pound's 'cosmic' model in the following way:

there is but the one intelligence: human intelligence, and the intelligence in nature, these are (or ought to be) one and the same. Real intelligence is seminal intelligence, the intelligence that is of the vital process. Hence Pound's 'paradiso terrestre', not a paradise out of nature, but the right ordering of man in nature. And this is his 'Cosmos'.⁵²

It is obvious that the very material that is employed to advertise or create this *paradiso terrestre*, language, stands in the way. As most linguists agree, signifiers are

⁵¹Discussions of phallocentrism and anality can be found in Smith, *Pound Revised*, pp. 52-55; Ellmann, *Poetics of Impersonality*, pp. 185 & 189; also in Alan Durant, *Ezra Pound: Identity in Crisis* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 130 and pp. 138 ff. It is a central issue in Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986) and in the Pound chapter in Edward Larrissy, *Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry: The Language of Gender and Objects* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), esp. pp. 31 & 43-46.

⁵²A.D. Moody, 'The Pisan Cantos: Making Cosmos in the Wreckage of Europe', *Paideuma*, 12, no. 1 (1982), 135-46 (p. 145).

always in excess of signifieds.⁵³ Inflation is thus an in-built feature of signification just as much as lack of stability in the problematic motivation of signs. Both threaten every artistic production that strives to get beyond mere appearances. The dilemma is summarised by Adorno and Horkheimer in the caustic remark, 'the word knows that it is weaker than the nature it has deceived'.⁵⁴

Consequently, *The Cantos* try first to gather language in as many of its manifestations as possible (this includes, for example, hieroglyphs and even musical notation), then they attempt to paralyse these fragments of discourse by fixing them into their own unexplained and inexplicable structure. The 'right ordering' they acquire in the process kills their evocative metaphorical potential much more thoroughly than any translation could have done. The text becomes a monolithic block that no longer relates to other texts but becomes the ultimate text. Barthes calls this paralysis a form of suicide. Language plays dead in order to avoid transformation and eventual obsolescence.⁵⁵ This, however, throws *The Cantos* back into the essential impasse of Pound's poetry: its stress on vitality while being completely submerged in the dead. The massive shape and solid structure of *The Cantos* are the external expression of the dilemma. Their incompleteness can be regarded as the revenge of language for the attempted murder.

⁵³See, for instance, Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 290: 'The *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be *supplemented*.'

⁵⁴Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 69.

⁵⁵Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 144. See also Adorno & Horkheimer on mathematics as a linguistic adaption to death in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 60.

7. Sailing Into the Known: Odysseus as Miscast Archivist

Although *The Cantos* avoid the introduction of a central narrator or even recurring protagonists, their ordering structure highlights two basic modes of dealing with the rich material of the text. One could call them exploration and archive.

The archivist aspect of the poem finds its expression in the addiction to all forms of cultural heritage preserved in written language⁵⁶ and also in the, albeit highly idiosyncratic, ways of ordering them. Yet - unlike *The Waste Land* - *The Cantos* do not aim at integrating the reader into a common cultural heritage. On the contrary, they gain their authority from their inaccessibility. They force their reader to become an academic researcher - and thus to identify very closely with both the ordering principle of the text and its creator, Pound. The representation of Sigismundo Malatesta, an obscure Renaissance character, is typical. Dug up from the archives by Pound himself, he is portrayed almost exclusively by the quotation of manuscripts. Alternatively, his actions are summarised in the manner of a medieval text. The summary thus gains itself the status of a document. The poem tries hard to be non-poetic. An impression of authenticity is created that transcends the fragments and permeates the whole of the poem. Despite its characteristically artificial appearance, the text makes the reader believe that it actually incorporates reality. One is made to forget that the documents cited in it - authentic as they may be - only ever contain

⁵⁶In this respect, it remains a mystery that some critics still stress the particular oral and aural qualities of Pound's poetry. See, for instance, Nänny, *Poetics for an Electric Age*.

fictions themselves. The signal is set once more for the transformation of history into nature, the creation of myth.

The archive as one of the major ordering devices of *The Cantos* has as its model and point of reference Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Its counterpart and competitor is a rather different organisation of traditional knowledge: Homer's *Odyssey*. Both works describe a journey undertaken by a courageous individual, both of them collect established stories from their respective cultural backgrounds. Yet there are two major differences in their organisation which cause problems in *The Cantos* where both models are employed simultaneously. Dante's first person narrator does not actually get involved in any of the stories he encounters. They are events of the past, actions of other individuals whom he meets either in hell, purgatory, or heaven where they have ended up as a result of their deeds. What he comes across are stories, other texts that he collects. He is the prototypical archivist. Odysseus, on the other hand, actually undergoes all the perils of his journey. He is the reverse of Dante's narrator, since he himself describes his adventures to an audience, the Phaiakians. He is the producer of texts, the active principle that Pound endorses.

But as impersonations of phallic activity both his journey and his personality are something of a problem. *The Odyssey* is characterised by the absence of a map; Odysseus' travels are a *periplous*, random explorations with uncertain outcome; his eventual return to Ithaca is not so much his achievement than a favour granted by the gods who have used him as their toy all the time. Despite his aggressive masculine actions he remains a passive victim. His personality is no match for his fate, and very often this fate is represented by women. 'Wandering holes', as they are indirectly alluded to in canto XLVII, they still exert considerable control. Circe is the most

obvious example and characteristically also the one that appears at the very outset of canto I. When Odysseus and his crew set sail in such a manly fashion, when *The Cantos* start their exploration and (re-)construction of cultural history, both follow Circe's instructions. And she is only one among the many powerful female characters, goddesses, historic personalities, or mere unidentified girls in the poem, all of whom are assigned a dangerous and destructive sexuality. In canto XXXIX is an overt example of this tendency:

When I lay in the ingle of Circe
I heard a song of that kind.
Fat panther lay by me
Girls talked there of fucking, beasts talked there of eating,
All heavy with sleep, fucked girls and fat leopards,

The danger inherent in the female principle is formlessness, the loss of definition and identity. But the denial of identity is exactly the survival strategy adopted by Odysseus and also by *The Cantos* themselves. Odysseus masters one of his adventures, the defeat of the Cyclops, by keeping his name secret, by punning on the phonetic similarity of 'Odysseus' and *outis*, meaning 'no man'. Dante's protagonist, too, lacks a name. His journey, however, is clearly mapped out and follows the doctrines of Christian faith, an 'Aquinas-map', as Pound calls it. Those guidelines are no longer valid in *The Cantos*.⁵⁷ They try to undertake a journey without a defined protagonist and without reliable orientations. This has two consequences: it continually throws *The Cantos* back into their own system; i.e. as a vehicle the text becomes monadic, self-sufficient, and ends up in an ahistorical isolation that obscures even the history of its production. 'No man made me' is the

⁵⁷'Aquinas-map; Aquinas *not* valid now', writes Pound in *Selected Letters*, p. 323; quoted in George Kearns, *Ezra Pound: The Cantos*, Landmarks of World Literature (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 6.

message of the text, as Maud Ellmann points out.⁵⁸ This could also act as a self-applied description of many other modernist texts which try to present themselves as *machines célibataires*, created impersonally out of themselves.

The idea that being named endangers one's identity and makes one susceptible to change (this is one of the standard premises of magic) forces *The Cantos* to shun stable and identifiable representations of identity. Yet the complementary notion that the power to name and erase is the power of textuality (*PI* 189-190) opens up the way for the poem's main stunt: it not only becomes its own history, it even manages to suggest that this is not merely the history of a poetic text, but actual history, the only conclusive history of civilisation. In the long development from the painful discovery that words no longer describe reality adequately Pound's poem goes all the way and, although claiming to be interested in 'the thing' only, actually abandons the notion of a reality outside the text. It declares the text to be reality. *The Cantos* are not an account of history, culture, and language; they are history, culture, and language in language. A 'poem including history' is Pound's description of the project.⁵⁹ The trick indeed eliminates both personality and competitive mythical fragments in its construction. What it creates instead is an all-inclusive meta-myth that is identical with the text itself and an all-powerful identity that neither requires justification nor has to fear fate.

⁵⁸Maud Ellmann, 'Floating the Pound: The Circulation of the Subject in Pound's *The Cantos*', *Oxford Literary Review*, 3, no. 3 (1979), 16-27 (p. 26).

⁵⁹It derives from the description of the *Odyssey* by its translator Andreas Divus. See Kenner, *Pound Era*, pp. 360-361.

8. Oedipus With Sunglasses: Self-Inflicted Blindness as the Most Powerful Device of Modernism

Both the arrangement of its material in paratactic and consequently illogical order and the careful abstinence from narratorial voices which could invite identification by the reader and thus open up the text to interpretation transform *The Cantos* into a solid block of discourse. William Carlos Williams saw this accurately in his review of *A Draft of XXX Cantos* in 1931 when he described them as 'a closed mind which clings to its power - about which the intelligence beats seeking entrance.'⁶⁰ *The Cantos* are indeed shaped like a modern mind, or rather like *the* modern mind. For their insights and charges are no longer personal ones; they aspire towards universal significance. In a paradoxical way this justifies the approach of so many post-war critics who tried to rescue *The Cantos* from accusations of fascism and anti-humanism by insisting that they should be treated and judged separately from their creator, Pound, who could then be labelled fascist or mad or both.

What such a justified approach often conveniently overlooks is that the impersonal yet universalist nature of a text like *The Cantos* requires an even more thorough look at its political and ethical premises. In that respect it is important to see that *The Cantos* are first and foremost a piece of elaborate cultural criticism. Their attention is almost exclusively fixed on the past. Although Durant overstates the case by characterising the poem as being peopled by gods, heroic demi-gods and evil

⁶⁰Quoted in Guy Davenport, *Cities on Hills* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 102.

spirits, but leaving hardly any part to ordinary men and none to modern man,⁶¹ it is true that all positive examples the text has to offer are drawn from history. The few contemporaries who get a positive mentioning - like Mussolini - are treated as modern versions of classical values.⁶²

Yet most of those past role models are losers themselves. Sigismundo Malatesta is again a good example: he fell from grace through his political manoeuvrings, ended up in exile and even had his effigy burned. It is apparent that despite their uninhibited restorative tendencies the object of reconstruction in *The Cantos* is far from clear. Alexander calls it Pound's 'Hellenic Zion' and - consciously or unconsciously - fuses Pound's internal contradictions in that term. For neither an unproblematic co-existence of Hellenic and Jewish culture nor Zion have ever been realised. The latter has always remained a utopian promise. And then, of course, Pound would never tolerate a Jewish influence in his *paradiso terrestre*. Anti-semitism is a recurring theme of *The Cantos*. Jews - just like women - act as the vilified other without which the text cannot arrive at its constitution (abuse for both women and Jews is coupled in the telling term 'intravaginal warmth of/Hebrew affections' in canto XXXV). The text cannot do without either women or Jews; its archivist tendencies as well as its circulation of forever the same subject of economics actually adds a strong 'Jewish' element to the text. The same internal contradiction characterises the text's propaganda for phallocentrism and the rejection of its opposite, the softness and possible formlessness of the vaginal and anal. Again, rejection mutates into obsession,

⁶¹Durant, *Identity in Crisis*, p. 50.

⁶²Canto LXI compares his tax policy to that of the Chinese emperor Yong Tching. See Kenner, *Pound Era*, p. 435.

and the faecal excesses of the 'Hell Cantos' display a degree of *jouissance* that would have pleased Barthes, but undermines the purity of Pound's poetics radically.

The most important of these contradictions affects the very textuality of *The Cantos*, their heart and soul (if they can be granted one), or perhaps rather the folds of that gigantic mind, if one follows W.C. Williams and implies at the same time that, despite the stress on vitality and elemental urges, *The Cantos* remain an example of rationalism driven to an extreme. They are the embodiment of logocentrism *per se*. The central term of usury, trickery and inflation, which is used so broadly to condemn many aspects of culture is also the one that infects *The Cantos* with the disease it describes. As Kenner observes, the term is inextricably connected with Pound's other major concern, that for exact definition:

The whole key to Pound, the basis of his *Cantos*, his music, his economics, and everything else, is his concern for exact definition.⁶³

Yet from its introduction in canto XII onwards, the term spreads like an epidemic over the whole of the poem until it dominates, at least, cantos XLV and XLVI, L and LI, LXXXV to XC, and XCVI to CIX.⁶⁴ While condemning usury, *The Cantos* themselves commit the crime. Their inflation of discourse that forever centres around the same concepts and their excessive use of sign systems do not at all arrive at *the* proper expression. Instead they create layers of translation⁶⁵ and introduce the polysemy that they try to get rid of through the back door. Kearns tries to describe the dilemma in positive terms:

⁶³Kenner, *Poetry of Ezra Pound*, p. 37.

⁶⁴Michael Alexander, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1979), p. 132.

⁶⁵Smith, *Pound Revised*, p. 54.

As always with Pound, we have an enriching conflict of impulses. Gestures towards an infinite opening into textuality, the undecidable, the free association (via play, puns, fanciful etymologies, fortuitous homophones, superimposition of images, texts and languages) is balanced by an unwavering longing for 'the total sincerity, the precise definition'.⁶⁶

The more aggressive the assertions of *The Cantos* get, the more their internal weakness is laid bare. But this does not make them less dangerous. In the absence of firm concepts of belief, order, religion even, the text draws on an impossible equation, because the concepts that are employed (internal and external nature), problematic since their introduction (they came to prominence in the Enlightenment), were made obsolete by the very crises that spawned modernism. Once more A.D. Moody summarises this equation neatly:

The Pisan Cantos, and *The Cantos* as a whole, cohere as things cohere in the process of nature and in the natural process of the mind.⁶⁷

This is, of course, also the basis of fascism, a premise that can eventually justify everything, because it is based on the interaction of two poles that are neither separate nor separable. Its simplifying nature makes it attractive in times of upheavals. It fulfills the function of a post-Enlightenment myth in the sense that Horkheimer and Adorno discuss it in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and which Hans Blumenberg summarises in the following way:

History says that already some of the monsters have disappeared from the world which were worse than the ones which stand behind the present state of things; and it says that things have always been exactly or almost exactly as they are now. This makes times with quick changes in the structure of their systems anxious for new myths, for re-mythification.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Kearns, *The Cantos*, p. 12.

⁶⁷Moody, 'Pisan Cantos', p. 136.

⁶⁸Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 41 (my translation).

The synthetic consciousness of *The Cantos* unveils a major deficiency of modernism: it does not and cannot contain an element of self-awareness, an inbuilt critical distance to its own assertions. Wolfgang Hildesheimer calls this the lack of a theory of cognition,⁶⁹ Maud Ellmann an enforced blindness towards its own features (*PI* 164). The knowledge of *The Cantos* is universally valid because it is 'simply there' and has no origins in either a personality or a history. When real history catches up with the text in the shape of World War II, when the creator of *The Cantos* became a prisoner of the U.S., the poem answers with a structural gap. Two missing cantos, LXXII and LXXIII, create a 'real break or seismic rift'.⁷⁰ The only point in the text where an element of self-reflection could come in through the momentary cease in the flow of discourse is an absence. A weaker echo of this is the exchange of human language for music, the most unreferential of sign systems, in canto LXXV. The title of the sixteenth century composition *Chant des Oiseaux*⁷¹ even hints at the substitution of language for the unconscious voices of birds. The self-inflicted blindness of *The Cantos* hides an extremist rationalism that has purged the text from any weakening traces of personality by giving it the status of a all-encompassing consciousness. The text itself becomes the meta-myth of modernism.

⁶⁹Wolfgang Hildesheimer, 'Die Wirklichkeit der Reaktionäre: Über T.S. Eliot und Ezra Pound', *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 28 (July, 1974), 630-647 (p. 640).

⁷⁰Moody, '*Pisan Cantos*', p. 137. The missing cantos exist but have never been published. Written in Italian, they praise German-Italian resistance behind Allied lines. See Peter Ackroyd, *Ezra Pound, Literary Lives* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987, ¹1981), pp. 82-83.

⁷¹William Cookson, *A Guide to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London & Sidney: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 78.

VI. The Impossible Utterance Refuses to Die: Modernist Poetry as a Universal Compensation Strategy

1. Internal Problems and Lost Outsides

Modernism in English poetry starts from the experience of a fundamental instability. It develops through various experimental stages in which attempts to overcome this instability are made - and leads to the apparent triumph of the tactics: a stable synthetic consciousness is created that resolves all possible tensions between reality, experience and the medium that tries to connect both: language.¹

Yet if the eventual result of the compensation process, the concrete block of discourse as represented by Pound's *Cantos*, is accepted as that as which it tries to present itself, *the* modern consciousness, the analyst has become the victim of the self-mystification that accompanies all stages of the development. What has started as a process of substitution, as a defence against the lost grip of poetry on any form of external reality, eventually presents itself as total victory. The 'lost outside' matters no longer, because now everything is and happens 'inside': the work of art becomes its own world. This is not at all similar to aestheticist tendencies which denounce reality in favour of art. Aestheticism finds reality revolting and chooses the artistic

¹The term 'synthetic consciousness' derives from an unpublished paper by Dr. Michael Bell (University of Warwick) with the title 'Odysseus Bound: Joyce, Nietzsche and the Myth of Modernism' presented at a conference on 'Myth and Modernism' in Meschede, Germany, in November 1990.

realm as its abode instead.² Modernism - after a long period of struggle with reality - does not present itself as anti- or counter-realism, but as an ultimately sophisticated form of realism that no longer knows of a reality outside its works. This achievement disguises both the processes that have to be undergone in order to arrive at the complete autonomy of the work and - equally important - the traces that every stage of the development inevitably leaves in all modernist poems.

Consequently, the aim of this summary will be threefold. It will present once more in condensed form the strategies with which modernist poetry fights its basic instability, its lack of orientation in a reality outside its works. Secondly, it will outline the consequences of these strategies. Thirdly, taking strategies and effects together and examining them from the final outcome of the modernist poetics, ways of assessing the modernist project in English poetry will be discussed. These should still be based on its structures but without being caught in the greatest structure of all, the modernist myth of itself. They will then structure the second part of this study, the discussion of the limits of modernism in English poetry.

2. Strategies of Stabilisation

The analysis of Hopkins' poetry shows that the basic instability which lies at the heart of modernism is not simply definable as a change of external reality, i.e. the

²Aestheticism as a step in the development from Victorianism to modernism is discussed in Peter Faulkner, *Modernism, The Critical Idiom*, 35 (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 4. He mentions the interest of modernism in ordinary experience as a distinguishing factor (p. 16). Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde* describes modernism as firmly based in aestheticism. The crucial difference he sees is the modernists' attempt to organise a new life and practice from a basis in art (p. 49).

context of the poems. The themes and topics of Hopkins' poems remain firmly within the conventions of their time. The same applies to the majority of Yeats's works, and - to a more limited extent - even those of Eliot and Pound. The threat to Hopkins' poems is internal: language no longer fulfils its task of signification; the connection between signifier and signified is lost.³ The consequences of this loss are manifold. The poems are deprived of their mimetic potential, but also of any external point of reference that could control their imagery. The effects are an increasing artistic freedom: daring combinations of images become possible. But this freedom also entails an eventual futility. No matter how ingenious the texts become, the threat that within their established autonomy they are eventually meaningless is continually present.

This danger is most perceptible when it comes to the central aspect in Hopkins' poetry: the assertion of an identity in the face of a transcendental Other, God. Both this identity and its necessary counterpart become increasingly problematic and evasive in the development of modernist poetry. Yet their interchange and mutual challenge remains crucial. It represents the survival of the Romantic heritage, the continual presence of an identity that is forced to establish and defend itself all the time.⁴

³Richard Sheppard describes this loss as follows: 'That which links thought with language, language with the external world, and man with man has disappeared. Like the mock tennis game in Antonioni's *Blow-up*, all language games are felt to have become absurd because the ball, that which guarantees communication between subject and object, is lost'; 'The Crisis of Language', in Bradbury & McFarlane, *Modernism*, pp. 323-336 (p. 328).

⁴The Romantic poles of self and world are still present, although their identity is no longer possible. See Faulkner, *Modernism*, p. 51.

In Yeats's poetry these Romantic roots are even more pronounced. The starting-point of his poems is always the individual - artistic - self fighting for its position in an environment that denies permanence to the self and its works. History is experienced as a succession of creation and destruction that refuses the individual an active part. The only way of coping with this flux is its aesthetic reification. Yeats transforms history into an esoteric cycle in which both man and historic events fulfil a passive function. The leaning of this model towards fatalism and myth is evident.

The tendency of reifying experience is even stronger in Eliot's works. Not only history and events are transformed into objects with the help of metaphors and metonymies. The procedure does not stop when faced with people or even the speaker(s) of the poems themselves. One could argue that reification is indeed a way of dealing with external reality in a text, i.e. claim that this tendency proves - contrary to what has been said before - that the connection between language and reality is still unbroken. If that is the case, language itself has changed its status radically. If it is not to be seen as a paradoxical mechanism that transforms experience into something that is neither experience nor language, it must be regarded as an object itself. This would entail the reification of language itself. Not the growing internalisation that has been observed as a feature of modernist poetry, but a complete exteriorisation would be the eventual outcome of its development.

The apparent contradiction disappears when one abandons the notion that the relation (or non-relation) between language and its exterior in modernist poetry is a mimetic one. Neither is the language of modernist poems merely an effect, much less the depiction of an external reality, nor is the reality of modernist poems modelled on the features of its material, language. A dialectic tension between the two poles

activated by the notion of their separateness is a more adequate description of their relation. Both language and reality become fluid concepts which undermine and transform each other continually. The two most radical outcomes of this interaction are indeed the complete objectification of language and the complete internalisation of reality. They can be found in their most refined forms in the works of Ezra Pound, especially *The Cantos* which can be described in both terms and thus demonstrate the internal similarities of the seemingly antithetic developments.

The underlying strategies of these developments accompany modernism from its very beginnings. They can be called reduction and expansion. In most cases, the techniques go hand in hand, the effect thus created is alienating and distorting. Hopkins' compounds which fuse images and his strings of nouns and adjectives are illustrations of their interaction. The goal is clearly contact with the reality the poems try to describe. Yet the belief in the existence of an outside and the mimetic approach towards it already clash with an awareness of the poem's own constructive aspect: form and possible 'content' can no longer be reconciled.

The internal ambivalence of Hopkins' poems concerning their own act of secondary creation which - if it was successful - would prove the complete autonomy of poetry, leads to self-destructive mechanisms which create and destroy images simultaneously (as in 'The Windhover'). Although this distrust of the potentials of poetry is closely linked with Hopkins' religious beliefs, it can be regarded as an early manifestation of the observed schizophrenic rift within modernism. It undermines the attempts to compensate the lost grip on reality by the creation of its own with a constant notion of futility, or - in Hopkins' and also Eliot's case - hubris.

Yeats's early works seem much more at ease with their own position because they do not try to come to terms with real life, but prefer to remain within their Victorian conventions or rely on well-trodden Romantic settings. This addiction to symbolic systems, be they established ones or idiosyncratic, never really leaves Yeats's works. It represents a shift of the problem of text versus a possible outside. Now the point of reference of the poem is no longer reality, but another text. The signifieds of symbols remain opaque and thus powerful. Yet this confidence in an inherent autonomy of the textual does not make his poems immune to an intrusion from the conveniently ignored outside or problems created by the texts' internal mechanisms.

The first enters the poem in the shape of history and in the equally important suspicion that the reliance on symbols and symbolic settings is incapable of dealing with the concerns of an actual subject (in Yeats's case, Yeats himself and his tortured private life). The latter are generated by Yeats's symbolic technique itself: the use of symbols as an intertextual device fills the poems to the brim with additional associations, paradigms, and subtexts. Up to a certain degree this procedure enriches them. But when it becomes dominant, not only the direction of the texts is lost, in some cases their capacity of expression disappears completely and only the impression of chaos remains. This can still be productive (as in 'The Valley of the Black Pig' which deals explicitly with apocalypse); in most cases it is counterproductive and leaves the reader with a jumble of disconnected images.

Again, the additive technique which piles up layer upon layer of symbolic references is countered by a reductive one. The exotic imagery of Yeats's earliest poems and the Irish fairy tale settings are replaced by personal recollections or images

drawn from nature. Yet both substitutes quickly become symbolic themselves. Once a symbolic approach has been chosen, it transforms all images into elements of a symbolic network. Thus Maud Gonne becomes Pallas Athene in 'Beautiful Lofty Things', and seemingly innocent nature images - like the swans in 'The Wild Swans at Coole' - are soon charged with symbolic potential, by their association with classical mythology for example.

Yeats's poems only overcome their addiction to symbolism by submission to an even more universal system, that of myth.⁵ His last poems actually discuss their indebtedness to symbols. Poems like 'A Long-Legged Fly' and 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' depict an unbroken reliance on them, yet with the crucial difference that the speaker is now in a position to discuss this attachment. This capacity is the result of a superhistorical attitude (to use Nietzsche's term) which is nothing but the elevation of the individual through its submission to myth.

Addiction to symbols or myths is not the first thing to come to mind in the discussion of Eliot's poems. Indeed, he is the first among the poets in this study to introduce what appears to be 'realistic' imagery drawn from the 'urban experience' which features so crucially in most assessments of modernism.⁶ The distaste of 'real

⁵See James McFarlane: 'Within the situation of fluidity, 'myth' [...] commended itself as a highly effective device for imposing order of a symbolic, even poetic, kind on the chaos of quotidian events, and offering the opportunity - to use a phrase of Frank Kermode's - to "short circuit the intellectual and liberate the imagination which the scientism of the modern world suppresses"'; 'The Mind of Modernism', in Bradbury & McFarlane, *Modernism*, pp. 71-93 (p.82).

⁶Malcolm Bradbury describes its importance in the following terms: 'And if modernism is a particularly urban art, that is partly because the modernist artist, like his fellow-men, has been caught up in the spirit of the modern city, which is itself the spirit of a modern technological society. The modern city has appropriated most of the functions and communications of society, most of its population, and the furthest extremities of its

life' which is so evident in most of Yeats's works seems to have been replaced by a craving for reality. Eliot's poems no longer rely on intertextuality to create a convenient intermediate plane that facilitates (or prevents) an interaction between text and its exterior.

Two contradictions are, however, instantly provoked by the preceding statements: if Eliot's poems refrain from using intertextuality, why are so many of them supplied with classical epigraphs? And if they aim at grasping 'real life', why do they employ complex metaphors for its depiction? Apparently, Eliot's 'realism' is not a simple one, if it is one at all. His use of daring metaphors - metaphors whose signified hovers between the poles of two distant signifiers - hints at an attempt to recapture certain capacities of language that have apparently been lost. If T.E. Hulme's statement is correct and 'abstract words are merely codified dead metaphors',⁷ then Eliot's fusion of abstract words into daring metaphors is an attempt to revive the metaphoric potential of language.

This metaphoric potential has wider implications which by far transcend mere linguistic capacities. As Kittay points out, cognition and the creation of metaphors are interrelated procedures. Eliot's struggle with metaphors reveals problems of the cognitive handling of experience.⁸ His poems are indeed psychological landscapes,

technological, commercial, industrial and intellectual experience. The city has become culture, or perhaps the chaos that succeeds it.'; 'The Cities of Modernism', in Bradbury & McFarlane, *Modernism*, pp. 96-104 (p. 97).

⁷T.E. Hulme, *Further Speculations*, edited by Sam Hynes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 11. Quoted in Schwartz, *Matrix of Modernism*, p. 57.

⁸In Schwartz's words: 'Language is another mechanism for arranging practical experience. Words like concepts are designed to facilitate practical transactions but only at the expense of immediate experience. They do not so much express our thoughts as condition them. Most of us fail to realize the extent to which language shapes the very way we register

but not in the simplistic autobiographic sense. They depict the problems within the interaction of experience, cognition, and language that accompany modernism like a birthmark. His increasing use of metonymic structures hints at a radical attempt to come to terms with the distorted relation between those poles and is not merely a mimetic reaction to a fragmentation of reality.

Eliot's crucial concept of the 'objective correlative' points at the reification of experience that goes hand in hand with the use of metonymies. It is an endeavour to bridge the gap between language and reality in the arena of their interaction, the realm of cognition. Both his radical tactics of questioning the validity of knowledge in *The Waste Land* and the conservative move that stresses the importance of traditional knowledge in *Four Quartets* are such strategies of reification. The former reifies sensual impressions, i.e. experience, in disconnected images. The latter reifies knowledge, i.e. established symbolic systems and thus forms of (meta-)language.⁹

Eliot's reification of the two poles that constitute cognition and knowledge, experience and language, is radicalised by Pound.¹⁰ His extensive use of personae takes the histories of (imaginary or real) characters - which are nothing but reified experience - as filters to create and support the structures of his own poems. The same applies to the manipulation of mythical fragments.

impressions'; *Matrix of Modernism*, p. 28.

⁹Schwartz rightly traces this idea back to Nietzsche; *Matrix of Modernism*, p. 77. This connection will be further explored in the chapter on language philosophy below.

¹⁰Schwartz stresses the "'tensional" relationship that mediates between the desire to recover suppressed experience and the desire to project new forms that reshape the world around us' in Pound; *Matrix of Modernism*, p. 114.

Language itself is reified when Pound's attention turns towards the materiality of his works. The nature of language is apparently the problem. After the gathering tendencies of the explorer (the random move) and the archivist (the structured assembly of language), Pound's works soon discover the danger of being overwhelmed by their own material. Its paradigmatic aspect which constantly brings in new associations, new contexts, is the crux. And, on an even more basic level, again the lacking motivation of signs. Pound's poems can never be sure that - in spite of their attempts at economy - they are not invaded by meaning that they do not want to produce, tradition for example. The danger of inflation that is eventually directly attacked in the endless sermons on usury in *The Cantos* hints at the peril that every text has to face: the risk of being superfluous.

Pound's poetry in and for an age in which - as Paul Valéry points out - literature has become 'as obsolete and as far removed from life and practices as geomancy, the heraldic art and the science of falconry'¹¹ (and one should add: not willingly so) has indeed problems justifying its own existence. The declared Mallarméan intention of purifying the dialect of the tribe must be seen as both a macrocosmic endeavour to reshuffle the dominant epistemes of Western culture and as the microcosmic attempt to streamline - and thus to justify - poetry itself.

The two radical moves that have been mentioned several times, complete internalisation and total externalisation, are consequently most overt in Pound's works. The latter appears as tactics of transforming poetry into formulas (as in Imagism and Vorticism): the 'mathematisation' of language is designed to exempt the texts from temporality and possible corruption. The exact counterpart of the 'simple' formulas

¹¹Quoted in Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, p. 225.

of Imagist poems is the 'world formula'¹² of *The Cantos* which tries to include all of history and civilisation. Both strategies simulate a superhistorical position of the work of art and are thus essentially mythical procedures. But although they return to myth as the most comprehensive of all structures of language, they are born out of the same bewilderment that generates Hopkins' poetry. They cannot come to terms with the basic feature of language: the arbitrary nature of the sign.

3. 'In my beginning is my end': Approaching the Limits of Modernism

The structural description of the limits of modernist English poetry shows how the instability of the basic element of language triggers off various strategies of compensation. Each of these strategies is superseded by or indeed incorporated in an even more radical procedure when its shortcomings become obvious.¹³ The deficiencies of the tactics are always unveiled when the texts are faced with exactly that which highlights the instability of the sign: the exterior of language, its referent. No matter whether it confronts the poems in the shape of history or identity, it always acts as the Other of the texts whose repression grants them temporary omnipotence, yet whose inevitable re-emergence not only relativises them, but questions their status and eventually their right to exist.

¹²The allusion to Heisenberg and quantum physics is intended. The modernist 'project' finds its expression in a multitude of disciplines.

¹³This should not be misread as a claim for a linear progression of modernist techniques. As the discussions of the four poets has shown, some techniques prove more addictive than others, and modernism is, after all, not a depersonalised development - despite its claims for impersonality.

The modernist yearning for its outside thus reverberates back on its internal justifications. Both the tendency towards superhistoricism and impersonality can be interpreted as radical attempts to overcome the problem by eliminating its cause. The strategies seemingly succeed when developed to their utmost, when the poems are either everything - or nothing, no thing, apparitions without subjective centre or historic position. The first stance is a radical expansion of the potentials of the poetic material: everything is (in) language - language is everything. The second one is a radical reduction: language is only language.

Both are paradoxical, and their paradoxes are easily uncovered. If everything is in language, then language itself is nothing, nothing, that is, which is separable from reality. But if language was not different from what it talks about, it would not communicate, would not even signify. A sign is only a sign because it stands for something which it is not.¹⁴ The presentation of the text as a self-sufficient monadic entity also contradicts the basic rules of communication theory: meaning is only achieved by difference. Signs as well as complete texts achieve their meaning by not being other signs or texts. In order to signify, signs as well as texts must belong to a system.¹⁵

The limits of modernist poetics are thus made obvious by the possibility of analysing their mechanisms, i.e. by the capacity of the reader/analyst to assume a position which is a) outside the text (although the text presents itself as an inclusive

¹⁴This is a pragmatic simplification of the problem. For an overview of linguistic positions concerning the referentiality of signs see Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, pp. 35-38.

¹⁵See, among many others, Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 292: 'The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain'.

myth) and b) a discursive one (even though the poem pretends to be non-discursive, an object, the purified 'thing' of Pound's poetic theories). The lost outside - which in its radical formulation includes the reader, the analyst of the text - returns with a vengeance.

Making limits obvious, however, does not explain them. If this study wants to understand the limitations of modernist poetry and its possible ends, it has to broaden its approach in order to escape the tendency of modernist poetry to present itself as all-inclusive. Yet it must remain attached to those points that have presented themselves as impasses in the analyses of the four poets and the interrelated structures of modernist poems. These areas of tension are the subject - which surfaces in the various futile attempts to give it a permanent and convincing representation - and objective reality 'outside' the texts which enters them at various points and continually threatens their structures. The following chapters will try to capture the impasses behind these poles by using related disciplines as a point of comparison and as 'lenses' through which the particular problems of modernist poetry will present themselves as facets of the impasses of the entire 'modernist project'. Psychoanalysis will supply the concepts for an evaluation of the problematic constitution of the subject. Language philosophy will shed some light on the various approaches to the connection of language and reality. Economy will cover the middle ground in the mechanisms of exchange, evaluation and distribution which happen internally in modernist poems. The broadening of the view will eventually enable this study to survey the attempts of modernist poetry in the light of a general notion of aesthetics where the particular aesthetics of modernism will present themselves in a radical light which places particular demands on works of art.

VII. Inside the Outside of the Inside: Modernist Poetry and Psychoanalysis

*No, non ho madre, non ho sesso,
ho ucciso il padre col silenzio*
[No, I have neither mother nor sex,
I have killed father with silence]

(Pier Paolo Pasolini, '*Lingua*' [Language])

1. Outside, Looking In? Modernist Poetry and Psychoanalysis as Intersections of the Modernist Project

No matter how much antagonism psychoanalysis had to face when it emerged as a science from about 1850 onwards and more pronouncedly with the works of Freud after the turn of the century, it could always rely on one ally, literature. The two disciplines instantly established a relation that not only superficially resembled family ties. It was as if with psychoanalysis a lost or forgotten element within or at the borders of literature had suddenly resurfaced and changed literature for good. As Lionel Trilling puts it (his remarks refer to poetry, but can be applied to other genres, too):

For, of all mental systems, the Freudian psychology is the one which makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind. Indeed, the mind, as Freud sees it, is in the greater part of its tendency exactly a poetry-making organ. [...] Freud has not merely naturalized poetry; he has discovered its status as a pioneer settler, and he sees it as a method of thought.¹

Yet the relationship also worked successfully in the opposite direction. Psychoanalysis

¹Lionel Trilling, 'Freud and Literature', in David Lodge, ed., *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London & New York: Longman, 1985, ¹1972), pp. 276-290 (p. 287); (first published in *The Liberal Imagination* (New York, 1950), pp. 49-50).

happily appropriated both the subject-matter of literature, stories and myths, and made literary terms elements of its own vocabulary. Freud's central concepts of narcissism and the Oedipus complex are the most prominent examples. And whether he applied his ideas to Jensen, Goethe, E.T.A. Hoffmann, or Dostoevsky, he had no problems seeing a close relation between literature (and art in general) and psychological dispositions, a connection discussed in depth in his essay on 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming'.² C.G. Jung - whose works paralleled Freud's before he left the Freudian concept of individual psychology behind to concentrate on his own theory of general anthropological patterns of the psyche - uses fairy tales, folklore, and eventually Eastern mysticism as the material of his inquiries. Jacques Lacan, in many ways Freud's successor, returns to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for a discussion of desire and its interpretation.³

In the terminology of psychoanalysis, the term 'symbol' quickly reached considerable prominence. It features crucially in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but also appears in Jung's theory of archetypes when he explicitly discusses their symbolic nature as opposed to any notion that they might be allegories (another literary term):

All the mythological processes of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective occurrences; rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's

²Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', in *Art and Literature*, The Pelican Freud Library, 14, pp. 129-141.

³Jacques Lacan, 'Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*', in Shoshana Felman, ed., *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading - Otherwise* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, ¹1982), pp. 11-52.

consciousness by way of projection - that is, mirrored in the events of nature.⁴

An allegory is a paraphrase of a conscious content, whereas a symbol is the best possible expression for an unconscious content whose nature can only be guessed, because it is still unknown.⁵

Two other Freudian concepts, those of condensation and displacement, bear crucial resemblance to metaphor and metonymy. They will be discussed in some detail below.

Lacan eventually goes all the way in relating psychoanalysis and literature by describing psychic phenomena in terms of textual ones. His claim that the unconscious is structured like a language marks the merging point, while his theory of desire as displacement on the chain of signifiers brings psychoanalysis' attachment to literature back to the basic element of language, the sign.

Yet this seemingly happy and untroubled (re-)union of the two disciplines obscures some questions which are usually glossed over in simplistic equations. The most fundamental one concerns the compatibility of the related elements. Is it at all possible to treat a neurosis, its symptom(s), and its analysis as if it were the simple equivalent of the meaning of a text, the text in its material manifestation, and the interpretation of the latter? The devaluation that the notion of 'meaning' has undergone in recent years already hints at some discrepancies. It does not require much effort to identify both tripartite schemes as variants of the classicist model outlined by Foucault: commentary, language (i.e. the utterance), and the underlying 'original text' as the creator of the utterance. It is not difficult to see that in both cases the division is a highly problematic one: both commentary and 'meaning' (Foucault's

⁴'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', in *The Collected Works of Carl G. Jung*, edited by Sir Herbert Read et al., translated by R.F.C. Hull, 20 vols [+ 4 unnumbered volumes] (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 9, part 1, p. 6.

⁵Jung, 'Archetypes', p. 6 (footnote).

'original text') only manifest themselves once more in language. In a neurosis, the symptom may appear in somatic shape. But as such it only gains significance when it is seen as a sign that is interpreted within the code of the analysis.

Both bodily symptom and the material artefact of the text are nothing but different manifestations of texts. And into this category of textuality slide the underlying neurosis and the analysis of a symptom as well as the assumed 'meaning' of a literary text and its interpretation. In the latter case, it is even manifestly evident that one could not exist without the other. In the case of psychoanalysis, Freud's suspicion that the process of the analysis is not simply a catalyst that helps the neurosis to emerge, but an element in its development, is expressed in his crucial concept of *transference*. It signifies the projection of libidinous impulses of the patient onto the analyst - and also the other way round.

Thus, psychoanalytic treatment and the reading of texts assume the same initial position: while the symptom of a psychoanalytic case only achieves its status through the presence of the analyst who identifies it as a sign of something else, the neurosis, the literary text only gains its status when it is perceived as one by its reader. This act of perception which is the beginning of every reading process, the first stage of the interpretation, is always already based on the premise that this text does not stand for itself, that 'underneath' the text lurks that which the text represents and hides at the same time. More than that: in the same way that the psychoanalysis creates the analyst, the reading of the text creates its reader. The seemingly independent three poles of both processes are creators and creations in a dialectic interrelationship of textuality and interpretation. In this they are analogous to the triadic concept of the sign in Peirce: signified (trauma)/signifier (symptom)/sign (neurosis).

The stimulus of the analysing operation of psychoanalysis and textual interpretation as well as their stumbling block is the temporal and spatial distance to their origin which symptom as well as text carry as their birthmarks. They invite attempts to bridge the gap - and signal that the endeavour will be in vain. What the psychoanalyst can hope for is the re-creation of the traumatic event that engendered the neurosis in the form of a text, never the capture of the original situation.⁶ What the reader/interpreter of a text produces is also another text. In this respect, Harold Bloom is right in stating that 'the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but *another poem - a poem not itself*'.⁷

On these similarities of interpretation and transference that Freud himself acknowledges will the analysis of this chapter be based. It will emphasise their common ground in text production rather than simple equations of particular structures. For reasons of the internal logic of this study, the evaluation will work its way backwards from the largest structure of the poetic text, the synthetic consciousness of myth, to the smallest one, the individual sign. In the course of this analysis, certain problems will continually present themselves. The most prominent one arises directly when psychoanalysis and literature are brought into a relation not

⁶In Murray M. Schwartz's words: 'The analyst's wording ('spelling out') of this experience simultaneously articulates a difference and makes a difference. The patient can then perceive a difference for the first time. Even so simple an interjection as, 'I see!' implies both difference and distance. The interpretive wording bridges the gap between subjectivities by symbolizing their relationship. The past becomes present to consciousness for the first time as it becomes consciously past for the first time. The interpretive words are a real illusion; they create what is there by substitution.'; 'Critic, Define Thyself', in Geoffrey H. Hartmann, ed., *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1976-77, New Series, 2 (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1978) pp. 1-17 (p. 9).

⁷Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 70.

so much of similarity but of causality: if the/a psyche is the origin of a text, i.e. if the text is the representation of a self, what is the status of the self of the text, the textual identity? Can it simply be regarded as a secondary identity, a kind of plastercast of its creator? Or does the question become obsolete when both creating and textual identity are uncovered as fictions, as texts?

2. The Whole and Its Parts: The Synthetic Consciousness of Modernist Poems and Psychoanalytic Concepts of The Self

The tendency of simultaneous expansion and reduction unveiled as one of the dominant strategies of modernist poetry has its counterpart in psychoanalysis, too. There it finds its expression in the tendency to develop universal holistic concepts of the psyche while this endeavour simultaneously calls for the introduction of smaller structures, delineations and borderlines. Freud's original model of the psyche, the twofold compound of consciousness and unconscious, still adheres closely to the Platonic distinction between appearance and reality. The unconscious is granted both greater power and greater authenticity. It influences one's individual life - and consciousness - drastically. But at the same time it remains inaccessible and only permits occasional glimpses of its contents in dreams, slips of the tongue, or jokes. The consciousness, on the other hand, is - disturbingly - an awareness that is not quite aware, a controlled and self-conscious thinking, evaluating, and judging that is itself controlled by the uncontrollable unconscious.

In modernist poems various similar relations spring to one's attention: the shaping but ungraspable outside of natural phenomena (their 'inscape') and also the layers of the self which constantly frustrate every attempt of the text to mirror or deal

with them in Hopkins; Yeats's endeavour to handle history - both personal and impersonal - using artefacts which are in turn threatened by the very history they are meant to represent; Eliot's 'objective correlatives', designed to depict mental states but continually unfaithful to their task; eventually Pound's attempt to arrive at a purified 'dialect of the tribe' which remains forever threatened by usury, i.e. the unwanted exchange of values and meanings.

In all these examples an unsuccessful reification takes place whose object becomes increasingly sophisticated, because more universal and more fundamental at the same time. In Hopkins it is still unmediated experience which forms the starting point of the process. In Yeats this experience is already channelled into a dominantly linear experience of history whose continuity is always endangered but eventually finds its refuge in the sophisticated linearity of the cycle. Eliot narrows the focus of experience even more and transposes it into the individual, thus creating psychological landscapes with their own landmarks and time schemes. Pound eventually attempts the reification of the most fundamental element in the process of experience, language; thus making his strategy the narrowest and yet most universal.

Although this becomes most evident in Pound, in all cases the problem that the reification has to face (and one could speculate that this problem is also the one which provokes the reification in the first place) is an economic one. 'Economy' used in a broad sense, encompassing everything from the distribution of 'energy' and 'tensions' in Freud's questionable physiological model of psychic activities⁸ to Deleuze and Guattari's questioning of Freud's basic assumptions in their *Anti-Oedipus* and

⁸Sigmund Freud, 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', in *Metapsychology*, pp. 35-44.

Lyotard's sophisticated but far from uncontroversial merger of psychoanalysis and Marxist economics in his *Économie Libidinale*.⁹ What concerns us here is the recurring problem of the adequacy of representation, the origin of the modernist impasses and its strategies of compensation.

As an economic model, Pound's *Cantos* are remarkably successful and a complete failure at the same time. If the most important feature in a working economic system of an advanced nature is the successful transformation of goods and services into a unified symbolic system (i.e. money), *The Cantos* are a masterpiece. Their capacity of integrating diverse material into their own symbolic structure is certainly unsurpassed. But although the resulting concept is impressive, indeed massive and monumental, the process of incorporation (transformation is not the correct term, since *The Cantos* are anxious to retain the individuality of their fragments) also engenders internal tensions which appear as ruptures on the surface of the work. The three most obvious 'cracks' are the beginning of the poem, its incomplete end, and the missing cantos in the final section of the poem.

The open beginning cannot be counted as a serious rupture since it links the text to its dominant structural model, Homer's *Odyssey*, already with the first word 'And'. The missing cantos, however, and especially the unfinished state of the entire poem are a different issue. They are the expression of the intervention of history on the formation of the text. But they are more than that: they are the acknowledgement that the internal arrangement of the poem is flawed. 'Control' and 'ownership' are the issues raised in a rather panicky way in one of the last cantos (CXIV). 'To make

⁹Jean-François Lyotard, *Économie Libidinale*, Collection 'Critique' (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974).

Cosmos' (CXVI) has ended up in 'errors and wrecks' (*Ibid.*). The 'Notes for CXVII et seq.' talk of loss and destruction - and very surprisingly also of guilt, very personal guilt after the poem's continual attempts to be impersonal:

I have tried to write Paradise

Do not move

Let the wind speak
that is paradise.

Let the gods forgive what I
have made

Let those I love try to forgive
what I have made.

The 'world formula' has unravelled itself and lays bare the same old chaos it set out to criticise and overcome - and a personality that was meant to be raised to the status of an impersonal Nietzschean superman.

But what is the reason for this failure? What interferes with the creation of Pound's *paradiso terrestre* which would eventually have represented a coherent synthetic modern consciousness capable of incorporating *and making sense* of the wreckage and fragmentation of culture in the twentieth century? The reason for the eventual failure of *The Cantos* is not hidden, but spread visibly over their surface. It is the text itself, its textuality, that is responsible for its internal problems. In a revealing, because uncontrolled and certainly disconnected moment, in a late fragment from 1966, the text gives itself away:

That her acts
Olga's acts
of beauty
be remembered.

Her name was Courage
& is written Olga

These lines are for the
ultimate CANTO

*whatever I may write
in the interim.*

My emphasis highlights the problem of textual production that is shown to be the eventual danger to the text's attempted constitution of a stable message. Writing continues - and by continuing blots out and changes all that has been said before.

In Freud's writings, the problem of the closure of the analytic process appears in his difficulties in stating exactly when an analysis is finished. The notion of a complete 'cure', still very verbal in his earlier studies, retreats more and more into the background. The analysis engenders layer after layer of translation in an effort to arrive at a truth whose discovery would entail the transposition of the suppressed, the unconscious, into the consciousness, thus eliminating its power, subjecting it to the forces of consciousness. Yet the point where translation ends and 'the original text' is uncovered is never reached. What is worse: the progress of the translations is not simply unilateral, it does not lead into one direction only. By acts of transference without which an analysis could not take place, the libidinous impulses of the unconscious enter the translation process, change its direction, and trouble the desired clarity. In order to accommodate these contradictory impulses, Freud introduces a threefold distinction in the place of the binary opposition of unconscious and consciousness: the *id* (which represents the libidinal drives of the unconscious), the *ego* (a substitute for the consciousness, yet with the crucial distinction that in it the struggle of the hostile forces takes place), and the *super-ego*, sometimes also called 'ego ideal' or 'censor' which controls the interaction between *id* and *ego* and is

responsible for repression.¹⁰

Applied to a complex poetic text like *The Cantos*, the problem of arriving at an essence is equally poignant and leads to the imposition of various strata of narratorial strategies (although these need not be connected with identifiable characters). It is when the discourse of the text seems anonymous or depersonalised - as in the case of many fragments - when the texts employed seem to be controlled by the poem rather than in control of it, that one has to suspect its mechanisms of suppression at work. For, as has been demonstrated, the textual fragments that form part of the structure of *The Cantos* are much more than mute props on a stage designed and arranged by the 'super-ego' of the poem, its - difficult to pin down yet all-pervasive - textual identity. The area in which their uncomfortable paradigms clash with the arrangement of the whole, the *egos* of the text (for in its attempt to be impersonal it again multiplies rather than reduces the number of its apparent mouthpieces) are the protagonists and personae of the poem.

Indeed, the complex co-existence of voices and patterns, clear intentions and contradictory associations is the result of a discovery very similar to Freud's insight that the translation process is neither an undisturbed nor a unilateral one. When *The Cantos* discuss economy, this includes their own as well, even if this is not made explicit. Thus, the poem shifts from what Barthes calls the 'readerly' perspective

¹⁰The ego ideal is therefore the heir of the Oedipus complex, and thus it is also the expression of the most powerful impulses and most important libidinal vicissitudes of the id. By setting up this ego ideal, the ego has mastered the Oedipus complex and at the same time placed itself in subjection to the id. Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. Conflicts between the ego and the ideal will, as we are now prepared to find, ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is psychical, between the external world and the internal world'; Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in *Metapsychology*, pp. 339-407 (p. 376).

(where the reader-controlling aspect is in the focus of the text) to a 'writerly' one (in which its own construction is under scrutiny). This internal change of perspective opens up possibilities for the exploration of important dimensions such as the ethics and the politics of *The Cantos*. It is their tragedy that these passages remain unexplored. The refusal of the text to engage in its own structures leads to the observed blindness of the poem concerning its own cognitive procedures. In a blatantly brutal move, the poem rapidly reasserts the traditional readerly view by filling the conceptual gaps with aggressive rhetoric.

Using Freud's terminology, one could argue that the *super-ego* of the text quickly re-establishes its dominance. That in these moments of maximum poetic complexity a shift of the most basic paradigms of textual production happens, hints at the fact that *The Cantos* approach the limits of modernism in English poetry. But only when poems abandon both the notion of conclusiveness and that of monosemy (i.e. the desire for unambiguous statements) can the readerly of traditional English poetry be superseded by the writerly. In Freud's concepts, this desire for abandon (which for him is ultimately related to the assertive drive of the *super-ego* as well as the chaotic libidinal ones of the *id*) is called the death instinct. Aptly, its introduction marks the point when Freud eventually abandons (though not explicitly disclaims) his tripartite scheme of the self in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'.¹¹ The discussion of analogies of the death instinct in modernist poetry will reappear at various points of this chapter and form part of its conclusion. At this initial point, however, one can already suspect that it is related - or indeed the antidote - to an essential crux of modernism's attempt at perfecting itself: the potential endlessness of the utterance.

¹¹Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Metapsychology*, pp. 270-338.

3. The Writer and His Double: Who Reads Whom in the Cabinet of Mirrors?

Hugh Kenner refers to the threatening double nature of the personae and masks that are so important in Pound's works (and also in Yeats's poems and - to a lesser extent - Eliot's):

That personae are donned as masks we learn from the etymology of the word and from much of Pound's early poetic practice [...] That personae may also possess the way spirits do is a truth somewhat obscured by Pound's characteristic stress on expertise.¹²

The personae, in the first instance a handy guise for the subject of the utterance (and it does not matter at this point whether this is seen as an actual person or as a textual construct), bring with them certain frightening or even destructive characteristics. Like Freud's *uncanny*, they are simultaneously familiar - thus controllable - and alien - and thus in control. The etymology of the German *das Unheimliche* refers to its contradictory aspects: alien and uncanny, but also *heimlich*, meaning 'secretive' and in 19th century German the same as *heimisch*: familiar. Both alien and familiar, concealed and outspoken, this uncanny which even in Freud appears closely related to the double (in his famous analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, the sandman is quite clearly the double of the father) can be identified in modernist poetry as tradition. The texts utilise past and/or fictional characters to constitute their own message, but in a move reminiscent of the fatal personality split in *Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde*, these characters assume a life of their own and shift the text in directions

¹²Hugh Kenner, 'Blood for the Ghosts', in Eva Hesse, ed., *New Approaches to Ezra Pound: A Co-ordinated Investigation of Pound's Poetry and Ideas* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), pp. 331-348 (p. 331).

that disturb its constitution. This gaining of an individual life is of course only possible in language and - as we shall see - also generated by language. The paradigmatic broadening that the texts undergo through this procedure, the introduction of complex foreign paradigms, distorts the economy of a text like *The Cantos* which is, after all, primarily concerned with this very economy.

But equally important - in the light of Pound's 'make it new' doctrine - is the question of the creator and owner of texts which employ foreign material in such a way (here one should remember once more the concern for 'control' and 'ownership' expressed in the final canto CXIV). The insecurity of *The Cantos* - which amounts to an equivalent of hysteria in many passages - has its roots in an uncertainty concerning the right to particular utterances, eventually the right to language in general. The poem's manic attempt to gather every available form of written communication is a move to fight the ever-present threat that this language is only borrowed. The story of the Australian demigod Wanjina, featured in canto LXXIV, illustrates the issue. He creates the world by naming it, but is punished for this unauthorised action by his father with the removal of his mouth. The parallels are clear: the making of cosmos with words - and the fear that the institution which grants these powers (the father/tradition/eventually language itself) could take revenge for their abuse by imposing a castrational punishment on the creator (*PI* 190). The images of carnivorous women and the frequent impotent characters both in Pound's and Eliot's poetry can be seen as connected to this primal fear of the poet: the loss of his poetic potency. A line from *The Waste Land* is one of its illustrations: 'Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit' (line 339).

The only possibility to escape the shadow of tradition which accompanies

every production of language is - paradoxically, but not unexpectedly - sought in language itself in *The Cantos*. This is yet another variant of the modernist tendency of complete internalisation. In a passage that discusses the clash of the compulsion to say something with the knowledge that this always links the utterance with the past, the poem introduces an interesting equation:

to the room in Poitiers where one can stand
 casting no shadow,
 That is Sagetrieb,
 that is tradition.
 Builders had kept the proportion,

(canto XC)

What appears quite obscure at first glance - where is the connection between a perfectly designed room and the compulsion to perpetuate tradition? - becomes clear when seen in the light of the problem of the uncanny double that the use of (always preformulated) language brings with it: the shadow of the punishing father. Only the perfect work of art can escape his revenge, create something that is truly new.

The threatening shadow of tradition can assume very concrete shapes. In Pound's oeuvre, *Homage to Sextus Propertius* reveals a shift in attitude from reverence to parody which Eliot, in his introduction to Pound's *Selected Poems* of 1928, tentatively characterises as 'not a translation, it is a paraphrase, or still more truly (for the instructed) a *persona*.'¹³ What takes place is a mutilating appropriation. *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* represents an even stronger attempt to exorcise the ghost of tradition - who in this instance is most uncanny, because an exact double of the author of the poem. '*Vocat aestus in umbram*' is its revealing epigraph. The poem abounds

¹³Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, edited by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928), p. 19. Quoted in Peter Brooker, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1979), p. 152.

with images of death, the death of traditions as well as that of a generation of young men in the trenches of the Great War. The most surprising of these, however, occurs at the very beginning of the poem - or indeed even before, because what it confronts its reader with is already the sepulchre of the poet E.P. Disposed of and its death already clothed in an acceptable shape, tradition, here Pound's very personal poetic past, becomes controllable, part of a poetic argument. In a different disguise, that of M. Verog, this past undergoes another grotesque reification: it ends up

Among the pickled foetuses and bottled bones,
Engaged in perfecting the catalogues

Both concerned 'exclusively with the dead' (Wyndham Lewis's characterisation of Pound), almost pickled and shelved himself, at the same time engaged in one of the dominant activities of Pound's later poems, the work of the archivist, Verog is the bogey man easily discarded as a relic of the past, busy dreaming of the great of the last generation: Galliffet, Dowson, the Rhymers' Club, Lionel Johnson. Yet his disposal as 'out of step with the decade,/Detached from his contemporaries' is not an altogether negative and condescending one. 'Neglected by the young,/Because of these reveries' ends the poem and strikes a sympathetic and pitiful note.

This ambiguous attitude towards tradition hints once more at the double nature of this ghost of one's past: it is both distant and alien and all too familiar, both threatening and comforting. Its exorcism by calling it dead is thus no more a proper elimination than the burning of an effigy - like that of Sigismundo Malatesta, one of the 'heroes' of *The Cantos*. It is an attitude that combines negation and reverence, one that, as will be remembered, can be characterised as blasphemy. It is an attitude of immobilisation and control, and simultaneously of internalisation and worship that corresponds to the main theorem in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. The initial murder (and

cannibalistic devouring) of the oppressive father institutionalises his control forever as a totem.¹⁴ In modernist poems, this totem can be an actual poet, the artistic model that the text must deal with, tries to integrate and perhaps to overcome. It can even be, as in Pound's case, the shadow of the poet's own past that he has to confront.

Julia Kristeva describes the dilemma of the artist in the following way:

A hardy explorer of the same psychic landscape, the artist pours or spends the identificatory symptom into original discourse: into style. Neither subservient like the believer, nor subjected to somatic conversion like the hysteric, but sometimes both of these, he constantly produces multiple identifications, but he *speaks* them. Hypothesis: because more than any other he is in the grip of the 'father in the individual prehistory'. Contrary to the widespread myth of the artist subject to the desire for his mother, or rather in order to defend himself against this desire, he takes himself...not for the phallus of the mother, but for this ghost, the third party to which the mother aspires, for the loving version of the third party, for a pre-Oedipal father 'who loved you first' (say the Gospels), a conglomerate of both sexes (suggests Freud)... 'God is *Agape*'.¹⁵

In Eliot, who seems to have fewer problems with tradition (a fact that is perhaps explained by the restricted amount - and thus greater control - of his poetic output), this totemic ghost appears explicitly at a very late stage of his career. The compound spectre encountered in 'Little Gidding', the last of the *Four Quartets*, is such an echo of the past. Stylistic similarities, such as parentheses and 'passages of less intensity'¹⁶ which are abundant in the last three *Quartets*, hint at the identity of the ghost. It is Yeats that Eliot has to deal with eventually. As Sabine Roth points out,

¹⁴Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics', in *The Origins of Religion*, The Pelican Freud Library, 13, pp. 44-224 (especially chapter II, 'Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence', pp. 71-131).

¹⁵Julia Kristeva, 'Identification and the Real', translated by Shaun Whiteside, in Peter Collier & Helga Geyer-Ryan, eds, *Literary Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 167-176 (pp. 171-172).

¹⁶T.S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', in: *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 32.

Eliot employs Yeats in a very complex way to explore some basic issues that are also prominent in the work of the latter, notably the problem of wisdom and age, i.e. the by now familiar problem of achieving a stable and valuable message in the face of the continually changing framework of language.¹⁷ Roth explains how Yeats becomes the ghostly double of the speaker of this part of *Four Quartets*: 'So I assumed a double part, and cried/And heard another voice cry: "What! Are *you* here?"'. It is the speaker of 'Little Gidding' himself who initiates the doubling. Also it is not Yeats proper who appears as a stylistic spectre, but a deliberate misrepresentation - or rather a multiple representation, a double (or indeed manifold) double, 'both one and many'. It is Yeats reread or misread through his own works, especially the two 'Byzantium' poems, and the way in which he is interpreted is not a positive one. Yeats's esoteric model of purification of the artistic spirit is perceived through another dominant model of this part of the *Four Quartets*, Dante, and found lacking when confronted with the latter's overtly Christian doctrines.

The procedure of reading through the (distorting) eyes of another is, of course, nothing but the reversal of the personae approach analysed in Pound's early poetry. While the arrangement of masks - like a system of lenses - is designed to achieve increased authority by the bundling of various perspectives in a focus, i.e. an act of appropriation, the (mis-)reading of poets and poems through the eyes of other authors and texts disseminates the view and devalues as much as it creates distance. The complex cut through the layers of tradition follows the same initial mechanisms of appropriation and distancing. They also represent the Freudian notion of

¹⁷The central ideas concerning the role of Yeats in Eliot's *Four Quartets* derive from Sabine Roth's essay 'Eliot Comforted: The Yeatsian Presence in *Four Quartets*' (forthcoming in *Journal of Modern Literature*, 1992).

dismemberment, cannibalism and totemisation.

The surprisingly personal engagement with tradition in 'Little Gidding' is certainly unique in its cathartic directness in Eliot's oeuvre. But it is not the only instance in which his works deal with the powers of the past, and explicitly with the powers of texts. The first part of *The Waste Land*, 'The Burial of the Dead', and especially its rather confusing final section can be regarded as an expression of the poem's ambivalence concerning the plethora of texts that it alludes to. The poem is permeated by intertextual references which - 'elegant' and 'intelligent' like the Shakespearean Rag - create a metatext underneath the distorted surface of the poem that, as Maud Ellmann points out, is very much the authoritarian canon of Western civilisation (PI 95-96). The effect of this technique of simultaneous subversion (mainly by a metonymic scattering of the references which will be discussed in greater depth below) and institutionalisation as a ghostly counter-text is twofold. A feeling of loss and nostalgia is created which can be interpreted in ideological terms as a conservative or even reactionary feature. It also functions in the same way as the mechanisms of mourning and melancholia which Freud describes in his essay of the same title.¹⁸ Mourning is always coupled with a feeling of relief - in the first instance relief that someone else has died and not the mourner - and, more important, with an amount of suppressed aggression that forms the subtext of mourning: the unconscious wish that the beloved person should die.¹⁹

An object cathexis is replaced by an identification, i.e. that which can no

¹⁸Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *Metapsychology*, pp. 245-268.

¹⁹This links mourning and melancholia with the animistic notions of totem and taboo. Compare chapter III of *Totem and Taboo*, 'Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts', pp. 132-158.

longer be had is incorporated into the mourner. This mirrors exactly the modernist technique of ceaselessly gathering cultural fragments. Melancholia and depression are regarded in a similar way as a distorted form of aggression. The aggressive impulse is directed against an object which is found guilty of not giving the melancholic the amount of attention, sympathy and love that he requires.

The analogy to the authoritarian canon of civilisation is evident: every new text finds itself outside the canon, by its very nature rejected and 'unloved' because of its otherness. In order for the new utterance to assert itself, tradition has to be made disposable, either in the declaration of its death (a very common move in the history of literature, art, philosophy, etc.) or in its more subtle integration and cannibalization. A poem like *The Waste Land* which - unlike *The Cantos* - is aware of its mechanisms, even though it cannot escape them, transforms them into parts of its own imagery. The title of its first section can already be taken as an introduction of the topic. Who are the dead that are buried in the section? Of course they are 'memory and desire' from a personal past, but the explicitly dead are those in the crowd on London Bridge in its final section. The speaker's surprise at their number, 'so many./I had not thought death had undone so many', is the realisation how many lives have preceded his, more precisely, how many utterances ('sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled') were made before his, an insight not at all uncommon for writers or indeed everyone concerned with literature. As Foucault implicitly claims, statements are few, utterances are many:

[...] *everything* is never said; in relation to what might have been stated in a natural language (*langue*), in relation to the unlimited combination of linguistic elements, statements (however numerous they may be) are always in deficit; on the basis of the grammar and of the wealth of vocabulary available at a

given period, there are, in total, relatively few things that are said.²⁰

What appears to be a rather banal assertion at first glance, gains threatening dimensions when translated into a question: perhaps everything has been said already? In a time when a sudden access to artefacts from the most distant cultures and periods became possible, when the progress of communication techniques and the media created an impression of a focussing of voices and utterances on the Western mind, this question became very poignant indeed. An original authentic *new* statement must have seemed almost impossible. The notes that accompany *The Waste Land* are an indication of what Foucault describes as the inevitable participation of every statement in 'networks and fields of use' in which it 'is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced'²¹: there is no utterance that is not intertextually related to already existing ones, no text without its ghostly shadow. In that respect, Eliot's curious note to line 68 of *The Waste Land* which refers to the church of Saint Mary Woolnoth whose bell rang 'With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine': 'A phenomenon which I have often noticed', can be seen as both an ironic and subversive inclusion among all the learned references, but also as an assertive move stating that at least this observation is an original contribution.

It is not enough to counterbalance the recurring influence of the dead and buried, the suppressed voices of the past. These voices do not even have to impose themselves on the speaker of the poem; their attraction is so strong that he searches for them (another hint at their combined character as taboo and totem). Here he

²⁰Foucault, 'The Enunciative Function' in *Archaeology*, pp. 88-105 (p. 105).

²¹Foucault, *Archaeology*, p. 105.

discovers a character named 'Stetson' and identifies him as one who was with him 'in the ships at Mylae'. The paradoxical coupling of the very American name and the incident from classical history is telling:²² it creates a cultural brace that forcefully unites the archaic starting point of Western culture with its contemporary limit. It is not unimportant that this 'end' of culture is located in America, both Eliot's (and Pound's) origin and the country that translated Pound's doctrine of 'making it new' into pragmatic cultural terms in its 'melting pot' ideology. Apparently, not even this attitude produces a shadowless present; the buried past can sprout and bloom (although it is far from certain what kind of flowers it will produce). The suppression of cultural origins leads only to their re-emergence in uncontrollable shapes - just as the suppression of libidinous impulses cannot get rid of them but makes them mutate into the symptoms of neuroses. Eventually, the suppressed will be dug up again - and then it will pester the present with its festering stench.

It is tempting to see some 'censoring' significance in the image of the unearthing dog in 'The Burial of the Dead', too. Curiously capitalised and attributed with 'nails' rather than the more common claws, 'he' (not *it*) provokes an interpretation as an anagram: Dog = God (i.e. Christ, nailed to the cross), who will eventually - as the most radical cultural *super-ego* - judge every action, thought, and feeling. If this interpretation is not too far-fetched, it still has to be taken with a pinch of salt. In the strange arrangement of irreconcilable elements in the first part of *The Waste Land*, each of which brings its own paradigmatic shadow into the text, every

²²The *COED* explains 'stetson' as 'slouch hat with very wide brim and high crown [f. J.B. Stetson, Amer. hat-maker d. 1906]'. Mylae is the site of the battle between the Romans and the Carthaginians (260 B.C.) in the First Punic War. Compare B.C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to The Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 77.

part undergoes relativisation and becomes tainted with a hint of irony. By stressing both its metonymic collage technique and its multilayered structure, the text cautiously avoids locating a fixed point of view, a textual identity. Like echoes in a complex building, the effect thus created is that the speaker always seems to be elsewhere. Every utterance becomes equally unauthentic, a mere quotation.

This removal of the textual identity onto the same plane as allusions is a characteristic of modernist poetry. It is usually in a rather helpless fashion called irony. Although superficial, the characterisation points out both the innovative and the restrictive traditional aspect of this technique: although the textual identity appears to be destabilised - which in turn leads to a decentering of the texts that offers new opportunities in terms of the authority of statements - a textual identity remains nonetheless, and one that is even more powerful than the firm voice of readerly texts. Irony always requires a point of view. The problems of the impossible complete negativity of identity that have been encountered in the discussion of impersonality reappear on a larger scale in the problem of textual surface and the layers 'underneath'. Only texts that transcend the aesthetics of modernism manage to overcome this impasse. Although in many cases just as much constructed out of quotations, they no longer create the illusion of layers in which an identity plays hide and seek, its *Fort-Da* game. They become polysemous yet single-layered. Surface only that no longer knows or needs an identity. The problem of inside and outside disappears.

4. Gaps, Voids, Absences, Limits, Divisions: Metaphor, Metonymy, Symbol and their Psychoanalytic Counterparts

It is not a rich and difficult germination, it is a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions.²³

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*²⁴ Freud describes the two dominant procedures at work in the creation of dream images, condensation and displacement, in terms that can be applied to metaphor and metonymy as well. The characterisation of condensation employs the categories of 'compression' (*ID* 383), 'loop-lines or short-circuits' (*ID* 385) 'brought about by *omission*' (*ID* 386). Displacement, on the other hand, is described as a mechanism that

extract[s] from the dream-thought fragments of speeches'²⁵ and 'deals with them in the most arbitrary fashion. Not only does it drag them out of their context and cut them in pieces, incorporating some portions and rejecting others, but often puts them together in a new order so that a speech which appears in a dream to be a connected whole turns out in the analysis to be composed of three or four detached fragments. In producing this new version, a dream will often abandon the meaning that the word originally had in the dream-thoughts and give them a fresh one. (*ID* 545)

Freud's reluctance to draw the parallel explicitly is a symptom of his recurring refusal to admit the intricacies of language which is so central to his theories. Far from naming names, Freud constantly slides into metaphors himself, 'switch-words'

²³Foucault, *Archaeology*, p. 119. I am using Foucault's description of discursive formations somewhat illicitly here to describe in a slightly provocative way the formation of the identity of texts.

²⁴Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (henceforth quoted in the text as *ID*).

²⁵Or images. The passage is taken from a section entitled 'Speeches in Dreams', *Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 544-553.

as he calls them in 'A Case of Hysteria'.²⁶ (*'J'appelle un chat un chat'*, Freud's programmatic dictum concerning his attitude in the same case study gives the problem away in its (unintentional?) pun on the colloquial term for the female genitals and, of course, also in its distancing via the French language.²⁷) Thus when it comes to summarising the characteristics of displacement, once more a concrete metaphor rather than a more convincing literary or linguistic parallel is employed:

Thus speeches in dreams have a structure similar to that of breccia, in which largish blocks of various kinds of stone are cemented together by a binding medium. (*ID* 546)

It was up to others to point out the obvious. Roman Jakobson, the Russian structuralist, described the dominance of metaphor and metonymy as functions of poetic language, first without reference to Freud, but in very Freudian terms in his essay on Pasternak's prose in 1935, later in his seminal essay called 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance' (1956).²⁸ This in turn had repercussion on other structuralists, such as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and, to bring the issue full circle back to psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan.²⁹

What is of interest for this study is not the obvious structural parallels of

²⁶Freud, 'A Case of Hysteria', p. 100 (footnote).

²⁷Freud, 'A Case of Hysteria', p. 82.

²⁸Roman Jakobson, 'Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak', in: *Pasternak*, edited by Donald Davie & A. Livingstone, corrected edition (Glasgow, 1971), p. 135-151; 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance' in *Word and Language*, Selected Writings, 2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 239-259. A very useful discussion can be found in Elmar Holenstein, *Roman Jakobson's Approach to Language: Phenomenological Structuralism*, translated by Catherine Schelbert & Tarcisius Schelbert (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 143-151.

²⁹See Elmar Holenstein's introduction to the German edition of Jakobson's essays on poetry, *Poetik: Ausgewählte Aufsätze 1921-1971*, edited by Elmar Holenstein & Tarcisius Schelbert (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 192.

condensation/metaphor and displacement/metonymy, but the question whether the structures - which have been shown to be dominant in Eliot's works - can be related to what has been said above. Is there a connection between the shadow of language, the double of the utterance, and the techniques of paradigmatic condensation and syntagmatic displacement? What happens in the 'gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions', and what is the material of Freud's breccia, the 'binding medium'?

The poems themselves lead the way into their analysis: so obviously caught in the tension of birth and death, Eliot's works point out that their dominant mechanisms are stuck in the dialectic force-field of absence and presence which becomes - once a textual identity is established - one of disclosure and hiding. 'Pray for us now and in the hour of our birth', the last line of 'Animula', and 'Pray for us now and at the hour of our death', the more orthodox version of the 'Hail Mary' which reappears as the last verse of the first part of *Ash-Wednesday*, form the bracket that encloses the central structural issue of Eliot's poems from *The Waste Land* onwards. 'Because the beginning shall remind us of the end' (in 'The Cultivation of Christmas Trees') which returns as the haunting refrain of 'East Coker': 'In my beginning is my end'. What exactly reminds us of the inextricable connection between creation and destruction is elaborated tentatively once more in the *Ariel Poems* in order to be perfected in *Four Quartets*. 'Journey of the Magi' talks about the issue in Christian terms (the magi realise the inadequacy of their own religion, their inevitable spiritual death, when faced with the newborn Christ):

Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt, I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; [...]

But when applied to the context of the text's self-reflective inquiry into its own

temporality and register on the scale of tradition, the passage acquires a slightly different meaning: every utterance is placed on the larger syntagmatic scale of literary history, the place where it is born and dies almost simultaneously. And what is worse than this instant ossification (in its negative form ignorance/forgetting, in its positive shape institutionalisation) is that in its flash of existence the literary utterance does not even occupy a realm of its own. There are always already other utterances it relates to; there will inevitably be more utterances which in turn relate to it, cover it until it is nothing more than the hidden layer of a palimpsest. (The covering text can easily be that of an interpretation, as the example of *The Waste Land*, hardly visible under the mass of critical analyses it has engendered, shows.) 'A Song for Simeon' refers to this agonising insight in two of its final lines:

I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.

The metaphor embodies the creative principle of poetry. Its invigorating aspect lies in its in-between status, its merging of two signifiers that create or point to a signified that appears to be new. But metaphors can and do die; furthermore, they become poetic set-pieces that are recycled, distorted, fragmented by other texts, over- or rewritten and transformed into just one layer of the tradition out of which they originally emerge as different and alienating. This points towards the ambiguity of the metaphoric principle itself: although it creates something new both on the textual and the cognitive level, thus acts as a moment of signifiatory poetic expansion, it is essentially a retentive technique. Creating meaning between signifiers, it also retains this meaning in the locus of its creation. Although potentially polysemous, the poles of the metaphoric creation - at least try to - bar the way for the unreliable and sliding signification. A hint at this can be found in the line from 'A Song for Simeon' just

quoted: 'I am dying *in* my own death [...]' (my emphasis).

The complex and daring metaphor of poetic and sexual creativity in *The Waste Land* is another case in point: 'Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit'. 'Dead mountain', in itself meaningless, evokes its opposite, a living mountain, a volcano. Into this image, the mouth and its edges (the broken teeth) can be integrated. 'Cannot spit' then hints at the inactive state of the volcano, in its active form emblem of ceaseless, senseless and destructive distribution; coupled with 'mouth' an image of the production of language. Yet the 'cannot' is more than a tautological doubling of the 'Dead' of the beginning of the verse. It is not a 'cannot spit any more', but implies an (at least underlying) reluctance - in the manner of Hopkins's 'cry *I can no more. I can*' (in '(Carrion Comfort)'). Its status is that of the analysand's 'no' in the psychoanalytic process, the refusal to give away that which constitutes the core of his neurosis, but which in a complicated but crucial move also becomes a fetish of his desire. While this fetish must remain secret, the act of refusal to unveil it, the analysand's 'no', the impotences, cuts, dead ends and silences of modernist poems, are the stylisations of the refusal, a secondary betrayal. As Abraham and Torok state for the case of Freud's Wolf-Man:

For the Wolf-Man - we understand why - a return of the repressed in the waking state through symbolization, for example, is out of the question. The single exception concerns the expression of *the very act of the retention of telling*, well expressed hysterically by tenacious constipation. But whatever might be the *object* of telling is so deeply buried behind words never to be uttered that its emergence, when it does take place, occurs not in the form of a symbol or a symptom but of a delirium such as that of the nose or later of the cut finger, and finally of the erogenous fantasy itself.³⁰

³⁰Nicolas Abraham & Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, translated by Nicholas Rand, *Theory and History of Literature*, 37 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 21 (henceforth references are in the text as WMW).

The fetishisation of the 'first significant production' - as Freud calls the faeces - or, in the case of poetry, the utterance itself, its creation (the phonological similarity of 'spit' in the quote from *The Waste Land* to 'shit' is perhaps not coincidental, as will become more evident below), also features strongly in a form of poetry already discussed. Imagism, although not essentially a metaphoric technique and indeed opposed to merely ornamental uses of metaphors, displays some striking similarities to the characteristics just pointed out. If the entire Imagist poem is viewed as one structure, one re-encounters the creation between two signifying poles, here: the 'apparition' created by the interaction of perception and object. And just as much as longer poems (like Eliot's), Imagist texts refuse to give away the secret of their creation in their attempt to be both impersonal and to develop no narrative. Imagism is an unusual literary movement in that it coincides with the establishment of its own rules, a perfect *machine célibataire* that keeps its creation and eventual death inside its own realm and thus arrives at complete self-sufficiency, a refusal to communicate, become external, open: constipation. Thus the importance of 'THE LIST OF DONT'S' of Imagism:³¹ do not use the potentials of language! The object, 'the thing', so much in the centre of modernist poems, from Eliot's 'objective correlative' to Pound's addiction to the *res*, preferably sculpted by the poet himself, is thus not a utopian goal, outside, new, but the embodiment of a thing of the past, a loss:

It is in this sense that we are going to call this erogenous image, this good-luck charm fantasy, this magical taboo dodger: *a fetish*. Beneath the fetish, the occult love for a word-object remains concealed, beneath this love, the taboo-forming experience of a catastrophe, and finally beneath the catastrophe, the

³¹'The immediate necessity is to tabulate A LIST OF DONT'S for those beginning to write verses'; Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', in Lodge, *20th Century Literary Criticism*, pp. 58-68 (p. 58) (first in *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), pp. 3-14 (p. 4)).

perennial memory of a hoarded pleasure with the ineducable wish that one day it shall return. (WMW 22)

(One also recognises the roots of the modernist quest motif here, both that of Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the Odyssean detours of Pound *Cantos*.)

But what is the 'experience of catastrophe' which at the same time becomes 'the perennial memory of a hoarded pleasure'? This is an area in which psychoanalysis remains opaque exactly when it is most talkative. Of course it abounds with eventually unveiled traumatic situations, some more conventionally shocking, others quite banal, but neither does a pattern evolve out of them, nor do they answer the question why neuroses develop in some people and not in others. The analysis of literature is both easier and more difficult in this respect: the textual nature of its 'symptoms' is evident and can hardly be overlooked; the texts can be considered in isolation or in any context and paradigm that appears interesting to the reader/analyst, because the 'end' of the analysis is equally evidently another text without implications for the life of an actual person. As the discussion of the refusal strategies of modernist poems has shown, it is not this refusal itself which forms the core, the origin of the textual mechanisms.

But if one takes these mechanisms of refusal, retention and internalisation as expressions of a shared modernist anxiety, one can hardly overlook the various indications that pinpoint the main origin of the tactics - at least with regard to poetic production - in the ambiguous simultaneous destruction and (re-)construction of identity. One can speculate that the reason for cherishing the trauma in a neurosis is the fact that the traumatic event both radically threatens and most thoroughly highlights the personal identity of its victim. There are many instances of this in Freud's studies: the discovery of the missing penis of the mother (which threatens the

little boy's world-view, but also gives him a feeling of superiority), the exposure to sexual misdeeds of the father (which shatters the father's role as a model for the ego-ideal, yet offers a chance of independent development, etc.). Lacan eventually draws attention to the first instance in which loss and gain for the personal identity are painfully exposed: the discovery that one is a separate being (analysed in his seminal paper on the 'mirror-stage').³² Lacan and in particular Julia Kristeva then link the loss/establishment of identity dialectic to language and draw the line between the imaginary stage, a realm of unconnected impressions, and the symbolic stage where impressions are metonymically severed, given names, and reality achieves an order, for which, however, the feelings of wholeness and belonging of the subject have to be sacrificed.³³

It is of course possible to question these assumptions for the life of the individual. But it is difficult to ignore some striking parallels in modernist poetic texts. Unsuccessful or negative instances of identity-constitution via retention have already been pointed out. Yet there are just as many positive ones, sometimes in texts that display retentive features at the same time. Pound's essay on the Imagist 'Image' has already been quoted in relation to myth. It is quoted once more at this stage to highlight the psychological overtones that accompany this particular act of poetic

³²This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic - and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.'; Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', p. 4.

³³Julia Kristeva's most comprehensive contribution to the debate is her book *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); see especially chapter 1, 'The Semiotic and the Symbolic', pp. 19-106.

creation, the function that 'the fetish of the word-object', as Abraham and Torok call it, fulfills:

An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time [...] It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.³⁴

Apparently, the 'presence' of this magical object helps to overcome the limits of the self, and these are very clearly described as those of its body in the 'freedom from time limits and space limits'. It is once more the dilemma of birth and death that is addressed here. But just as those two poles of human existence are only seemingly binary, the function of the 'greatest works of art' is twofold and contradictory: it liberates and it expands. Liberation from the constraints of one's (physical) self is nothing but the regressive wish never to have been born, to be ejected as a solitary being into a potentially hostile reality. The 'sense of sudden growth' is the move in the opposite direction - but to the same end: the desire to transform the isolated dislocated self into its own universe that encompasses (and controls!) every aspect of reality. The starting point and the end of modernist poetry are re-encountered in psychological terms: the isolating feeling of a loss of mimetic connection between language and its outside, any conceivable form of reality, and the compensation technique of constructive expansion that eventually leads to the modernist myth of itself as an all-encompassing reality *inside* the text.

Yet again, the positive description of the metaphoric word-object implies negatively the threat that this fetish embodies once it is established. Already in the repetitive formulas of Pound's description lies a hint at its stifling power, the suspicion

³⁴Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays* (1954), p. 4; quoted in Link, *Pound*, p. 53.

that it offers nothing but a momentary liberation in order to create immediately its own limitations again; thus the three recurring terms presents/presentation/presence; instant/instantaneously; sense/sense(/*presence*). The ambiguous nature of metaphoric utterances as creative and petrifying is clearly encountered once again. If one takes the final clause of Pound's description and turns it upside down, one arrives at a much more common characterisation of 'the greatest works of art': they make their beholder feel *small*. Again, the potentially original utterance, the great work, both establishes identity (of its creator and its percipient - who seemingly become one in the reading-process) and immobilises and thus threatens this identity. In the shadow of the rebellious act of creation lurks the punishing law of the father.

It is ironic and yet of a paradoxical consequence that the escape from this overpowering double nature of the metaphor is sought in exactly the strategy that embodies the initial problem: repetition. The shift towards metonymy that has been observed in Eliot's works is an attempt to break up the instantaneously petrifying nature of the metaphoric *hapax legomenon*, the singular unique utterance,³⁵ to break through the echoes of the authoritarian forces of the past, 'the father in one's own personal prehistory', by the creation of another echo. For, in spite of its nature as fragmentation or mutilation, the metonymy is always also a reconstruction, a reconstitution of the fragmented and mutilated, albeit with a changed character. As has already been pointed out, the metonymy stresses this act of destruction/reconstruction, i.e. the textual identity at work in its creation, contrary to the metaphor which hides it. If the metaphor thus equals retention and refusal, the metonymy is a spouting out,

³⁵The *COED* reveals its paradoxical nature in the definition 'word of which only one instance is recorded'. The recording, of course, instantly doubles the utterance.

an overspilling, seemingly the ceaseless unveiling of that which the metaphor suppresses. Yet just as the metaphoric retention is not a meaning in itself, the metonymic overflow does not constitute the simple equivalent of an unleashed libidinal flow, the eventual giving-away of the guarded secret. Its apparent submission is just another way of continuing the pleasurable hide and seek game that could ultimately be connected with that most central issue: the constitution/preservation of identity through the very act of endangering it.

The Wolf Man's hope was deposited in the word whose secret lover he was. This word, his Object, he kept in his possession for an entire lifetime. Initially and by vocation, the word was addressed to someone. As an Object of love, it had to be removed from everyone's reach so that it would not be lost. Saying it without saying it. To show/hide. Walk around with a rebus and pretend it is undecipherable. Repeat tirelessly to one and all, especially to his analyst: 'Here is nothing, hold it tight.' Inaccessible, wending his way alongside the unattainable. To love without knowing, to love desperately, to love loving the analyst endlessly. (WMW 22)

Abraham and Torok's rather surprising conclusion which suddenly brings the analyst back into the game is linked with the problem of transference. Yet it also has repercussions on the relation between text and reader in modernist poetry. A famous passage in *The Waste Land* can be seen as the perfect illustration of their idea: 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust'. "'Here is nothing, hold it tight.'" Their idea of the love-affair which - via the word-object - extends from analysand to analyst will be taken up again in the concluding part of this study where the view will be reversed: what is the effect of reading modernist poems on the constitution of identity of its reader? Or, more bluntly, why is modernist poetry read (or, more realistically, why not)?

Although metonymies in modernist poetry must - like those in the tales of the Wolf Man - be seen as 'not a *metonymy of things* but a *metonymy of words*' (WMW

19), their material often consists of images. Their treatment follows initially the same pattern of reification at work in the construction of metaphors. By the act of naming or evocation between the poles of two signifiers, an act of appropriation takes place that makes its object controllable, puts it simultaneously outside the creative identity of the text and into its creative universe. But while this act strives towards singularity in the metaphor, tries to ban its object inside the 'apparition' thus created, the metonymy is a compulsive return to the dismembered object, a re-enactment of its mutilation.³⁶ It is the equivalent of the magic ritual that tries to ban its object, as Ellmann rightly points out, using imitative magic (based on similarity - like that of a voodoo doll, an effigy, to its victim) in the metaphor, and contagious magic (which works through contiguity) in the metonymy and its variant, the synecdoche (*PI* 72).

The object that is thus attacked in modernist poems is very often the human body. Being the arena in which the initial trauma of loss in the constitution of identity is inscribed, its significant move into the centre of attention does not come as a surprise when this initial loss is repeated on a much larger, namely impersonal universal scale. The simultaneous threat to both identity and meaning through signification endangers these two basic symbolic gains that the initial loss of the coherence of the imaginary stage has procured. Thus the return to its focus, the body, with the indigenous mixture of hatred and desire that characterises ritualist obsession.

Four examples from Eliot's works will illustrate the ways in which the metonymy bans and invokes, disintegrates and recreates simultaneously. In 'Whispers of Immortality', two complementary metonymies are at work. The first one, that of

³⁶In the sense of the totemisation of the overbearing and eventually cannibalised father in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, p. 203.

the skeleton, is a description of the body *ex negativo*: skull (rather than head), breastless, lipless, empty sockets where the eyeballs should be, no flesh, only bones. The second metonymy which describes the woman Grishkin complements the first one positively. That does not imply that the description is a favourable one. The misogynist or at least highly ambiguous characteristics attributed to her have become famous. Yet no matter whether Grishkin's presence is a pleasant one, a presence it is, the *Da* [there] to the skeleton's *Fort* [gone]. She has eyes; they are even emphasised. Contrary to the 'breastless creatures', she has more than her share of a 'friendly bust'. Where they live 'underground', she has a maisonette, and in general she counters their lifelessness with the larger-than-life presence of an attractive and at the same time dangerous (and smelly) jungle animal, the jaguar.³⁷ What the counterpointing, once more of death and life, creates is desire, the only immortal thing in the poem, in the irreconcilable contradiction between the abstract metaphysics and the irreducible simple sensual experience of warmth in its last lines. Once more, Eliot's poem creates the loss it laments: the primordial feeling of universal pleasure and shelter, the warmth of its finale (clearly linked to the maternal and sexual image of breasts with their promise of 'bliss') is fragmented, rearranged in metonymic description, counterpointed and infused with its counter-terms.

The ritualist procedure is, of course, the re-enactment of the 'loss of innocence' through intellect; the *vanitas* motif that is so strongly alluded to in its archetypal depiction: the mind knows that the end of all bodily pleasure is death. The stress on the dominant creative and perceptive mind of modernism is there; yet its power is

³⁷The split into ideal and horror-image is discussed in Freud's paper 'Repression', in *Metapsychology*, pp. 139-158 (p. 150).

undermined by the very images it creates. The metonymic woman suffused with the emblem of animality, the jaguar, does not remain fragmented, but in an act of paradigmatic rhizomatic extension grows together again and manages to infuse even the consciously mental images of the skeleton metonymy (their intertextual status as references to Donne and Webster stresses their intellectual rather than sensual character) with its vitality. The self of the text, so much master of its allusions in the poem's first half, is then literally brought to its knees, reduced to being a nameless member of a species (the 'our lot'; the implicit 'us' of the poem's penultimate line is, of course, also the rhetorical trick of winning over the reader by inclusion).

But our lot crawls between dry ribs
To keep our metaphysics warm.

There are still traces of ironic detachment in the humorous last line, but the general impression is that of a preventive ritual that becomes itself the danger it tries to ban, a danger that is also its desire: the return to the mute bliss of the primordial shelter. 'Mute' is important here: Grishkin does not speak, does not even seem to think, whereas Webster has his vision, Donne even knowledge, and the anonymous speaker of the poem his suppositions. Grishkin merely *is*. That makes her so powerful as an undermining imaginary force even in fragmented form. As the goal of desire she represents the death of the poetic utterance which is created exactly out of the experience of *not being*. The modernist circle closes itself once more. The utterance that regrets its birth strives to die, but its act of striving keeps it alive, although in fragmented, mutilated form. This is what is implied in Abraham and Torok's notion of the endless love-affair of analysand and analyst. Foucault refers to it in his paper

on the utterance fighting its own death;³⁸ and Leo Bersani's excellent study of psychoanalysis and art makes it its central point as the discussion of the ultimately masochistic nature of the libidinal drives that finds its expression in the creation and reception of works of art, too.³⁹

The close link between body, ego, and the poetic utterance is discussed by various critics. Robert Rogers' study of metaphor in psychoanalytic terms, although sometimes crude and reductive when it comes to poetry, offers an interesting collection of case studies illustrating particular analogies.⁴⁰ Two cases of fragmented body imagery produced by a schizophrenic girl which are apparently attempts at a symbolic healing of the rift between unity and individuation, expulsion (both of the child from the womb, of faeces, and of language) and incorporation (feeding, devouring as well as being devoured, the swallowing of (imaginary) others, the cannibalization of discourse) are of particular interest when compared to the already discussed Eliot prose poem 'Hysteria':

The next drawing Milner [a psychoanalyst whose case studies Rogers uses] discusses appears to her as a picture of a cavity, "not of a face, but a cavity which has some kind of sentience, since it has the basic features of a profile face on its inner boundary - but it also has teeth-like forms all around it. In fact, could it not be an attempt to depict the idea of an anus-vagina as a biting-off organ; or, to put it in another way, is there not here a primitive conception in which mouth, vagina, and anus are all undifferentiated?" [...] "Alternatively, the eyes in the middle of the two ovals can be seen as the nipples of two breasts."⁴¹

³⁸Foucault, 'Le Langage a l'infini'.

³⁹Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), especially pp. 45-47.

⁴⁰Robert Rogers, *Metaphor: A Psychoanalytic View* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1978).

⁴¹Rogers, *Metaphor*, p. 98.

In both the picture of the schizophrenic and Eliot's poem, the metonymic technique of fragmentation is at work. But in both cases the initial fragmentation gives way to a growth of new connections, whose effect in Eliot's poem is not as positive as the analyst's interpretation of the girl's picture might suggest. There, the animated fragments, far from being controllable by their percipient, deprive him of identity; he gives in to the regressive desire to become part of his opposing Other, 'lost finally'. The effect of this loss of identity is once more a fragmentation of perception, the mutilation of images. The metonymy produces its own echoes and thus eventually takes over. The seemingly reasserted identity capable of claiming 'I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end' is a very ironic and consequently highly dubious one. The conditional form of the statement ('could'/'might'), the hint at limitation ('some of the fragments') and some blatantly contradictory claims (where does concentration and subtlety come in after the literal hysteria of the preceding lines?) disqualify the seemingly collected 'I decided' completely.

This effect of the metonymic technique is more obvious when the metonymy is not presented by a apparently coherent narrator in an act of reification of an Other, but applied to the speaker himself. The figure of the possibly raped woman in 'The Fire Sermon', the part of *The Waste Land* that displays close connections with sexuality, is a case in point. Just as in 'Whispers of Immortality', two metonymies interact, diffuse each other and thus increase the metonymic effect of displacement. In this case, the topographic metonymy representing London as 'Highbury', 'Richmond', 'Kew', and 'Moorgate' (before the image is carried away with the

connecting river Thames to Margate) is coupled with that of an apparently female narrator (or three voices sharing the same point of view, if one accepts Eliot's view and sees them as the 'Thames-daughters' analogous to Wagner's *Rheintöchter*) submitting to the sexual advances of an anonymous 'he'. This time, the effect of the fragmentation whose connection with rape unveils its violent nature is clear: it leads to the loss of the self: 'Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew/Undid me'. With what is perhaps a crude variation on Yeats's line from 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven', 'I have spread my dreams under your feet;/Tread softly because you tread on my dreams', the speaker refers to the destruction of her identity: 'My feet at Moorgate, and my heart/Under my feet'. The metonymy has its exact counterpart in the imaginary self-destruction of the schizophrenic.

'She saw a figure with arms and legs all over the place, kind of floating, and a breast somewhere.'⁴²

This corresponds to Lacan's descriptions of the manifestations of the 'fragmented body' produced by the individuation of the mirror stage:

This fragmented body - which term I have also introduced into our system of theoretical references - usually manifests itself in dreams when the movement of the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual. It then appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions.⁴³

Once more, the metonymy produces its own echo: 'I can connect/Nothing with nothing'. This outcry actually slyly alludes back to the constitutive principle of the device itself, the syntagmatic connection of distant signifiers (no things). But the metapoetic closure excludes the speaker's identity, and after a final 'Nothing' her

⁴²Rogers, *Metaphor*, p. 98.

⁴³Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', p. 5.

utterance ceases for good.

The problem of the dislocated voice speaking its own destruction, thus asserting itself in its own dissolution and vice versa, identity as its own limit, is a recurring feature of modernist poetry. It will be re-encountered in the philosophy of Heidegger. A final example from Eliot's works will focus the analysis more closely on this metapoetic aspect of the metonymy while simultaneously leading to the last form of - in the broader sense - metaphoric utterance to be discussed in psychoanalytic terms, the symbol. Tiresias, one of the many voices in *The Waste Land*, has, as Maud Ellmann points out, only 'a single walk-on part'. Yet, as she goes on, he indeed represents the 'osmotic force that makes all the voices of *The Waste Land* melt into one another' (PI 97), blurring the borderlines of textual identity while at the same time asserting it in a complex new shape which strives towards an all-encompassing paradoxical double nature as absence and presence. For, indeed, as Eliot points out in his notes to the poem, 'What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem'. Nothing, that is, for Tiresias is blind. He is the representative of all the decentered voices of the poem, decentered because revolving around absence. In his 'personage', as Eliot prefers to call him, the negative union of the metonymy takes place that leaves eventually 'nothing'. He is both metaphor (the act of fusion), metonymy (displaced and fragmented voice), and symbol as the concrete representation of an abstract concept. What he stands for is the modernist impasse, the incurable rift between language and reality that makes him unable to see anything. Yet he sees a lot in the prophetic metaphoric sense, so much that the act becomes painful, the more so because the gaze is always also directed backwards (the internalising strategy is again at work), and inevitably discovers the shadow of the past in the present: 'And I

Tiresias have foresuffered all'. The utterance continues *ad infinitum*, but only ever repeats what has already been said. Pound's Cino describes his position between his 'I have sung' and 'I will sing'. One adds 'forever the same old song' and gets Eliot's Tiresias.

Tiresias' multiple function as an unceasing purveyor of nothing is also reflected in his physical description. Both man and woman, he is not at all the perfect Platonic union: the halves do not complement each other, but only unveil each other's incompleteness: 'throbbing between two lives'. In *The Waste Land* Tiresias is already more than old; what the reader gets is a *post-mortem*; he has already 'walked among the lowest of the dead'. Interesting is the recurring stress on his female breasts. Their connection with distribution, giving, spilling out, their role as the source of language has already been encountered. Also their fetish-character as the ultimate goal of desire, because they are the primordial means of its fulfilment. In Tiresias' case, these breasts are wrinkled, no longer capable of production. In their second appearance, they are even referred to with the derogatory term 'dugs'. The coupling of attraction and repulsion that characterises the fetish becomes obvious once more. Potentially a symbol of the union between displaced subject and its bisexual ego-ideal, 'the father in the personal prehistory', Tiresias fails abysmally. Himself only a shadow, and a rather unimpressive one, he indicates that the way back to a primordial wholeness is blocked. If *The Waste Land* is a complex question looking for an answer, Tiresias is the hapless Oedipus who knows that the sphinx has no secret.⁴⁴ As Ellmann points out:

⁴⁴Ellmann's *Poetics of Impersonality* uses the heading 'The Sphinx Without a Secret' for its chapter on the poem, pp. 91-113.

Now *The Waste Land*, like any good sphinx, lures the reader into hermeneutics, too: but there is no secret underneath its hugger-muggery. Indeed, Hegel saw the Sphinx as a symbol of the symbolic itself, because it did not know the answer to its own question and *The Waste Land*, too is a riddle to *itself*. (PI 92)

The radical inquiry into the secrets of the constitution of the self with the help of a symbolic magic fetish who has no problems in stating his identity (the triple repetition 'I Tiresias' certainly has the character of a productive charm here) is already a wide-reaching structural step in modernist poems. As the analysis of Hopkins' and Yeats's poetry has shown, very often the completion of the second part of the formula 'I -' leads to severe problems. The use of a symbol helps to overcome some of them. By its nature a compound signifier like the metaphor, but one that - unlike the metaphor - transfers and locates meaning directly from one signifier to another, it manages to stabilise the flow of signification at least to a certain extent. The symbol thus becomes a more controllable and reliable device than both metaphor and metonymy, the first necessarily imprecise, the second one unstoppable in its repercussions. Furthermore, a symbol always forms part of a symbolic system which adds a further stabilising weight to a construction employing it.

Tiresias is a symbol in various aspects: he represents the merger of masculine and feminine; he stands for the crossing of the barrier between life and death (in its negative connotations also for the inevitable return of the past, the dead and suppressed), and - related to that - for the connection and communication between ordinary reality and a higher sphere. The symbolic systems he represents is that of Greek mythology where he is an established character, and - in an even more archaic sense - he is also the prototype of the seer (very often blind), the magician, and the trickster (the latter, as anthropological studies show, often attributed with blurred

gender characteristics). The combination of these features make him a powerful symbol and indeed a practicable point of orientation in the osmotic sliding of signification in Eliot's long poem, although not quite an identity - as Eliot's description of him as 'not indeed a "character"' indicates.

Yeats also employs symbolic characters in order to deal with complex issues which in his poetry usually combine very personal with general problems. All these characters display a strong tendency to become archetypes. Some bring this archetypal status with them as an inherent quality - such as the heroes of Irish mythology, Cuchulain, Oisín, etc. - by being part of an established cultural heritage. Other characters are clearly geared towards this mythical status - like the recurring 'The Lover' of Yeats's earlier poems and his counterpart, called in a move that makes him both anonymous, impersonal and universal 'he'.

The 'set forms within the reader's mind'⁴⁵ which are the locus of quotation and cliché, are also the realm of the archetypal symbol. It facilitates identification by the reader. The shadow of tradition, far from being threatening, is here in the first instance a necessary constitutive factor both for the textual identity and also for the reader who establishes his position in the act of recognition. Jung puts this as follows:

The necessary and needful reaction from the collective unconscious expresses itself in archetypally formed ideas. The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well. But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is. For what comes after the door is, surprisingly enough, a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty, with apparently no inside and no outside, no above and no below, no here and no there, no mine and no thine, no good and no bad. It is the world of water, where all life floats in suspension: where the

⁴⁵The phrase is Michel Riffaterre's. He analyses the structure of clichés in his *Semiotics of Poetry*, *Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, ¹1978), pp. 39-46 (quote on p. 39).

realm of the sympathetic system, the soul of everything living, begins; where I am indivisibly this *and* that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me.⁴⁶

Jung is convinced that the collective unconscious is an existing entity which in a binary move both provides the stimulus for the creation of archetypal images and eventually unveils them as inadequate so that new ones are created or sought.⁴⁷ A similar stimulus will be re-encountered in Nietzsche's drive to create metaphors. The validity of Jung's claim is immaterial for this study, but not the economic principle embedded in it, the urgency to create images in order to represent something that is at once personal and universal, and the eventual dissolution or petrification of these images when faced with what is both their source and eventual goal. In this process the already mentioned move of signification from the imaginary to the symbolic stage manifests itself.

In terms of textual economy, it is the creation of symbolic networks and their perfection which eventually leads to their toppling through self-reflection and self-destruction when the systems reflect back on and question both their material and their premises, in the case of poetry language and textual identity. Or, if one wanted to describe the archetypal move in Freudian terms (and I would suggest considering the Jungian concept as a substructure of the Freudian system rather than a complementary one), one could argue that the reference to an impersonal collective unconscious is the projective wish for the wholeness of the maternal womb as the source of all signifying power out of whose security the phallic power of the symbol emerges. The perfect universal symbol would then be the phallic mother, and just like her it proves

⁴⁶Jung, 'Archetypes', pp. 21-22.

⁴⁷Jung, 'Archetypes', pp. 12-13.

unattainable.

If the metaphor corresponds to retention and hiding and the metonymy is the equivalent of distribution, dissolution and speaking out, the symbol combines features of both. Structurally a stable metaphor, so to speak, it is one that blatantly displays its meaning. In contrast to the 'anal' metaphor and metonymy, it is indeed the proudly displayed phallus of signification. In this respect, it is telling that its exhibition is very often coupled with hints at its possible removal: castration. The dialectic of absence and presence does not spare the structure that claims the strongest presence of those hitherto discussed.

Yeats's early poem 'The Cap and Bells' uses the archetypal characters of the jester and the young queen as its protagonists. The jester represents the masculine, but his position as a sexually active being is curtailed by his role; he occupies a position similar to children, madmen and eunuchs; his social status is also inferior. The young queen, on the other hand, is both sexually mature and in an unattainable position of power. These two symbolic characters are metonymically dissolved into smaller symbolic units. The jester first becomes his soul, then his heart, eventually the central symbol of the poem, his cap and bells. The latter is the most evident depiction of what the other more abstract descriptions have hinted at from the very beginning of the poem. Rising upward and standing straight, red and quivering, they describe an erection. The cap and bells are a symbol of the male genitals.

The young queen is in turn described by metonymically employed symbols relating to her body and, more and more explicitly, her genitals, too. It is an interesting ideological side-effect with some relevance for a psychoanalytic interpretation of the text that the images with which she is connected are those of the

garden and the house, the conquered wilderness and the epitome of civilisation, inhabited (in the Victorian imagination) by the woman - and especially the mother and the wife - but governed by man. The queen, half-asleep, is first implicitly equalled with the garden 'fallen still' (note the promise in the ambiguity of the verb). Then the masculine symbol approaches the first vaginal threshold, the window-sill, but is rejected. Her genital symbols, suddenly solid and magnified into 'heavy casement' with 'latches', bar the way. The jester's second attempt, this time directed at the more conventional, yet equally vaginal door, is also defeated, this time with a fan, an object whose folded shape resembles the female genitals.

Only the - once more archetypal - third attempt is successful (three is a traditionally masculine number referring back to the male genitals; the symbolic network of the poem is very dense indeed). The queen permits the masculine symbol access to her body; the hitherto barred thresholds open, and sexual intercourse is clearly implied in 'her red lips sang them [the cap and bells] a love-song', until the poem ends in the post-coital calm of 'the quiet of love in her feet' which forms a symbolic bracket with the initial erotic fantasy of the jester, 'the quiet and light footfall'.

This admittedly crude overview of the symbols at work in Yeats's poem helps to shed some light on the features of psychoanalytic interest which ultimately relate back to the poem's textuality, i.e. act as metapoetic devices. In order to make these pieces fit, two central issues of the text that have so far been ignored must be added to its discussion. The most important one is certainly the ambiguity of the jester's conquest: he achieves his aim through his destruction. He sacrifices his cap and bells and then dies. This castrational death (and it makes no difference if it is seen in a

positive light, 'die' as an ancient euphemism for orgasm, because the effect is the same) indicates that the possession of the phallus is the necessary prerequisite of identity and this, very importantly, is the precondition of the poetic utterance. For the second feature hitherto ignored is the curious description of the masculine symbols: both soul and heart (traditionally the twin loci of identity) are endowed with a (once more phallic) tongue. Their intrusion is that of an utterance; the erection is that of the symbolic system - which in turn refers back to the poem itself. But, paradoxically, the aim of the phallic symbolic system is exactly its own destruction, its loss in the embrace of the Other. The symbols' aim and end lies in the womb of the imaginary. Yet just as much as the identity of the speaker reaches its (literal and metaphoric) climax when his song is taken over by the Other and melts into what Kristeva calls the undifferentiated *chora* which are the relics of the imaginary in the symbolic sphere.⁴⁸ 'They set up a noise like crickets,/A chattering wise and sweet'. To use Lacan's words, the subject is constituted by the desire *of* the Other (with all the ambiguity inherent in the preposition), or:

The Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks to him who hears, that which is said by the one being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken.⁴⁹

The movement of creating symbolic systems out of archetypal images which

⁴⁸'I believe that this archaic semiotic modality that I have referred to as infantile babblings, in order to give it clearer definition, is a modality which bears the most archaic memories of our link with the maternal body - Of the dependence that all of us have vis-a-vis the maternal body, and where a sort of self-eroticism is indissociable from the experience of the (m)other, We repress the vocal or gestural inscription of this experience under our subsequent acquisition and this is an important condition for autonomy'; Julia Kristeva, 'A Question of Subjectivity - An Interview', in Philip Rice & Patricia Waugh, eds, *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (London et al.: Edward Arnold, 1989), pp. 128-134 (p. 130).

⁴⁹Lacan, 'The Freudian thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis', in *Écrits*, pp. 104-145 (p. 141) (henceforth quoted in the text as 'FT').

then, in turn, dissolve or become threatened by dissolution into the imaginary again is a recurring feature in Yeats's works. It has already been discussed in the analysis of 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time' with its ambiguous lines

Come near, come near, come near - Ah leave me still
A little space for the rose-breath to fill!

and even more explicitly in 'Fergus and the Druid' where 'knowledge' eventually means the annihilation of symbolic certainty and the sliding into the chaos of the imaginary with its resulting loss of identity: 'But now I have grown nothing, knowing all'.

Jung regards this as one of the primal dangers of human consciousness:

The unconscious no sooner touches us than we *are* it - we become unconscious of ourselves. This is the age-old danger, instinctively known and feared by primitive man, who himself stands so very close to this pleroma. His consciousness is still uncertain, wobbling on its feet. It is still childish, having just emerged from the primal waters. A wave of the unconscious may easily roll over it, and then he forgets who he was and does things that are strange to him. Hence primitives are afraid of uncontrolled emotions, because consciousness breaks down under them and gives way to possession. All man's strivings have therefore been directed towards the consolidation of consciousness. This was the purpose of rite and dogma; they were dams and walls to keep back the dangers of the unconscious, the 'perils of the soul'.⁵⁰

But if this is a primitive notion, it is equally one that pervades the most sophisticated expressions of human creativity ambiguously both as desire and fear. As Foucault puts it:

Perhaps language delineates the realm of experience in which the speaking subject, rather than expressing itself, exposes itself, thrusts itself against its own temporality and finds itself referred back to its death with each word.⁵¹

Exposing rather than expressing, showing oneself in symbolic shape as one's phallus

⁵⁰Jung, 'Archetypes', p. 22 ('perils of the soul' English in the original).

⁵¹Michel Foucault, 'Préface à la transgression', *Critique*, 19, nos 195-196 (August-September 1963), 751-769 (p. 768) (my translation).

in order to rise from the chaos of the imaginary - only to be reminded of one's inevitable dissolution in the same is a formula that fits as a description of Yeats's poems as well as of modernist poetry in general. The impossible utterance refuses to die, but in order to prevent this death only ever produces mirror images showing deaths's grinning face. The distancing moves that keep fears of old age and mortality at bay in externalisations, such as the 'battered kettle' in 'The Tower' and the simultaneously phallic and morbid image of the 'tattered coat upon a stick' in 'Sailing to Byzantium', eventually the desperate hyperbolic formulas 'Now I shall make my soul' (in 'The Tower') and 'Man has invented death' (in 'Death') are such symbolic mirrors.

They are the *Fort* [gone] move in the *Fort-Da* game of symbolic representation. But as every *Fort* provokes yet another *Da*, so the poems cannot get rid of the shadow of their own destruction which is nothing but the echo of their creation. While characterised by a disillusionment concerning symbolic certainties, modernist poems never completely abandon symbolic systems, one of which is that of symbolic identity. Jung describes this impasse as follows:

Is it becoming a problem today? Shall we be able to put on, like a new suit of clothes, ready-made symbols grown on foreign soil, saturated with foreign blood, spoken in a foreign tongue, nourished by a foreign culture, interwoven with foreign history, and so resemble a beggar who wraps himself in kingly raiment, a king who disguises himself as a beggar? No doubt this is possible. Or is there something in ourselves that commands us to go in for no mummeries, but perhaps even to sew our garment ourselves? [...] Anyone who has lost the historical symbols and cannot be satisfied with substitutes is certainly in a very difficult position today: before him there yawns the void, and he turns away from it in horror. What is worse, the vacuum gets filled with absurd political and social ideas, which one and all are distinguished by their spiritual bleakness.⁵²

⁵²Jung, 'Archetypes', pp. 14-15.

Yeats discusses the dilemma of the symbolic technique in poems like 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' in which symbols are uncovered as what they are: set-pieces employed as mirrors by a textual identity that needs them for its own constitution. Yet not even the uncovering of their status gets rid of their influence and impasses: the uncovering agency, the textual identity, is a symbol itself. Its dissolution would affect the poetic utterance radically; it would indeed be the end of a coherent and closed articulation. Although permanently caught in the dialectic of absence and presence, *Fort* and *Da*, identity in its tensional and liminal state is never completely abandoned. The cord connecting the playing child and the reel representing the mother becomes a borderline of the poetics of modernism.

5. Conclusion: Signs of Desire/The Desire of Signs

*Le Sexe est un charnier de Signes.
Le Signe est un Sexe décharné.*⁵³

If the initial catastrophe of individuation spawns both the ego as the isolated body and the sign, their nature as twins is reflected in their similar structures as well as their unceasing desire to reach for each other, for the one to inscribe itself in its counterpart.⁵⁴ Their birthmarks are absence, lack, and the desire for its completion. But just as little as the body can return to its (either pre-natal or pre-conscious) wholeness, the sign manages to establish a stable connection between its components,

⁵³[The Sex is a grave of Signs. The Sign is a skeletized Sex.]; Jean Baudrillard, 'Le Corps ou le charnier de signes', in *L'Échange symbolique et la mort*, Bibliothèque des Sciences humaines (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976), pp. 153-189 (p. 154).

⁵⁴Michel Foucault's work studies the ways in which the body acts as a writing board for cultural discourses, from his early *Discipline and Punish* onwards up to his final work, *The History of Sexuality*. The present study is concerned with an aspect of the other half, the sign, and the ways in which the features of the body/the self are mirrored in it.

signifier and signified. The effect of the body's attempt at recovering totality is narcissism. In textual terms, the attempt to stabilise the 'two non-overlapping networks of relation' that signifier and signified represent ('FT' 126) only ever leads to the production of new signifiers in a process that defers rather than establishes what it tries to achieve: coherence, meaning, and identity.

Hopkins' poems with their strategy of lining up signifier after signifier in their desire to achieve the impossible connection with an evasive signified are examples of this futile yet essential urge of signification.

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, ' vaulty, voluminous,
 ...stupendous
 Evening strains to be tíme's vást, ' womb-of-all, home-of-all,
 hearse-of-all night.

The beginning of his 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' illustrates this urge to return to - explicitly - the womb. Here, as in Yeats's 'The Cap and Bells', the return to the mother appears in oedipal guise, the mother as a phallic one.

Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, ' her wild
 hollow hoarlight hung to the height

The play on 'horn' and 'hoar' (which phonetically resembles 'whore'; note also its vaginal adjective 'hollow') is evident. But the lines also exhibit stylistically the struggle they describe. The seven adjectives of line one and two, almost painful in the contrast of phonetic adequacy yet almost complete absence of visual quality, do not manage to describe the 'Evening' they precede. 'Strains' is the first of many verbs in the poem that describe painful activity met with resistance. The list continues with 'wound', 'hung', 'overbend', 'steepèd', 'páshed', 'Disremembering', 'dísmémbering', 'whélms', 'wind/Off', 'grínd'. They describe the Sisyphean labour of signification

which proves never to be resolved into a pure indication of the real, but always refers back to another signification. That is to say, the signification is realized

only on the basis of a grasp of things in their totality.

Its origin cannot be grasped at the level at which it usually assures itself of the redundancy proper to it, for it always proves to be in excess over the things that it leaves floating within it. ('FT' 126)

[...] Lét life, wáned,
 ah lét life wind
 Off hér once skéined stained véined varíety ' upon, áll on twó
 spools; párt, pen, páck
 Now her áll in twó flocks, twó folds -- black, white; ' right,
 wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
 But thése two; wáre of a wórld where bút these ' twó tell, each
 off the óther [...]

'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' represents what Lacan calls

the congenital gap presented by man's real being in his natural relations, and by the resumption, for a sometimes ideographical, but also a phonetic, not to say grammatical, usage, of imaginary elements that appear fragmented in this gap. ('FT' 127)

Yet in this gap, 'Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, ' thoughts/against thoughts ín groans grínd', identity finds its only possible locus of constitution. The self that is not there without being called by an Other, cries out for the attention of this Other but only hears itself: 'self ín self/steepèd'. The self that is not quite itself strives towards itself. In Freud's terms, *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, not, as the English translation suggests, 'where the id was, there the ego shall be', but in Lacan's more adequate interpretation: 'it is my duty that I should come into being' ('FT' 128-129) with all its paradoxical implications. The modernist self desires its own end, as the various attempts at impersonality show. But in order to achieve this end, the self has to constitute itself first. Indeed, the act of self-destruction falls together with that of self-creation, modernism's *machine célibataire*, Pound's hammering of the phallic self, Eliot's sibyl surviving into the present by repeating her death wish, Yeats's making of both his soul and its death, Hopkins's recurring references to the death of the nuns in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* as birth.

This locus of creation/destruction of the self is language itself, as *The Wreck of the Deutschland* indicates when it introduces - seemingly only superficially motivated - the feast of the immaculate conception which follows the night of the shipwreck in stanza 30:

But here was heart-throe, birth of a brain,
Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright.

The word as creator refers, of course, to the beginning of the gospel according to John, but also to the creation *sui generis* of modernist poetry. Easily overlooked, however, is the self-destructive implication of the lines: the 'Word, that heard' must be one that is - at least momentarily - silent, i.e. not a word at all. It is first an absence, then a retention ('and kept in'), then a distribution ('and uttered thee outright'). It unveils the contradictory yet also complementary strategies of modernist poems. Yet if this locus of the constitution of the I which Lacan calls the Other 'extends as far into the subject as the laws of speech' ('FT' 141), it is also subject to the rules of speech and its possible pitfalls: arbitrariness, ambiguity, the possibility of the non-functioning of communication. 'Me, or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one?', asks Hopkins' '(Carrion Comfort)', unable to answer the central question concerning its own textual identity - which nevertheless makes this inquiry.

Hopkins' poems abound with desperate appeals addressed to an Other, all of them unanswered. The tragedy is brought to a point in one of the 'Terrible Sonnets', 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day':

[...] And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

Christ or imaginary lover or both, the addressee is the Other whose desire, expressed in a reply, would ensure the constitution of identity, but whose silence leads to its

incompleteness, its eventual loss:

The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

The insight that the subject is characterised by lack, yet the ways to the appropriation of the Other - which is necessary for the completion of this self and guarantees the reality of the signs it employs - is barred, is the essential crux of both identity and the sign in modernist poetry. Out of this most basic deficiency evolves the desire of modernism for wholeness, control, and totality, because, as Lacan reminds us, 'the signification is only realised on the basis of a grasp of things in their totality' ('FT'126). The greatest endeavour of modernism thus reflects its attempt to control its very basis. Yet the control it simulates is only that of the signifier. 'The signifier alone guarantees the theoretical coherence of the whole as a whole' ('FT' 126). The adjective 'theoretical' is crucial here. For what the technique of adding signifier to signifier achieves is but the creation of a layer of text which forms the plane of the 'signifying quest' in which 'I dedicate myself to becoming what I am, to coming into being. I cannot doubt that even if I lose myself in the process, I am in that process'.⁵⁵ Modernist poetry, caught between the refusal of its own material and the desire for what it cannot attain, true being, constitutes identity negatively as a continual absence along 'the rails', as Lacan puts it, 'eternally stretching forth towards the *desire for something else*',⁵⁶ the rails, that is, of its own never-ending utterance.

⁵⁵Lacan, 'Agency of the letter', pp. 165-166.

⁵⁶Lacan, 'Agency of the letter', p. 167.

VIII. Radical Values: Towards an Economy of the Modernist Poem

Nous n'avons qu'une ressource avec la mort: faire de l'art avant elle.
[We only have one means of coping with death: to make art before it.]

(René Char)

1. The Text as an Economy of Meaning

Little could be less obvious than a close relation between a poetic text and economy. So apparently designed to be non-pragmatic, non-functional in an everyday sense, a poem can in very few cases claim to be a statement on distribution, exchange, and value.

The impression changes, however, if the poems are viewed internally as a system that establishes a relation between its elements, a structure of equations and disjunctions, comparisons and incompatibilities. In this respect, poetic texts work in the same way as economic systems. They display surplus and shortage, place value on certain aspects, devalue others, shift the balance of significance, and transform elements of no intrinsic value - words - into symbolic value, in the same way as advanced economic systems transform labour into money or its equivalents.

The analysis of dominant structures of modernist poetry in the light of psychoanalysis has revealed similar features, although these remained related to the identity of the texts, mirror-images or counter-concepts of an individual psyche whose shortcomings and internal ruptures found their equivalents in textual mechanisms. If

this discussion was designed to cover the illocutionary aspect of the poems as discourse, i.e. the question: what do the texts try to convey about their own conception, their own 'selves', the seemingly more abstract inquiry into their economy is concerned with their perlocutionary attitude: what do the texts try to do as texts? In this respect, the comparison of the techniques of the four authors covered by this study will reveal a consequent development of some economic theorems. These can be detected in the analysis of economy as an underlying theme of poems, a view which eventually merges with an evaluation of economy as form, following one of the fundamental ideas of this study, that of the transformation of form into theme in modernist poems: their characteristic self-reflection. The results of their economic strategies will present themselves as borderlines of the aesthetics of modernism.

2. The Stability of the Mirror

Hopkins' poems display the essentially modernist tensions between a mimetic approach and a growing awareness of construction. Starting from an assumption that the unlimited variety of natural phenomena can hardly be grasped in language, i.e. from an idea of scarcity of poetic means, the power of signification moves increasingly into the focus of his poems (see 'Spelt From Sibyl's Leaves') and brings with it a simultaneous notion of entropy affecting reality, a draining away of its force, essence, and value. Yet already relatively early poems - which display few signs of self-reflection on an obvious level - can be interpreted as complex discussions of 'economic' issues, economy here interpreted as the polarity of appropriation and distancing observed in the analysis of the role of the sign in Hopkins' poetry.

A pair of related sonnets, 'The Lantern Out of Doors' and the later 'The Candle Indoors', illustrate the mechanisms of subject-object relations which are central to the poems and whose adequate description is one of economy. In 'The Lantern Out of Doors', the reader is faced with an impersonal situation, a vague setting in a 'Sometimes' made a little more concrete as 'along the night'. It only takes two more lines, however, to make the text both concrete and personal: via the possessive 'our' the poem focusses on a narratorial 'I' and also introduces the crucial setting 'outside versus inside' that is so important for the message of the poem and reappears in reversed form in its companion piece.

Sometimes a lantern moves along the night,
That interests our eyes. And who goes there?
I think; where from and bound, I wonder, where,
With, all down darkness wide, his wading light?

The speaker is inside, apparently in a stable position, watching the light of a lantern moving across the darkness outside, until it is seemingly lost in the darkness that surrounds it. The second quatrain of the poem then unveils the beam of light produced by the lantern as a symbol of man's physical and spiritual beauty.¹ It penetrates ordinary reality (described in the negative terms 'our much-thick and marsh air') like rain.

Men go by whom either beauty bright
In mould or mind or what not else makes rare:
They rain against our much-thick and marsh air
Rich beams, till death or distance buys them quite.

¹And, as Marshall McLuhan points out, by a further symbolic shift this in turn becomes a symbol for God's grandeur; Herbert Marshall McLuhan, 'The Analogical Mirrors', in *The Kenion Critics, Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Symposium* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), pp. 15-27.

That the poem is concerned with values becomes apparent at this early stage when the adjectives 'rare' which describes men of quality and 'rich' which accompanies the beams contrast with the associations of worthlessness implied in 'marsh' (indicating land of no value). The paradigm is then extended with the rather unusual formula 'till death or distance *buys* them quite' (my emphasis). Apparently, human qualities are not simply lost in the baseness of ordinary life, they are sold, exchanged that is, at a price which is ultimately too low. Thus the insistence on consumption that the poem displays by repeating the formula in slightly altered shape: 'Death or distance soon consumes them'.

Death or distance soon consumes them: wind,
What most I may eye after, be in at the end
I cannot, and out of sight is out of mind.

The lines can be read as autobiographic statements.² Yet they are also related to the highly ambiguous role of distancing and loss in Hopkins' poems. As has been pointed out in the discussion of distancing as a mode of signification, it is a necessary prerequisite of textual identity which thus integrates itself into a dialectic resembling the Freudian *Fort-Da* game. Put in a simplified formula: I am there, because there is something outside of me, distant (temporally and spatially), eventually lost. Its implications in terms of identity as a liminal state have been discussed in the preceding chapter, and the discovered desire for completion through the Other are indeed depicted very accurately in Hopkins' lines 'What most I may eye after, be in at the end/I cannot'. They also describe the strong yet paradoxical wish of the speaker to belong, to 'be in', although this is exactly the place where he is, at least physically.

²Norman H. MacKenzie interprets 'out of sight [...]' as Hopkins criticising his friends in *A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981), pp. 94-95.

The verb 'wind', attached to death and distance, hints at the almost physical intensity with which this separation of subject and Other is experienced.³

But how does the poem respond in economic terms when faced with this loss that cannot be prevented? It refuses to accept it and invokes Christ who rescues those almost lost and gathers them in his care. This is an accurate reflection of the Christian - or more specifically Catholic - doctrine according to which all possible evil in the world is outbalanced by God's grace which is granted indiscriminately of eventual personal merit.

Christ minds: Christ's interest, what to avow or amend
There, éyes them, heart wánts, care haúnts, foot fóllows kínd,
Their ránsom, théir rescue, ánd first, fást, last friénd.

This concept of care and responsibility corresponds to the feudal medieval economy which is closed and non-expansive. Redistribution happens hierarchically. All goods are essentially loans, and their use is granted in exchange for services and dependency towards their owner: the aristocracy for material goods, God and His representative, the church, for spiritual ones.

Although Hopkins' poem follows this religiously motivated pattern, the terms employed in its description stem from a different period and a different economic background. They are those of mercantilism:⁴ Christ's 'interest' is what is in the

³The underlying religious paradigm, that of Christ trying to rescue frail mankind in the darkness of their sins, does not clarify the situation (the speaker is already secure), unless one reads his longing as that to follow Christ's sacrifice - with the consequence that the rescue of others is bought at the expense of the self.

⁴R.H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (West Drayton: Penguin, 1948, 1926) defines the term on pp. 43-44:

[...] economic interests are subordinate to the real business of life, which is salvation, and [...] economic conduct is one aspect of personal conduct upon which, as on other parts of it, the rules of morality are binding. Material riches are necessary; they have a secondary importance, since without them men cannot support themselves and help

centre of the poem, and in order to secure it, he has to be a clever investor with explicit demands and a not always pleasant presence ('care haunts'), paying the necessary 'ransom'. Even though 'The Lantern Out of Doors' tries to present a spiritual ideal untainted by materialist or even (proto-)capitalist notions, it cannot help but display that it is informed by a knowledge of the dominant economic principles of its time. This becomes a problem when Hopkins' texts have to place themselves inside an economic network.

'The Candle Indoors', the companion piece to the above poem, is an example of such a text ultimately reflecting back on its own status, its *value*. Now the speaker, clearly present from line one onwards, is outside, exposed to 'night's blear-all black'. The tempting light is inside, that of a candle in a window.

Some candle clear burns somewhere I come by.
I muse at how its being puts blissful back
With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black
Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at the eye.

By that window what task what fingers ply,
I plod wondering, a-wanting, just for lack
Of answer the eagerer a-wanting Jessy or Jack
There / God to aggrandise, God to glorify. --

But once more the distance only helps to identify the position of the speaker more clearly: in spite of being surrounded by the dark and, one would assume, in a much less comfortable position than that inside the house, he knows where he stands, has time to muse. Even 'plod' indicates, besides its connotations of laborious work, that he has a task. The bright window, on the other hand, is 'somewhere', the candle 'some', i.e. non-specific, without a clear identity.

one another; the wise ruler, as St. Thomas said, will consider in founding his State the natural resources of the country.

Still, once more it is the light that is attributed with positive qualities: 'clear', 'blissful', 'mild', and 'tender' are its characteristics, while the speaker is, as in 'The Candle Out of Doors', 'a-wanting', suffering from an outspoken lack. In a complex act of deferral, the speaker's lack, his desire to get to know who or what is inside the brightened window, is projected onto the woman or man that he suspects there and becomes the ambition that they should worship God in the same way as he does. In psychological terms, a sublimation takes place which fulfills libidinal urges by an integration of the desired object into the desiring subject, by making it like him in an act of eventually narcissistic identification. In economic terms, a potential loss is prevented by channelling the expenditure (once more of light as the equivalent of human value) into the transcendental resources of God which are thus 'aggrandise[d]'.⁵

Yet the poem does not end there. In a dramatic reversal, there suddenly appears a voice which, apparently from the inside of the house, calls the person outside and asks him in. Or is it the same speaker as before who turns his desire to make people worship God into action and starts sermonising - using various biblical allusions for his argument?

Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:
You there are master, do your own desire;

What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
In a neighbour deft-handed? Are you that liar
And, cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?

⁵MacKenzie's *Reader's Guide* assumes hard-working fingers behind the window (p. 120), but the poem contains no hints at what is happening there.

If the first assumption is correct, then an act of self-criticism takes place which places the speaker's value, his 'fading fire', versus the 'clear' candle inside the window, i.e. weakness and exhaustion versus moral brilliance, and shows that behind the missionary zeal of the speaker of the first half lies a personality which is less than certain about its merits. If the second interpretation is more adequate, then a rift appears within the speaker's attitude which shows that the apparent attraction of the light disguises some ambivalence, fear even that it will unveil his imperfections - or a contradictory nature of the light itself which brightens the nights but is also capable of blinding. (Here could be a possible link with another poem, 'To What Serves Mortal Beauty', where beauty does not lead to moral righteousness, but is distracting and dangerous.)

Although 'The Candle Indoors' displays a tendency in favour of the first solution (the 'plod' of its first half and the 'fading fire' of its second, among other pieces of evidence, hint at the identity of the addresser of part one and the addressee of part two), the text offers no definite solution. This, together with the sheer aggressiveness of the accusations of its finale, creates a sombre ending which, in economic terms, opens up the neat enclosure of its first part again and hints at the possibility of total exclusion and loss. 'Spendsavour salt', a reference to the Sermon on the Mount (where, significantly, the image of the 'salt of the Earth' is followed by that of the 'light of the world'), Matthew 5.13,⁶ indicates utter worthlessness. What has started as an orthodox exclamation turns back on itself. In the final consequence, the poem accuses itself of self-righteousness and thus moral depravity. In the context of the entire corpus of Hopkins' works where the problem of artistic production as

⁶MacKenzie, *Reader's Guide*, p. 120.

hubris is continually present, this indicates the outline of a crux which marks the beginning of a new, namely the modernist aesthetic where the work of art tries to do something it cannot achieve, knowing that by not achieving it, it admits its superfluous status, but by achieving it, it breaks down the premises of its own production.

What Hopkins' poems discuss in their imagery and - in the case of the two poems just analysed - the miniature dramas of their plots, corresponds to their structural premises, the way they deal with and estimate their material. Language is still regarded as essentially mimetic, i.e. capable of depicting reality. Ideally, there is a one to one relation between the elements of reality and those that language provides to illustrate and mirror the former. This perfectly outbalanced system which denotes a stable economy without one-sided increase and, even more importantly, without any waste either, is never abandoned as an ideal in Hopkins' works. The most elaborate example of the force with which his poetry clings to it is 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection' which counters possible expense ('Man, how fast his firedint, ' his mark on mind, is gone!') with the absolute stability of the 'immortal diamond' representing Christ. It strikes today's analyst as traditionalist in its religious implications, as naïve and anachronistic even in Hopkins' own age. Yet premature judgements of the complexity of underlying - eventually not only linguistic but philosophical - structures should be postponed until the analysis of the further evolution of modernist poetry reveals that in its most refined developments a return to a very similar system of stability takes place.

When faced with this danger of producing works that fall visibly short of their ideal, works in which either the constructive principle takes over or in which the construction is unveiled as deficient, as *waste*, when compared to God's grandiose

creation, Hopkins' poems opt for silence, the termination of the poetic utterance. His seven years of poetic inactivity before the writing of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* can be seen in this light. The inevitability of this outcome is already sketchily outlined in his earliest works. 'The Habit of Perfection', for instance, illustrates in rather paradoxical eloquence the need for ultimate renunciation and reduction which entails the withdrawal of possible poetic utterances:

Elected Silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorlèd ear,
Pipe me to pastures still and be
The music that I care to hear.

Shape nothing, lips; be lovely-dumb:
It is the shut, the curfew sent
From there where all surrenders come
Which only makes you eloquent.

'The Alchemist in the City' is an even more interesting case in point. Alchemy, the transformation of base metals into gold, is a potent symbol of artificial creation. As will become evident in the next section, this artificial creation - in textual terms of symbolic reality or realities - is one way out of the impasses that are brought to the surface when the mimetic model collapses entirely and the rift between language and reality becomes unsurmountable. In Hopkins' poems, however, the alchemist produces nothing. Static in the face of the ever-changing world, he is aware of *wasting* his life by attempting a discovery that cannot be made.

My window shews the travelling clouds,
Leaves spent, new seasons, alter'd sky,
The making and the melting crowds:
The whole world passes; I stand by.

They do not waste their meted hours,
But men and masters plan and build:
I see the crowning of their towers,
And happy promises fulfill'd.

He is a strange alchemist indeed in that he knows that the teachings of his profession are unsound, and one cannot help but wonder what keeps him locked in his tower, tied to a thankless task, when all his desire is the freedom of the wilderness and eventual death.

And then I hate the most that lore
That holds no promise of success;
Then sweetest seems the houseless shore,
Then free and kind the wilderness.

Or ancient mounds that cover bones,
Or rocks where rockdoves do repair
And trees of terebinth and stones
And silence and a gulf of air.

There on a long and squared height
After the sunset I would lie,
And pierce the yellow waxen light
With free long looking, ere I die.

The question can be answered if one takes the alchemist to be an allegory of the poet on the borderline of a new aesthetic, aware of the collapse of the old certainties of his craft, yet unwilling to leave them behind.

3. Artificial Creation: Symbolic Values

Talking of religion with reference to Yeats is a thankless task. His poems offer a hotchpotch of beliefs, a truly eclectic mixture of faiths and fibs. Yet the intellectual climate that influences his oeuvre and is to a great extent responsible for its attachment to and struggle with symbolism rests on premises which can ultimately be traced back to the Reformation.

In its attempt to fight the increasing worldliness of faith, Protestantism separated reality and the sacred and denied an access of the first to the latter. Saints,

relics, and holy images had to go, and the main principle of Catholicism, the belief in the transubstantiation, the actual transformation of the host into Christ's body through the sacramental formula, i.e. *language*, was denied. This liberated everyday life from religious constraints and made, most importantly, the development of capitalism, the uninhibited creation of wealth independent of religious scruples, possible.⁷ Yet it also robbed language of its power to partake in a transcendental reality and reduced its status massively.⁸ This remained acceptable as long as the products of language, i.e. literary works, found an alternative realm in the bourgeois world of commodities (the work on the market will be discussed in greater detail below), but only as long as this world provided a coherent explanation of its premises, an unbroken set of paradigms. This indeed displayed growing cracks when from the mid-Nineteenth century onwards the ever-increasing speed of industrial capitalism step by step took away those traditional principles that were in its way, and the scientific developments that preceded or followed it in its track shook the established certainties of the ruling bourgeoisie. Darwin, Marx, and Freud are the unholy trinity in this respect.

Literature, so far only a more or less ornamental means of underlining accepted doctrines, was suddenly cast into the role of a rescuing force which had to provide alternative truths. Artificial production, already the long-established mode of capitalist

⁷This is the basis of Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. It derives from Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930) (first published in 1904-05). See also Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988), especially 'The Distant Effect of the Reformation: The Autonomy of the World of Production', pp. 124-127.

⁸See Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, pp. 104-105, 117 & 149.

economy but frowned upon in the arts, now became not only acceptable but a necessity when the toppling of truths created a desire (and a market) for artificial ones. Such phenomena as the rise of spiritualism and occult sciences, but also the renewed interest in Catholicism, the vogue for everything Oriental and exotic as well as the search for a mythical Germanic or Celtic inheritance have to be seen in this light. This is the intellectual climate in which the works of W.B. Yeats matured.

At first introduced in a very subtle way that still adheres to traditional models, the early poem 'The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart' illustrates this shift from a mimetic approach to one that detaches language from reality and dreams up (very literally) a 'better' reality inside subjective imagination, thus ultimately in language.

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out
and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lum-
bering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the
wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the
depths of my heart.

The comparison between sordid reality and the better variety to be found in love is an old literary topic. But the really interesting shift that takes place in this poem is its professed aim to remake reality inside its own sphere and in the shape of a symbol:

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great
to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on the green knoll
apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like
a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in
the depths of my heart.

The 'casket of gold' is an early example of Yeats's symbolic representations of the artistic work. Its implications are threefold and set the tone for the structural

significance of the symbol throughout Yeats's career and - more than that - every form of symbolic approach in the widest sense in modernist poetry. First, gold represents unquestionable value. The consequent implication that the work of art, here the poem, is valuable, should not be taken for granted. As has been stated, re-defining the status of the work of art is one of the aims of the symbolic approach. Secondly, gold stands for immutability. Faced with the collapse of certainties, value must be sought in things which do not change, do not succumb to the seemingly arbitrary slithering of reality. This becomes even more evident in the artificial (and also golden) nightingale in the much later 'Byzantium' poems, where the production of the steadfast symbol is motivated by a rather different emotion than romantic love: fear of death.

The third implication of the 'golden casket' shows where the economic ideal of the symbol is to be sought: it is still an economy of keeping together, one that knows no expenditure. The extended paradigm of 'casket' includes both the money-box and the coffin. It opens up the possibility of creation of wealth, of increase. At the same time it keeps its creation in its own realm. The parallel to the features of metaphor and symbol in a psychoanalytic view are obvious. While being the proudly displayed symbol of value, the casket is also the metaphor inside which creation takes place, but which also keeps the created in its place, prevents a signifiatory overflow, expense, and loss. If one accepts the subtle undertone of death in 'casket', one could even argue that the metaphor keeps its own end in its enclosed sphere:⁹ truly, nothing is wasted. It will later become even more evident that in this multiple face of the

⁹Approaching the issue from the angle of epistemology, Derrida also claims that 'Metaphor, then, always carries its death within itself'; in 'White Mythology', p. 271.

modernist symbol both the capitalist myth of creation of wealth out of nothing (the economic *machine célibataire*) as well as its repressed borderline find their expression, Bataille's *part maudite*, what he calls the ultimate luxury and waste: death.

To sum up: a shift takes place that devalues objective reality and in turn reinvests language with 'eternal' merit in the shape of subjective imaginary creation. Two major problems that Yeats's later poems have to deal with are produced by this move: first, although reality is downgraded, it still acts as a source of inspiration. The mimetic model is not entirely overcome. Reality is only 're-made', not created as something autonomous and new. Secondly, the stress on individual imagination brings with it a tendency of passivity in the face of external change - which this particular poem treats ambivalently and without taking a clear stand. ('Build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart' describes the creative power as well as the contemplative passive isolation of the artist, the 'ivory tower' position.) Other poems condemn this passivity as deadening (implications can already be found in a poem as early as 'The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland') and/or escapist (some hints at this are even in the suggestive images of 'The Stolen Child').

Although never quite free from the escapist tendency towards idyllic personal fantasy worlds, Yeats's poems display a growing awareness that historic reality demands action. At first this action is sought in writing alone, but eventually even this self-sufficient attitude of the writer is criticised as inadequate (as the discussion of 'Easter 1916' has shown). As will shortly become evident, the symbolic approach does not create a self-sufficient stable textual economy. The devaluation/re-valuation dialectic swings back on the texts themselves and deals with them in a similar way

as they deal with reality, by declaring them to be 'uncomely and broken, [...] worn out and old': waste.

If the poems themselves eventually get tainted with the air of decay and futility that has caused their drift into a rather dubious semi-autonomy from reality in the first place, it is not only because reality proves impossible to keep out of their constitution. Although this inevitable intrusion of (personal and impersonal) history is one of the causes of their trouble (as the chapter on Yeats's poetry has shown), their problems are not - as in Hopkins' works - those of complex and overbearing reality versus limited language. The partial absorption of this reality into the realm of language prevents this simple imbalance. Indeed the poems' impasse derives exactly from the opposite cause: the success of the symbol. It has been claimed in various places in this study that the perfect symbol leads to the collapse of the symbolic system, thus to the end of the poetic utterance.

What does this mean in terms of textual economy? The symbolising machinery of the poems perfects itself, runs more and more smoothly, until it runs completely on its own, i.e. without the need of input by the subject and reality and - more importantly - without any kind of output that is of use to the creator of the system. Indeed, when faced with the subjectivity of a creator, i.e. the poet, two things can happen in symbolic poetry, both of which are highly undesirable. For once, the machinery can exclude this subjectivity completely and become self-sufficient yet useless. As in the short poem significantly entitled 'Words', words may indeed obey the call of the poet, but produce no effect on reality.¹⁰ Thus they become 'poor

¹⁰See W.H. Auden's poem 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' with the line 'For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives' - which could be a shorthand description of modernist poetry.

words', i.e. worthless, and are eventually thrown away. The perfect symbolic system is useless for the production of lasting values. This is a long-term effect of the insight that the symbol as representation remains inadequate.¹¹ There are still two external authorities which cannot be overcome without endangering the poetic utterance: subjectivity and reality. Their presence devalues everything that the text can produce.

The second possible fate of the subject in symbolic poetry is the very opposite of its exclusion: it is its internalisation. The symbolising machinery takes its material from a reality it cannot leave behind - and also from the very personal reality of its creator. Yet what it produces out of them are forever symbols, fictional systems which can offer temporary escape from reality but no means of coping with it. The *machine célibataire* does not only produce worthless junk; much worse: it transforms valuable reality into rubbish. 'The Fascination of What's Difficult' talks about this effect in personal terms. Although apparently a lament over the difficulties of running a theatre, it deals with the economic relation of art and its creator.¹² It uses the image of a cart-horse as a sad parody of the mythical Pegasus to indicate that, since divine inspiration is no longer available, all art has become extremely hard and unrewarding labour. The poem is aware that after the loss of transcendental certainties, the status of art as product is laid bare.

¹¹See Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, p. 38: 'in the *symbol* the representation is analogical and inadequate (Christianity 'outruns' the cross)'.

¹²Since its construction in 1904, Yeats had been involved with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. In 1910, when the above poem was published in the collection *The Green Helmet and Other Poems*, Miss A.E. Horniman, the theatre's main patron, withdrew her financial support. See Micheál Mac Liammóir & Eavan Boland, *W.B. Yeats, Literary Lives* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986, ¹1971), pp. 67-69 and p. 132.

The complaints of artists about the difficulties of their task and their lack of reward are as old as their profession. What is really interesting in this otherwise thematically unremarkable poem is its attempt at a symbolic solution of the problem. In order to escape from the restraints of artistic production, the speaker suggests the liberation of the poetic impulse. In a significant double move, first its locus has to be found, then it has to be set free. What is made even more explicit in the very late poem 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' is already prefigured here: the symbolic system strives towards perfection, but once it is complete, the only possible continuation of artistic production lies in the collapse of this very system. In structural terms, this means the breaking up of symbols into metaphors and metonymies. In economic terms, it is the shifting of the artificial surplus of symbolic creation either into the stability of reification (Eliot's half-objects, for instance), the equivalent to the fixing of a - however subjective - value, or the continual devaluation of the metonymy with its echoes of diminishing intensity which describe the inflationary diffusion of value.

These are the two options open to modernist poetry, and both of them arrive at their own particular borderlines. The alternative is illustrated in various poems by Yeats. 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' has already been mentioned several times as such a consequent assembly of disconnected 'broken' symbols with a strong tendency towards a metonymic arrangement. 'Lapis Lazuli' is a representative of the alternative solution which reifies the experience of symbolic overkill into a literally petrified image of a Chinese sculpture meant to express Nietzschean tragic gaiety. In 'To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing', an even more radical reification in the face of the inevitable collapse of symbolic certainties, i.e. the failure of the artistic utterance, is recommended. What is petrified here is the poetic potential itself in

silence. The text advocates an end of texts - yet under one crucial condition: 'like a laughing string', 'Amid a place of stone', the poetic silence survives statue-like, 'secret' and triumphant in an élitist realm in which - this is important - even in its ultimate zero-state the modernist artistic utterance survives as an intact *work*.

The alternative, dissolution and devaluation (rather than condensation and re-valuation) is significantly enough easier to accept when it is applied not to the artistic utterance but to a concrete everyday object untainted by the pretensions of artificial value. 'Upon a House Shook by the Land Agitation' describes the fate of such a building and claims that, in spite of its value as a cradle and shelter of human life, activity, and inspiration, it does not constitute a symbolic statement. Yet by putting the issue into verse, 'Gradual Time's last gift, a written speech', the poem cleverly contradicts its own claim and immortalises the decaying house. (In negative terms: the symbolising activity cannot be stopped.) Important is the constitution of this gift of speech: 'Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease', it is not the strict and stable encoded artefact, but a Bakhtinian burst of laughter that destabilises while it expresses and carries in its disappearing echo both its constitution and its destruction which, as the alternative form of tragic gaiety, it can bear with 'ease'.¹³

4. Stable Investments: The Economy of Reification

If Jürgen Habermas' assessment can be accepted that 'greatly oversimplifying, [...] in the history of modern art one can detect a trend towards ever greater autonomy

¹³The idea that laughter can be the force of a productive destabilising of certainties can be found in Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

in the definition and practice of art',¹⁴ it becomes evident why Eliot's poems fit more snugly into the canon of modernism than Yeats's and Hopkins'. In his oeuvre, the shift from a polarity of reality and language via the symbolic stage in which reality is to be found partly in language to the complete integration of reality into language is completed. The psychological landscapes for which his works are renowned have no reason to lament their exclusion from a reality that is to be sought outside of them. Capable of taking in everything, their problem is, on the contrary, that they cannot shut their eyes (and ears and nose - Eliot's poems are very much concerned with the senses, a fact that is often eclipsed by their intellectual treatment of these sensations) to the impressions that bombard them. Like a camera whose shutter is jammed, they become the victim of perception, a passive writing-board of phenomena. Tiresias in *The Waste Land* who 'perceived the scene and foretold the rest', who has 'foresuffered all', is the embodiment of this condition.

The shift of objective reality into the sphere of psychological reality where impressions undergo a further transformation, an intellectualisation and draining-away of their physical force (which recalls the way in which Derrida describes the treatment of myth, its de-colouring, by Western philosophy), eliminates the problem of value. There is no longer an outside against which the constructions of the text have to be measured. Even more importantly, the relativistic notion of the poetic work as produced, as product, is obfuscated. Artistic creation thus follows the same path of mystification with which capitalist economy obscures the origins of capital and

¹⁴Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project', p. 10.

surplus.¹⁵ It becomes evident that modernism always remains entangled in the conditions of society, even when it tries to criticise them. This essential impasse will be re-encountered in Adorno's aesthetics in the final section of this study.

Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon
you have the scene arrange itself - as it will seem to do -

starts 'Portrait of a Lady' and describes its own mechanisms.

The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune
Of a broken violin on an August afternoon:

are two lines from its second part which display this seemingly unstoppable intrusion of external sensations into the text.

This stream of objects entering the poem via the sensitivity of the textual identity puts this identity in a precarious position. It can hardly be called in control any more; it becomes the hostage of the things it describes. When the lady whose self-declared portrait Eliot's poem is supposed to be suggests to its speaker 'Perhaps you can write to me', he responds with a revealing 'My self-possession flares up for a second'. Here, truly, is identity called into being by the desire of the Other in the Lacanian sense, by its command. One instance of being thus provoked into existence (the circularity of the writer who is created by the reference to writing is a first hint at the establishment of a textual *machine célibataire*) is, however, not enough to guarantee a stable textual identity. Already the employed verb 'flares' hints at the momentary character of this identification. When the end of this 'objective' stimulation is contemplated in the shape of the death of this irritating yet captivating

¹⁵See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Ben Fowkes, 3 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, ¹1976), i, pp. 258-269 ('Contradictions in the General Formula'): 'Hence we see that behind all attempts to represent the circulation of commodities as a source of surplus-value, there lurks an inadvertent substitution, a confusion of use-value and exchange-value' (p. 261).

woman (Freud's fetish is certainly not far away), the speaker experiences a radical anxiety concerning his own status, his capacity of creating himself out of the transformation and evaluation of impressions:

Well! And what if she should die some afternoon,
 Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;
 Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand
 With the smoke coming down above the housetops;
 Doubtful, for a while
 Not knowing what to feel or if I understand
 Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon...
 Would she not have the advantage after all?

Indeed, she would. For the revenge of the objects (as Baudrillard enthusiastically calls it¹⁶) for their reification is their eventual take-over. The props of the subjective play-actor begin a life of their own and eventually push him off the stage.

This music is successful with a 'dying fall'
 Now that we talk of dying--
 And should I have the right to smile?

Even the half-jocular reference to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* cannot hide the fact that the speaker is overawed by the sensations that only permit him to come into being after all. In a similar vein, the strange second line of this stanza, 'Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose', presents itself. It is an almost ritualist invocation of the objective impressions without which the identity of the text could not constitute itself, and analogous references are overabundant in Eliot's poems.

The system has now become water-tight. Everything inside it has already been labelled by perception. There is no longer a listing of values of objects in the face of an external measure determining their worth. It is as if one wanted, as Marx suggests,

¹⁶Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, translated by Philip Beitchman & W.G.J. Niesluchowski, edited by Jim Fleming (London: Pluto Press, 1990), pp. 81-99.

to apply the evaluating principle behind the prices of commodities to that against which these prices are measured: money. Yet the monetary value of money cannot be determined.¹⁷ The system closes in on itself and becomes tautological. Only on this apparent tautology can arguments which see the modernist aspects of Eliot's works in conflict with their capitalist premises be based. The circular motion of transformation and evaluation that his poetry exercises points at the ultimate emptiness of the process, its lack of both transcendental *and* objective foundation. The conveyor-belt of civilisation's objects (and those, as will be shown, include people, too) that goes through his poems only describes the ultimate absence of a concept of civilisation. The constitution of identity in Eliot's poems with the help of impressions that are filtered into the text through exactly this identity (again the tautological machine) highlights the loss of a concept of identity, its more that endangered, indeed already paradoxical status. Maud Ellmann describes this impasse as that of narcissism (*PI* 67-68). Freud's concept of narcissism gives as the four forms of the narcissist's love the love of

- a) what he himself is (i.e. himself),
- b) what he himself was,
- c) what he himself would like to be,
- d) someone who was once part of himself.¹⁸

The first three cases hint at the principle of metamorphosis that characterises the succession of speakers in Eliot's poetry. A radical view could indeed call all of them mere variants of a single identity. Yet even when the principle itself is

¹⁷Marx, *Capital*, i, pp. 188-244 ('Money, or the Circulation of Commodities'): 'As against this [commodities], money has no price. In order to form a part of this uniform relative form of value of the other commodities, it would have to be brought into relation with itself as its own equivalent'; p. 189.

¹⁸Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in *Metapsychology*, pp. 59-97 (p. 84).

personified - as it is in Tiresias in *The Waste Land* - the self-reflective view of the speaker is always directed to one, and only one of his states at a time. Freud implies clearly that the narcissist does not love his transformations and changes, but always one particular stage in this metamorphosis. Narcissism is thus essentially ahistorical and entails the reification of the self by itself.

When Freud's fourth category is slightly expanded to include 'something' besides 'someone', it becomes clear that the process of reification is indeed the way to establish a love-affair between subject and object, yet one that transforms all objects into parts, organs of the subject: 'I am, because I perceive objects who thus become parts of me'. As we have seen, the need for objects which are to be reified eventually overthrows the order (one should remember the take-over of entire poems, such as 'Hysteria' and 'Whispers of Immortality', by reified Others). What has started as a transmutation of the objective into the subjective leads to the reification of the subject itself: the subject becomes (its own) object. The system thus ultimately perfects itself until its internal frictions disappear. Yet still (or perhaps because of this perfection), the value produced by this tautological machine remains nil.

The Waste Land is such a machine, one that transforms lack into absence and vice versa, indeed - as many critics have overlooked - not only a waste land but also a land of waste in which all the props on the stage are shown as what they are, the papier mâché of poetry, empty words. Its addiction to prefabricated discourse, fragments gathered from other texts, is an indication of its attempt to bring value into its system, no matter which means have to be exploited. Yet the fragments it has shored against its ruins remain fragments, left-overs, waste. The ruins are not transformed into shiny new palaces (the ivory tower is broken for good). The work

of art remains the dump into which it has been turned by - also economic - history. And even though the text borrows where it can (another attempt at sponging on alien genres is its inclusion of dramatic fragments), it does not manage to increase its value, because even outside of it (and it is important to note that this 'outside' is here only ever other texts) nothing valuable is to be found. Its seemingly optimistic end, the peace-inducing magic spell of its finale, must thus be regarded with some suspicion. Magic depends on a connection between words and things. Eliot's poems - in spite of Eliot's notion of an 'objective' correlative - only know a connection between words and words. Thus their modernism. Thus their hopelessness. The seemingly stable economy of the modernist poem is bought at the price of its self-declared worthlessness.

'A penny for the Old Guy', the begging epigraph of 'The Hollow Men', a poem that is itself a kind of dumping ground (some of the more pessimistic elements removed from *The Waste Land*, for instance the reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, have ended up there), prepares for the bleakest example of a discussion of economy in Eliot's poems. The economy of 'The Hollow Men' is one of utter bankruptcy.

The poem sets up a dualistic concept inside itself: the 'here' is a dead land (the waste land, once more) where the voices of the text identify themselves as hollow, stuffed with straw, quiet and meaningless, i.e. completely devoid of value. They inhabit a reality of reified objects which do not constitute a message, a meaning, much less worth.

Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

What is worse than the draining of reality of meaning and value is that the speakers of the poem are in no way different from their surroundings.

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

describes them as reified or indeed petrified objects. ('Form' in this connection seems to refer to the Platonic idea that individual objects are formed according to a universal idea, their form. Thus 'Shape without form' describes the strange hybrid produced by the *machine célibataire*, not only a self-contained system, but a cancerous growth deviating from any original plan, an implication of some importance for the poem's attitude to loss.)

The 'there' of the poem is enigmatically called 'death's other Kingdom'. This implies at least three things. First it can be seen as a reference to sleep and dreaming (already in Greek mythology, *hypnos*, sleep, is the little brother of *thanatos*, death), thus as an alternative utopian realm of unrealised possibilities and unfulfilled desires. The second section of the poem with its reminiscent imagery corroborates this view. Secondly, the capitalised 'Kingdom' can be interpreted in Christian terms, as a negative view of Christian doctrine according to which death has no power over God's Kingdom. Here it apparently has. Thirdly - and most slyly - the term 'death's other Kingdom' implies that not only this negative utopia, but also the 'here' of the poem, its worthless but nonetheless present landscape, is ultimately ruled by death.

Death is indeed what unsettles the poem (and, one could argue, what provokes it into existence). For in spite of its worthlessness, the 'dead land', 'cactus land' of 'The Hollow Men' is at least, like every good desert, a haven of stability. The question arises: why does the poem (and it is not alone in that) have to defend itself against a possible loss if there is no value to start with? The means of this defense

will be discussed in the next section, but the origins of the problem must be sought inside this stable economy of worthlessness. What the poem is concerned about are two things, ultimately related ones, as will be demonstrated. The first one is the fear that 'reality' and utopian counter-reality could meet.

Let me be no nearer
 In death's dream kingdom
 Let me also wear
 Such deliberate disguises
 Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
 In a field
 Behaving as the wind behaves
 No nearer--

Two things can be recognised here: the first is the similarity to the fear of Yeats's poems that the desired perfect symbol could bring about the end of the poem. Secondly, a prefiguration of the ghostly encounter with the composite spectre in *Four Quartets* which has been discussed in its psychoanalytic implications. Yet there is no symbol here, neither is there a recognisable person. Still, the mechanisms are the same as in Yeats and 'Little Gidding': the potential union of present reality and that which is defined as exactly *not* this reality, the utopia as a) everything which might be but b) *is not* would topple every notion of existence and thus identity. Identification and localisation would no longer be possible, not even as men of straw in a dead land.

That the fear in 'The Hollow Men' is once more the fear for the intactness of the poem as work becomes clear when the second related aspect of its anxiety is highlighted. It is the notion that something has already been lost, namely the capacity for speech, i.e. the means of poetic production. 'This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms', the only significantly different variant of the seven times repeated formula of the kingdom, is an emblem of speechlessness. What is worse than the production

of nothing is no longer having the means of production. By producing nothing, the poems at least produce themselves.

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

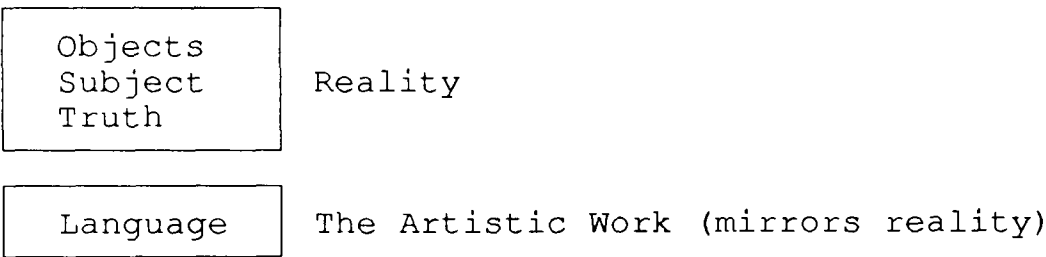
Marginalised by history ('on the beach of the tumid river'), the poems turn in on themselves. Yet there is a world of difference between being silent and being silenced. The struggle of a poem like 'The Hollow Men' reveals that inside the value-free economy of modernist poems, two residual values have survived that they are not willing to give up. A notion of subjectivity - however thwarted and mutilated this may be (the Romantic heritage) - and the equally strong notion of the poem as *work* (the inheritance of Classicism), as an artefact that might not have an intrinsic value, yet retains a special status in a world of continual reification.¹⁹ These two, individual subjectivity and the artistic work, are threatened by 'the Shadow' whose negative influence is evoked in the fifth part of the poem. What this shadow is and possible strategies to infuse the dying conglomerate of work/subject with new life, meaning, and value, ways of rising out of the ashes - or even turning ash into something valuable (*vide Ash-Wednesday*) will be discussed in the following section.

¹⁹Steven Connor, in a talk on 'Rubbish, Waste, Negativity, and the Avant-garde' (Oxford, February 1991), used the ambiguous connotations of the adjective 'priceless' to indicate the paradoxical status of the modernist work: it wants to remain outside the realm of commodities, yet strives to be called valuable.

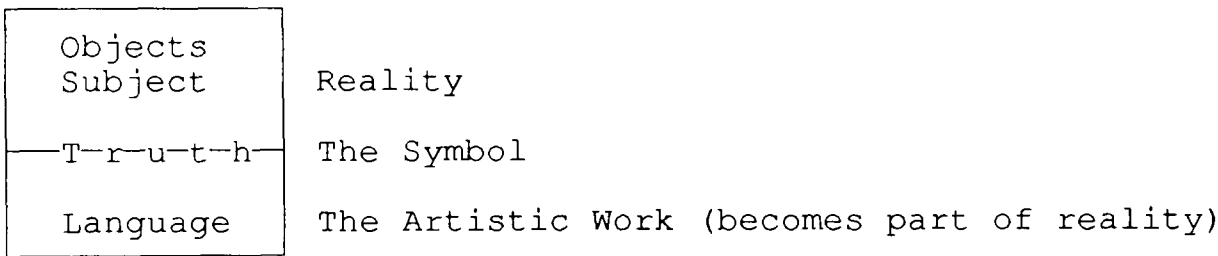
5. Conspicuous Waste

If the shifts inside the economic structures of the analysed modernist poems were to be visualised in a diagram, one would end up with three distinct phases.

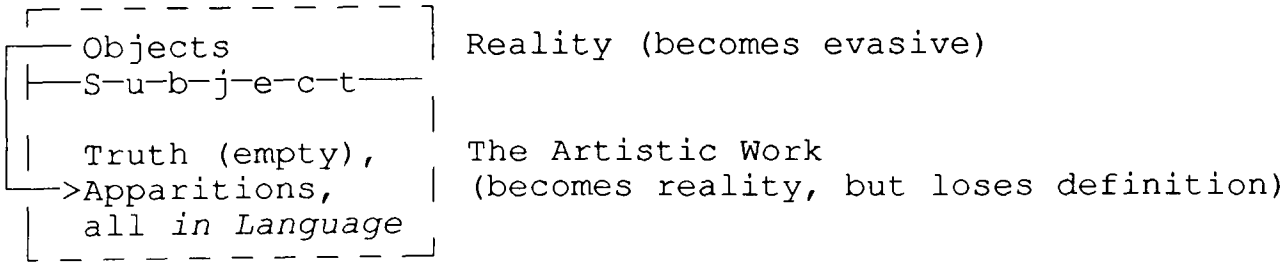
1. The Stable Economy of the Mimetic Approach



2. The Expansive Economy of the Symbolic Approach



3. The Empty Economy of the Modernist Approach



This final phase displays two areas of tension: the liminal status of subjective identity and the endangered notion of the artistic work. Both are brought about by the one element that has taken over: language itself. These three stages are equivalent to the changing concept of the sign: from binary compound signifier/signified to an opaque signified in symbolism - and eventually reduced to one layer, that of the signifier only.

In Baudrillard's concept of the development of representation, the three phases correspond to what he describes as the 'successive phases of the image':

- 1 It is the reflection of a basic reality.
- 2 It masks and perverts a basic reality.
- 3 It masks the *absence* of a basic reality.

One recognises the rupture between language and reality which happens between stage one and two and the consequent attempt to bridge the gap in stage three. The fourth and, so Baudrillard claims, nowadays most influential stage of the process is

- 4 It bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.²⁰

The modernist poem must be located between stage three and this final stage. That it is torn between merely acting in the place of an absence, i.e. setting up a machinery that runs empty, and simulating an artificial presence, one that leads Adorno - whose aesthetics are determined by their adherence to the specifically modernist work of art - to the following description:

Art works are things which tend to shed their thing-like quality. The authentic and the thing-like do not form distinct layers in a work of art; spirit is not superimposed on some supposedly solid objective basis. One of the key characteristics of works of art is, on the contrary, their ability to undo their own reified shapes in such a way that reification becomes the medium of its own negation. The two levels are mediated through each other. The spirit of art works evolves from their thing-likeness, and conversely their thing-likeness - i.e. their existence as works - springs from their spirit.²¹

This attempt to overcome their status as objects is an attempt to escape the symbolic exchange of society which, as Baudrillard points out in the introductory hypothesis of his *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*, actually

²⁰Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulation', in *Selected Writings*, edited by Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 166-184 (p. 170).

²¹Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 389.

determines this value rather than responding to any intrinsic value (of use, for instance):

A veritable theory of the object and consumption will not be founded on a theory of needs and their satisfaction, but on a theory of social obligations and of signification.²²

It is from the moment onwards (which can theoretically be isolated) when exchange is no longer purely transitive that the object (the material of the exchange) comes into being through the exchange, that it becomes reified in the sign. Instead of abolishing itself in the relation that it founds and to assume for itself symbolic value (as does the gift), the object becomes autonomous, intransitive, opaque, and starts immediately to abolish the relation. The object-sign is no longer this shifting signifier of the lack between two beings, it is 'part of' the reified relation (as on a different plane, goods are part of the reified force of labour). Where the symbol returns to lack (in the absence) as a virtual relation of desire, the object-sign no longer refers to anything but the absence of the relation and to the separated individual subjects.²³

It is this integration into the evaluating symbolic exchange system that is responsible for the spiritual and aesthetic bankruptcy of the modernist works, and the poems are aware of that:

Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkling of a fading star.

Pound's poems are even more outspoken on this issue:

An Object

This thing, that hath a code and not a core,
Hath set acquaintance where might be
affections,
And nothing now
Disturbeth his reflections.

²²Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*, Les Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 8 (my translation).

²³Baudrillard, *Critique*, p. 62 (my translation).

The little exercise laments exactly that which it undertakes through its own structures: the reification of impressions, objects, people in the modernist work of art - which thus becomes 'An Object' itself.

'Portrait d'une femme', in a way a companion-piece to Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady' and yet quite different, attacks the described woman because her personality is a mere collection of objects that have been assembled over the years, just as the Sargasso Sea with its almost complete lack of currents to which she is compared in the poem's first line collects algae and gulf-weed. If she is taken to be exemplary of the modern character, this is described in rather straightforward terms as a cross between junk shop and garbage heap, the realm of valueless objects.

Yet when the poem is compared to Eliot's, some striking dissimilarities emerge. Eliot's speaker is passive, almost carried away by his observations. Pound's is in control, capable of taking a stand and indeed attacking his object. But even this position of authority is endangered. This is indicated by the sly reference to the fact that the woman is not the, but 'our' Sargasso Sea. The 'bright ships' that have supplied the essentially vacuous woman with

Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of
price.

are the true spirits of the age, 'Great minds'. They are, of course, male in Pound's chauvinist universe which, however, is also that of the other modernists discussed here. The male principle creates, is responsible for the artificial production of the modernist *machine célibataire*. The female principle collects, devours - or is used as a dump. It does not produce, but - much worse - turns the glittering artefacts of the male project into useless rubbish, back to earth or the faeces from which the male

creators so vehemently distance themselves.²⁴ The problem remains, however, that this anti-principle of modernist production lurks everywhere, even inside perfectly masculine works - and their authors. It is Bataille's *part maudite*, the accursed share, as the English translation calls it. For Bataille, this is the inevitable element of waste and expenditure that accompanies every act of production and is yet negated by it.

Human activity cannot entirely be reduced to processes of production and conservation, and consumption must be differentiated into two distinct realms. The first, which is reducible, contains the minimal consumption necessary for the support of life of the individuals of a society and for the continuation of their productive activity: it is thus merely a fundamental condition of the latter. The second realm encompasses the so-called unproductive expenditures: luxury, mourning ceremonies, wars, cults, the erection of representative monuments, games, theatre, the arts, perverse (i.e. non-genital) sexuality represent a similar number of activities which, at least originally, have their end in themselves.²⁵

Bataille later re-integrates this expenditure into a larger complex which he calls general economy to distinguish it from all restrictive economies which simply deny its existence. Here waste and expenditure fulfill the function of creating space in life for new life. And here is the link with the attempt to 'kill' tradition that has been observed as a dominant structural principle of modernist poetry in its psychoanalytic evaluation. In a world that leaves virtually no space for the poetic utterance, space has to be created - by force, if necessary - to make the poem possible as a 'statement' in Foucault's terminology, one that includes a statement of the self and the statement of its own status and value as a work.

²⁴The conspicuous absence of women from the canon of classical modernism deserves a thorough structural treatment. When women actually appeared on the scene, such as H.D. and Amy Lowell, they were quickly excluded as polluters of the purity of the modernist project. Thus Pound's attempt to rescue Imagism from becoming Amygism.

²⁵Georges Bataille, 'La Notion de dépense', in *La Part maudite: précédé de La Notion de dépense*, Collection 'Critique' (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), pp. 27-54 (p. 33) (my translation).

When Bataille lists the three most prominent forms of expenditure, one re-encounters the obsessive principles of modernist poetry, too:

The eating of one species by another is the simplest form of luxury. [...] generally vegetation is less burdensome than animal life. [...] the wild beast is at the summit: Its continual depredation of depredators represents an immense squandering. [...]

Eating brings death, but only in an accidental form. *Of all conceivable luxuries, death, in its fatal and inexorable form, is undoubtedly the most costly.* [...] It continually leaves the necessary room for the coming of the newborn, and we are wrong to curse *the one without whom we would not exist.* [...]

The luxury of death is regarded by us in the same way as that of sexuality, first as a negation of ourselves, then - in a sudden reversal - as the profound truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation.²⁶

The textual equivalent of eating, cannibalism even, is the recycling of pre-existent discourse, intertextuality, the palimpsest. The suspension and endangering of textual identity in its shifts between self and Other, subject and object, corresponds to the luxury of sexuality. And death finds its alternative shapes in the options of silence, the end of the poetic utterance, and the metonymic overspill, the echoing self-destruction of the text.

Needless to say, the texts do not like these forms of shifting themselves into oblivion, even though they are attracted to all of them. They are not capable of seeing that the eventual dissolution of their own form is inherent in their structures. Bataille even characterises poetry as the purest form of loss:

The term poetry which characterises the least polluted, the least intellectualised forms of expressing a state of being lost, can be seen as a synonym of expenditure: it signifies, in fact, most precisely creation through loss. Its meaning is thus close to that of the sacrifice.²⁷

²⁶Bataille, *Accursed Share*, pp. 33-35.

²⁷Bataille, 'Notion de dépense', p. 36 (my translation).

In relation to the problem of the work on the market, it is precisely this in-built character as waste that creates problems for the poetic genre. Poetry is indeed an institutionalised form of waste in the bourgeois sphere, a respected waste of time and energy (the actual market-value of poetry is negligible). It is thus an indication that even the streamlined rationalist world of the bourgeois needs its outlet of expenditure, which, however, differs radically in shape from the great and sometimes orgiastic forms of antiquity and the aristocracy of pre-capitalist times.

Today the great deliberate social forms of unproductive expenditure have disappeared. Yet one should not as a consequence conclude that the principle of expenditure itself has ceased to be the aim of economic activity.

A particular development of wealth whose symptoms are illness and exhaustion leads to an embarrassment of itself and simultaneously to an evil hypocrisy. Everything generous, orgiastic, and boundless has disappeared: rivalries which continue to determine individual action happen only in hiding and resemble an ashamed belching. The exponents of the bourgeoisie choose a more subtle attire: the display of riches takes place only behind the walls of boring and depressing conventions.²⁸

Yet with its enclosure in the realm of the private entertainment of the bourgeois, the poetic work has not only been submerged in the market, it also becomes the victim of the market-forces which eventually push it into a corner whose one angle is kitsch, the surrogate satisfaction of fashions, the other an equally false classicism that institutionalises and petrifies it. What is worse, the very institution of poetry as a cultural *sine qua non* disappears in the late nineteenth century, and poetry finds its realm among the poets only, until it is eventually rescued by the emerging field of literary studies.²⁹ In order to cope with these changes and ultimately to become

²⁸Bataille, 'Notion de dépense', p. 44 (my translation).

²⁹The twin dangers of kitsch and fake classicism find their expression in Pound's struggle with his own early works. His famous 'stale creampuffs' remark hints at the first danger, while the problems of the confrontation with a classical canon shape his poetry throughout his career.

capable of stepping outside the structures of the market, the poems would have to overcome their status as works. And this is what they refuse to do.

Eliot's poems register their invasion by the sordid phenomena of reality in the early twentieth century passively. The individual body, the city, and civilisation as a whole melt together in his poems to become one huge metaphor of defilement (*PI* 99). In *The Waste Land*, the carriers of this defilement are rats, traditionally the spreaders of disease, here symbols of *The Waste Land*'s particular infection which severs words from meanings (*PI* 105) and makes language impotent. The poem discovers a symbol for the ever-widening rift between language and reality, a gap that is, as will be shown in Pound's works, broadened by every attempt to bridge it in the structures of an artistic text.

Yet Eliot finds an apparent solution to the problem of this continued loss - of value, of integrity, of existence - in the very structure he uses to describe it. The symbol becomes the lifebelt of his poems, the lid on the pot of unstoppable signification that prevents a final overflow. In *Ash-Wednesday*, this symbolic reversal is only present in a paradoxical combination with its own antithesis. The poem renounces all capacity of transformation, reification and vision that language possesses.

Because I know that time is always time
 And place is always and only place
 And what is actual is actual only for one time
 And only for one place
 I rejoice that things are as they are and
 I renounce the blessed face
 And renounce the voice
 Because I cannot hope to turn again

This reduction of the potentials of language (which has some similarities in Imagist doctrines) is accompanied by the paradoxical inward turn which can already be encountered in Yeats:

Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice

Seemingly the text becomes its only object. Yet at the same time the poem invokes an external agency just when its own powers have been reduced to the smallest possible output of a *machine célibataire*, the mere production of itself. This external force is indeed the greatest available one. The move corresponds to what Odo Marquard calls the replacement of the question of fate,

Why did just this happen to me, to us, to him, to her, to them? - the question of (as it is now called) 'mastering contingency' - [which] is surpassed in biblical Christianity and theological metaphysics by the absolute initial question, to which God is the absolute answer: the omnipotent creator alone, and no one else, makes everything and guides everything. This appeal to God - to creaturely contingency and divine omnipotence - brings the career of fate to an end: the one omnipotent God is the end of fate. And the modern world, it seems, merely implements this end of fate, which in essence was already accomplished earlier.³⁰

That this absolute solution is a regression to the symbolic technique which eventually tries to rescue some - however paradoxical - value for *Ash-Wednesday* becomes evident in its second part. It abounds with symbolic images, all adding up to the hope of resurrection through the intervention of a female figure (Dante's Beatrice comes to mind and, of course, the Virgin Mary). When the third part of the poem then echoes Yeats in its image of the winding stair, it is clear where the journey goes. Against the lost word and spent word with which the poem also characterises itself is set the yet unheard Word (note the capitalisation).

³⁰Marquard, 'The End of Fate?', p. 69.

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

The allusion is, of course, to John 1.1-5. God's word is the only creative one. Economically speaking, the poem tumbles back through the stages in the development of textual economy and indeed reaches the mimetic starting position again. There, truth, reality, and subject are firmly in place. There is an address to which the poetic utterance can be directed. As a consequence, the prayer with which the poem ends becomes a practicable and adequate form once more.

That this prevention of absolute loss and worthlessness is the very opposite of the development from a restrictive to a general economy which accepts and includes expenditure and waste becomes apparent in Eliot's late *magnum opus*, *Four Quartets*. Indications are the well-known philosophical speculation on time as an enclosed monadic system (again, no expenditure, no escape) in 'Burnt Norton' and the image of the dance (also prominent in Yeats) which, also in 'Burnt Norton', becomes linked with a view of the cosmos as a wheel on which

Garlic and sapphire in the mud
 Clot the bedded axle-tree.

The image contains references to Eastern religions as well as the Western notion of cyclical time which ultimately leads to an integration of waste in the machinery of production of value. It is 'Garlic *and sapphire*', and although they are 'in the mud', they gain value by being part of an all-encompassing symbolic system, that of a transcendental philosophy.

Even death, the ultimate obstacle, loses its threatening and subversive status as luxury/loss when it is integrated in the vertical historicist structure of cultural layers. In the first part of 'East Coker', the peasants dancing around a bonfire (once more the dance as a symbol of historic inevitability) are described in an archaic English that refers back to a time when the connection between language and the sacred were still strong. The reference to 'matrimonie -/A dignified and commodious sacrament' is not coincidental. The image is used to point out that death is just one of the layers of life. The poem expands its view to include in a manner that resembles the style of the Ecclesiastes

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

Death as a kind of fertilizer, that is what the poem tries to convey, thus rescuing reality from loss - and implicitly itself from the possibility of disappearance: the poetic utterance continues, even though this might be in other texts.³¹ The poem's self-depreciation is thus more than a little hypocritical:

That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory:
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.

For in spite of its surface-humility, the poem neither gives up the notion of value nor does it sacrifice itself when faced with the dissolution of certainties. 'O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,/The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the

³¹In this connection, Harold Bloom's otherwise rather misleading ideas might have some bearing. Texts do indeed sponge on other texts, even though they might not be aware of it, yet the ways in which this happens are determined by plenty of factors and not just the 'greatness' of some authors. See his *Anxiety of Influence*, pp. 5-12 & 93-96.

vacant,' is countered by 'You say I am repeating/Something I have said before. I shall say it again'. The poem refuses to become a victim in Bataille's sense:

The victim is a surplus taken from the mass of *useful* wealth. And he can only be withdrawn from it in order to be consumed profitlessly, and therefore utterly destroyed. Once chosen, he is the *accursed share*, destined for violent consumption. But the curse tears him away from *the order of things*; it gives him a recognizable figure, which now radiates intimacy, anguish, the profundity of human beings.³²

This would be the way to remove it from the sphere of commodities which ultimately refuses value for it. Despite its insight into the paradoxical nature of its beliefs, it chooses to believe in Christ rather than self-abandonment. Christ's death has a similarly ambivalent character:

The cults require a bloody wasting of men and animals *as sacrifices*. The 'sacrificium' is etymologically nothing else but the *creation of sacred things*. Thus it becomes clear that holy things are created through an action of loss. Especially the success of Christianity must be explained through the value of the degrading crucifixion of the son of God which extends the human fear to a vision of unlimited loss and humiliation.³³

What Bataille overlooks, is that this ultimate, because Divine expenditure is saved from being one by its integration into the Divine rescuing scheme for His creation. In the re-creation of Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist the three main forms of expenditure according to Bataille are merged: cannibalism (the congregation eats Christ's flesh and drinks his blood), sexuality (less obvious, but highlighted both in Freud's analysis of cannibalism and psychoanalytic readings of, for instance, Christian mystics), and of course death. And yet this potential overkill of expenditure is sublimated (in Adorno's sense: removed from the realm of things by its insistence on

³²Bataille, *Accursed Share*, p. 59.

³³Bataille, 'Notion de dépense', p. 34 (my translation).

its thing-likeness) by its connection to the paradoxical idea of eternal life deriving from death.

The structural similarities between the complex position of faith in the twentieth century and the impasses of modernist poetry explain their mutual attraction.³⁴ Corresponding analogies will present themselves in the analysis of Heidegger's existential philosophy. What the symbiosis *produces* is, however, a utopian concept, one that remains symbolic and thus ultimately chained to language.

In Baudrillard's words:

Seductive is only the secret that is not circulating as a hidden meaning, but as a rule of the game, as a form of initiation, a symbolic pact without a key to its interpretation, without a code that offers itself for deciphering. Moreover there is nothing to uncover. One cannot repeat it too often: THERE IS NEVER ANYTHING TO REVEAL (PRO-DUIRE). In spite of all its materialistic endeavours *production remains a utopia*.³⁵

This relapse of the poetic work into its own traditional sublime status despite the disappearance of firm transcendental values assumes a rather different shape in Pound's works. In the form of Imagism, he also cultivates the reductionist technique that makes the poem its own object, the perfect enclosed machinery which produces a single apparition only. This apparition can be multifaceted, but it never disperses itself. It is never integrated - into an argument or a narrative pattern - and thus never overwritten and lost. In contrast to some of Eliot's later poems which create an

³⁴A.V.C. Schmidt sees in Eliot's poetry a 'discovery of a *homology* between religion and poetry, faith and art, which furnishes the basis of the process of "integration"', in: 'The Integrity of Eliot', *Essays in Criticism*, 41, no. 3 (July 1991), 222-239 (p. 232), Yet Schmidt's optimistic view of both religiosity and integration prevents him from seeing that the similarity derives from the same structural impasses and that integration can also lead to the opposite of integrity: disintegration.

³⁵Jean Baudrillard, *L'Autre par lui-même: Habilitation*, Collection Débats (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987), p. 57 (my translation).

outspoken humility of the poetic form by its subjection to a higher transcendental system promising value to the work in spite of its obvious worthlessness, its failure to produce, Pound's Imagist texts vehemently deny an outside. They are the purest representations of Adorno's idea of the work as thing moving beyond 'thing-likeness' through the stress on its materiality. Pound's poems insist that their creative tactics are the only reality, i.e. they turn the reality-art dichotomy upside down and call symbolic production real and reality empty. Examples of this attitude are numerous. 'Apparuit' is a poem whose title indicates that it discusses the manifestation of an apparition, i.e. the transformation of a vision into reality: symbolic production.³⁶

Golden rose the house, in the portal I saw
thee, a marvel, carven in subtle stuff, a
portent. Life died down in the lamp and flickered,
caught at the wonder.

Life significantly dies down under the weight of the apparition and thus unveils its inferior status. The vision, however, continues, and supplies all the elements usually associated with reality: colour, temperature, moisture, etc. The apparition 'drinks in' reality which is thus transferred into the text.

Crimson, frosty with dew, the roses bend where
thou afar, moving in the glamorous sun,
drinkst in life of earth, of the air, the tissue
golden about thee.

Even a poem that seems more sceptical about the status of art versus reality, such as 'Silet', cannot help but contradict its own argument - the actual event is more significant than its artistic depiction - even when it sets up this argument:

When I behold how black, immortal ink
Drips from my deathless pen--ah, well-

³⁶The title is an allusion to Dante's *Vita Nuova* where the line 'Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra' describes the effect of Beatrice's apparition. See Brooker, *Student's Guide*, pp. 77-78.

away!
 Why should we stop at all for what I think?
 There is enough in what I chance to say.

It is interesting that this poem replicates the old Platonic idea (explained in the tenth book of *The Republic*) that there is a hierarchy of diminishing value from idea via concrete objects (which are the impersonations of ideas) to artistic imitations of real objects (which are thus mere pictures of pictures). Plato uses this model explicitly to condemn poetry as the producer of mere illusions, whose products are highly imperfect.³⁷ Yet in spite of its protestation 'It is enough that we once came together' (repeated three times), the poem is there. Its own order - in contrast to the Platonic one - is the actual event, thinking about it, saying it, and eventually 'setting it to rhythm'. 'To plague to-morrow with a testament' is what the poem claims it wants to avoid, i.e the institutionalisation of itself as permanent, thus contradicting the momentary character of event, thought, and verbal utterance. It does the opposite.

To round up the discussion of the economy of the modernist poem, it is tempting to compare Pound's poem 'The Alchemist' with Hopkins' poem on the same subject. The differences could not be greater. Pound's alchemist is not for a second plagued by doubts concerning his success. Like a well-oiled machine, we encounter him in mid-action, already busy conjuring up assisting spirits. The names used in the invocations stem from all kinds of sources. There are Provençal-sounding ones, such as Raimona, Tibor, Berangère (the poem's shape hints at its roots in Provençal models; its subtitle 'Chant for the Transmutations of Metals' also stresses its claim to authenticity - which is always a dubious one in Pound). Others appear to be Greek in

³⁷Plato, *The Republic*, with an English translation by Paul Shorey, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1956, ¹1935), i, pp. 419-521 (esp. pp. 420-435 (hierarchy of idea, object, and imitation) & pp. 440-469 (defects of poetry)).

origin (Tireis, Alcmena, Briseis, Alcyon, Phaetona), some Arabic (Midonz). A few seem sheer fantasy creations, while one, 'Jocelynn', has an evident Anglo-American flavour. The poem patches together its intertextual roots in an attempt to duplicate the alchemy it describes by its own feat of transmutation. Its goal: the creation of an authentic poem out of fragments of other texts, gold out of base metal. The 'fire' in the heart of the production process is the poetic force itself which first fuses the impressive images and equally colourful allusions of the poem to a homogeneous amalgam, then stabilises it in its form: 'Quiet this metal'. Once more the modernist machinery creates something out of nothing, and then keeps the created value inside itself.

Besides this stress on form which shows once more the work's reluctance to give up its status and thus to disperse the artificially created value, the poem also foregrounds the second force that it refuses to abandon. It is the creative subject that is still in power and control. In this poem it finds its expression in the speaker. But even in Imagist attempts at impersonality, so central to Pound's own poetic ideas, this subject merely hides behind the apparition it creates. As Ellmann points out, in Pound's doctrine of the 'Direct treatment of the thing', one can discern the intact subjective force in the very term 'treatment' which simultaneously institutionalises a subject-object dichotomy and disguises the process-character of the formation of the apparition (*PI* 143). This process-character is called work (as in labour, not thing) by Durant who points out that this process is obscured by subject and object, although these are both created by it.³⁸

³⁸Durant, *Identity in Crisis*, p. 23.

The concepts of work and creator find their combined expression in *The Cantos*. Among the many themes, stories, and mere listings of this complex text, it is the continuing thread, its lifeline, but also its limit. For its attempt not only to create a voice, but *the* voice of Western culture, the Odyssean trickery of the text forces it to dig deep in the rag-bag of history. What it comes up with is exactly the dilemma which proves fortunate for Odysseus: the similarity between *polumetis* (many-minded) and *outis* (no man). The poem's attempt to transcend history by becoming it, i.e. leaving its own status as product behind in order to become an immortal *work*, actually purges it from the restrictions of a clearly defined textual identity. Yet the price that has to be paid for this achievement is both a dangerous blindness, i.e. lack of self-reflection, which makes the blatantly misogynist, anti-semitic, and pro-fascistic statements of *The Cantos* possible, and a drifting of its discourse in all directions, a real and sometimes orgiastic overspill (which, according to Bataille, at least exempts it from becoming part of the bourgeois sphere, a fact that the history of the poem's reception seems to prove).

What *The Cantos* do in their attempt to purge language from impurity, i.e. waste, an attempt that is ultimately connected with the text's problem of justifying its own existence, leads only to the production of more waste. This paradoxical self-contradiction arises out of the underlying premises of the poem which regard nature (both external and textual, the distinction - here A.D. Moody is right for once³⁹ - has disappeared) as an economy without waste. This failure to think beyond the restrictive economy of the realities of production which surround the text is its eventual downfall. 'The production IS the beloved', exclaims canto CIV. Even the Second

³⁹Moody, '*Pisan Cantos*', p. 136.

World War did not change the text's view of expenditure; wars, as Bataille claims, being one of the dominant forms of organised and sanctioned expense of our age.

Rather than seeing the limits of its major theme of usury which always adheres to the capitalist structures it criticises, *The Cantos* eventually fall victim to their own taboo. And it is not at all Pound's intention which nonetheless pushes the text towards the limits of modernism through its dissolution and fragmentation. In an interview with Allen Ginsberg he claimed that *The Cantos* were 'a mess [...] stupid and ignorant all the way through [...] botched it [...] picked out this and that thing that interested me, and then jumbled them down into a bag. But that's not the way to make [...] a *work of art*'.⁴⁰ The work status is never abandoned. And rather than disclaiming the value of the usury concept of devaluation, Pound shifts planes in a way that is very similar to Eliot when he suddenly asserts that not usury lies at the root of all evil, but avarice:

re USURY:
I was out of focus, taking a symptom for a cause.
The cause is AVARICE.⁴¹

The re-introduction of the Christian notion of sin is the flight back to the symbolic when the consequent machinery of the modernist poem moves towards its own destruction.

When *The Cantos* proclaim the end of the work of art in their unstoppable expenditure into the nothingness of history, by their inability to keep together and form a whole, they show the way to an aesthetic that might actually be capable of

⁴⁰Quoted in Brooker, *Student's Guide*, p. 363.

⁴¹Pound wrote those lines in Venice, on the 4th of July 1972. They are printed in his *Selected Prose*, edited by William Cookson (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), p. 6.

making statements about its political and social backgrounds, the premises of its own production. In this respect, the indiscriminate condemnation of postmodernism as a mere ploy of the consumer society⁴² and the naïve acceptance of the modernist *work* as valuable social comment need to be reassessed.

The breaking-up of the work on the border of modernism which lays bare its internal processes of production, its economy, has its parallels in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the schizophrenic body which symbolically sheds its organs in its realisation that it is not an object, but a process.⁴³ Just as the schizophrenic refuses to be locked in the Oedipal triangle father/mother/child in which all routes lead from father (the father in the personal prehistory) to father (the analyst),⁴⁴ a modernist text on the borderlines of its own dissolution like *The Cantos* refuses to be a mere move from the classical works of its own tradition to a self-created classical status as work of art. By exposing its own construction, by spilling-over and wasting its own force, it not so much sublimates itself in the traditional sense, i.e. removes itself onto a higher sphere, but infuses reality - if there is one outside it - with its contradictory utopian notions, or - if one rejects the idea of an external reality altogether - forms a surface, Lyotard's *grande pellicule éphémère*, on which the transactions, exchanges, transformations and simulations visibly take place which constitute reality in the twentieth century.⁴⁵

⁴²Fredric Jameson set the tone with his essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', reprinted in Foster, *Postmodern Culture*, pp. 111-125.

⁴³Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 9-16.

⁴⁴Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 23 & 35.

⁴⁵Lyotard, *Économie Libidinale*, pp. 9-55. I am indebted to Iain Hamilton Grant (Department of Philosophy, University of Warwick) for permission to read the draft of his

IX. From Word to World: Modernist Poetry in the Light of Language Philosophy

*Willst du ins Innere der Physik dringen, so laß dich einweihen in die
Mysterien der Poesie.*

[If you want to enter into the depths of physics, let yourself be initiated
into the mysteries of poetry.]

(Friedrich Schlegel)

1. Knowing the Outside: Cognition and Language

After having discussed subjectivity in relation to the formation of modernist poetic texts in the chapter on psychoanalysis and the mechanisms of exchange between the text and its outside in the section on economy, the picture now demands completion by a closer description of this outside. The object of this analysis is, however, far from stable. As the attempt to display the development of poetry in the three diagrams of the preceding chapter has shown, what is or what is *considered to be* outside varies from virtually everything (every *thing* that is, objective reality that includes the subject) to nothing. The situation is complicated even further if one takes into consideration that what is described as outside is always described in language and thus already at least partly internalised. The problems are the same as those encountered in the description of the psyche in relation to its manifestation in/as a text. Once more, what is to be discussed, pinned down, and objectified, is not automatically already given as an object. It is always already in a relation which is a textual one. This is a simple insight with wide-reaching implications, one that already

the first modern linguists were aware of when they formulated the problem of the sign in relation to what it stands for, its *referent*.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the founding father of pragmatics, arrived at what he called 'four incapacities' in three essays on the logical faculties of man published as early as 1868/69:

1. We have no power of introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.
2. We have no power of intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.
3. We have no power of thinking without signs.
4. We have no conception of the absolute incognizable.¹

Those seemingly unspectacular statements are the result of some of the most important upheavals in the philosophy of the modern period. Although too complex to be condensed into a mere paragraph of this chapter, it is helpful to keep its main stages in mind. Kant is the one to question the problem of objective reality most thoroughly in his first critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Its main question is whether it is possible to assume the existence of an external reality that is not based on an act of cognition, i.e. is there a reality that is not produced by human consciousness? The question is a very old one and can be found in the medieval scholastic dispute of universalists versus nominalists - which can in turn be referred back to Aristotle and his 'objective' view of reality versus Plato's theory of apparitions. Kant's provocative demand for a non-reflexive proof of external reality brought the already ongoing struggle between idealists and empiricists to a boiling point. Its repercussions can be felt in modernist philosophy up to Heidegger and Wittgenstein who, as this chapter

¹Published in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in the essay 'Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man' (1868) which was followed by two other essays in the same and the following year. Quoted in Krampen, *Welt als Zeichen*, p. 32.

wants to demonstrate, are in a somewhat binary position towards the essence of Peirce's claims which is: there is no reality which can be proved to exist outside signs.

This has various implications for poetry. It takes away two of its most important points of orientation. First, the external reality that it can depict, mirror, or even distort, make more beautiful or uglier according to the poem's intention, becomes evasive when unveiled as a cognitive construct. Secondly, subjectivity, the realm of this cognition, is also questioned by the scrutiny of objective reality: what is the status of the (self-)reflective organ, cognition and subjectivity, in relation to the objects it perceives or creates? If poetic creation was traditionally seen as hovering between the poles of object(s) and subject, it was virtually left in a vacuum when these poles were forcibly taken away. Hopkins' simultaneous attempts at appropriation (of a problematic objective 'outside') and distancing (from an equally unstable subjective 'inside') can be seen as an attempt to span the ensuing gap. This double move is then transformed into the dialectic of expansion and reduction which is one of the dominant features of modernist poetry. In Wittgenstein's early philosophy, this becomes extension and exclusion, as will be explained below.

At the same time, the weight that had hitherto been attached to Truth, Reality, and the Subject as transcendental entities was shifted onto the material of this problematic cognition which, as Lotman states, is also the *matériel* of poetry: language. The increasing concentration of poetry on its constitutive elements, far from being a deliberate craze for experimentation, is a consequence of poetry being burdened with the badly digested leftovers of aborted philosophical disputes. It became the dumping ground for spiritual problems from the mid-Nineteenth century onwards, and its engagement with those issues is very unlike the liberal exercise of ideas in

18th century poetry, for example. It is the struggle to 'shore fragments against ruins', to create something stable and valuable, truth, reality and a notion of subjectivity, albeit of reduced dimensions, in the waste land that it was assigned to.

2. A Way of Saying: Nietzsche's Radical Reduction of Truth

What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical and binding to a nation. Truth are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they *are* illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins.²

Nietzsche's radical redefinition of truth turns the Platonic hierarchy of truth, objects, and language upside down and focuses on the element most derided by Plato as insufficient and treacherous, language, as the only one at man's disposal. In spite of its radicalism, his doctrine is a reaction: it responds to the continuing secularisation of reality which found its epicentre in the Reformation and whose reverberations spawned the mutual independence of theology, philosophy (and the sciences), and art, a separation that had not existed before.

By excluding truth from the realm of human disposal and shifting the attention to truth as human creation, Nietzsche re-invests language and specifically poetic language with its necessary imprecisions and instabilities with an enormous potential. It now becomes the creator of the premises on which our notions of reality are based.

²Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, translated and edited by Sandel L. Gilman, Carole Blair & David J. Parent (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 246-257 (p. 250) (Henceforth referred to in the text as *T&L*).

Nietzsche's move can thus be regarded as the second major shift within modernity, the first being that from theology to science and empirical philosophy in the Enlightenment, the second one a reaction against this Enlightenment by shifting the emphasis from the false alternative of materialist empiricism and idealism to aesthetics. It is precisely this shift of balance in favour of aesthetics that corresponds to the move from a mimetic approach (which relies on the existence of an objective reality) to the symbolic approach which stresses the inextricable involvement of the subject in the creation of truth, a truth that continues to hover between a subject that it cannot define without endangering it and a notion of a transcendental Truth that it requires as a point of orientation yet is unable to reach. This oppositional move against the modernity of the Enlightenment with its ensuing instabilities of both identity and statements is the starting point of modernism.

The liberation of language from a subservient status as a mere mirror of objective reality opens up possibilities for the creation of alternative worlds, of utopian concepts. The need for these has been explained in the previous chapter as the consequence of the crumbling of established certainties. Their most sophisticated shape can be encountered in Martin Heidegger's attempts to transcend Western metaphysics by establishing a linguistic universe in which language becomes the all-powerful utopian realm. The structure of this realm and its implications and dangers of totalisation will be discussed in a separate section below.

It would be misleading, however, to interpret Nietzsche's essay on 'Truth and Lying' in this one-sided way. As Habermas rightly points out, his works represent a

crossroads of modern thinking, and only one of its paths leads to Heidegger.³ The other is outlined by an equally radical description as that of truth, one which both relates to and relativises the former. For before Nietzsche attempts his reduction of man's capacity to know, he puts the entire endeavour into a perspective which is more than historical:

In some remote corner of the universe that is poured out in countless flickering solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the most arrogant and the most untruthful moment in 'world history' - yet indeed only a moment. After nature had taken a few breaths, the star froze over and the clever animals had to die.

Someone could invent such a fable and still not have illustrated adequately how pitiful, how shadowy and fleeting, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect appears within nature. There were eternities when it did not exist; and someday when it no longer is there, not much will have changed. (*T&L* 246)

What Nietzsche's parable illustrates is his superhistorical attitude which devalues every human attempt to grasp reality, truth, and essences. All these endeavours are restricted by man's actual being, Adorno calls it the subject's thing-likeness:

For that intellect has no further mission leading beyond human life. It is utterly human, and only its owner and producer takes it with such pathos as if the whole world hinged upon it. (*T&L* 246)

While on the one hand opening up the possibilities for human creation of truth with and in language, Nietzsche simultaneously points out the cynical limitations of this creation. It is devoid of value in any sense that transcends human immediacy and it can never hope to come to terms with anything that might exist outside the human sphere. As Wiebrecht Ries points out, Nietzsche thus becomes 'the spiritual father of the suspicion that all final constructions of history, morality, and truth are ultimately

³Jürgen Habermas, 'The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point', in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick G. Lawrence, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990, ¹1987), pp. 83-105 (p. 97).

meaningless'.⁴ It would be a decisive misunderstanding, however, to see in him merely the originator of nihilism (although nihilism can indeed be seen as a misreading of Nietzsche). Nihilism as an institutionalised negation is indeed the very opposite of Nietzsche's continual questioning of the limits of human knowledge. As a matter of fact, he curbs most thoroughly the one human faculty left intact in the creation of certainties, that of the production of language. After separating truth from objective reality, he divorces language from both of them:

What is a word? The portrayal of nerve stimuli in sounds. But to conclude from a nerve stimulus to a cause outside ourselves is already the result of a false and unjustified application of the law of causality. (*T&L* 248)⁵

Far from actually denying the existence of Truth and objective reality, Nietzsche takes away the possibilities of reaching them and thus leaves the issue in a provocative suspense. Language, declared to be the medium with which man creates truth and reality, is thus simultaneously shown as infinitely lacking, incapable of making exactly those statements that would give a foundation to its creation. This fundamental disqualification of language as the means of establishing contact with an outside reality, truth even, makes Nietzsche the precursor of Wittgenstein, the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, to be precise. Wittgenstein's elaborate outline of the impotence of language will be in the focus of the next section.

Nietzsche's essay formulates precisely the impasse that is also the locus of modernist poetry. Statements have to be made, indeed not only simple but universally

⁴Wiebrecht Ries, *Nietzsche zur Einführung*, SOAK-Einführungen, 12 (Hannover: SOAK, 1985, ¹1982), back cover (my translation).

⁵The law of causality is one of the four basic rules of formal logic. It states that things are as they are, because there is a reason for them being what they are. The sentence has always been the cause of dispute. See Georg Klaus & Manfred Buhr, eds, *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols (Berlin: Verlag das europäische Buch, 1985, ¹1976), ii, pp. 1089-1090.

valid ones, yet the only material at disposal for this artificial creation *sui generis* is not up to its task. Forever caught in the realm delineated by its shortcomings, the poetic utterance behaves exactly like Nietzsche's 'knowledge' in the face of its inevitable destruction. It inflates itself until it covers up the abyss above which it hovers, *becomes* reality and truth and yet cannot escape the constant threat of death, the border that eventually unveils its paradoxical status and against which its continual permutations try to erect aesthetic barriers. The modernist poem tries to bridge the gap between phases 3 and 4 in Baudrillard's scheme: from merely covering the disappearance of a certain reality, it moves on to create a simulacrum of reality inside its own sphere, one that - and this is most important - tries to exclude death, its own death, the death of the paradoxical poetic utterance (or indeed tries to *include* it, which leads to the same result).

Nietzsche is aware that among the limitations and discontinuities of his model of human cognition and the creation of dubious certainties there is one continuity left. He calls it the 'desire for truth' (*T&L* 250), and this is nothing but the need to invent metaphors in order to give meaning to existence. Nietzsche replaces the thinking thing, Descartes' *res cogitans*, as a philosophical description of man by the poetic animal. Only after this metaphoric stage do more abstract concepts and schemes emerge.

Everything that sets man off from the animal depends upon this capacity to dilute the concrete metaphors into a schema; for in the realm of such schemata, something is possible that might never have succeeded under the intuited first impressions: to build up a pyramidal order according to castes and classes, a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, boundary determinations, which now stands opposite the other, concrete world of primary impressions, as the more solid, more universal, more familiar, more human, and therefore as the regulatory and imperative world. (*T&L* 250)

This urge to create metaphors and out of metaphors terms, schemes, concepts, and truths, the discoloured myths that Derrida accuses Western metaphysics of employing, falls together with the human desire to master existence. It is a variant of Nietzsche's will to power. In Wiebrecht Ries's words:

As a means of self-preservation, the intellect is a *deception* about the direction- and meaningless character of the natural world - a deception which makes human existence which is built 'on the mercilessness, the homicidal' of interior as well as exterior nature 'in the indifference of its ignorance' possible in the first place.⁶

One recognises the compulsion to continue with the production of - always inadequate - poetic utterances. From Hopkins's 'cry *I can no more*. I can' via Yeats's search for a theme in the absence of possible ones in 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' to Eliot's 'Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt/Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure' in part V of 'East Coker'. It is the endless poetic utterance in the face of its own impossibility. When its own expanding complexity eclipses the abyss over which it is constructed, as in Pound's *Sagetrieb* in canto XC (literally 'drive towards uttering' and thus the very concept Nietzsche has in mind), i.e. when the human reaction to a hostile nature presents itself as this very nature, a reversal takes place which simultaneously blots out the createdness of the utterance (as in the drive towards impersonality) and institutionalises the utterance as nature, i.e. creates a myth with all the possibilities of ideological misuse.

Nietzsche sees the necessity of at least a temporary deception of man by his creation in order to allow for *Selbstbewußtsein*, literally a consciousness of the self, but equally self-assertion that makes action possible (*T&L* 252). But when the deception becomes permanent, the way is cleared for the establishment of oppressive

⁶Ries, *Nietzsche*, pp. 26-27 (my translation).

systems based on the fictitious metaphysical distinction between true and false (and as such Nietzsche regards morality as well as religion and political systems). Nietzsche is adamant that there is no connection between subject and object save one:

For between two absolutely different spheres such as subject and object, there can be no expression, but at most an *aesthetic* stance, I mean an allusive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign medium. For this, however, in any case a freely fictionalizing and freely inventive middle sphere and middle faculty is necessary. (*T&L* 254)

Poetry which foregrounds the constitutive principle of the formation of metaphors is thus a way to point at the only 'truth' that is available, that of the drive towards creating metaphoric crutches to come to terms with a hostile nature which can only become 'reality' in the same way as the subject comes into existence: by being clothed in inadequate language. It is at the same time a radically undermining force which threatens the established systems based on metaphysical premises which poetry can unveil in their createdness, relativism, and arbitrariness. Nietzsche sees indeed both the erection of truths and their eventual dismissal as well as artistic creation as symptoms of the same drive towards metaphoric creation:

That drive to form metaphors, that fundamental desire of man, which cannot be discounted for one moment, because that would amount to ignoring man himself, is in truth not overcome and indeed hardly restrained by the fact that out of its diminished products, the concepts, a regular and rigid new world is built up for him as a prison fortress. It seeks a new province for its activities and a different riverbed and generally finds it in *myth* and in *art*. It constantly confuses the categories and cells of concepts by presenting new transferences, metaphors and metonyms; constantly showing the desire to shape the existing world of the wideawake person to be variegatedly irregular and disinterestedly incoherent, exciting and eternally new, as is the world of dreams. (*T&L* 254)

(The connections with psychoanalytic distinctions of consciousness and unconscious are obvious. The passage reads like a precursor of Jung's theory of the necessary setting up and eventual disappearance of beliefs.)

When Nietzsche thus throws truth back into language, questions the ultimate value of the search for truth even, yet within his radical destruction sets up the human desire for metaphoric cognition as the only permanent force and art and metaphysical concepts as its binary and mutually threatening expressions, he implicitly sets aside a special position for the work (of art and philosophy; the distinction becomes fluid) capable of seeing this dialectic. Inextricably linked with the human attempt to master nature and thus part of the will to power, yet at the same time in a position to see the endeavour in its entirety and eventual futility, it arrives in a strange orbital position - not at all detached from the baseness of human existence yet neither entirely determined by its needs and thus blind towards its mechanisms. In Nietzsche's discussion of history in 'On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life', the superhistorical position would be the parallel (its relation to myth has been discussed in the chapter on Pound). Nietzsche's view of art in a dialectic interplay with the force that creates it sets up a far less static and thus more responsible model.

What appeared like just another detached non-reflexive attitude in the narratorial position of his fable of the intelligent animals at the beginning of the essay on 'Truth and Lying' reappears in a much more sophisticated form towards its end. There, Nietzsche describes the not always harmonious co-existence of 'intuitive man' (who represents the endlessly shifting world of metaphoric artistic creation) and 'reasonable man' (who trusts the stability of abstract metaphysical concepts). 'Both desire to master life' (*T&L* 256), yet both attitudes are described as deficient. In an attempt to combine what appears as the Dionysian and Apollonian in 'The Birth of Tragedy', Nietzsche claims that artistic ignorance of the necessities of life makes intuitive man incompetent in the face of misfortune, incapable of learning from

mistakes because of his rejection of rules. Reasonable man, on the other hand, is not equipped to deal with happiness, indeed not capable of experiencing it.

The strange finale of Nietzsche's essay, on the surface a claim for the superiority of the stoic position of man controlled by the certainty of concepts, indeed sets up the tangled interplay of art and rationality as the only available option.

How different stands the stoic person who has learned from experience and controls himself by reason! He who otherwise only seeks honesty, truth, freedom from delusions, and protection from enthralling seizures, now, in misfortune, produces a masterpiece of dissimulation, as the former did in happiness; he does not wear a quivering and mobile human face but, as it were, a mask with dignified harmony of features [...] (T&L 256)

Even the most austere rationalism is suffused with the irrationality of art, just as much as the most fluid artistic expression is caught in the stability of form and can be subjected to rational scrutiny. Modernist poetry, aware of its own mechanisms, expresses this insight in its attempt to become metapoetic, to discuss the principles of its own constitution. Yet when it tries to stabilise its mechanisms completely in a rationally determined form (as in Imagism), the metaphoric drive blasts the 'artificial' stability and leads to fragmentation, incompleteness, and dissolution of works. Pound's *Cantos* are once more the most drastic expression of this failure to control the material of poetry.

The alternative danger is to be found in attempts to set up art itself, the artefact, as substitute truth, yet one without the restrictions of rationality. Yeats's stone sculpture of the Chinamen in 'Lapis Lazuli' comes to mind, which is intended to represent exactly the Nietzschean concept of tragic gaiety described in the above parable as the serene mask of the stoic. Yet the mask remains external and dead; it has no connection with what goes on underneath - which it only hides but fails to control. The consequences for a poem relying entirely on the aesthetic are a decline

into empty ornament, incapable of becoming a statement in the reality that surrounds it. The dialectic of art and rationality is developed to its most sophisticated expression by Adorno whose views on the position of the modernist work of art will be part of the conclusion of this chapter.

3. Towards a Little Language: Wittgenstein's Distrust of the Capacities of Human Expression

The space allocated to poetry in Wittgenstein's early philosophy developed in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is easy to determine: there is none.⁷ Concerned with its attempt to outline the limits of language (in the same way as Kant tried to delineate that of thought) in its capacity to make propositions about facts, non-factual language falls outside the realm of investigation and into that of non-sense [4.114-4.116]. Wittgenstein neither denies poetry's right to exist nor does he qualify it as deficient in the way Plato does. It is simply concerned with that about which we cannot speak (in a philosophical sense) and about which we consequently ought to keep quiet, as the famous last statement of the *Tractatus* suggests [7].

In its endeavour to cut down the functions of statements to their atomic basis and to eliminate everything that does not derive logically from the resulting elementary propositions, the philosophy of the *Tractatus* relies, as its name implies, on the strict rules of logic. Especially the rule of the excluded middle, the basic

⁷Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus: The German Text of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, with a new translation by D.F. Pears & B.F. MacGuinness, International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961). The arrangement of Wittgenstein's treatise calls for quotation according to its own subdivisions rather than page numbers. Thus, henceforth, the references in brackets will refer to these divisions.

logical assumption that something either is the case or is not - with nothing in between (or, in a logical formula, $p \neq \text{not-}p$) - is one of those necessary exclusions that eliminates exactly the locus of the metaphoric, the constitutive principle of poetry as that which is created *between* two signficatory poles and continues to hover in this space.

If in spite of this clear demarcation, Wittgenstein's early philosophy will be used to highlight further parallels between modernist poetry and the development of contemporary philosophy, this attempt is based on two assumptions which will have to be validated in the process of the comparison. First, it will be made apparent that, despite its exclusion, the metaphoric invades Wittgenstein's concepts in a subtle, yet decisive way. Secondly, the main impetus of Wittgenstein's project, the purification of philosophy through exclusion and reduction will be shown as analogous to the aesthetics of modernist poetry - and as deriving from similar sources.

The insight that engenders Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is that philosophy too often concerns itself with questions that do not fall within its competence and whose investigation therefore leads to nonsense. Point 6.53 of the treatise claims:

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science - i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy - and then, whenever someone wanted to say something metaphysical - to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person - he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy - *this* method would be the only strictly correct one.

Wittgenstein's early philosophy thus follows the assumptions of critical philosophy as opposed to transcendental philosophy which, in the broadest sense, tries to point beyond the realm of factual existence. When critical philosophy completes its inward turn and attempts to outline the capacities and shortcomings of its own devices and

material, i.e. those of language, it becomes linguistic philosophy. Although the movement of contemporary philosophy seems more self-determined than that of modernist poetry (this attitude could, however, merely reflect an even greater self-mystification), it is clear that the underlying problems that provoke the move are similar. The realm of competence, i.e. the sphere inside which sensible utterances can be made, is suddenly seen as limited. First the transcendental is, if not completely lost, at least experienced as unapproachable.

Kant's first critique, that of pure reason ('pure' stands for transcendental), tries to compensate for this loss by positing that which had hitherto been outside human existence (God and morality) inside the subject as points of orientation in the subject's relation to itself and objective reality. The aesthetic equivalent is the symbolic move which makes the suddenly evasive transcendental sphere (called 'Truth' in the schematic model of the preceding chapter) part of the subjective poetic construction. Both the philosophical and the aesthetic attempt to bridge the gap created by the departure of the transcendental (here Nietzsche's 'God is dead' is located) run into the same trouble: the two poles used to set up a compensatory force-field prove inseparable and eventually mutually destructive. Permanence and stability of neither subject nor objective reality can be ascertained.

Wittgenstein's 'negative' endeavour in the *Tractatus* is thus to arrive at an at least minimal, an atomic stability. The task is far from simple, since he refuses to assume a position 'outside' discourse as a vantage point of his inquiry. David Pears describes the procedure in a useful image:

First, he worked back from the skin of the bubble of ordinary factual discourse to its notional centre, elementary propositions. Then using a logical formula he worked outwards again to the limit of expansion of the bubble.⁸

Once more, a loss of the outside is compensated by a simultaneous reduction and expansion. The attempted purification - here of philosophy, in the case of modernist poetry that of the 'dialect of the tribe' - rests, as Pears points out (although he does not use these terms), on a structuralist concept of language, one that assumes that all languages are based on the same foundation, even though these are difficult to figure out.⁹ Point 4.002 of the *Tractatus* concludes:

Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes.

The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated.

A similar assumption underlies the strategies of modernist poetry which enables it to both appropriate fragments and concepts from other languages and cultures (its manifold quotations and use of exotic forms, such as the *haiku*) and, more importantly, to endeavour a reduction to a minimalism that is seen as universally valid and comprehensible (in the theory of the apparition in Imagism, for example, and also in Eliot's 'objective correlative' which is, in a way, a structural echo of the former).

The conceptual weakness of Wittgenstein's model of purification and those set up in modernist poems are also remarkably similar. Both display a blind spot for the subjectivity behind their respective creations. In Wittgenstein, it is eclipsed by the elementary proposition to which all factual ones can be reduced and from which they

⁸David Pears, *Wittgenstein*, Fontana Modern Masters (London: Fontana, 1985, ¹1971), pp. 56-57.

⁹Pears, *Wittgenstein*, p. 85.

are also engendered. Point 5.631 of the *Tractatus* actually claims 'There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas'. It is telling that Wittgenstein does not come up with an example of one of these smallest elements on which his theory rests. In the same way function the various modernist attempts at impersonality. Always more programmatic than realistic, the frequent calls for this impersonality - even in an author whose works abound with depictions of the subject at work, Eliot - in themselves statements of the very personality they try to ban, hardly manage to hide that even in the most reduced Imagist fragment (Pound's poem 'Fragment' is the obvious example) a textual identity remains visibly at work.

The other side of the coin which represents the blindness of the purifying endeavour is the simplistic notion of the object. In his sophisticated attempt to show the desperate inadequacy of human expression when faced with objective reality, Wittgenstein naïvely assumes the existence of objects as given. Indeed, he does not even make clear whether they are to be regarded as material or sense-data.¹⁰ He lacks an underlying theory of knowledge, a reflection about the way in which objects become objects which corresponds to the weakness of modernism characterised by Wolfgang Hildesheimer as the lack of a theory of cognition. This makes Pound's *res* possible as an object which is simply *there* and has no foundation whatsoever that could be questioned phenomenologically or hermeneutically.

In the *Tractatus*, this significant blindness towards cognition, which can in turn be related back to the very element that is excluded from Wittgenstein's reasoning, *Vermitteltheit* of experience, its inevitable shaping through subjectivity with its inextricable metaphoric imprecisions, enters the centre of the basic formulas of the

¹⁰Pears, *Wittgenstein*, p. 67.

treatise. In the introductory moves to set up his theory, in section 2 and, more precisely, 2.1 to 3.01, he defines reality in connection with facts, objects and the way in which they are related. Here he reverts to a thinking not unlike Plato's hierarchic one when he claims that 'We pictures facts to ourselves' [2.1]. Only six steps further, he states 'A picture is a fact' [2.141]. He then continues with a nominalist construction which relates the elements of the 'picture' (the ambiguity of the German *Bild* which can mean both visual image and intellectual concept is important) with the way reality is structured:

2.15 The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determined way represents that things are related to one another in the same way.

Let us call this connexion of its elements the structure of the picture, and let us call the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture.

2.151 Pictorial form is the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture.

2.1511 *That* is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it.

2.1512 It is laid against reality like a ruler.

2.15121 Only the end-points of the graduating lines actually *touch* the object that is to be measured.

The uncertainty which sphere orders and creates which, that of the picture the objects or vice versa, projects Wittgenstein's logical reductions back into the metaphoric realm. There, exactly the same process takes place: the metaphor creates while both the poles of its creation and its status remain attached to a pre-existent given, signifiers that are not - or no longer - metaphoric themselves. Otherwise the metaphor would either be a stable sign itself (if it did not happen 'between') or it would not signify (if the poles between which it happens were as fluid as the metaphoric creation).

Even the ascetic logical shape of the *Tractatus* is deeply pervaded by the dialectic observed in Nietzsche's essay on 'Truth and Lying': the erection of symbolic

systems of truth is both generated and eventually undermined by the metaphoric drive that characterises human intellect. The attempt of the *Tractatus* to suppress this insight is unveiled in little lapses, metaphoric slips in this very tightly knit and 'colourless' logical network (point 2.0232, incidentally, claims 'In a manner of speaking: objects are colourless'; the significance of 'a manner of speaking' in a structure like that of the *Tractatus* is worth considering). In the final section of the *Tractatus*, especially from clause 6.372 onwards, the treatise is once more busy to exclude 'nothings', concepts which do not belong into its inquiry and - according to its main thesis - not into the realm of philosophy.

A collection of late fragments of Wittgenstein's works entitled *Über Gewißheit: On Certainty* shows him still concerned, in an almost manic way, with this exclusion: Fragment 31 reads 'The propositions which one comes back to again and again as if bewitched - these I should like to expunge from philosophical language'. Fragment 33 then brings the matter to a conclusion: 'Thus we expunge the sentences that don't get us any further'.¹¹ Such propositions are those concerning God, fate, ethics, and, in particular, will. Especially this last and very Nietzschean term crops up repeatedly, as if it represented an obstacle that cannot easily be integrated or put aside.

6.373 The world is independent of my will.

[...]

6.423 It is impossible to speak about the will in so far as it is the subject of ethical attributes.

And the will as a phenomenon is of interest only to psychology.

¹¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit: On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. von Wright, translated by Denis Paul & G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), p. 6e. This collection of fragments forms an interesting unity with the *Tractatus* and, apart from shedding some light on various implications of the sometimes cryptic formulas of the much earlier treatise, demonstrates that the claim that Wittgenstein developed two entirely distinct philosophies neglects the recurrence of the same themes and problems both in his early and late stage.

6.43 If good or bad acts of will do alter the world, it can only be the limits of the world that they alter, not the facts, not what can be expressed by means of language.

In short their effect must be that it becomes an altogether different world. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole.

The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man.

Will in the *Tractatus* is indeed similar to the Nietzschean one of aesthetic creation. Once unveiled as such, it becomes one of the borderlines of the philosophy of the *Tractatus*, the liminal region where that which shapes the world touches on that which the world means - and which cannot be expressed. First, this speechlessness of the aesthetic appears in a subtle formula:

6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words.

Ethics is transcendental.

(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)

The two clauses that precede this inconspicuous equation make clear where this self-limiting insight leads: to a true *reductio ad absurdum* in which the philosophy of the early Wittgenstein condemns itself to silence. In this respect, the final claim of the *Tractatus*, that of the necessary silence in the face of that which cannot be expressed, is more than flippancy. It is a serious structural conclusion. It points in the same direction as the silences that form one of the structural outcomes of modernist poetry, the symptoms of the insight that the poems have detected an insurmountable inability to make statements. Or, more than that, the result of their discovery that this internal end in silence is the only means of their survival, either in the attempt to become unchangeable by 'playing dead', as Barthes points out (and it is worth asking whether Wittgenstein's mathematisation of philosophy does not serve a similar purpose), or an attempt to fight death by mimetically depicting it in the most efficient way possible to language.

Death as the most visible barrier of inquiry and as that which hints at the not only possible but inevitable rupture between subject and object, self and world, all of a sudden appears also in the *Tractatus* when the treatise attempts its final act of exclusion.

6.431 So too at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end.

6.4311 Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death.

If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.

Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.

6.4312 Not only is there no guarantee of the temporal immortality of the human soul, that is to say of its eternal survival after death; but in any case, this assumption completely fails to accomplish the purpose for which it has always been intended. Or is some riddle solved by my surviving for ever? Is not this eternal life itself as much of a riddle as our present life? The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time.

(It is certainly not the solution of any problems of natural science that is required.)

The increasing length of the numbers of the subdivisions indicates that statements have shrunk to the status of asides. Even in the formalism of the *Tractatus* lurks the devil of the superfluous, 'always afraid to say more than it meant', to borrow Auden's line. In Wittgenstein, these asides increasingly mark the transgression into forbidden territory. The treatise is fatally attracted by the very outside it tries to exclude all the time. In its final assertion of philosophy's necessary restrictedness (which is simultaneously a pronouncement of its right to exist - in the same way as the purification of modernist poetry tries to make its continuation possible), it also vehemently projects an outside which it calls 'mystical'.

6.44 It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.

The finale of the *Tractatus* shows that inside its cogent argument there hides both an elementary contradiction and an admission of failure. The contradiction is that

of its attempt to first distill an elementary truth out of propositions in order to expand its findings into an all-encompassing world-formula in what Pears calls the *Tractatus* 'thesis of extensionality': 'all factual propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions'.¹² Thus, the ultimate reduction eventually manages to bridge the gap between logic and objective reality, things and nothings, sense and non-sense.

Yet at the same time it does not. There remain 'things that cannot be put into words' which can only 'make themselves manifest', the mystical [6.522]. The defeat of language is complete in the very moment of its victory. And even in this sudden new dichotomy seeing/speaking (which is reminiscent of a related, though different one in psychoanalysis: showing/hiding (i.e. exactly not speaking)), an ontological problem remains:

But do things that are represented have to exist in order to be represented? There is a dilemma here. For if they do not have to exist, it is not clear how they get represented: and if they do have to exist, Y [the axiom that says that the way in which every factual proposition gets this sense is pictorial] is open to the obvious objection that a factual proposition might well have a sense even if it contained a word which happened to represent something which did not exist.¹³

The creative potential of the aesthetic as simultaneous origin and ultimate boundary cannot be overcome. The penultimate statement of the *Tractatus*, the one preceding its advocating of silence, outlines the problems in images strikingly similar to Yeats's assessment of (his own) poetry in 'The Circus Animals' Desertion'.

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them - as steps - to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

¹²Pears, *Wittgenstein*, p. 71.

¹³Pears, *Wittgenstein*, p. 60.

He must transcend these propositions, and then will he see the world aright.¹⁴

Yet Yeats, one could claim, is already a little wiser, not only because he has already lost or got rid of his 'ladder'. His poem rightly sees the abandoning of the potentials of language as a futile endeavour.

4. From Bubble to Bastion: Heidegger's Concept of Language as the House of Being

Heidegger's philosophy shares Wittgenstein's suspicion that philosophy has failed in its task. By its concentration on ontology, the question of origins, it has failed to notice man's and its own entanglement in daily practice, in the 'ontic', Heidegger's *Dasein*. The question of the nature of Being whose centrality is indicated by the inevitable paradox created by every attempt to define it: Being *is...*, has not been asked correctly throughout the centuries, and the attempt to answer it must be made with recourse to the actual *Dasein* of the being who can envisage the problem: man.¹⁵

Being and Time, Heidegger's major exploration of the issue published in 1927, summarises the problem in four ways: 1. The nature of *Dasein* is Being-in-the-World (*BT* 36-40 & 78-86); 2. The nature of Being-in-the-World is care (*BT* 227 & 235-241); 3. The Nature of care is temporality as it manifests itself in the finality of death (*BT*

¹⁴The German original abounds with terms that are both physical and metaphysical, such as *hinausgestiegen* which means to climb on top or over something, but also to transcend, even to become sublime or - in a derogatory sense - over the top.

¹⁵Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, ¹1962), pp. 21-35. Henceforth, references will be in the text as *BT*.

458-464); 4. This temporality is the original time from which all other notions of time (historical, physical, etc.) derive (*BT* 464-480).¹⁶

The radicalism of Heidegger's concept and that which connects it with the analysis of modernist poetry is first and foremost its farewell to traditional metaphysics. '*Being is the transcendens pure and simple*' (*BT* 62) is an early statement that signals a farewell even to Kant's notion of an external goal or point of orientation. This inevitably also destroys the subject-object dichotomy which characterises Western metaphysics from its origins. Standing outside *Dasein* is impossible (the special role of death will be discussed below), and although man must assume the availability of things in order to live (these things-to-hand are called *Zeug*, which the English translation reproduces as 'equipment', but which clearly also has the connotations of 'stuff', indicating the reductiveness of the move), this practical relation says nothing about the Being that is both concealed behind the practice and makes it possible. It is not viable to talk of a controlling or even creating subject any more.

Heidegger's attempt to find solutions to the most fundamental question of the nature of Being in the analysis of everyday life, his rejection of both an external transcendental point of view while at the same time denying a simulated objectivism that claims a special status for man in the realm of *Dasein*, shows close affinities to T.S. Eliot's poetry. Eliot, too, explores fundamental issues of what Heidegger would call *Dasein* by focussing on seemingly banal everyday situations, in Heidegger's words, '*proximally and for the most part - in its average everydayness*' (*BT* 37-38).

¹⁶This brilliant summary of Heidegger's concepts is in Thomas Rentsch, *Martin Heidegger - Das Sein und der Tod: Eine kritische Einführung*, Serie Piper, 1057 (Munich: Piper, 1989), pp. 108-109.

The dividing line between subject and object also becomes fluid, especially in his early poems where a continual anthropomorphisation of objects is combined with an often painfully registered reification of human beings. His early poetry thus refutes any possible sublimity and stresses the sordidness of common reality (compare, for instance, 'Preludes') as much as it claims that this reality is all we have at our disposal.

Behind the appearances, the phenomena of *Dasein*, lies Being, yet without being disclosed by them. Heidegger claims in a characteristically devious move that they are both referential, yet do not show themselves (*BT* 53-54). He characterises *logos*, the human drive toward understanding, as a mechanism both of disclosure (Plato's *aletheia*) and of concealing, thus reproducing the nature of truth (authentic Being) (*BT* 56-57). This has important implications for an evaluation of the position of language and literature in Heidegger's cosmos. Paul A. Bové rightly claims that 'This dualistic definition of *logos* is of crucial importance, because of Heidegger's earlier definition of *logos* as *Rede*, i.e. as speech' (*BT* 55-58).¹⁷ The dialectic concealing/uncovering determined by an underlying pattern corresponds to Pound's notion of *logopoeia*. In Pound's model, *logos* itself is the implicitly structuring device in 'the dance of the intellect among words'.¹⁸ This logocentrism pervades the entire modernist 'project'. Its dualism together with the implicit premise that there is something to conceal or uncover will become crucial in the evaluation of modernism in Adorno's theory of aesthetics.

¹⁷Paul A. Bové, *Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 61.

¹⁸Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 25; quoted in Brooker, *Student's Guide*, p. 153.

The three major characterisations of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*, thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), fallenness (*Verfallenheit*) (BT 219-224), and that of human activity between these two poles as a resolute, yet eventually ungrounded running towards death (BT 434-439), fit equally well as descriptions of the subject as presented in modernist poems. The origins of this essentially nihilistic concept (which infiltrated French Existentialism) are easy to detect in the disappearance of traditional certainties, in the crumbling of the established paradigms of ontology, subjectivity, and teleology which encompass human origin, *raison d'être*, constitution, and goals.

This deep-rooted disorientation and self-doubt which characterises modern existence can be found even in poems which seemingly take recourse to traditional models, such as Yeats's earlier ones. They employ traditional narratives, mainly those of Irish folklore. Yet it is evident that they show a distinct preference for models which are concerned with alienated and dislocated individuals whose state could easily be characterised as being thrown into an ultimately hostile environment. It is equally apparent that solutions to their existential impasses are often sought in romantic dissolution, in self-sacrifice, suicidal struggle, Heidegger's running towards death.

Thomas Rentsch demonstrates the connection between this romantic concept and the rhetoric and experience of the Great War (in which Heidegger, incidentally, never actively took part).¹⁹ It would be interesting to pursue the link between this influence and the development of the rhetorical strategies in modernist poems which in some of them eventually pave the way for fascistic ideas. Heidegger's shifting of nothingness into the centre of attention clearly has analogies in the central poems of Eliot's middle phase, such as 'Gerontion', 'The Hollow Men', and *Ash-Wednesday*.

¹⁹Rentsch, *Heidegger*, pp. 61 & 144.

Pound's oeuvre, too, is concerned with existence as an essentially endangered state, although it is more preoccupied with the erection of barricades against the threat than a passive suffering like Eliot's. This becomes most visible in the *Pisan Cantos*, but one can trace this tendency already in the various erections of monuments - to past characters mainly, but also to mere events - in his earlier poetry, culminating in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* where the strategy is analysed and questioned, yet not abandoned.

Pound's pragmatic actionism which also finds its expression in his continued preference of Confucius, the philosopher of action and order, rather than Lao Tse, the prophet of passive suffering, is paralleled by Heidegger's insistence on action despite the lack of orientation and justification. His notion of resoluteness (*BT* 434-439) is, as Rentsch argues, based on an uncritical understanding of Truth in *Being and Time* which decides out of itself whether *Dasein* is authentic or not.²⁰ Inside the gesture against the transcendental, there remains an unquestioned and unquestionable authority outside *Dasein* as its very core. This attitude later blends in with the foregrounding of fate over the individual and forms the link between Heidegger's philosophy and German fascism - which Heidegger actively supported. An echo of this can be detected in Pound's concern for *cheng ming*, correct expression, which also suspiciously lacks exterior norms that define it but nonetheless becomes the all-encompassing rule of his later works.

Heidegger's emphasis on time as a human concept governed by man's existential needs completes the Enlightenment discovery of time as history which takes time out of its mythical cyclic origins and its subsequent theological and teleological

²⁰Rentsch, *Heidegger*, p. 166. Furthermore, *Entschlossenheit* [resoluteness] has close affinities with *Erschlossenheit* [uncoveredness] and thus relates to the observed dialectic of revealing and concealing.

framework and turns it into a dimension of human practice.²¹ Yet Heidegger goes even further and removes time from the disposal of the individual altogether and - in his stress on existence as an impersonal concept (which later merges with fate again) - shifts it back into a mythical realm once more. He thus mirrors modernist poetry in its endeavour to experiment with time schemes (compare the discussion of time in *The Waste Land*) as well as its eventual return to a 'neo-mythical' view of time (as in *Ash-Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*, and *The Cantos*). Yet Heidegger's evaluation is actually capable of discussing the crux that only ever features as a structural impasse in modernist poems: the seemingly paradoxical entering of every new text into a past tradition that it is meant to overcome and leave behind. In the initial set-up of *Being and Time*, Heidegger discusses the dilemma:

Dasein 'is' its past in the way of *its* own Being, which, to put it roughly, 'historizes' (*geschieht*) out of its future on each occasion. Whatever the way of being it may have at the time, and thus with whatever understanding of Being it may possess, Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally and, within a certain range, constantly. By this understanding, the possibilities of its Being are disclosed and regulated. Its own past - and this always means the past of its 'generation' - is not something which *follows along after* Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it. (BT 41)

The reduction of the importance of the individual and the succumbing to a mythical notion of destiny is prefigured in the shift from *Schicksal*, fate, to *Geschick*, destiny - which is already that of a people in the important paragraph 74 of *Being and Time* (see esp. BT 436). It culminates in Heidegger's famous turn of ideas, his *Kehre*, which he always wanted to be understood as a consequent development, a turning in the path of his thinking rather than a reversal. It, too, can be linked with the particular

²¹I am paraphrasing a summary used by Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Höhn (University of Cologne) in the unpublished script of his talk on religion and modernity, 'Religion und Modernität: Sozialtheoretische Perspektiven', in Oberwesel (Germany) in December 1991.

structural impasses of modernism and its attempt to escape from and/or solve them. After the radical destruction of subject and object as distinct poles, his stress on human practice as the only legitimate point of orientation is left in a curious vacuum which resembles the locus of constitution of the utterance of the modernist poem. Who says/does what in the face of what? What has started as an essentially critical enterprise in the face of the alienation of the individual in a technological modern world, i.e. what is fundamentally a conservative move (compare the similar paradox of *The Waste Land*), actually destroys the very subjectivity it was meant to preserve from falling blindly into the traps of a base reality which makes it inauthentic and estranges it from its original Being. The lapse of *Dasein* into inauthenticity, Heidegger's *Verfallenheit*, is always linked with a pronounced distaste for the collective. Just as in modernist poems it is always the individual faced with reality whose interaction with others is alienated and disturbed, in Heidegger's philosophy it is 'the particular *Dasein*' that becomes the victim of the *Man*, the grammatical 'one', the faceless human collective into which it disperses ('They' in the English translation) (*BT* 167).

In this fatal attraction of the collective, the crucial role of language is highlighted. Although present from the introductory moves of Heidegger's concepts, its status remains that of a tool, very much in accord with other 'things-to-hand', 'stuff' in his terminology. Yet when it comes to the scrutiny of the mechanisms through which existence loses its authenticity - and authenticity stands for the connection of original Being and practical expression in existence and is thus the very equivalent of signified and signifier in linguistic theory - the gap between the two opens up exactly where the problems of modernist poetry start: in language. The

crucial proof of lapsing into the inauthentic is the reduction of language to idle talk (*Gerede*), curiosity, and ambiguity (*BT* 211-224; esp. 219). Bové stresses the connection between idle talk and literature.²² This is true, but one-sided. Equally important for an evaluation of modernism through Heidegger's ideas is his condemnation of both curiosity and ambiguity. While the negative status of ambiguity is self-evident in a system of thinking that strives to attain authenticity, curiosity seems a rather innocent victim of the attack. For is it not, after all, also the generative force behind philosophy? Not exclusively so in Heidegger:

When curiosity has become free, however, it concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen (that is, to come into a Being towards it) but *just* in order to see. (*BT* 216)

In this kind of seeing, that which is an issue for care does not lie in grasping something and being knowingly in the truth; it lies rather in its possibilities of abandoning itself to the world. (*BT* 216)

This is a shorthand description of the self-reflective tendencies in art, the inward turn that becomes so central in modernism. An outside is abandoned in favour of an introspection that seems all the more necessary because internal impasses, lack of foundation, etc. have become apparent.²³ Adorno calls this the essential tension between the mimetic and the constructed. In economic terms, a devaluation takes place, an inflationary corruption called usury in Pound's *Cantos*. Language, the shape

²²Bové claims that 'in the context of literature, the idea of idle talk is of most interest. In the immediate context of his discussion of the primordial and derivative senses of truth, Heidegger points out how the authentic use of language to bring about disclosure becomes, through repetition in an assertion, an inauthentic expression of something present-at-hand in which Dasein's disclosedness is covered-up.' He thus outlines the inherent ambiguity of the relation of modernism to its outside. *Destructive Poetics*, p. 59.

²³See my general evaluation of the crux. Rainer Emig, 'Text-Literature-Text: Self-Reflection and Self-Destruction as Two Related Features of Textual Systems', in *Warwick Work in Progress*, 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 1-7.

in which *logos* as human curiosity presents itself, is already the receptacle of true Being in *Being and Time*. When it is used for a purpose that detaches it from this true Being, this must indeed appear as the ultimate sin. This crucial role of language becomes even more prominent in Heidegger's later works.

In paragraph 17 of *Being and Time*, entitled 'Reference and Signs', its elementary dichotomy is analysed with regard to everyday phenomena such as signposts and signals, but also banners and signs of mourning (*BT* 108). The difference between these forms of signs corresponds closely to Peirce's distinction between arbitrary signs (which he calls symbols) and motivated signs (indices). Heidegger defines the distinction as the one between referring and relating:

Every reference is a relation, but not every relation is a reference. Every 'indication' is a reference, but not every referring is an indicating. This implies at the same time that every 'indication' is a relation, but not every relation is an indicating. (*BT* 108)

What the typically convoluted formula describes is once more the problem of the motivation of the sign, the source also of the structural problems of modernist poetry. It becomes crucial in Heidegger's thinking, because his exclusive orientation in the 'real' confronts him with signs only - out of which he somehow has to extract real Being. This is his attempt to solve the problem:

Indeed we shall eventually have to show that 'relations' themselves, *because* of their formally general character, have their ontological source in a reference. (*BT* 108)

The move is analogous to the nominalist upside-down turn of modernism: signs do not convey meaning because there are real things they refer to, but reality has its source in the sign.

Heidegger quickly draws a line by claiming that from his referential sign various phenomena have to be separated (traces, residues, commemorative monuments, documents, testimony, symbols, expression, appearances, and signification). These he disqualifies because they are subject to interpretation. The exclusion is a safety mechanism to prevent a tendency from taking over that has already been encountered in Heidegger's counterpart Wittgenstein: the absolute reduction to factuality procures a universalism. The very hotchpotch of excluded phenomena unveils in its logical flaws (traces are certainly indices, and so are residues) that the underlying concept of the intrinsic connection between the inauthentic phenomena of *Dasein* and an authentic Being postulated underneath them is questionable. Heidegger's already mentioned 'turn' eventually overcomes the ambivalence of uncovering and covering-up by succumbing to a universalism which as a 'positive' result paves the way for his development of a hermeneutic universe, one of interpretation (the very mechanism that is still disqualified in *Being and Time*) which eventually and inevitably becomes a linguistic universe.

On the negative side, Heidegger's 'turn' produces results analogous to both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein and the self-preservation strategies of modernist poems. The individual is wiped out when the linguistic universe takes over in which 'the world worlds'.²⁴ A system that started also as a critique of traditional and still subject-centered phenomenology (Husserl, its main exponent, was Heidegger's teacher) eventually surmounts individuality altogether. It is arguable that - with its basis in the observation of everyday practice - this move, similar to Nietzsche's superman

²⁴'World presences by worlding'; Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York et. al.: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 163-186 (p. 179).

transcending the ordinary individual and Wittgenstein's denial of the subject, is in its facile exclusion at least as simplistic as phenomenology with its unproblematic notion of subjectivity.

In its inevitability, Heidegger's move corresponds to modernism's attempts at impersonality, one of its ways of closing its eyes to its internal tensions. The effects of the move are also strikingly similar. Once the individual is overcome, two things shift fetish-like into the centre of attention. In his later writings 'The Origin of the Work of Art' and 'The Thing',²⁵ the artistic work as a substitute for abandoned transcendental finalities and values and the 'simple things' respectively replace his former interest in human practice. It is evident that a streamlining and reification has taken place, a reduction of the complexities of the analysis of existence in *Being and Time* to two petrified poles that the earlier Heidegger would simply have labelled 'stuff'.

This simplification in Heidegger's later philosophy reflects a general tendency within modernism. The interest in 'the simple thing' which merely *is*, despite all knowledge of cognition, interpretation, etc., runs like a thread through the works of the poets discussed in this study until it culminates in Pound's *res*. The circular move that disqualifies faith, invests art with the task and potentials of a former transcendental truth only to be forced to evoke the powers of this overcome truth in order to preserve some paradoxical value for the artistic work and provide reasons for its existence and continuation has been outlined in the chapter on economy. It will be

²⁵Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 15-87.

re-encountered below in Adorno’s critique of Heidegger’s thinking and the focussing on the impossibility of reconciliation in Adorno’s aesthetic theories.

That underneath the radical destructive habitus of existential philosophy there lurks a tendency to postulate an eventual ‘redemption’ is demonstrated by Thomas Rentsch in his comparison of traditional Christian dogma and Heidegger’s existential analysis which he calls, in accord with Adorno and others, a regressive myth, a theology without God. This is his schema:²⁶

Christian Dogma	Existential Analysis
1. Protology (teaching of the creation and continuation of the World)	1. Phenomenology of thrownness (factuality) into a Being-in-the-World
2. Hamartiology (teaching of Original Sin)	2. Phenomenology of fallenness; phenomenology of care, anxiety, conscience and guilt; inauthenticity
3. Soteriology (teaching of redemption; especially Christology, teaching of reconciliation)	3. Phenomenology of authenticity; disclosure of wholeness through mortal fear and the call of conscience
4. Pneumatology (teaching of the Holy Ghost)	4. Phenomenology of the freedom towards death and the fearful determination
5. Eschatology (teaching of the conclusion, of the end of things and the Last Judgement)	5. Phenomenology of running towards death

The five aspects of Rentsch’s summary of Heidegger’s thinking could also act as philosophical descriptions of the poems analysed in this study. Even texts which are temporarily, religiously, and culturally as distinct as Hopkins’ *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, Yeats’s ‘The Tower’, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and Pound’s *The Cantos*

²⁶Rentsch, *Heidegger*, p. 150 (my translation).

(to name but a few major ones) share the same existential premises. These are characterised by radical destabilisation and loss. In Hans-Joachim Höhn's words:

The process of modernity has unveiled numerous conditions of human life which had previously been regarded as absolute, unchangeable, and necessary as contingent and thus shifted them into the realm of disposition of human decisions and transformations. In the same way, much of that which had hitherto been regarded as uncontrollable, because coincidental, was discovered as ruled by natural laws and thus made predictable and calculable. In this bilateral process, both the awareness of contingency was enlarged and the destabilising effects of experienced contingency were removed.²⁷

Rentsch quotes Wilhelm Schapp, Heidegger's contemporary and fellow student under Husserl, who claimed retrospectively that of the critical philosophy of the Enlightenment which culminates in Kant's three postulates of God, freedom, and immortality, after Heidegger nothing remains but death.²⁸

Death, the frontier against which modernist poetry has to defend itself both on an internal level and as the macrocosmic enterprise of producing art in the face of inevitable destruction, is turned into a constructive force by Heidegger. In order to come into existence, man has to learn about his mortality:

death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility - non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein's end, in the Being of this entity towards its end. (BT 303)

It is one's duty to become mortal²⁹ (a dark variant of Lacan's 'It is my duty that I come into being, even if I lose myself in the process'). In the face of death, in mortal fear, original Being can still be glimpsed according to Heidegger. The modernist project in all its variants is clearly a balancing on the borderlines of its own possibility

²⁷Höhn, 'Religion und Modernität' (my translation).

²⁸Rentsch, *Heidegger*, pp. 150-151.

²⁹'Rational living beings must first *become* mortals', is Heidegger's dictum in 'The Thing', p. 179.

and destruction. Language supplies both the original source of authentic Being and the means of its sliding into inauthenticity. The rift is indeed incurable, and it opens up in the ambiguity, arbitrariness, and potential emptiness of the sign itself and keeps reverberating through the textual structures depending on it where it produces the obscurity, ambiguity, and fragmentation so dearly beloved as superficial characterisations of modernism.

The postulation of an original and now lost authenticity, a truth and value inherent in language and now corrupted by it, runs from traditional Christian doctrine via Western metaphysics to its toppling in Heidegger up to Foucault and Derrida. Foucault's notion that the true nature of language is forever removed from human knowledge, yet literature sometimes permits glimpses of it in *The Order of Things* is the equivalent of Heidegger's concept. Modernist poetry, as has been demonstrated, is based on aesthetic premises which constantly undermine its own existence. According to Paul de Man, this manifestation in spite of an awareness of its own impossibility is the very defining mark of modernism. Yet the equilibrium between acknowledging its paradoxical status and the creation of artistic utterances which, as de Man rightly claims, *must* strive for duration, is a delicate one.³⁰

Adorno criticises Heidegger and a branch of German philosophy following in his tracks of existential analysis which leads to a mourning and nostalgia for lost authenticity (Karl Jaspers is the main exponent) as producers of an ideologically

³⁰de Man, 'Literary History and Literary Modernity', p. 152: 'The ambivalence of writing is such that it can be considered both an act and an interpretative process that follows after an act with which it cannot coincide. As such, it both affirms and denies its own nature or specificity.'

loaded 'jargon of authenticity' in his book of the same title.³¹ By merely evaluating the tensions between the attraction of an ungraspable true Being and the daily corruption of *Dasein*, this brand of philosophical discourse conveniently ignores that it is itself subjected to the corrosion it attests. The reason for this is once more its dependence on language:

The search for meaning as that which something is authentically, and as that which is hidden in it, pushes away, often unnoticed and therefore all the faster, the question as to the right of this something. Analysis of meaning becomes the norm in this demand, not only for the signs, but also for that which they refer to. (JA 41)

In bypassing its own impotence, the philosophical discourse of authenticity sets itself up as authentic. It reifies itself (JA 10) as exempt from societal conditioning - and in its postulation of true Being both from history and personality. Retroactively it thus invests 'fallen' language with some truth too, as a sort of wrapping of an authentic core:

The nimbus in which the works are being wrapped, like oranges in tissue paper, takes under its own direction the mythology of language, as if the radiant force of the words could not yet quite be trusted. (JA 43)

The transcendence of truth beyond the meaning of individual words and propositional statements is attributed to the words by the jargon, as their immutable possession, whereas this 'more' is formed only by the mediation of the constellation. According to this ideal, philosophical language goes beyond what it says, by means of what it says in the development of a train of thought. Philosophical language transcends dialectically in that the contradiction between truth and thought becomes self-conscious and thus overcomes itself. The jargon takes over this transcendence destructively and consigns it to its own chatter. Whatever more of meaning there is in the words than what they say has been secured for them once and for all as expression. The dialectic is broken off: the dialectic between word and thing as well as the dialectic within language, between individual words and their relations. Without judgement, without having been thought, the word is to leave its meaning behind. This is to institute the reality of the 'more'. It is to scoff,

³¹Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, translated by Knut Tarnowski & Frederic Will (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) (henceforth quoted in the text as *JA*).

without reason, at that mystical language speculation which the jargon, proud of its simplicity, is careful not to remember. The jargon obliterates the difference between this 'more' for which language gropes, and the in-itself of this more. Hypocrisy thus becomes an a priori, and everyday language is spoken here and now as if it were the sacred one. A profane language could only approach the sacred one by distancing itself from the sound of the holy, instead of by trying to imitate it. The jargon transgresses this rule blasphemously. When it dresses empirical words with aura, it exaggerates general concepts and ideas of philosophy - as for instance the concept of being - so grossly that their conceptual essence, the mediation through the thinking subject, disappears completely under the varnish. Then these terms lure us on as if they were the most concrete terms. Transcendence and concretion scintillate. Ambiguity is the medium of an attitude towards language which is damned by its favourite philosophy. (JA 11-13)

The analogies to the aesthetics of modernist poetry are evident: out of a total disqualification and devaluation of itself, an insecurity concerning even the smallest elements at its disposal, evolves a universalist model, a machinery that invests itself with value. It sets itself up as a replacement of what it has both wiped aside and actively destroyed - and in a paradoxical counter-move also tried to grasp and retain: notions of truth, reality, and subjectivity. Within its own synthetic reality it gains artificial value down to its smallest elements, even though it has to employ a constant self-mystification in order to cover up the simulation strategies which keep its machinery going. The move away from the sign as a constituent of poems to strangely ungrounded 'things', Eliot's 'objective correlative' and Pound's *res*, a tendency which also manifests itself in Yeats's fascination for concrete artefacts as symbols of art and poetry, his golden nightingale and stone Chinamen, are indications of this.

Yet the setting-up of the immutable, the durable and eternal, whether in the most sophisticated work of art or the 'simple thing', always remains entangled with the complementary force: dissolution, destruction, death. Heidegger's 'worlding world' in which language constitutes reality and retains an ungraspable essence of true Being (as a closed, a restrictive economic system in Bataille's terms, a perfect narcissistic

wholeness in psychoanalytic ones) has its counterpart in the silence of nothingness. 'As the shrine of Nothing, death is the shelter of being' is Heidegger's truly poetic description.³² The German *Gebirg* for 'shelter' contains both *bergen* (to shelter) and *verbergen* (to conceal) in Heidegger's curious etymology and thus an analogy to Freud's ambiguous *uncanny*: it is reassuring in its familiarity and presence, but simultaneously threatening in its strange mysteriousness. Death thus mirrors the simultaneously uncovering and concealing nature of Being. Once more, value is to be retained, loss is to be prevented. This time it is the most essential value that is to be rescued, that of Being itself. Threatened by its antithesis, death, an act of integration is attempted that puts even the ventures of modernist poems to integrate their own structural impasses to shame. In the same way as death as the negation of existence is claimed to make an authentic life as a mortal possible, silence as the negation of language is now in an existential relation to the authentic Being that this language retains and the reality language constitutes. It thus has its share of authenticity, of truth, as much as its positive twin, language. Indeed, the very symbol employed by Heidegger, the shrine, hints at the almost religious significance of that which it contains. Poetry - which in language represents most clearly the dialectic of speaking and silence - is elevated to an the almost messianic representative of truth: 'The nature of art is poetry. The nature of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth'.³³

Nothingness is incapable of being spoilt by *Dasein* in the same way as silence cannot be invaded by the inflationary processes within language. Thus both entities become even more authentic than the authentic. And here they fall together with what

³²Heidegger, 'The Thing', p. 179.

³³Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', p. 75.

Baudrillard describes in exactly those terms: they become a simulacrum.³⁴ This is what happens in the sophisticated inclusions of death into the structures of modernist poems, in Eliot's *Four Quartets* where death appears as just one of the many layers in his vertical historicist model of history, and in a more opaque form in the plethora of documents and monuments bringing past lives back to life again in *The Cantos*. They are clever acknowledgements of death while simultaneously countering its destructive force by the poem's own act of reconstruction by simulation.

Internally, Heidegger's growing addiction to a symbolically charged language which merges with his constant attempt to reinvest common language with new meaning by capitalisation, hyphenation, use of archaic forms (such as *Seyn* for *Sein* in his later writings) and often creates false pathos and even kitsch, is of course the very contradiction of the disqualification of the symbol as inauthentic, as incapable of being referential. In Adorno's biting words: 'the untruth indicts itself by becoming bombastic' (JA 13). In the same way as those of Wittgenstein, Heidegger's attempts to remain purely factual become ensnared in the traps of language. While modernist poetry strives to purify its worn-out material, he tries to create his own vocabulary, a microcosmic endeavour that mirrors his macrocosmic notion that language creates the world. The results of the attempts are similar: in both cases an inflation happens that eventually takes over and produces internally the symptoms of the corruption that the utterance (philosophical or poetic) was meant to criticise.

Modernist poetry, caught between the twin attractions of continuing its utterance in an attempt to constitute its own synthetic Being along the rails of

³⁴'The real does not efface itself in favor of the imaginary: it effaces itself in favor of the more than real: the hyperreal. The truer than true: this is simulation'; Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 11.

language and drifting into the authenticity of silence, could thus be labelled both (in a reversal of Heidegger's image) a manifestation of being in the realm of the nothingness of an alienated and inauthentic world and the reminder of nothingness in a reality of established certainties, a reminder also of the limits of existence. It of necessity both constitutes and destroys - certainties, reality, identity. In its affirmation - at least of itself, the smallest utterance possible for the poem: 'I am a poem' (*vide Ash-Wednesday*) - it always also contains its own negation. When Adorno claims that, following Nietzsche's insight, the modernist aesthetic postulates in a reversal of traditional philosophy that 'truth exists only as a product of historical becoming',³⁵ he only captures one side of the coin. For this does not automatically make it free from its 'one-time ignominious relation to magical abracadabra, human servitude and entertainment', and it requires a very emphatic view of modernist art to claim that 'it has after all annihilated these tendencies along with the memory of its fall from grace' (*AT* 4).

The final part of Adorno's statement reveals why. Modernism's necessary work of destruction leaves its traces - and nowhere else but in the artistic works themselves. They thus enter into the relational tension of existence according to Heidegger where every affirmation of existence here and now carries with it a wherefrom and whither, an orientation both towards an origin in the past and a goal in the future (*BT* 145). And this entails that, in a way, they cannot free themselves from past compulsions - such as the search for a hidden truth behind their material. They can only analyse these compulsions in themselves, and this creates the productive/destructive tensions described at various points in this study. Even in lyric poetry, traditionally associated

³⁵Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 4 (henceforth quoted in the text as *AT*).

with timelessness and lack of progression, this tension becomes visible.³⁶ It is no coincidence that in the progress of modernism the lyric mode loses its autonomy and is increasingly incorporated into larger diverse patterns which, although they derive from a rejection of the epic, drift towards a post- or neo-epic character. The final attempt to rescue the lyric mode as a viable aesthetic model, Imagism, characteristically drifts either towards meaninglessness in the sense of its incapacity for making statements - or silence. Once more, reification or death unveil themselves as alternative limits.

Adorno tries to formulate the impasses of modernism and truth positively in his *Aesthetic Theory*:

Art works talk like fairies in tales: if you want the absolute, you shall have it, but only in disguise. By contrast, the truth of discursive knowledge, while undisguised, is unattainable. (AT 183)

Art possesses what it tries to gain, because it cannot gain access to it. Yet in its futile attempt to reach it, it unveils it to its percipient - but in the form of a riddle. The shape of modernist poetry, the often observed inward turn of self-reflection, is this endeavour to reach beyond its own capacity, an endeavour that only ever leads to the insight into its own shortcomings.

The enigma of works of art is the fact of their having been broken off. If transcendence were really present in them, they would be mysteries rather than riddles. They are not. They are riddles precisely because they are fragments disclaiming to be wholes, even though wholes is what they really want to be. (AT 184)

Truth content is the objective answer or solution to the riddle posed by any particular work. By calling for a solution it points to its truth content, which in turn cannot actually be nailed down except by philosophical reflection. This alone is what legitimates aesthetics. (AT 186)

³⁶See Paul de Man, 'Lyric and Modernity', in *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 166-186.

X. Defying Conclusions: Opening Up Modernism

The truth of modernist poems lies in their continual failure, in their simultaneous constitution and negation of themselves. Their aesthetics thus necessarily remain anti-aesthetic as well; they try to leave the realm of mere appearances, Thomas Mann's 'sham', behind (this is what Adorno calls the only justification of aesthetics), but in doing so automatically undermine the premises of their own production and make themselves impossible.

Their relation to the society in which they manifest themselves mirrors this internal contradiction. Modernist poems are not mere mimetic depictions of the conditions of the environment that determine their shape, including that of their material, language. They are not the plastercast of society, not even via the psyche of an author living in it. Yet they are not completely autonomous either, free and unrestricted explorations of possibilities, experiments for experiment's sake. 'While art opposes society, it is incapable of taking up a vantage point beyond it. Art's opposition is thus in part identification with what it opposes' (*AT* 194). The discussion of modernist poetry reproducing the mechanisms of capitalism in the mystification of its artificial surplus of value has revealed this impasse.

In a complex double bend, modernist poems both respond to societal conditions which provide the realm and the stimulus of works as well as their material, but their response dislocates the premises from which they emerge, destabilises their authority,

and questions their validity in a way much later recaptured theoretically in textual deconstruction. To remain within Adorno's imagery: the modernist poem gives answers to the questions of modernity, yet they are always inadequate ones. Inadequate in such a radical way that they undermine even the act of asking questions, i.e. the process of reading and interpretation with its tacit agreements between reader and text. The poem violates the locutionary aspect of discourse by mutilating and obscuring the message until it eventually threatens the notions of meaning and interpretation altogether (as in *The Waste Land*). It corrodes the illocutionary aspect, too: the modernist poem makes it increasingly difficult to locate its voice, its identity. It splits it up, disqualifies its fragments as mere quotations or in ironic representation, until it eventually unveils the very notion of subjectivity as far from stable.

While obscurity, ambiguity, and the problematic 'voice' of modernist poems have received much critical attention, their third and equally radical aspect of destabilisation has often been conveniently neglected: the perlocutionary aspect, the way in which the poems act as reading-instructions, as reader-controlling devices. It is in this function that the shift from a classical readerly work - which presents itself as both approachable and stable, firmly based in a code and context that it shares with the reader - to a writerly perspective becomes most evident. The poems dislocate both their own position (here, illocutionary and perlocutionary aspect are linked) and that of their percipient. The latter is also achieved by a free transgression of genre borderlines (both *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos* are lyric *and* prose *and* dramatic) and through fragmentation and montage. Those devices leave the reader searching for the meaning and message he can expect from a readerly text with an abyss that threatens his very role as reader and turns him into a creator/destroyer. This makes

modernist poems such unpleasant reading experiences. They do not reassure us in our settled habits of thinking (or indeed not thinking) about ourselves, but in their act of self-sacrifice highlight the cracks in our own concept of ourselves as subjects.

Yet, as the preceding chapters have shown, there is also an equally strong tendency in modernist poems to present themselves as coherent and complete, as *works*, or - even stronger - a desire to leave their character as appearance behind, to overcome internal ruptures by presenting themselves as synthetic wholes, as an artificial consciousness or even a reality of their own. This 'reality' of the modernist poem, far from declaring itself a mere alternative utopian realm (Paul Klee's *Zwischenwelt* or Lyotard's *Nebenwelt*¹), is - on the contrary - characterised by a continual expansion of its power which has its source in its constructedness. The failure to be mimetic is transformed into a rejection of the mimetic or rather into a massive redistribution of value onto the aspect of construction. This suddenly all-powerful construction (the realm of modernism's complete autonomy, the locus of its 'project') secures its power by exclusion. In Adorno's words, it 'manifests intolerance of all externality and wants to transform itself into a reality *sui generis*' (AT 85). On the level of the smallest constituent of the modernist poem, the sign, the all-too problematic connection between signifier and signified is overcome by a further reduction: now the signifier alone remains and guarantees the absolute control of signification.

This claim for universality is inherent in all facets of modernism and can be detected in their aspiration for unrestricted competence: everything can be interpreted

¹Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-garde', in *The Lyotard Reader*, edited by Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 196-211 (p. 202).

in psychoanalytic or economic terms or those of existential philosophy. And should the object be unwilling to be integrated, it is forcibly excluded as standing for something else or even as something of which we cannot sensibly speak. It is arguable that the claim that literature has no distinct boundaries, i.e. that it is concerned with and capable of making statements about everything, is a variant of this universalism. It would be an interesting endeavour to pursue the historic roots of a development which eventually permits the highly specialised discourse called poetry, for instance, to produce a 'poem including history' in the shape of *The Cantos*.

An alternative expression of the totalitarian tendency of modernist poetry, alternative to the ceaseless signifiatory exertions of a poem like *The Cantos*, is the 'calming' of the material (see Pounds 'Alchemist'), the stabilisation of its processes in once more symbolic shape. Eliot's *Four Quartets* are an example of the seeming reconciliation of the internal contradictions of the structures of modernist poems. The recourse to the symbolic helps them to overcome their tensions and creates a oneness, a whole, that - according to de Man's description of modernism as struggle - should no longer be possible. It is, but - as Adorno points out - only in the form of an illusion (AT 425). The illusory harmony of a dubious reconciliation of irreconcilable tensions (between subject and object, work and world, language and truth) is, as Adorno demonstrates, an inward turn within modernism, a retraction of the developments that have brought modernism's negative or anti-aesthetic aesthetics into being: expression, so Adorno claims, is the result of modernism's insistence on dissonance, its stress on its constructive aspect which clashes with the traditionally mimetic task of art. If this dissonance is overcome, then artistic expression becomes impossible (AT 160-162).

This becomes immediately evident in the problem of the perfect symbol in Yeats which would bring about the end of the poetic utterance. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Vorticism, the institutionalisation of a force analogous to Nietzsche's constructive/destructive drive to create metaphors, i.e. a reconciliation of the irreconcilable, would - if strictly applied - remain a theory without application. It is easy to see why: where is the possible abode of a poetic text which must of necessity try to achieve duration, if not permanence, in a concept of perpetual flux? One can only imagine it as residue left behind on the walls of the vortex, thus as deficient, as waste, from its very conception.

In order to fulfil itself, modernist poetry must keep a precarious balance. It must pursue modernity's tendency (highlighted in Nietzsche) of transforming reality into an aesthetic construct. Yet it must not give in to a complete aesthetification of reality, to the notion of its own omnipotence, to the allure of its own simulated reality. For this would, as Wolfgang Iser convincingly demonstrates, entail the transformation of aesthetics into, as he calls it, anaesthetics. By that he means the equivalent of Adorno's dubious 'more', the reckless adding of a nimbus of truth and authenticity to the results of experiences which are conditioned and conditional, the creation of compulsory norms out of relative insights.² In this respect, Walter Benjamin's description of fascism as an aesthetification of history comes to mind.³

²Wolfgang Iser, 'Ästhetik und Anästhetik', in *Ästhetisches Denken* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990), pp. 9-40 (p. 25).

³Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 219-253 (pp. 243-244).

Fascism is indeed the most drastic demonstration of complete aesthetification turning into absolute anaesthesia: of ethics, values, of entire people.

Similar tendencies, albeit on a smaller scale, can be found in extreme examples of modernist poems. *The Cantos* with their aim of selling their own idiosyncratic jumble of fragments as universally valid history have been mentioned several times. But there are other, seemingly more harmless expressions of the same disposition. Eliot's *Four Quartets* represent such an aesthetic reconciliation of tensions, of most existential doubts and impotences. They are indeed capable of creating an enormous beauty out of their desperation. But this is their hook. By laying bare all their impasses, Eliot's *Four Quartets* also cover up their own strategy of control. Who could deny the charges of this text? Who could fail to sympathise, indeed to identify with its narcissistic visions of individual failure, and who does not experience relief at the assimilation of these shortcomings into a universal pattern? This seemingly unlimited competence of the poem, its total inclusion of discursive positions towards it, or (which means the same thing) its 'intolerance of all externality', exposes it as an end of modernism, as *false* according to modernism's own endeavour of relativisation and plurality.

Self-reflection is the key term in modernist poetry's delicate balancing act. It must of necessity constitute itself, even strive to achieve an impossible unity. This is, as Adorno reminds us, the inheritance of myth as an attempt to master the chaos of nature. Yet part of its internal dialectic is also its drive towards dissolution as the acceptance of heterogeneity (AT 266-267) and thus also as an acknowledgment of its own constructive potential and the tension created by its interplay with the mimetic. Both the fake unity of its own reification as truth, history and work and the

unrestrained flow of signification, the dissolution into an endless utterance are thus false variants of modernism in poetry. False because they betray the essential character of the modernist work as tension.

The concept of tension is above the suspicion of being formalistic. Tension highlights dissonant experience and antinomial relations in the artistic object, thus stressing precisely the substantive moment of 'form'. It is through its inner tensions that the art work defines itself as a field of force, even when it has already come to rest, i.e. when it is objectified. A work of art is as much a sum total of relations of tensions as it is an attempt to dissolve them.
(AT 407)

False reconciliation and wholeness as well as unrestricted dissolution break off the modernist dialectic simply because they do not break off the works. The work, as has been revealed in the discussion of textual economy, is one of the stumbling blocks of modernist poetry. In Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, it is the devil who not only has the best tunes, but also the best arguments against the concept of the 'work' (he talks about musical works, but his remarks have general significance):

The prohibitive difficulties of the work lie deep in the work itself. The historical movement of the musical material has turned against the self-contained work. It shrinks in time, it scorns extension in time, which is the dimension of a musical work, and lets it stand empty. Not out of impotence, not out of incapacity to give form. Rather from a ruthless demand for compression, which taboos the superfluous, negates the phrase, shatters the ornament, stands opposed to any extension of time, which is the life-form of the work. Work, time, and pretence, they are one, and together they fall victim to critique. It no longer tolerates pretence and play, the fiction, the self-glorification of form, which censors the passions and human suffering, divides out the parts, translates into pictures. Only the non-fictional is still permissible, the unplayed, the undisguised and untransfigured expression of suffering in its actual moment. Its impotence and extremity are so ingrained that no seeming play with them is any longer allowed.⁴

The wrongful continuation of the work in the false reconciliation of its tensions leads to the loss of the riddle, the riddle that Adorno interprets as the only way in

⁴Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, pp. 233-234.

which truth can present itself, but also the riddle that Baudrillard regards as the essence of reality itself. He calls the productive abstinence from false reconciliation *seduction*.⁵ Seduction is the productive, because non-affirmative process (not action, since it is self-determined) which reminds the dubious subject of its object-status. It is indeed the reader-controlling aspect in which the false closure or the true fragmentation of the modernist poem manifest themselves. An open text like *The Waste Land* directs the attention to the problem of interpretation, thus ultimately to the possibility of reading and creating a modernist poem in the best possible sense of Heidegger's definition in *Being and Time*: 'Interpretation [is not] the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding' (BT 188-189).

A closed text like *Four Quartets* convinces, asks to be understood, but does not question and indeed obscures the origins of our understanding. It aims at being accepted. In the same way *The Cantos* force their reader to follow its *periplous* of learning, prescribe secondary works without which the text cannot be understood, and spoonfeed their reader their own egotistical canon of underlying material as normative. Out of an organicist notion of the development of signification ('To significations, words accrue', is Heidegger's dictum; BT 204) evolves a work that sells itself as true.⁶ Henri Birault characterises the endeavour in emphatic terms (once more in

⁵'Seduction is not mysterious; it is enigmatic. The enigma, like the secret, is not unintelligible. It is, on the contrary, fully intelligible, but it cannot be said or revealed'; Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 107.

⁶The organicist notion of truth acquiring its own language in Heidegger is discussed in Jan Aler, 'Heidegger's Conception of Language in *Being and Time*', in Joseph J. Kockelmans, ed., *On Heidegger and Language*, Northwestern Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 33-62 (pp. 51-52).

relation to Heidegger): 'To develop a nonaesthetic conception of the work of art and to elaborate a new rule for the dialogue between thinkers and poets [...]'.⁷ Baudrillard interprets this desire in characteristically pragmatic fashion as the artistic work's reaction to the transformation of the aesthetic into a commodity. Its way out, he claims, is its transformation of itself into an 'absolute commodity', 'absolute' corresponding to Steven Connor's notion of 'pricelessness'.⁸

The second focus of the end of the modernist poem is the subject. It, too, is in a precarious position. Modernism's tendency to subject both its outside *and* its inside makes subjectivity immaterial (AT 84-85). This is most evident in the various strategies to achieve impersonality. Yet the paradox remains that the greater the impersonality of the poems (as in Imagism or *The Cantos*), the stronger the textual identity at work remains, albeit in concealed form. This is a sign that the poems do not abandon an underlying concept of subjectivity. They endanger it in their identities (as in Eliot's early works culminating in *The Waste Land*) when they unveil it in its constitution and constructedness, but they refuse to give it up - for this would entail their end as works. It would make their discourse one of madness and terminate their message. From another angle one could argue that even if they wanted to, they could not abandon a notion of subjectivity, for this would mean a potential to return from the symbolic to the imaginary, and this way is blocked by consciousness.

Yet this does not permit the subjectivity of the poems expressed in their textual identity, the *ego scriptor* of a poem like *The Cantos*, an easy victory. Indeed it grants

⁷Henri Birault, 'Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger', in *On Heidegger and Language*, pp. 147-168 (p. 161). His claim refers to Heidegger's essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art' and his commentaries on Hölderlin's poetry.

⁸Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, pp. 116-119 ('The Absolute Commodity').

it no victory at all. The inextricable connection of subject and work is the downfall of the subject. In Adorno's words:

One reason why works of art are things is that they *qua* autonomous objectification are like an in-itself - a determined and fixed entity which is at rest - patterned after the world of empirical things. Objectification is brought about by the synthetic unity of spirit. Works become spiritual only by being thing-like; their spirit and their thing-likeness are products of their reciprocal relation. Their spirit which serves them as means of transcendence also brings them death. Implicitly, they have had this mortal quality all along but it is the need for reflection that brings it out into the open. (AT 389-390).

Death is the be-all and end-all of modernist poems. It is the realm in which Adorno's negative utopia of the reconciliation of the irreconcilable is situated.

Art is left with a single *parti pris*, which is one in favour of death. This allows art to be at once critical and metaphysical. Works of art originate in the world of things: their material as well as their methods are derived from it. In fact, there is nothing in them that does not belong to the world of things also, nothing that does not entail the price of death if it were wrested from that world. Art partakes in reconciliation only because it is deadly, which is why it continues to be enslaved to myth. This is the Egyptian quality that characterizes all art. Wanting to immortalize the transitory - life - art in fact kills it.

The moment of reconciliation in art works has justly been seen to lie in their openness: they alone can heal the wounds that they inflict. By forswearing intervention in reality, i.e. by shunning real domination, artistic reason gains a dimension of innocence, although art, the greatest products included, resonates with social repression, and although art becomes culpable precisely because it refuses to intervene - a culpability that is shared by spirit. The act through which art neutralizes the mimetic and diffuses powers of nature is not wholly or exclusively a wrong committed against amorphous nature. Creating an aesthetic image is also a protest against nature's fear lest it dissipate and become completely chaotic. The aesthetic unity of the manifold thus appears to be non-repressive and to have organically grown out of that manifold. Synthesis shades over into reconciliation. In art works there is a tendency for myth to relax its destructive hold, with the result that in the field of art spirit ceases to be the arch-enemy of nature. Spirit tones down its antagonistic essence and becomes conciliatory. This differs from what classicism meant by reconciliation. Reconciliation here refers to the mode of conduct of works of art in so far as they become conscious of the non-identical in their midst. By following the dynamics of self-sameness at the end, art works assimilate themselves to the non-identical. This is the stage of development mimesis has reached today. Reconciliation as method or mode of conduct is discernible at the present time in those works which have

abandoned the traditional idea of reconciliation, works where the form prescribes intransigence. (AT 194-195)

This is the link between modernism's openness, its denial of false reconciliations, and the recent dispute about the resurrected notion of the sublime. Wolfgang Iser stresses the idea of reconciliation as a negative utopia in Adorno and claims that by his insistence on the necessary incompleteness of works, Adorno rejects the possibility of a practical reconciliation although he retains it as a paradoxical goal. This is what makes him an exponent of the idea of the sublime, not the watered-down version which merely designates an empty notion of 'greatness' and 'beauty', but the original idea expressed in Kant that happiness in art lies only in the human power to bear exposure to art, because it reminds us of the irreconcilable ruptures of our existence.⁹

The only atonement of the modernist poem for its existence in spite of its impossibility ('Every work is a "desecration of silence" (Beckett), wishing it were possible to restore that silence', AT 195) is its death. How this can be achieved in aesthetic terms (a complete negation of the utterance is unthinkable) is a difficult question. It is evident, however, that the modernist dialectic of tensions has to be continued and radicalised - until it embraces work and subject. Which means that the 'postmodern' poem has to question its own status and to refuse a position of authority both to itself and its reader. In Lyotard's characterisation:

[...] the avant-garde is not concerned with what happens to the 'subject', but with 'Does it happen?', with privation. This is the sense in which it still belongs to the aesthetics of the sublime. In asking the question of the *It happens* that the work of art is, avant-garde art abandons the role of

⁹Wolfgang Iser, 'Adornos Ästhetik: Eine implizite Ästhetik des Erhabenen', in *Ästhetisches Denken*, pp. 114-156 (p. 114).

identification that the work previously played in relation to the community of addressees.¹⁰

It could then conform to the most sensible description of postmodernism to date, the one given by Wolfgang Iser in his seminal study *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* [Our Postmodern Modernism], in which he calls postmodernism the fulfilment of some of the promises inherent in modernism.¹¹ The most important of these promises is the one formulated by Adorno as the justice towards heterogeneity (AT 266-267).¹² In a negative formulation this means a farewell to totalisations. Under no circumstances must an awareness of the human capacity for speech lead to a world-formula based on nominalist principles as described by Walter Benjamin:

The conviction that the spiritual essence of a thing consists in its language - this view understood as a hypothesis is the great abyss into which all theory of language threatens to fall, and to sustain itself hovering above it is its very task.

And, in a footnote to the above statement:

Or is it the temptation to place this hypothesis at the beginning which creates the abyss of all philosophising?¹³

Equally dangerous - and just as much a totalisation - is the opposite of a nominalist world-formula: the setting-up of relativism as norm. Exclusions and assertions will be made and have to be made. It is essential, however, to retain an

¹⁰Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-garde', p. 208.

¹¹Wolfgang Iser, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, second edition, Acta humaniora (Weinheim: VCH, 1988), pp. 6 & 319-320.

¹²Iser, 'Adornos Ästhetik', p. 130.

¹³Walter Benjamin, 'Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen', in *Angelus Novus*, Ausgewählte Schriften, 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 9-26 (p. 10) (my translation).

awareness of these mechanisms and an insight into the - often missing or dubious - premises of one's concepts.

This affects acts of interpretation, too - such as this study. Adorno stresses the importance of criticism in order to fight the appearance of unity, thus the false reification of works of art (*AT* 267). Yet the nimbus of closure and completeness does not spare interpretations and critical writings either. Therefore it is necessary to point out at this stage that this study is one way of seeing and evaluating modernist poetry, one approach which of necessity strives towards a relative coherence of its own, but remains partial and must compete in its relative value with possible others. It certainly does not manage to present *the* concept of modernism (this is the only subtle criticism I would aim in the direction of Eysteinnsson's otherwise excellent book). A closed evaluation would indeed betray its inadequacy concerning its object - if this object is modernism's aesthetics of tension and openness. Yet again, insight into the relativity of one's position must not lead to an institutionalisation of this relativity. Therefore this study concludes inconclusively with Wittgenstein's warning - which embraces once more the impasses of modernist poetry: 'A doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt'.¹⁴

¹⁴Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, p. 59e.

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