

The Influence of Some Minor Nineteenth-Century Poets on T. S. Eliot

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Abstract:

Thomas Stearns Eliot is one of the most daring innovators of twentieth century poetry. Eliot's poetry is mainly characterized by the difficulty of its language as he believes that the function of poetry is to represent the complexities of modern civilization. In spite of such difficulty, Eliot's poetic language exerted a great influence on modern poetic diction which made him one of the major poets of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, his greatness stems from his own religious tendency which has been resulted in producing "purified poetry". For Eliot, purified poetry is one of the most prominent means of

achieving spirituality in one's life. According to many critics, this kind of poetry has an almost mystical purpose, for instance, Paul Murray called Eliot "the theorist of mysticism". In his "The Function of Criticism", Eliot attempts to define his own mystical experience saying that it is "something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to obtain his unique position ... [something which exists] between the true artists of any time" (68).

One of his most interesting as well as controversial works is *Four Quartets*, which has been

intentionally composed in such a way that resists interpretation and identification. Moreover, Eliot's originality lies in his way of assimilating tradition – whether direct or indirect influences, documented or nondocumented sources – in order to create a new whole. In the context of Eliot's mysticism, there are two nineteenth century forgotten poets: William Butler Yeats and John Addington Symonds who are great sources of mysticism that are not completely mentioned nor commented on in Eliot's works especially in the *Four Quartets*. In general, the variety of influences and sources used by Eliot refers mainly to the depth of his knowledge of his near and far predecessors.

Key words:

Modern poetry -Twentieth century
poetry -Mysticism - T. S. Eliot -

William Butler Yeats - John
Addington Symonds - Purified poetry
- Religious poetry - Mystical
experience - Four Quartets

المخلص

يعتبر توماس سترنس إليوت واحدًا
من أكثر المجددين جرأة في القرن
العشرين. يتميز شعر إليوت بصعوبة لغته
حيث إنه يؤمن بأن وظيفة الشعر هي
إظهار تعقيدات الحضارة الحديثة. على
الرغم من تلك الصعوبة إلا أن شعر
إليوت كان له تأثير عظيم على أسلوب
الشعر الحديث؛ مما جعله واحدًا من أهم
شعراء القرن العشرين. في حقيقة الأمر
يرجع شأن إليوت العظيم إلى اتجاهه
الديني الذي جعله ينتج شعر نقيًا .
فبالنسبة لإليوت يعتبر الشعر النقي واحدًا
من أهم وسائل تحقيق الروحية في حياة
الإنسان. وبالنسبة لعدد من النقاد فإن
هذا الشعر ينطوي على هدف صوفي. فعلى

سبيل المثال أطلق بول موري علي اليوت مسمي "منظر الصوفية". ففي مقاله "وظيفة النقد" حاول اليوت تعريف خبرته الصوفية بانها "شيء ما خارج الفنان يدين له بالولاء، و هو نوع من الاخلاص علي الفنان ان يستسلم له و يضحي بنفسه من اجله لكي يحصل علي مكانته الفريده (وهو شيء ما موجود) بين الفنانين الحقيقيين في اي وقت."

تعتبر الرباعيات الاربعة واحدة من اكثر أعمال اليوت أثاره و جدلا و التي نظمها بشكل متعمد يحول دون امكانية تفسيرها او تحديد نوعها. و كذلك من احد ابداعات اليوت في هذا العمل هو طريقته في دمج التراث - سواء التأثيرات المباشرة و الغير مباشرة أو المصادر الموثقه و الغير موثقه - من اجل خلق كيان جديد. وفي سياق صوفية اليوت هناك اثنان من شعراء القرن التاسع عشر

المنسيين: وليام بتلر يتس وجون أدينجتون سيمودس واللذان يعتبران من أعظم مصادر الصوفية ومع ذلك لم يذكرأ أو يعلق عليها تمامًا في أي من اعمال إليوت خاصًا الرباعيات الإربعة. وبشكل عام فإن تنوع التأثيرات والمصادر المستخدمة من قبل إليوت يشير بشكل أساسي إلى مدى عمق معرفته بالسلف سواء القريب أو البعيد.

Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot is considered one of the most innovative poets of twentieth century poetry. His keen attempt to represent the complexity of modern civilization resulted in the difficulty of his poetic language. In spite of such difficulty, Eliot's poetic language exerted a great influence on modern poetic diction which made him one of the major poets of the twentieth century. As

a matter of fact, his greatness stems from his own religious tendency which has been resulted in producing "purified poetry". For Eliot, purified poetry is one of the most prominent means of achieving spirituality in one's life. According to many critics, this kind of poetry has an almost mystical purpose, for instance, Paul Murray called Eliot "the theorist of mysticism". In his "The Function of Criticism", Eliot attempts to define his own mystical experience saying that it is "something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to obtain his unique position ... [something which exists] between the true artists of any time"(68). In the context of Eliot's mysticism, there are two nineteenth century forgotten poets: William Butler

Yeats and John Addington Symonds who are great sources of mysticism that are not completely mentioned nor commented on in Eliot's works especially in the *Four Quartets*. In general, the variety of influences and sources used by Eliot refers mainly to the depth of his knowledge of his near and far predecessors.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, one of the most daring innovators of twentieth-century poetry, believed that the function of poetry is to represent the complexities of modern civilization. Eliot is characterized by the difficulty of his poetics language. In spite of this difficulty, Eliot's poetic language has had a great influence on modern poetic diction in fact, it is Eliot's use of language which made him one of the major poets of the twentieth century. His

greatness stems from his religious tendency, which has resulted in producing 'purified poetry'. Helen Gardner states that:

The further quality that distinguishes the major poet is a special power of language, a special feeling for the connections of words in sound and meaning Such poets not only write poems that are felicitous in phrase and rhythm, in which the diction seems exquisitely appropriate, but they revive the very stuff of poetry, the language and speech-rhythms of their day and country; they re-create the instrument they use, and suggest to their contemporaries and to those who come after them new capacities in the language and new possibilities of poetic expression. (*The Art of T.S. Eliot*, 3-4)

In the process of his poetic composition, Eliot is well aware that the poem should contain purified poetry. For him, such refined poetry is one of the most prominent means of achieving spirituality in one's life. According to many critics, this kind of poetry has an almost mystical purpose: for instance, Paul Murray called Eliot "The theorist of mysticism". In his "The Function of Criticism", Eliot attempts to define his own mystical experience saying that it is "something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to obtain his unique position ... [something which exists] between the true artists of any time" (68).

Interestingly, Eliot always refused to call himself a mystic; for him, being a poet is

stronger than being a mystic. In an interview with Tom Greenwell, Eliot indicates that:

I don't think I am a mystic at all, though I have always been much interested in mysticism. But I seem to remember that somewhere Yeats said, in an answer to a question, that he wasn't a mystic but a poet. Rather implying that you couldn't be both. With me, certainly, the poetic impulse is stronger than the mystical impulse. ("Talking Freely", 46)

Generally speaking, Eliot admits that mystical experiences are common among great poets. However, poetry, for him, is a full time job which indicates that a poet should devote himself completely to poetry. This means that one should decide either to be a poet or a mystic as no one can be both at

the same time. He illustrates in the same interview that:

Wordsworth and Vaughan and Traherne and even Tennyson, I believe, had had some curious mystical experiences. But I can't think of any mystic who was also a fine poet, except Saint John of the Cross. A great many people of sensibility have had some more or less mystical experiences. That doesn't make them mystics. To be a mystic is a whole time job – so is poetry. (46)

Practically speaking, from the first moment of reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* while still a student at Harvard University in 1910, Eliot became greatly influenced by his mystical attitude, not only in his own poetry but also in his own intellectual life and creative development. As a result,

Eliot composed, in the same year of reading Dante, a poem called "Silence" in which he expresses his first quasi-mystical experience that can be clearly observed in describing how, while walking in Boston, he sees streets shrinking and dividing suddenly. In an attempt to interpret such a mystical impulse, Gordon states that: "His everyday preoccupations, his past, all claims of the future fell away and he was enfolded in a great silence" (15).

A similar mystical experience is more evident in his prose writing, namely his dissertation *Knowledge and Experience in the philosophy of F.H. Bradley*, in which he expresses his deep sense of agony and doubt when his visions refuse to be realized and he is torn between their truth and his rational distrust of them. Gordon elaborates that:

Written by a haunted young man torn between the truth of his visions and his rational distrust of them. His visions and his rational are characterized by deep sense of suffering, fear and passion. The dissertation resounds with confessions of suffering the 'agony' when the vision refuses to be realized and the observer falls back into artificial life; the fatal persecution of an obsessional idea 'for one crazed by fear or passion'; the wrenching beginning and end of the vision – annihilation and utter night. (53)

It is apparent that Eliot's early poetry and prose writings represent a great influence of mysticism, elaborated in his deep sense of agony, suffering, fear, and passion. Moreover, Eliot paid much attention to the Symbolist

Movement since his reading of Arthur Symonds' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* in 1908. Hence, Eliot, from his particular moment in his life, started a new stage in his poetic career towards a more creative development, that is, modern English poetry. His poetic oeuvre began with the production of his "Portrait of a Lady", "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "Preludes", and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night".

One of his most interesting works is *Four Quartets*, which Eliot himself considered to be his major achievement; so do many of his readers. With the composition of this poem, Eliot reached his widest public. Gardner defines Eliot's masterpiece in comparison with his early works as "a more richly complex experience [that] finds richer and more varied

expression; the range of feeling and the range of instrument is greater than before" (2). However, it is considered to be the most controversial poem written by Eliot as a remarkable number of critical works has been produced and is still being produced since its publication.

The reason that lies behind the controversial judgments of the poem is the existence of multiple sources and influences of major as well as minor poets which have been incorporated by Eliot into the poem in order to create a new whole. Consequently, the poem still introduces a problem of identification among Eliot's critics and readers concerning its meaning and status. For instance, Bergonzi stresses that: "the essays by Davie, Kenner, Stead, and Donoghue do not provide any kind

of a consensus, and they throw out more questions about the ultimate meaning and status of the Quartets that they resolve" (5).

Since he is a difficult poet, Eliot has composed the poem in such a way so as to resist identification and interpretation, he confesses that "It is part of the intention of this essay to deny that interpretation" (*Four Quartets*, 139). He has included, on the one hand, many major sources such as St. John of the Cross, Dante, Julian of Norwich, Søren Kierkegaard, Richard of St. Victor, Maurice Maeterlink, and Rudyard Kipling which are well-acknowledged, noted, and commented upon, by Eliot himself or by his own critics. On the other, the poem also includes many minor sources which are not acknowledged, noted, nor commented upon whom Eliot

defines as "the most disparate and unlikely material [that he assembles] to make a new whole" (*On Poetry and Poets*, 108). All such unacknowledged sources in the poem have led many critics to accuse him of plagiarism. For instance, Richard Aldington elaborates on "that abuse of the unacknowledged quotation whereby Eliot became credited with what was not his" (14). Moreover, Aldington concludes that "what is original in his poetry is not good, and what is good is not original" (17).

Generally speaking, Eliot's poetry shares many echoes from past, whether from his ancient predecessors or his recent ones. Throughout his poetic production, Eliot expresses his deep appreciation of the significance of tradition in the poet's work. It can be apparently observed that in

many of his works “the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality more vigorously (“Tradition and Individual Talent”, 38). Hence, he urges the poet to “write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (38). For Eliot, the present cannot be seen in isolation from the past: by and large, modernism cannot be isolated from tradition. Bergonzi elaborates that Eliot “advances some incontrovertible ideas; namely, that no poet writes in isolation from his fellows and ancestors; and that it is possible to regard the literature of the past, or some part of it, as a synchronic entity, coexisting with the present”

(64). According to Eliot, the task of the poet is to focus on the uniqueness of his predecessors; as through highlighting the distinguished features of those dead poets, the poet himself can be able to produce something new out of something old. He remarks that:

We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s differences from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the

impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity. ("Tradition and Individual Talent", 38).

In particular, Eliot's *Four Quartets* shows a distinguished example of including many different philosophical sources from various predecessors. While he sometimes identifies them by name, which makes it easy for the reader to recognize the source, other times he does not. The originality of Eliot in this poem lies in his insistence on highlighting the distinguished ideas of his predecessors in order to create his own ones. Moreover, Eliot, in this poem, moves from any kind of the private understanding of an experience that was dominant in the previous works to a much more common and universal grasp of the most fundamental principles of human

consciousness. Portraying himself as a religious poet who cannot adhere to a special set of religious symbols through which the reader can blindly trace the experience without celebrating the hunt for the supposed enjoyment, Eliot is deeply convinced that his task is not to impose his own beliefs on the reader but to explore and explain his own experience, and by implication, their own. Gardener states that Eliot's task is not to "make us believe what he believes, but to make us believe that he believes. He must convince us that he is himself convinced. He must also convince us that what he believes genuinely interprets, makes sense of, experience which we recognize as our own" (68).

For instance, one of the most common mystical traditions upon which Eliot has drawn in the *Quartets* is the knowledge of time

and motion as derived from Heraclitus's "Logos in the flux". Eliot firstly elaborates both of them, then introduces his own knowledge of timelessness and stillness. Hence, this is the general norm throughout the whole poem. An extract from the poem states that:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is
only living
Can only die. Words, after
speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the
form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar
still
Moves perpetually in its
stillness. (121)

Another extract states that:

As in the figure of the ten
stairs.

Desire itself is movement

Not in itself desirable;

Love is itself unmoving,

Only the cause and the end of
movement,

Timeless and undesiring

Except in the aspect of time

Caught in the form of
limitation

Between Un-being and being.

(122)

It is clearly apparent that Eliot's image of "the still point in the turning world" is a mystical one. Thus, searching through the general mystical tradition within which Eliot has worked, we can explain his definition of the "mystical illumination" as being "a vision which may be

accompanied by the realization that you will never be able to communicate it to anyone else, or even by the realization that when it is past you will not be able to recall it yourself" (*The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, 145). In practice, Eliot, in his *Four Quartets*, tries to express the vision that he was encountered through a mystical experience in his own poetic words. According to him, the only satisfying medium to express the inexpressible and to communicate the incommunicable is music. Throughout his poetic career, he paid great attention to the relation between poetry and music; as a result, he learnt to manipulate poetry by assimilating it to music. For Underhill, "of all arts music alone shares with great mystical literature the power of waking in us a response to the life-movement of the universe: bring

us – we know not how – news of its exultant passions and its incomparable peace. Beethoven heard the very voice of Reality, and little of it escaped when he translated it for our ears" (2012, 76-77). Eliot, too, heard and saw Reality, and little of it escaped when he translated it for our ears and eyes.

According to Eliot, the music of poetry does not exist apart from the poem's meaning which makes him able to express the mystical inexpressible and incommunicable visions in his poem. He insists "that 'a musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of he secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one" ("The Music of Poetry", 113). As a matter of fact, the final product of such indissolubility of

music and poetry is musical imagination or the music of imagery. Murray states that: "in the case of his short lyric, the poetry and mysticism have undoubtedly become one thing. There is no interruption between the surface beauty and the inner core of meaning. And this has been achieved by the subtle grace and brilliance of 'the music of imagery'" (21). He states that: "I know that a poem ... my tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself" ("The Music of Poetry", 114). In other words, Eliot believes that the poem's rhythm (its musical pattern) may precede its actual composition in words (its wording pattern).

For Eliot, poetry is mainly a consideration of words. Words in poetry, like notes in music, should have their meaning only in relation to each other. But since poetry and music are temporal arts, and so are words and music, they "move", thus they exist "only in time": even their life is a continual death, and also their "speech" leads to "silence". It is only within a form, within a pattern, within a poem, within a quartet, that the life of poetry or music, of that of words and notes, can be preserved, hence the word can only reach its "stillness" through its relation with other words in the poem. Eliot stresses that this should be the nature of poetry as it is already the nature of Beethoven's music. It is through mystical illumination that Eliot succeeds in manipulating music in order to be able to clearly render the mystical message. Eliot

clarifies that an image may have multiple meanings individually, but its full meaning can only be reached when it is mysteriously fused with other images. Thus the poem may contain transitions of meaning similar to those which occur in a symphony or a musical quartet. According to Gardner, "one is constantly reminded of music by the treatment of images, which recur with constant modifications, from their context, or from their combination with recurring images, as a phrase recurs with modifications in music" (48).

Broadly speaking, Eliot's *Four Quartets* is one of the most interesting examples of manipulating the musical medium in order to express the inexpressible mystical experience. In spite of its purely musical title as well as musical pattern, the

Four Quartets has nothing to do with music. The poem, like its name, consists of four quartets: "Burnt Norton", "East Coker", "The Dry Salvages", and "Little Gidding", and each is composed of five movements, as if in a symphony. Neither the title of the poem nor the titles of its four quartets have anything to do with its subjects since the poem, according to Eliot, resists interpretation and identification.

Every quartet refers to a particular place and a particular time for Eliot, affirming his belief that it is through the attachment to a particular place and time that man can transcend temporal life in order to find meaning. In fact, the *Four Quartets* is distinguished by Eliot's application of Heraclitus's emphasis on seasons, so every quartet represents one of the four seasons and one of the four

component elements of nature. Hence, each quartet corresponds to a phase of Eliot's spiritual development. For instance, "Burnt Norton" represents early spring, air, it refers to an old estate in England where Eliot went through a mystical experience in rose garden, it is an empirical space and time where his spiritual mediation begins. "East Coker" represents late summer, earth, it refers to the village of East Coker, site of Eliot's ancestral home. It indicates the historical dimension of the entire poem as it is the place where the sixteenth century humanist Sir Thomas Elyot lived, who was mainly concerned with keeping the spiritual language alive. "Dry Salvages" represents autumn, water, it refers to a rocky shoreline in the United States of America that implies the shift of the scene from England to the

United States of America, it is not only an immigration of the body from one place to another but also an immigration of the soul from community to isolation, which permits a deeper phase of spiritual contemplation, "Little Gidding" represents deep winter, fire, it refers to a place in England where the intersection of "timelessness and time" allows Eliot to reach a monastic finding. At the end of the poem, Eliot states that: "to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time". The final result of Eliot's spiritual mediation is that his purified soul has to return to its starting point in order to initiate a new beginning under a true light.

Eliot's *Four Quartets* is characterized by using two methods in its development of meaning: the first one is "the

presentation of concrete images and definite events, each of which is checked and passes over into another before it has developed far enough to stand meaningfully by itself" (Harding, 30). For instance, Eliot states in the fourth movement of "Burnt Norton":

Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property,
Desiccation of the world of
sense
Evacuation of the world of
fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of
spirit. (120)

If this strophe is isolated from the whole poem, it will be no more than a 'Nature Poem' which is only concerned with the mortality of anything that is temporal. Consequently, what gives this short lyric, with its terrible images

of death and darkness, a mystical resonance is the imagery of spiritual darkness in the preceding strophe of the third movement. Hence, this strophe cannot be read in isolation from the following strophe of the third movement:

Time and the bell have buried
the day,
The black cloud carries the sun
away.
Will the sunflower turns to us,
will the clematis
Stray down, bend to us; tendril
and spray
Clutch and cling ?
Chill
Fingers of yew be curled
Down on us ? After the
Kingfisher's wing
Has answered light to light,
and is silent, the light is still

At the still point of the turning
world. (121)

The second method brilliantly used by Eliot in the development of meaning of his *Four Quartets* is that of making “pseudo-statements”. According to Harding, “the complementary method is to make pseudo-statements in highly abstracts language, for the purpose, essentially, of putting forward and immediately rejecting ready-made concepts that might seem to approximate to the concept he is creating” (30). For instance, Eliot states in the fourth movement of “Burnt Norton”:

Neither from nor towards; at
the still point, there the dance
is,

But neither arrest nor
movement. And do not call it
fixity,

Where past and future are

gathered. Neither movement
from nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline.
Except for the point, the still
point,

There would be no dance, and
there is only the dance.

I can only say, there we have
been: but I cannot say where.
(119)

It is apparent that the form of mysticism adopted by Eliot is a mysticism of pseudo-statements. Thus, dealing with abstractions, manipulating associations and making pseudo-statements in order to express the inexpressible are the reasons that lie behind calling Eliot a meditative poet. However, abstractions, in Eliot’s meditations, are not mere abstractions, but have the same significance as images. The consciousness of the myth, according to Srivastava, is like a

cinema screen because he is able to fuse the abstract and the concrete, the idea and the image in order to make them one:

In a calm mood of meditative exploration thoughts emerge and float upon a mystic's consciousness as pictures upon the cinema screen, and his perceptive mind grasps them as concrete reality ... in a poetry of vision, the abstract is transformed into concrete images. (78)

It is extremely important to note that Eliot is completely aware that the mystical experience, brilliantly expressed in the *Four Quartets*, is the product of the unconsciousness as it is an inner experience that belongs to a state of spiritual feelings and at its end the vision suddenly comes "just in the way it has been felt or seen

without the obvious aid or interference of the analytical or reasoning mind" (Srivastava, 78). Moreover, Eliot's originality lies in his way of assimilating tradition – whether direct or indirect influences, documented or non-documented sources – in order to create a new whole. Eliot stresses that "the originality of the poet stems from his ability to assemble the most disparate and unlikely material to make a new whole" (*On Poetry and Poets*, 108).

In relation to the competence of the mystical poet in expressing the inexpressible, there are two nineteenth-century forgotten whose role tends to be poets in the context of Eliot's mysticism: William Butler Yeats and John Addington Symonds. In spite of the similarity of their status concerning Eliot, as both are his predecessors, they have different positions in terms of

nineteenth-century poetry: Yeats is considered to be one of the major poets of the nineteenth century, while Symonds is a minor one of the same period. It is important to note that Yeats is not forgotten in the same way as is the case with Symonds; it is only Yeats's use of myth and its relation to Eliot's works in general and the *Four Quartets* in particular that is forgotten. However, both of them constituted great sources of mysticism which are not sufficiently mentioned nor commented on in Eliot's works, especially the *Four Quartets*.

Concerning Yeats, Eliot affirmed in many occasions that early works by Yeats had not influenced his own; however he concedes Yeats's greatest significance as a poet for British and American younger poets, saying that:

His [Yeats's] idiom was too different for there for there to be any danger of imitation, his opinions too different to flatter and confirm their prejudices. It was good for them to have the spectacle of an unquestionably great living poet, whose style they were not tempted to echo and whose ideas opposite those in vague among them. You will not see, I think in their writing, more than passing evidences of the impression he made, but the work, and the man himself as poet, have been of greatest significance to them for all that. ("Yeats", 249)

However, the later works of Yeats engendered an extremely different attitude. The poetry of the older poet made Eliot very enthusiastic about "the secret of

his ability after becoming unquestionably the master, to remain always a contemporary” (“Yeats” 249). Of course it is Yeats’s maturity, not only as a poet, but also as a man, that enables Eliot to regard him as a contemporary poet rather than a predecessor. For Eliot, it is the later works of Yeats that represent his ability to “express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol” (251) that constitute his universality as a poet. As a matter of fact, it is not his later works which constitute his universality but his earlier experiences which caused the intensity of his later works.

Generally speaking, the main characteristic of Yeats’s universality which greatly attracted Eliot is Yeats’s use of myth. It is important to clarify that

the question of myth in the *Four Quartets* in general did not attract any serious attention among Eliot’s readers and critics. For instance, Gardner expresses his own view that “the thematic material [of the poem] is not an idea or a myth”. She further gives the implication that the poem, unlike *The Waste Land*, does not depend on a myth “to which constant reference can be made” but rather depends for its coherence on “certain common symbols”: the four elements of mortal life which are air, earth, water, and fire. Moreover, “some have thought that there is a fifth element, unnamed but latent in all things: the quintessence, the true principle of life, and that this unnamed principle is the subject of the whole poem” (*The Art of T.S. Eliot*, 44-45). Stressing the existence of myth in the *Four*

Quartets, it can be concluded that the poem is in itself a myth; and to be more illuminating, it is a myth that explains the story of death, *the quintessence that is latent in all things* which Gardner refers to as the fifth element of mortal life.

The main reason that lies behind excluding the question of myth while dealing with the *Four Quartets* is that the musical imagination as well as the intense philosophical and religious strains employed by Eliot within the fabric of the poem leave no room for its readers to realize its underlying myth. Another important reason is that Eliot, during the composition of the poem, intended to make the use of myth ambiguous. Murray states that: "when Eliot came to write *Four Quartets*, he had no desire whatsoever to set over against the

present age, and its horror, a romantically conceived image of the classical past. And for this reason his use of the mystical method in the poem takes a much more discreet form" (203).

To begin with, Eliot introduces his own idea of the myth through contrasting Yeats's two methods of handling the myth. In his essay "Eats", Eliot hints at the external method of Yeats's earlier works in which "legendary heroes and heroines" are shown "with the respect that we pay to legend, as creatures of a different world from ours". And the *internal* method of Yeats's later works in which the mythical characters "are universal men and women". As a matter of fact, according to Eliot, it is in Yeats's later works that his internal method of handling the myth reaches the peak of its

maturity, as "the myth is not presented for its own sake, but as a vehicle for a situation of universal meaning" (256).

It is worth noting that Eliot believed myth to be a poet's inescapable duty ever since he first discovered this internal method in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. Confessing his admiration of this novel, Eliot states in his essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth" that:

It is a book to which we are all indebted, and from which none of us can escape ... It is here that Mr. Joyce's parallel use of the *Odyssey* has a great importance ... In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be

imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. (176-177)

For Eliot, the universality of Yeats is twofold: firstly, the way he dealt with the myth as an expression of a universal meaning; secondly, the way that works can be seen as a poetic restatement of the vision that he expressed in his earlier works. In other words, Yeats remains a contemporary poet because of his ability to retain the particularities of his previous experiences into universal symbols. By the same token, the early works of Eliot up to *The Waste Land* are

mainly concerned with the description and interpretation of his contemporary world which can be depicted as an empty world that is void of any sign of life; it is almost a waste land. In his later works, particularly the *Four Quartets*, Eliot depicts the same vision but with some deliberate modifications. As the waste land still hovers in the scene but it is accompanied by a deep desire to seek a way out of that worldly realm which prevails over his early works.

It is important to note that mystics, in general, are aware that there is a far-reaching dimension in which they are experiencing a certain perception that enables them to transfer sadness into joy, materialism into spirituality, the waste land into the desired paradise. Hence, the mystical experience is a basically a figurative journey which

will lead through mediation to the sought-after peaceful end. Eliot's the *Four Quartets*, Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium", and Symonds's "An Invocation" are illustrative examples of such mystical experience. Marion Glasscoe elaborates that:

Mystics are overwhelmed by a consciousness that there is a dimension beyond that of time, experiences of which brings such certainty of fulfilling joy, such transfiguring of the material order, that the only possible priorities for existence in time can be to find a way of life that will allow access to that dimension. (4)

In general, Eliot, in the majority of his works, always makes a parallel between the world of myth and the world of his own personal experience. Also, Eliot is mostly

affected by the central vision of the similarity of the old myths and the Christian story whose dominant theme is that of death and rebirth. Hence, Eliot stresses the similarity of the experiences of human life in the modern world: that is, what happens to somebody has the same meaning as what happens to another if the circumstances are similar.

The most interesting common feature among Eliot's the *Four Quartets*, Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium", and Symonds's "An Invocation" is that all of them are written by old men. Being the utterances of old men at the point of approaching death, those poems represent a mode of thinking, which is a mystical experience that is mostly appropriate to old age. For instance, Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" begins with:

That is no country for old men.

The young

In one another's arms, birds in
the trees

– Those dying generations – at
their song,

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-
crowded seas,

Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend
all summer long

Whatever is begotten, born,
and dies.

Caught in that sensual music
all neglect

Monuments of unageing
intellect. (163)

Yeats is mainly concerned in this poem with the passage of time and how man can become eternal as he expresses his fears about aging and becoming neglected. The main theme of the poem is the natural human / animal condition,

which is that we are born, we live, and then we die. Yeats seeks a way out of this natural human / animal condition where he will be able to join the monuments of history in order to live on forever. He chooses Byzantium, which is present-day Istanbul, because of its rich history and monuments dedicated to the past. Through becoming a monument, Yeats aims at changing the natural human condition through challenging death.

From the first line of the poem, Yeats expresses his fears of death stating that there is no place or “no country” for the old because the young are the power of life. Throughout the poem, Yeats expresses his dissatisfaction with the cruelty of the natural cycle of life as well as his striving to achieve immortality through transmutation

into a work of art or “monument”. Experiencing the brutality of old age with its natural deterioration of the human body, as Yeats wrote this poem around the age of sixty, the whole poem is overwhelmed with the excessive desire for spiritual rebirth through the fusion of the human spirit and art.

In spite of depicting a scene of cheerful romanticism and delightful love where the young lovers are “in one another’s arms” and “birds in the tree” are singing “their song”, Yeats intentionally includes the theme of death in “those dying generation”. Moreover, Yeats provides a series of nature images like “birds” which refers to the freedom and independence of the young; “the salmon falls” indicates the short life of salmon which revolves around reproduction, their beginning and their end; “the

mackerel-crowded seas” elaborates that a female mackerel can lay up to one million eggs at a time which illustrates the fact that while the male salmon ends its life after laying its eggs, the female mackerel reproduces life to million young salmons and mackerels. Once again, Yeats refers to the two faces of life: birth and death in order to stress the natural cycle of life. For Yeats, everything that is born, whether it is fish, human, or bird, must die as it is the nature of life.

It is worthy to note that this poem was published in 1928, which was the high point of the modernist literary movement that partially emerged as a result of the devastating losses and destructive tragedies of the First World War. The whole world had witnessed a catastrophic change at all its levels, since everyone felt the bitterness of losing somebody he

knew in the war. Dissillusioned by the unconscious violence and futility of the war, a generation of young men and women who came back from the battlefields became cynical about the state of their society. Consequently, a group of early twentieth-century thinkers and modernist writers was known as “The Lost Generation”. Yeats’s use of the phrase “Those dying generations” in the third line is particularly evocative as it implies a reference to those “Lost Generation”.

In the last two lines of this stanza, Yeats makes a comparison between the young and the old through describing how the young indulge in the temporal moment of life “caught in that sensual music” to the point that they neglect to think about immortal things like “monuments”. Moreover, it is a comparison between the “sensual”

and the “intellect”, that is the temporal bodily joyfulness and the immortal mental thinking. Thus, it is not only a comparison between the young and the old, but also a comparison between the temporality of life, stressed by using the word “sensual” and the immortality of art, stressed by using the word “unageing”. Yeats seeks to challenge death in order to achieve the immortality of the spiritual rebirth that can take place only through the fusion between the human soul and the work of art.

By the same token, the following extract from Eliot’s “East Coker” expresses a similar conception about the temporality of life and the presence of death as follows:

In my beginning is my end. In
succession

Houses rise and fall, crumble,
are extended,

Are removed, destroyed,
restored, or in their place

Is an open field, or a factory, or
a by-pass.

Old stone to new building, old
timber to new fire,

Old fires to ashes, ashes to the
earth

Which is already flesh, fur and
faeces,

Bones of man and beast,
cornstalk and leaf.

Houses live and die (12).

As a matter of fact, Eliot prefaces his *Four Quartets* with the words of Heraclitus: “The way up and the way down are the same”. This quotation highlights Eliot’s concern with naturalistic determinism which stresses that every construction is followed by destruction; every creation is followed by demolition. In a

similar way, Eliot opens the first section of "East Coker" with the eloquent paradox "In my beginning is my end". Here lies the foundation of Eliot's notion of determinism, that is similar to Yeats's natural human condition, which suggests that a man's life and death has been determined since the time of his birth. In the act of coming into the world, man is resigned merely to enact what has already been planned for him. As a modernist poet, Eliot uses the phrase "In the beginning is my end" to emphasize a nihilistic as well as a spiritual meaning for the beginning which anticipates and ending, a pre-figuration of death and destruction. Hence, the theme of death is present in Eliot's poem from its first line, just like that of Yeats.

Overwhelmed with mystical language and Christian symbolism,

"East Coker" is the most explicitly Christian of the Four Quartets. In addition, it is considered to be the most extended and direct mediation on Eliot's poetic career. Also, it includes the most direct speech about the war, particularly in its pessimistic visions of destruction. In general, Eliot focuses on the natural cycle of decay and renewal. He goes on to describe the construction-destruction cycle of houses, which does not only indicate the outside buildings of the houses but also the tenants inside house houses. Thus, as soon as a house falls along with its tenants, new houses and new tenants replace them. By the same token, as soon as a generation falls, a new one replaces it. Such paraphrase suggests the similarity between the two poems as both of them imply a reference to "The Lost Generation". Moreover, Eliot

stresses the continuity between generations, which indicates the continuity of life itself as represented by the eternal cycle of creation-destruction throughout time, which is synonymous with change. Hence, the central image of Eliot's visionary experience, similar to that of Yeats's, is the temporality of life as it is subject to a constant change throughout time and the presence of death whether in the existing object (house) or living subject (man).

In addition, the phrase "flesh, fur and faeces" echoes Yeats's "Fish, flesh, or fowl"; while the former indicates every element of a living creature, the latter refers to every kind of living creatures. However, both of them are doomed to death since their life, according to Eliot as well as Yeats, is temporal. Also, Eliot

imitates Yeats's presentation of the human/animal natural condition of life and death, as he states that "Bone of man and beast". Eliot, moreover, adds the vegetable element to his catalogue of the natural condition of life and death by stating "cornstalk and leaf" which are also doomed to death. According to both of them, with a particular consideration to their ages while writing those two poems, the existence of death in every living creature, whether it is human, or animal, or plant, or even object as house for Eliot, is due to the temporality of life.

The poem is full of Biblical references and religious allusions. For instance, the opening line "In my beginning is my end", in spite of using the possessive pronoun "my", Eliot does not speak about himself but about everyman. In fact, this

line echoes the first words of Genesis: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" which is, according to Christianity, everyone's beginning. Connecting the beginning with the end in the same line indicates the eternal circle of life and death, as every beginning refers to an end and every end implies another new beginning, hence the continuity of life. Moreover, Eliot's eternal cycle of creation-destruction implies the Biblical reference "ashes to ashes, dust to dust", that is, the inevitability of death.

On the same track, Eliot's scene of the dancing newlyweds in the following extract is similar to that of Yeats. Eliot states that:

In that open field

If you do not come too close, if
you do not come too close,

On a summer midnight, you

can hear the music

Of the weak pipe and the little
drum

And see them dancing around
the bonfire

The association of man and
woman

In daunsinge, signifying
matrimonie

A dignified and commodious
sacrament

Two and two,
necessaryeconiunction,

Holding eche other by the hand
or the arm

Whichebetokenethconcorde.

Round and round the fire

Leaping through the flames, or
joined in circles,

Rustically solemn or in rustic
laughter

Lifting heavy feet in clumsy

shoes,
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in
country mirth
Mirth of those long since under
earth
Nourishing the corn. Keeping
time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living seasons
The time of the seasons and the
constellations
The time of milking and the
time of harvest
The time of coupling of man
and woman
And that of beasts. Feet rising
and falling
Eating and drinking. Dung and
death. (124-9)

Generally speaking, Eliot's
"East Coker" includes, throughout

the poem, an affirmation of both
time and place. "East Coker" is
mainly associated with Eliot's
ancestral home, a symbol of many
of his personal memories. Eliot,
like Yeats, stresses time through
representing the intersection of its
two aspects: temporality and
eternity/physical and spiritual/life
and death as the existence of each
depends chiefly on the other. Since
it is summer the scene takes place
outside East Coker in a nearby
"open field" where Eliot depicts
the religious rituals of an ancient
marriage celebration. Eliot
emphasizes ancient time and
setting through using older
spelling of some words like
"matrimonie" for matrimony and
"coniunction" for conjunction.
Thus, Eliot expresses his deep
appreciation of tradition which
connects the past to the present to
the future that leads to the

continuity of the fabric of life.

The title of the poem, with its glowing reference to music, constitutes a perfect complement with its central metaphor of dance since each of them is harmoniously dependent on the other. Throughout their poems, Yeats and Eliot stress the importance of music as a sign of the temporality of life which they brilliantly turned into an eternal element. In contrast to the metaphor of wheel used in the first Quartet "Burnt Norton" to symbolize stillness, Eliot uses the metaphor of dance which indicates movement in "East Coker", however each of them is complementary to the other. Moreover, dance, for Eliot, is a highly structured activity in which the movement of every individual is closely connected to that of the other and highly harmonious with the music in order to represent

beauty and so propose a meaning for human existence. Hence, the metaphor of dance, for Eliot, symbolizes order, union, harmony, beauty, and meaning. In other words, the main aim of using the metaphor of dance in the "East Coker", for Eliot, is an attempt to move outside our present-day modern, chaotic, individual, disharmonious, ugly, and meaningless universe in order to create a world that represents tradition, order, unity, harmony, beauty, and meaning. "Dancing" for Eliot is synonymous to transforming into "monuments" for Yeats since both of them are illuminating acts that transcend the temporality of life in favour of eternity and immortality.

In spite of the fact that dance is an earthly and temporal act, Eliot uses dance as a transcendent act in order to reach an eternal purpose:

such an interpretation is stressed by his last line "Dung and death". As the opening line of the "East Coker" suggests "In my beginning is my end", also in the Newlyweds' beginning is their end, and the end of their dancing is "dung and death". The new fire becomes an old one as it turns into ashes which is mixed with the dust of the earth that already consists of "flesh, fur and faeces". Just like the dancers circulating around the fire, the physical world is circulated around eternity. Dance, for Eliot, symbolizes the eternal dance since it represents joyous freedom and unbridled movement. Thus, dance here is not an expression of personal liberty but of death as stressed by the leaping through the fire in "Leaping through the flame". The newlyweds are dancing around and leaping through the fire which

symbolizes the circle of life since the human being, in fact, is nothing but a body that is decaying through time then buried into the earth. Once again, death exists within the cheerful features of life. Similar to Yeats, Eliot brilliantly situates the theme of death in the joyful scene of dancing.

From the mystical point of view, Eliot, like Yeats, is aware of modern man's dilemma which can be summarized in the alienation, emptiness, and meaninglessness of his present-day world. Both of them are conscious of the destructive features of the tragic movement of modernism. As a matter of fact, Eliot does not only consciously convey the problem of the modern man, but he also finds a brilliant solution for it. The reason that lies behind the difficulty of Eliot as a poet and the complexity of the *Four*

Quartets as a poem is that Eliot's mystical solution transcends intellectual understanding. The mystical solution for modern man is, for Eliot, to attempt to transcend the temporal dimension of the world in order to follow the mystical path which allows his soul to be in a mystical union with God in order to find order, unity, harmony, beauty, and meaning. For Yeats, the mystical solution is to transform oneself into a work of art or "monument" in order to transcend the temporality of life and achieve immortality. According to Eliot, the mystical illumination is the act of dancing; for instance, the act of dancing is an intimate connection since the dancer is usually accompanied by other dancers as opposed to the individual alienated modern world; also, the act of dancing implies a joyful celebration which resulted from the mystical

union between the human soul and God, and also from following its order as opposed to the disharmonious meaningless chaotic modern world. While Yeats suggests that the fusion of the human spirit with art enables man to transcend the temporality of life and achieve the immortality of art, Eliot declares that the union between the human soul and God enables man to transcend the temporal dimension of life and find meaning in the meaningless world. To sum up, Eliot's use of paradox in an intensive way throughout the poem aims at conveying the ultimate truth, that man must transcend the temporal world in order to discover the eternal purpose of life. Hence, the spiritual purpose of life, that is, its meaning, can only be found through the abstract philosophical mediation.

Concerning Symonds, he directly

states his mystical dimension from the opening line of his “an Invocation” edited in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* as follows:

To God, the everlasting, who
abides,

One Life within things infinite
that die:

To Him whose unity no
thought divides:

Whose breath is breathed
through immensity.

Him neither eye hath seen, nor
ear hath heard;

Nor reason, seated in the souls
of men,

Though pondering oft on the
mysterious word,

Hath e’er revealed His Being
to mortal ken.

Earth changes, and the starry

wheels roll round,

The seasons come and go,
moons wax and wane;

The nations rise and fall, and
fill the ground,

Storing the sure results of joy
and pain.

Slow knowledge widens
toward a perfect whole,

From that first man who named
the name of heaven,

To him who weighs the planets
as they roll,

And knows what laws to every
life are given. (307)

In the first stanza, Symonds unequivocally declares that this poem is mainly devoted to God; it seems like a supplication to Him. Then he makes a comparison between God, “the everlasting, who abides”, “whose unity no

thought divides”, and “Whose breath is breathed through immensity”, and the countless number of living things which are doomed to die. As a matter of fact, it is a comparison between the temporality of life and the immortality of God. Similar to Eliot, Symonds aims to transcend the temporal dimension of life that is elaborated in the inevitability of death of every living creature through being in an indissoluble mystical union in order to reach immortality. Also, like Eliot, Symonds includes the theme of death in his wonderful spiritual description of God.

In the second stanza, Symonds confirms the spiritual faith in God, Who occupies a particular place in “the souls of men” in spite of the impossibility of seeing or hearing Him or even having a reason for believing in Him. Moreover,

Symonds asserts that man is always thinking of God despite. His invisible nature which has been enhanced by using “the mysterious word”, that refers to “God” Who is always mentioned by all living creatures, in order to highlight God’s mystical/ mysterious/ambiguous nature. In fact, the intensifies the comparison of the first stanza by juxtaposing the word “mortal” that represents the temporal nature of any living creature with the word “ken” that indicates the limited knowledge or comprehension of any living creature including man in comparison to the immortal nature and limitless knowledge of Go. In brief, Symonds makes a comparison between the sensual world of any living creature and the spiritual world of God. It is obvious that Symonds, like Eliot, transcends the sensual world in order to reach the spiritual world of God.

In the third stanza, Symonds, in

a way similar to that used by Eliot, situates the themes of time and death into his poem. By including the theme of time, Symonds wants to affirm the changeable nature of everything in our temporal life throughout time. As a matter of fact, Symonds's "The Seasons come and go, moons wax and wane / The nation rise and fall" echoes Eliot's "Houses rise and fall", "Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires", and "Houses live and die". Both of them intentionally include the two extremes of many elements of our temporal world. By including the theme of death, Symonds, as an old poet, like Eliot and Yeats, wants to stress the inevitability of death, and by turn the temporality of life. Moreover, Symonds clarifies the two inevitable faces of the temporal life of all human beings which are "joy and pain".

According to Symonds, as he states in the fourth stanza, man should widen the scope of his knowledge from "that first man" who lived on earth, Adam, to our Perfect God Who "knows what laws to every life are given". Hence, he wants man to transcend the temporality of life in order to regard the immortality of God and, by turn, to transcend life to consider the inevitability of death, that is, every life is doomed to death, or as Eliot states, every beginning suggests an end: "In my beginning is my end".

On the same track, Symonds goes on numbering the main characteristics of God as follows:

And we yearn toward Him.
Beauty, Goodness, Truth;

These three are one; one life,
one thought, one being;

One source of still rejuvenescent

youth;
One light for endless and
unclouded seeing.
More symbols we perceive –
the dying beauty,
The partial truth that few can
comprehend,
The vacillating faith, the
painful duty,
The virtue labouring to a
dubious end. (308)

Symonds follows his comparison as shown in the above stanzas between: those who enjoy the mystical union with God (shown in the former stanza) and those who do not (shown in the latter). While the former group enjoys yearning towards God and regards Him the source of beauty, goodness, truth, youth, and light, the latter one feels life as “the dying beauty”, “the partial truth”,

“the vacillating faith”, and “the painful duty”. While the former group can clearly recognize the path of their life because they consider God to be the source of light and so their seeing is “endless and unclouded”, the latter one cannot see beauty or truth in life because of their “vacillating faith” towards “a dubious end”. For Symonds, as for Eliot, the mystical union with God enables man to realize beauty, goodness, and truth; otherwise he cannot but see “the dying beauty” and “the partial truth”.

Generally speaking, the theme of death weighs heavily upon the minds of the three poets, which is due to the fact that they were quite old while writing those poems. For instance, Eliot indicates in the last movement of “East Coker” that:

Home is where one starts from.

As we grow older
The world becomes stranger,
the pattern more complicated
Of dead and living. Not the
intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after
But a lifetime burning in every
moment
And not the lifetime of one
man only
But old stones that cannot be
deciphered.
There is a time for the evening
under starlight
A time for the evening under
the lamplight
(The evening with the
photograph album)
Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to
matter

Old men ought to be explorers
Here or there does not matter
We must be still and still
moving
Into another intensity
For further union, a deeper
communion
Through the dark cold and the
empty desolation
The wave cry, the wind cry,
the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise.
In my end is my beginning.
(129)

The last stanza of Eliot's "East
Coker" brings the poem full circle.
While "Home is where one starts
from", home is where we want to
return. Old men, like him, are
living, in complete isolation, in a
strange complicated world without
any past or future like old stones.

The life of those old men is insignificant as represented in no “intense moment” also their life is meaningless, represented in “cannot be deciphered”. Eliot, throughout the poem, asserts the fact that he is an old man which has been emphasized by the repetition of the word “evening” three times in this stanza declaring the frequent attempts of old men to look for their future, represented in “starlight” and “lamplight”, which ends up with returning to their past, represented in “photograph album”.

In spite of the bleak image drawn by Eliot of those old men, as represented in “the dark cold and the empty desolation”, they should find a way out of such darkness, coldness, emptiness, and desolation. Eliot suggests that through mediation, represented in “We must be still and still moving”, old men can find their

mystical path through transcending the temporal dimensions of the world in order to allow the soul to be in a mystical union with God, as represented by “Into another intensity / For further union and deeper communion”, in order to find meaning in their meaningless life. Eliot’s “East Coker” ends with an inversion of its opening line “In my end is my beginning” which suggests the ending of the temporal life and the beginning of the eternal life after death. Eliot’s spiritual / mystical journey ends with the fusion of the end and the beginning: the moment of mystical illumination that is brilliantly achieved when all the contradictory elements of life are reconciled.

To sum up, “East Coker” begins with the life’s cycle and its relation to earth: in the first section, the houses rise using earth-made products then they fall

back to earth; man rises obtaining his main nutrition from earth then he dies, returning to earth; the second section ends with "The dancers all gone under hill" as those living dancers go back to earth; also the various lords, in the third section, go back to earth; in the fourth section the earth is transformed into a hospital where Christ performs certain operations on human souls; and Eliot, in the last section, contemplates the earth as shown in reversing the opening line "In my end is my beginning" indicating that earth is the place from which life begins and it is also the place to which life ends. For Eliot, earth is the ultimate reality that symbolizes the mystical circle of life and death.

While he uses a different metaphor, Yeats deals with much the same themes. Yeats laments

his old age in the second stanza of his "sailing to Byzantium" as follows:

An aged man is but a partly
thing,

An tattered coat upon a stick,
unless

Soul clap its hands and sing,
and louder sing

For every tatter in its mortal
dress,

Nor is there singing school but
studying

Monuments of its own
magnificence;

And therefore I have sailed the
seas and come

To the holy city of Byzantium.
(163)

Yeats starts his stanza by showing the insignificance, represented in "a partly thing" and

“tattered coat”, and the weakness, of an aged man who is not able to walk without “a stick”. However, there is still a hope for that aged man to achieve immortality through becoming a monument, thus Yeats urges the aged man to loudly sing the song of his history in order to be heard by everyone. Every experience that he went through, “every tatter”, has a certain significance in his temporal life, “mortal dress”. For Yeats, the only place that represents history, also the only place where he can realize the mystical union between his human soul and art, is Byzantium, since in Byzantium, monuments are the true representations of history. The mystical illumination, for Yeats, can only be achieved through the mystical union between the human soul and art in order to transcend the mortality of life and reach the

immortality of art.

Yeats goes on to describe his dying body and his immortal soul in his third and fourth stanzas as follows:

O sages standing in God’s holy
fire

As in the gold mosaic of a
wall,

Come from the holy fire, perne
in a gyre,

And be the singing-masters of
my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick
with desire

And fastened to a dying animal

It knows not what it is; and
gather me

Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall
never take

My bodily form from any

natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian
goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold
enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to
sing
To lords and ladies of
Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or
to come. (163-64)

In the third stanza, Yeats is appealing to the immortal Saints of God, “sages”, to sing his history, as he wants them to end his mortal life, represented in “Consume my heart away; sick with desire”, in order to begin his immortal one, as represented in “gather me / Into the artifice of eternity”, as he wants the sages to transform him into a work of art in

order to be eternal. In the fourth stanza, Yeats illustrates that he wants to be one of the immortal golden birds in the Emperor’s palace at Byzantium which are singing all the time in order to keep the Emperor awake so he can be a part of the Emperor’s history. It is apparent that Yeats’ main goal is to become immortal through the past, the present, and the future, as represented in the last line of the poem, by his own work of art including this poem “sailing to Byzantium”.

Similarly, Symonds laments his lost “rejuvenescent youth”, and dying body, as represented in “dying beauty”, however, he finds salvation in his mystical union with God Who, according to Symonds, is the source of youth:

And we yearn toward Him.
Beauty, Goodness, Truth;

These three are one; one life,
one thought, one being;

One source of still rejuvenescent
youth;

One light for endless and
unclouded seeing.

Mere symbols we perceive –
the dying beauty,

The partial truth that few can
comprehend,

The vacillating faith, the painful
duty,

The virtue labouring to a
dubious end.

To recapitulate, the variety of influences and sources used by Eliot refers mainly to the depth of his knowledge of his near and far predecessors. According to McGrath, Eliot's work "makes severe demands of its readers, particularly with its at times ostentatious parade of classical

learning" (690). Some critics argue that Eliot's classical knowledge goes to even "the origins of our most essential philosophical and religious concepts ... of pre-history" David Ward states, since "Eliot was surely interested in the survival value of the idea, in the way in which its persistence seems to show that it satisfies some deep need" (59) for him. Of course, the main aim of Eliot's considerable borrowings from religious and mystical tradition is his deep desire to gain universality. As a matter of fact, whether those borrowings are conscious or unconscious, Eliot develops them into a new whole. Eliot declares his own conviction that "the originality of the poet stems from his ability to assemble the most disparate and unlikely material to make a new whole" (*On Poetry and Poets*, 108).

Conclusion

To recapitulate, the variety of influences and sources used by Eliot refers mainly to the depth of his knowledge of his near and far predecessors. According to McGrath, Eliot's work "makes severe demands of its readers, particularly with its at time ostentatious parade of classical learning" (690). Some critics argue that Eliot's classical knowledge goes far to even "the origins of our most essential philosophical and religious concepts ... of pre-history" David Ward states, since "Eliot was surely interested in the survival value of the idea, in the way in which its persistence seems to show that it satisfies some deep need" (59) for him. Of course, the main aim of Eliot's considerable borrowings from religious and

mystical traditions is his deep desire to gain universality. As a matter of fact, whether those borrowings are conscious or unconscious, Eliot mentioned them in order to develop them into a new whole. Since Eliot declare his own conviction that "the originality of the poet stems from his ability to assemble the most disparate and unlikely material to make a new whole" (*On Poetry and Poets*, 108).

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