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## **Introduction**

This thesis examines from a comparative perspective, the national and international dimensions in the works of two American-born Modernist poets, Thomas Stearns Eliot, and Wallace Stevens. These contemporaries wrote approximately at a similar, and particular time in the history of the United States, the beginning of the Twentieth-Century, a period known for the drastic changes it witnessed, on the social and economic plane, on the one hand, and for the emergence of a new literary movement, Modernism, on the artistic and cultural level, on the other hand. Therefore, it seems noteworthy to stress the general intellectual climate of the teens and early twenties in the United States, and Europe, and to observe that Eliot became famous at the first two decades of the Twentieth-century while Stevens alone had to wait other twenty years to gain notoriety. Moreover, one should underline that although the U.S had been leading the Western world since the beginning of the Twentieth- Century, and had become an international hegemon, imposing its economic, and political domination on the four continents, the interwar period was a time of strong cultural anxiety, engendered by the paucity of art in America, in general, and the absence of a pure American literary tradition, in particular. As a response, various notions of American cultural identity developed, reacting to the inferiority complex that many American intellectuals felt towards Europeans.

Writers and social critics, Americans and Europeans, both fraught and frustrated by the cultural void pervading the U.S.A. expressed their disappointment bitterly. Americanists, such as, Sinclair Lewis, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, H.L Mencken, Waldo Frank, James Oppenheim, Harold Stearns, and Gilmore Simms, sought to create a national literature, by striving to be distinctively American. Complaining about the “artlessness” of the American art,

James Gibbons Huneker remarked that the America of 1901 was “not bohemia,”<sup>1</sup> an artistic country, but “a land of bathtubs”.<sup>2</sup> To Ezra Pound, the United States was “a half-savage country, out of date”<sup>3</sup>. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp confirmed that “the only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges”. In fact, the lack of American art, principally due to the persisting American cultural dependence to Europe, and the hostile cultural climate still saturating the U.S.A. at the beginning of the Twentieth-Century could find plausible justifications in the functionalist approach adopted by the Americans, and rightly rationalized as early as 1780 by John Adams. In 1780, John Adams wrote to Abigail, his wife, a letter from Paris, in which he specified:

My Dear Portia,

I could fill volumes with Descriptions of Temples and Palaces, Paintings, Sculptures, Tapestry, Porcelains... if I could have time. But I could not do this without neglecting my duty... I must study Politics and War. That my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy, Geography, natural History, Naval Architectures, Navigation, Commerce and Agriculture, in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Music, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine.

In his article “The Artlessness of American Culture,” Dickran Tashjian explains that Adams advocated “deferred gratification not only for himself but for his progeny,”<sup>4</sup> because “his appreciation for the arts,”<sup>5</sup> and that of many other Americans of that time was “superseded by the need to exercise practical skills and knowledge to negotiate the

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1. James Gibbons Huneker, quoted in Marcus Cunliffe, *American Literature Since 1900* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 4.

2. Ibid.

3. Ezra Pound, quoted in Peter Faulkner, *Modernism* (New York: Routledge Revivals, 1991), 39.

4. Dickran Tashjian, “The Artlessness of American Culture,” ed. Luther S. Luedtke, *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 162.

5. Ibid

affairs of the world.”<sup>6</sup> Adam Smith’s argument for “deferred gratification” gave priority to the practical arts more serviceable in a society that had not yet securely established itself economically, and politically, as the time was not auspicious for the arts. Accordingly, the primacy went to basic knowledge consolidating and constructing the nation, not to its refinement.

In fact, although Americans gave precedence to the building of the nation, they, nevertheless, needed a national literature to help them form a national character, and provide them with required modes of thought and paradigms for reference. But the quest for “nationality” remained difficult, and there was disagreement about how American literature should grow. In addition, emulated Americans wanted to prove to themselves and to Europeans that the new nation was “civilized” and capable of producing poets, novelists, scholars and artists who could challenge or even surpass those of Europe.

Thus, among the suggestions offered amid this hot debate, two opposed groups, what Marcus Cunliffe labels in his article “The Conditions of An American Literature,” the ‘nationalists’ and the ‘universalists’ whose contrasting viewpoints diverged. The one worried because for them American literature lacked a national stamp, and consequently were determined to express the special character of the nation; the other felt that the call for a national literature was a mistake since a good literature was universal, always rising above time and place, and so could be, why not, based on European culture. Cunliffe explains:

The one endeavor, in itself emphasized a literature of America. The other, assuming that culture was universal and that America must ultimately be judged not according to its own rules but in the world-arena, postulated a level of polite culture that might or might not be specifically American in its outlook. The two needs co-existed, and competed, giving rise to a controversy that dragged on

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6. *ibid*

intermittently throughout the nineteenth century. The ‘nationalists’, including the Young America movement in the 1840s could be accused of chauvinism.

The ‘universalists’ could be accused of snobbishness and deference to Europe.<sup>7</sup>

The division between the two outlooks bears an essential significance for the reading of the poets I intend to study, for their categorization under either ‘nationalists’ or ‘universalists’ places them, already in opposite niches and determines their contradictory stances towards what one’s cultural identity, and national culture should be. So, why is it necessary to assemble two apparently different poets? Indeed, the association of Eliot’s classicism contrasting Stevens’s anticlassicism seems irrational because they have little or even nothing in common. First, their stylistic techniques, thematic concerns, and poetic reputations would suggest fairly important differences rather than similarities or affinities binding them. Second, since the main subject of this dissertation is to identify either the national or the universal aspects of each poet’s forms of poetry, elitist, or populist, it would be inappropriate therefore to associate poets who constitute polar extremes. The peculiarity of the grouping choice of the poets of this study may be clarified only by the following reasons.

One reason which may elucidate why Eliot and Stevens have not been thoroughly studied together and have been categorized as opposed poets is the dichotomy bred by the Twentieth-Century critics and their divide and rule strategy, what Andreas Huyssen calls “The Great Divide,” which tended then to divide Modernism into two binary oppositions: British / American Modernism; High brow/ Low brow Modernism; Classicist, Elitist/Populist Modernism, and Internationalist / Localist, Regionalist or Nationalist Modernism; or again Paleo-Modernism / Neo- Modernism.

This method of strong opposition is certainly a powerful polemical tool that critics have used for managing and controlling a discussion on a subject such as Modernism that is always

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7. Marcus Cunliffe, *American Literature*, 6.

complicated. It is also a judicious strategy for sharpening the understanding of the two trends of Modernism, and finding criteria for the classification of writers and poets in two distinct groups. But it also simplifies the relationship between the opposing poles. The too-stark oppositions render any reconciliation between the two almost impossible.

The gulf, then, separating Eliot and Stevens establishes a fundamental duality, which a twentieth-century critic, Philip Rahv has expressed as the division between the ‘paleface’ and the “redskin’ style in American literature. Before him and earlier in the century, the Spanish-American philosopher, George Santayana anticipated this notion of duality or clash between two value-systems ruling the American mind. In a famous lecture of 1911, Santayana explained: “One half of the American mind had remained slightly becalmed, it has floated gently in the backwater, while, alongside, in Invention and industry and social organization, the other half of the mind was leaping down a sort of Niagara Rapids.”<sup>8</sup>

For Cunliffe, one might therefore “visualize American culture as divided between two value-systems, set in rivalry against one another instead of in a complementary relationship, of elegance and roughness, experience and innocence, sophistication and spontaneity.”<sup>9</sup> He further suggests that “One way of dealing with the problem of this duality is to admit and to categorize the difference between an inchoate but powerful native impulse and a polished European mode”.<sup>10</sup>

As one can imagine, the greatest poetic contributions by Americans are two-fold, one following the “native impulse”, the other “the polished European mode” accordingly. The first is the extraordinary impetus given to modern poetry by the achievements of the “universalists”, Pound and Eliot who conceive of modern poetry as an extension of the Western

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8. George Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009),4.

9. Marcus Cunliffe, *American Literature* , 22.

10. *Ibid.*, 21.

tradition. Thus, exploiting “the polished European model”, they turned to the historical past of Europe or what Eliot calls “the mind of Europe” to initiate an internationalist poetics based mainly on European literary traditions, whether the classical Greek and Latin traditions, or the traditions of the Italian Renaissance, or again based on Oriental traditions, that of Confucius-era China or even Hinduism.

Even today, in the Twenty-First Century, and with the advent of Post-Modernism, our understanding of Modernism is still closely dependent upon Pound and Eliot, those literary significant figures, and American expatriates in Europe, who dominated the movement of Modernism, determined its reading and interpretation, and provided the paradigmatic examples of Modernist poetry of the established canon.

The second contribution to Modernist poetry is made explicit by another group of poets: those who followed “the native impulse”. Among them, we have Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and Stevens, who sought to disassociate their work from the ideological appeals to tradition made by Eliot and Pound. Yet Eliot’s and Pound’s reliance on established cultural traditions to validate their work represents, to the poets of the second division, too great a commitment to what is distant and abstract from the contemporary conditions of the modern era, in general, and modern America, in particular. Eliot’s dependence on tradition to reveal meaning and order for his contemporary era, and decidedly not in the immediate experience of the present, represents for Stevens, particularly, a failure to afford an appropriate uniqueness to the American modernist situation, and a strong argument for criticism.

As it appears most explicitly in his famous discussion of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and its use of the so-called “mythical method” (SP 178) Eliot explains that, Joyce’s method of using the classical story of the *Odyssey* to account of contemporary events “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” (SP 177). Therefore, Eliot, inspired by

Joyce's *Ulysses* makes also use of myth, Christian and Medieval to contrast, and juxtapose the religious Middle Ages with the secular alienated modern life, and offer by analogy to the stable and ordered religious traditional society a modern thoroughly reversed image of fragmentation, meaninglessness, and loss of faith. His relation to history, tradition, and Europe is quite different from that of Stevens who rejects the tradition of the past, for two essential reasons. First, it is European not American, and second it operates within a metaphysical world where God or gods are always omnipresent, and that Stevens 'secular poetry denies. So, even when Stevens uses myth, he does so for different motivations, and has to adapt it even to his own purposes. For this, he has to defamiliarize it to cope with obsolescence. This is, as a matter of evidence, the object of one of his poems on the subject, "The Man on the Dump".

The poem is an allegory that takes the reader little by little into the heart of the trash in an attempt to rediscover the reasons behind renewal and refreshment of the imagination any human culture and language need to survive. Stevens tells us that if we are constantly seeking new ways of understanding the world, we need to get rid of the old ones. The dump is the image of this: it is not a place of deposit, of trash, but a place of old poetry :

Day creeps down. The moon is creeping up.

The sun is a corbeil of flowers the moon Blanche

Places there, a bouquet. Ho-ho ...

The dump is full Of images.

Days pass like papers from a press.

The bouquets come here in the papers.

So the sun, And so the moon, both come, and the janitor's poems

Of every day, the wrapper on the can of pears,

The cat in the paper-bag, the corset, the box

From Esthonia: the tiger chest, for tea (WSCPP, 184).

If these lines suggest that Stevens celebrates consumption, desire, and sensual pleasure that make a certain kind of waste, he deals, in reality, with the problem of the past, of clichés, of old formulations which become obsolete with time, eventually a bouquet, and that you must necessarily throw out. Even though that the flowers become thrash and you have to throw them Stevens sees in them a potential perishable yet renewable because “one feels the purifying change” ; and therefore, you have the possibility to build the future from the past.

On the other hand, Williams’s evaluation of *The Waste Land* as a “great catastrophe to our letters,”<sup>11</sup> for it “gave the poem back to the academics,”<sup>12</sup> establishes Eliot’s position as the one against which not only Williams, but Stevens and the other poets of the second division would align their own work also. This is an important move away from what Williams saw as the Eurocentric academism of Eliot, and complained of it in his *Autobiography*: “ Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when we felt we were on the point of escaping into matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself- rooted in the locality which should give it fruit.”<sup>13</sup> Williams promotes the initiation of a nativist –modernist poetics celebrating the local American scene, and rooted in the American soil only, while Eliot, who praises the Italian Dante, the English John Donne, and the French Baudelaire as models, in his essays, extends his preoccupations to cover an international scene.

Frank Kermode’s clear-cut methodological formulation of the division of Modernism into Paleo-modernism and Neo-modernism in his essay “The Modern” may explain why Eliot and Stevens have neither been grouped nor studied together. Kermode proceeds by grouping writers and poets under two main, opposing, and contrasting polarities:

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11. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Neil Roberts, *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry* (New Jersey: Wiley’s son John, 2008), 21.

12. *Ibid.*

13. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Paul Mariani, *The Whole Harmonium: The Life of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 162

the Paleo-modernists, and the Neo-modernists. Hence, Paleo-modernism is the modernism of such classicist, elitist, and cosmopolitan writers as James Joyce, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, whereas Neo-Modernism is the modernism of William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Robert Frost, and Wallace Stevens, who sought to be typically American, local, and nativist, by striving to write “in the American Grain, as William Carlos Williams recommended, and resisted themselves any association with the first group.

In her essay "Pound / Stevens: Whose Era?" Marjorie Perloff also sheds light on the ways a poet is to be evaluated, and categorized, and, therefore, questions the criteria that determine the poet's appraisal, influence, legacy, innovation, and representativeness. She too, points out at the difficulty to define Modernism itself. Alike Kermode, she resorts to dividing authors into two distinctive, but contending groups who attempt to solve the problem, at least temporarily. Perloff explains judiciously how the definition of Modernism is narrowly dependent on whom one considers as the leading figure of the movement, and entirely restricted by his works, theory, and ideas. Perloff's pertinent remark on a poet's status, arbitrariness, and easy or misleading categorization points out at the risks of classification, affiliation, and taxonomy involved in the cramming and grouping of modernist writers. While wondering which poet best emblemizes a period, and debating such an ambivalent and misleading view, she illustrates through the example of two poets, Ezra Pound, and Wallace Stevens, how fleeting, diverse and opposed their classification and affiliation may be according to two groups of critics.

The first group of critics, led by Hugh Kenner, Donald Davie, Guy Davenport, and Christine Brooke-Rose places Ezra Pound as the iconic figure of all modernist poetry and dismisses Stevens, positioning him to a lesser, minor rank. The second group headed by Harold Bloom, Hillis Miller, Helen Vendler, and Frank Kermode, on the contrary, promotes Stevens to an iconic status. Nevertheless, Stevens “is defined by the majority of critics and this on the

basis of Kermode's own criteria, as pre-eminently neo-modernist."<sup>14</sup> At the end of her essay, Perloff suggests "to call the first half of the twentieth century the Eliot Era."<sup>15</sup> For Perloff, Modernism or the puzzle of Modernism will remain unsolved unless critics recognize their neglect for Eliot.

The point from this discussion serves to demonstrate that Kermode's or Perloff's classification of the Modernists into two opposed groups is problematic and reductive for it signifies that according to Kermode's criteria if a poet is a Neo-modernist, that is to say, localist and nationalist, he, consequently, cannot be considered as a Paleo-modernist, classicist, and internationalist, at the same time. If a poet belongs to the first group, he is excluded from the second group. Following this line of thinking, if a poet belongs to the second group, he cannot be included in the first group. It happens that Stevens who is considered as a Neo-Modernist and belongs to the stay-at-home faction of American poets is not essentially concerned with the local, and the native, but speaks in his poetry of subjects, that are not particularly American, but that can be extended universally to other nations.

Though he identified himself with America, and stressed the indigenous and the national, as critics, such as Harold Bloom, and Helen Vendler have attracted our attention on the importance of his Americanness, other critics meanwhile, like George Lensing, Hillis Miller, Bart Eeckhout and Edward Ragg incite the reader to read Stevens by focusing on the Transatlantic nature of his work, for the European and the international are also present in his poetry. Although Stevens denies any influence on his work, whether it is national or international, and seeks a new way of writing poetry outside a common history of culture with Europe, these critics detect in his poetry the presence of many Transatlantic influences. For

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14. Edna Rosenthal, *Aristotle and Modernism: Aesthetic Affinities of T S Eliot, Wallace Stevens and Virginia Woolf* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 3.

15. Marjorie Perloff, "Pound / Stevens: Whose Era?" *Modernism*, ed. Michael H Whitworth, (Malden, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 94.

someone wary of influence, and who has never travelled to Europe, Europe is for Stevens, according to George Lensing “a paradise unvisited but not ungained”.<sup>16</sup> His essay sheds light on Stevens’ European sensibility. In his essay “Stevens in Connecticut (and Denmark)”, Hillis Miller suggests that the poem “The River of Rivers in Connecticut” stands as a good example so as to highlight the fact that despite that the poem is local as the use of local place names suggest it is also universal for its use of names that refer to and define the existence of a collective cultural experience that cannot be uniquely American, and in this way surpasses Stevens’ Americanness.

The notion of “local,” and “locality,” “universal” and “universality” occupy a central position in the two writers’ work. In his review of W.C. Williams’s *In the American Grain*, H.D. Lawrence states that “All creative art must rise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place”.<sup>17</sup> The notion of place for the Neo- Modernists takes a particular meaning which is that places are particular places but places which are also representative of all other places. The local can become the universal, because “What is thoroughly local in region has some chance of being universal in application.”<sup>18</sup>

What we can retain from this and the work of the Nationalist poets who stress the local is that through their exploration of specific places, they seek answers to the general questions that concern all human beings, and that can be true for other places, too. In this way, their work reaches a new dimension for being both local and universal, it may be further extended, then.

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16. Bart Eeckhout and Edward Ragg, *Wallace Stevens Across the Atlantic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 162.

17. D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix: the Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, (London: William Heinemann, 1936), 334.

18. William Carlos Williams, *The William Carlos Williams Reader* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1966), 364.

Therefore, though the localist remains ingrained in his locality, this latter becomes a small-scale version of all America, and the world: a model capable of being functional and applied elsewhere. As a microcosm, his locality becomes a lens through which he views the external world, the universe, other places, and in this way, his experience transcends the local to reach the universal.

These Americanists or “nationalists” or, again Neo-modernists are Americans who identified themselves with America, their nation. The notions of “American” “national” and “cultural identity” are central to their writings unlike, Eliot the international poet, whose understanding of what a nation differs a great deal. The distinction he makes between a cultural and political nation in “Notes Towards a Definition of Culture,” where the cultural nation is seen as a tree that “must grow; you cannot build a tree, you can only plant it, and care for it to mature in its due time,”<sup>19</sup> and where the political nation is seen as a machine, that is to say as man-made and artificial. This capital distinction helps to explain why Eliot can take the political decision of becoming a naturalized British citizen in 1927 while justifying his simultaneous loyalties to England and to Europe, to New England, to the Midwest, and to America: “The unity of culture, in contrast to the unity of political organization, does not require us all to have only one loyalty; it means that there will be a variety of loyalties.”

Eliot has close affinities with the European, and British culture while for Stevens the two cultures are different and should be separate. In “Autumn Refrain,” for instance, Stevens sees the nightingale, the British Romantic symbol as something geographically and culturally foreign to and distant from America. However, Eliot’s claim to familiarity with European cultures is typical of an American who perceives America to be the product of various European

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19. T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1949), 122.

cultures. In 1953, Eliot even cautions against the danger of narrow national pride which always seeks to determine whether a writer and his work are truly American when Stevens strives and hopes to be typically American.

As an internationalist poet who sought to reach a wider audience, Eliot's Americanness was completely denied by most critics, so he was naturally dismissed from the American tradition, and instead viewed as part of the English tradition. The problem was compounded by the British citizenship he took in 1927, and his conversion from Protestantism to Anglo-Catholicism. Despite this apparent detachment from America, Eliot, as Eric Sigg confirms is a product of America. Although he tried to resist the infiltration of his American past into his poetry, as when he suppressed the passage entitled "Next Boat for Natchez, Cairo, and St Louis" from the original draft of his poem "Ash-Wednesday," he does mention facts, and events from his boyhood, and import his own associations and memories from his personal past into his poetry. In fact, his personal experience in America permeates his work. A good example will be the poem "The Dry Salvages." Yet, the main reason why Eliot's Americanness cannot be recognized from the start is that his American experience is not a visible, but an insidious component of his poetry.

Nonetheless, after he had spent more than twenty years of his life, wanting to assert himself as a writer of world literature, in the end of his life, he felt the need to return to his origins. Consequently, behind his cosmopolitanism, some indications about his personal feelings and experiences when he was a boy living in America, and the places he knew then, permeate his later poetry. A poem, such as "The Four Quartets" (1940) can be considered to be his most American poem. The poem is a good example of Eliot's move from the cosmopolitan to the local and from the generic to the specific.

Though the Paleo-Modernists, and the Neo-Modernists take opposite roads to account for their experiences: the first group taking as a point of departure the general to reach the

specific, and the second group starting from the local to reach the universal, they all eventually meet at one point. Either way they take, they both end by dealing with the same subjects of place, belonging, and identity. Therefore, both of them come full circle.

One of the aims of this thesis is to question Kermode's division into two exclusive camps and argue that such taxonomy is not exhaustive because the criteria of inclusion and exclusion are not systematically well-delineated, definite, and separate, but may overlap. Moreover, the borderline separating the two groups should not be as clear-cut as the critics of the 1960s and 1970s wanted it to be, but must waver between the two polarities, and borrow shared characteristics from one or the other.

With the complicated, ramified, and ambivalent meanings attributed recently to Modernism, issues of its periodization, definitions, and categorizations have arisen and are still arising. This is why this dissertation is an attempt to correct this too familiar view that Eliot and Stevens have molded two irreconcilable camps where they cannot be juxtaposed one next to the other, but only contrasted one to another. Above all, I argue that these poets, regardless of their classification, display national and international features in their poetry.

The methodology of this research will be mainly based on three theories: Julia Kristeva's Intertextuality, Viktor Shklovsky's defamiliarization and Harold Bloom's theory of influence as three important literary theories, that will be applied to account of the kind of responses and interactions the poets, both Eliot, the Paleo-Modernist, and Stevens, the Neo-Modernist, of this study have towards one another.

Intertextuality, as coined by Julia Kristeva, enables the reading of literary texts in relation with other texts or groups of other texts. It is a process that makes any text to be read as a transformation of another text or group of other texts. For her, "each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read"<sup>20</sup> and "any text

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20. Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

... is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”<sup>21</sup> In this respect, any work of art does not develop from nowhere, but rather interacts with other texts. As a whole, this thesis argues that the poetry of the Neo- modernist Stevens is a direct response to that of the Paleo- modernist, Eliot. To illustrate this point, some poems will be discussed, such as Stevens’ “Connoisseur of Chaos” “ Creations of Sound” and Eliot’s “Sunday Morning Service”, to demonstrate that Stevens’ forthright reaction, is intended to attack Eliot’s classicism, tradition , and his notorious defense of classical cultures. The Paleo-Modernists and the Neo-Modernists present two contrasted cases in bestowing the modes of intertextuality. The Paleo- Modernists use tradition to compare the past with the present, and show how degraded the present is as a result of its neglect of the values of the past. They use opacity, elitism, allusiveness to the classics. In contrast, the Neo- Modernists use apparently insignificant objects from everyday life to register the immediacy of the experience. As part of a reaction against Paleo-Modern internationalism, the Neo-Modernists therefore show a rejection of a classicist or perfectionist aesthetics and favor the use of colloquial English, and prefer the use of regional local or national settings, subjects, and characters.

To discuss the use of the past, tradition and their modes of representation in Stevens’ poetry, I will rely on the theory of defamiliarization that the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky developed in his essay “Art as Technique.” The main aim of this essay is to guard art against the automatization because “automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war”<sup>22</sup> ; consequently, "complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it's as if this life had never been." Shklovsky believes that art has the ability to help the reader see the world afresh by adopting

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21. Ibid.

22. Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 4.

literally unconventional stylistic devices: "The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By 'enstranging' objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious.' "

While the formalists show commitment to innovation, they also acknowledge the significance of tradition. To Shklovsky, innovations in literature occur as a result of the tendency to lose the perceptibility of a given tradition which decreases over time: "The new form makes its appearance not in order to express a new content, but rather, to replace an old form that has already outlived its artistic usefulness." In this respect, Shklovsky contends that "a work of art is perceived against a background of and by association with other works of art. The form of a work of art is determined by its relationship with other pre-existing forms."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the literariness of a text depends on the ability of conventions which constitute a tradition to give way to new ones that defamiliarize them afresh.

To examine the nature of the two poets' influence on the movement of Modernism, and the international scene, I shall operate from Harold Bloom's theory of influence. According to Bloom, a strong poet learns to appreciate poetry through the irresistible work of precursors. To make his new voice, a strong poet misreads precursors. Yet, he cannot escape the awareness that his imaginative vision is born out of the very achievements of the past poets. This awareness gives rise to immense anxieties of indebtedness that must be denied and which Bloom calls the poet's "anxiety of influence." Bloom likens the "anxiety of influence" to an oedipal relation of son to father. The defensive mechanism the belated poet uses against his precursor is "poetic misreading or misprision"<sup>24</sup> which is a process through which he sublimates his precursor's influence: "poetic influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets, - always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, as an act of creative correction that

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23. Ibid.

24. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 14.

is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.”<sup>25</sup>

Bloom identifies six distortive processes through which a belated poet operates in reading his precursor poem. He calls them reversionary ratios and means them to represent the developmental stage of the ephebe. Clinamen is a “poetic misreading or misprision proper.”<sup>26</sup> Tessera is “completion and antithesis.”<sup>27</sup> Kenosis is a “movement towards discontinuity with the precursor.”<sup>28</sup> Daemonization is “a movement towards a personalized Counter Sublime, in a reaction to the precursor’s Sublime.”<sup>29</sup> Askesis is a “movement of self-purgation which intends attainment of a state of solitude.”<sup>30</sup> Apophrades is “the return of the dead.”<sup>31</sup>

The thesis will include six chapters. The first chapter covers four main sections. The first section is concerned with the contexts which generated and formed Modernism. It, then, offers an overview of the general, historical, socio-political condition, as well as the intellectual and psychological climate pervading the Twentieth-Century the poets had to confront. WWI, industrialization, and urbanization, as atypical and curious singularities compelled the Twentieth -Century poets to turn against Romanticism, and look for new ways to account of the new and strange realities. In front of the failure of late Nineteenth-Century Romantics, to neither cope with the new circumstances, such as the moral crisis and the disintegration of the

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25. *Ibid.*, 30.

26. *Ibid.*, 14.

27. *Ibid.*, 67.

28. *Ibid.*, 14.

29. *Ibid.*, 15.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 139.

social bond following the Industrial Revolution, , nor to face those new realities effectively, the Modernists felt the obvious need to experiment new artistic and innovative ways of expression, to survive social change, first. Second, counteracting the Romantics' solipsist and escapist refuge to nature, Modernists confronted the harsh reality boldly.

The second section contrasts Modernism with Romanticism and is particularly concerned with the Modernists' diverse reactions to Romanticism. While attempting to define Romanticism, it also highlights the characteristic Romantic poet's attitude of escape to nature, and retreat to the self instead of the Modernist stance which confronts reality, and chaos and even rebels against it. To remedy to solipsism and escapism of the Romantic poetry, two American contending Modernist trends put forward two different methods. The Paleo-Modernists led by Ezra Pound and Eliot appealed to "the mind of Europe" in the face of a degraded modernity, and initiated an internationalist poetics. This poetics is so replete of cosmopolitan allusions and references for the only sake of juxtaposing the fragmented, chaotic and secular modern societies with the ordered, stable, and religious traditional ones. To achieve such a scheme, they borrowed from multicultural sources, whose "monuments of culture" as Eliot called them, varied from Donne, to Dante, to Baudelaire, and Mallarmé.

The Neo-Modernists among them William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and Stevens against both the Romantic reliance on the self and Eliot's and Pound's appeal to European cultural traditions, offered a poetry that focuses on the immediate conditions of American experience. They, rejected the domination of the European culture, and instead wanted to create a home-made literature by following the call of their American predecessors, Emerson and Whitman to "speak their own minds", not the "mind of Europe", as Emerson exhorted the American (national) writers to do. A nativist poetics grounded in the American soil, and focusing on the local and physical conditions of America originated.

While the second section seeks to trace back the origins as well as the main anti-romantic tenets of Paleo-modernism and Neo-Modernism, the third section solely highlights some of the traits that characterize the trend of Paleo- modernism. The stress is put on the Paleo-modernists' veneration to the past of the European classical culture, and their constant return to tradition.

The fourth section underscores the second trend of Modernism that Stevens followed, Neo-Modernism by focusing on some of its most distinctive characteristics, such as the neglect of the European tradition, and attack on conventions. Finally, while contrasting and comparing the two trends of Modernism to which Eliot, and Stevens respectively adhered this chapter examines also the cultural atmosphere of the beginning of the Twentieth- Century in Europe and the United States of America.

The second chapter serves to establish a parallel between the Paleo, and Neo- Modernists' theories of poetry which arise in part out of their reactions against the conventional standards of the Romantics and their concern with the role of the artist.

The theories put forward by each poet signal each poet's Modernist stance and direction. While discussing the opposite views each poet has on poetry and how they elaborated a theory of poetry of their own, this part will serve as a theoretical framework to read and interpret the poets' poems. Eliot and Stevens view that the poet must build the poem around an impersonal idea. To attain a high level of objectivity, they adopt two contradictory attitudes. For Eliot, and the Paleo- Modernists, the artist must always surrender himself to literary tradition. On the other hand, Stevens, against the Romantic attitudes asserts that poetic creation is a process in which reality and the imagination can meet. The Neo-Modernists against Eliot, believe that to attain this meeting, the poet must guard the imagination against the preconceptions of the past. Thus, while Eliot's appeal to tradition to validate his work places him in the Paleo-Modernist aesthetics, Stevens's radical break from tradition affiliates him with Neo-Modernism. Consequently, the third and fourth chapters are meant to validate the division of Modernists in

two camps according to Frank Kermode's criteria of selection ( classicism, respect of European conventions and tradition for the Paleo-Modernists, anti-classicism and rejection of European tradition for the Neo-Modernists). However, after discussing the Internationalism of Eliot and the Nationalism of Stevens, chapters five and six question the entire reliability of Kermode's proposition by juxtaposing Eliot and Stevens instead of opposing them, Thus, in the two last chapters, I undertake to place Eliot in the American tradition, and Stevens in the European tradition, reverse, in this way completely the initial proposition, and ask for its re- assessment, authority and credibility while studying Modernist writers.

The third chapter examines the poet's internationalist poetry by looking at the poet's European heritage. It reveals the different European influences, especially French, and English, but also Italian, exerted on Eliot, and the origin to the sources to his allusive and obscure poetry. Aiming to reach an international audience, Eliot's poetry is multicultural, half-American, half-European, fusing many influences and reveling them, shuttling back and forth in a sort of hybrid or transatlantic poetry. Eliot 's views and poetry will serve as indexes to read the successive chapter on Neo- Modernism, and answer how and why such a trend of Modernism developed so rapidly, opposing and contradicting Paelo-Modernism. Hence, it is against the Paelo-Modernist backdrop, that some of Stevens' poems will be read and explained in the fourth chapter.

The fourth chapter examines accordingly, Stevens' typical concern with the local and national identity that preoccupies so many of his American contemporaries also. It shows how Stevens, as an Americanist, responds to the Emersonian, and Whitmanian call of cultural independence by answering at the same time Ezra Pound's motto of "Make it New". ", Stevens sees his own task as the evocation of a specifically American sensibility since the "Americans are not British in sensibility", and Western literary European inheritance does not automatically create an American culture.

The second part of this chapter shows that Stevens is responding to both Whitman and Eliot in a continual and persistent intertextual debate. It places Stevens firmly in the American tradition of Emerson, Whitman, and Emily Dickinson. It seeks to show, above all, that although Stevens rejected any specific debt to Whitman, an anxiety of influence is traceable in his poetry in the way he responds to Whitman's concerns. They both deal with the same themes of national cultural identity, easily discernible in Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Stevens' "Connoisseur of Chaos," for instance. This chapter shows that Stevens' poetry is a direct retort to two different and opposed trends of poetry: the Eurocentric – biased view of Eliot whom he contradicts and opposes, and the Americanist – centered influence of Whitman, he cannot escape, and inherits, yet revises.

The aim of the fifth chapter is to show Eliot's Americanness and affiliation to the American tradition. It reveals that Eliot received the influence of some American poets, such as Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman despite his reluctance or denial to admit. I demonstrate that despite Eliot's classicism and veneration to the European culture and tradition, his poetry is infused with American experience and divulges his American roots and origins. Despite his will to write international poetry and despite his classification as a Paleo-modernist, his poetry nevertheless betrays American or national characteristics.

The sixth chapter seeks to underline the fact that though Stevens is anxious of being inclined to the European culture, and does his best to avoid its influence, he is nonetheless immersed in it. As a matter of evidence, his work mirrors and revels different cultures. Thus, his poems are full of allusions to and echoes of Donne, Dante, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Baudelaire and Mallarmé, the combination of British, French and Italian poetry that characterizes Pound and Eliot. As ironic as it seems to be for someone who has often been categorized by some critics as being expressly American and who thought of himself as the "dead opposite" of Eliot, Stevens has also often been identified mostly and often with hostility

as a poet who was not particularly American by other critics. He was seen closer to the expatriate, alien poets, Eliot and Pound than Hart Crane and Robert Frost who made a great deal of the American scene, monuments, and heroes. In fact, Stevens' relation to Europe is problematic. It is, indeed, one of the most singular and unique relations compared to that of his contemporary American writers, who visited Europe frequently or even established themselves permanently there as Pound and Eliot did. Despite his aversion to Europe, he paradoxically showed a particular interest and curiosity to Europe, collected French paintings, and postcards, and corresponded with friends from all over the world, from Ireland, France and Cuba. Thus, his wide knowledge of Europe and the world helped Stevens forge a new aesthetic out of his Transatlantic influences. Though cautious of 'influence' he created a poetry and poetics that are neither strictly Modernist nor simply post-Romantic, neither expressly American nor European, but a unique body of work that, in turn influenced various American and European poets and artists.

The conclusion I want to reach is best encapsulated by Eric White who in his 2013 book, *Transatlantic Avant-Gardes: Little Magazines and Localist Modernism*, notes the dominance of Eliot's high modernism, but also stresses the "transatlantic crosstalk generated by the localist and expatriate networks" which, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, had organized itself to the point where it could create "a new localist counter-narrative ... in the transatlantic slipstream of the dominant strains of high modernism" .

With poets such as William Carlos Williams, and Hart Crane, who wrote a poetics on location Stevens was at the center of this "localist" pushback against Eliot's strain of high modernism. Furthermore, Eliot's advocacy for the "existing monuments" of literary tradition, which for him must be an unavoidable presence for modern poets, compelled the Neo-Modernist poets to break free from this stultifying influence and write a poetry accountable first and foremost to the conditions of the contemporary world, and America. For this, they had to

construct their own literary monuments to take the place of those that they reject. In his efforts to take the dominant conception of modernism away from Eliot and Pound, Stevens attempted to construct a “supreme fiction” and to articulate a new form for his poetry.

## Chapter One: The Historical and Cultural Background of Modernism

In the history of ideas, all literary movements are viewed as ideologically and chronologically responsive to one another. Thus, the Nineteenth- Century introspective, Romantic period is delineated as a reaction to the Enlightenment, and the Eighteenth- Century rational, Classical movement. Likewise, Twentieth- Century iconoclast Modernism is generally seen as a response to Romanticism. So, every age is built on the preceding age. In the introduction of *Nature*, a book of essays, Ralph Waldo Emerson states that: “Our Age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism.”<sup>32</sup>

From this quotation and by analogy to Emerson’s thinking, we can infer that every age is as retrospective as Emerson’s age was. Although Emerson’s objective in this passage was to encourage young people to look to the future and not to the past, he nevertheless acknowledges the importance of the past in constructing the present and the future. By using the term retrospective, he means that too often we look back to history to learn more about our present situations. And this attitude of looking back, although viewed negatively by Emerson, is the one adopted in our age too. In this way, any study of Modernism, as a subsequent movement to Romanticism, lays its foundations and platforms for actions, in the form of counter-reactions against Romanticism. Hence, Romanticism serves as a background against which any upcoming ideas, can be formulated. Whether rejecting it altogether or refuting only some of its aspects, all Modernists had to consider Romanticism and its implications seriously. Advocating a complete break with the immediate past, T. E. Hulme, for instance, dismisses completely Romanticism when he states: “There is always at the back of romanticism a certain

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32. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), 240.

characteristic sentiment, a certain kind of exhilaration”<sup>33</sup> which betrays itself in certain clichés, “breaking down barriers’, freedom, emancipation, and the rest of it; but, above all, it betrays itself in the epithet NEW. One must believe that there is a NEW art, a NEW religion, even a NEW age.”<sup>34</sup> On the opposite, many think that Romanticism is a receptacle of enduring values, such as the prioritizing of the individual subjective experience that have been handed down so that several traces of Romanticism can be located in Modernist poetry. This issue has been explored by John Bayley and Albert Gelpi among others. In his *The Romantic Survival* (1957), Bayley argues that Modernism appropriated several key Romantic concepts. Among many Romantic strong and pervasive assets, he mentions the realization that poetry is the vehicle for the “irrational” elements of the self, and imagination. In these respects, Modernism is not so much a break with Romantic concerns, as much as it is a replication of them in a more contemporary context.

For such obvious contradictory viewpoints and diverging attitudes to both Romanticism and Modernism, in this chapter which is divided into four parts, I will be concerned by stressing some of those aspects of Romanticism which the Nineteenth- Century had neglected, and discarding some of those it had most strongly emphasized, rather than rejecting it outright. The first part provides a historical overview of the political, economic, social and cultural contexts which generated and formed Modernism. The second part, while attempting to define Romanticism, also highlights the characteristic Romantic poet’s attitude of escape to nature, and retreat to the self, instead of the modern stance which confronts reality, and chaos and even rebels against it. The third part seeks to trace back the origins as well as the main anti-romantic tenets of Paleo-modernism by insisting on the place which the Paleo- Modernists grant to tradition. The fourth part underscores the second trend of Modernism that Stevens followed,

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33. T. E. Hulme, *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 237.

34. *Ibid.*

Neo-Modernism by focusing on some of its most distinctive characteristics, such as the neglect of the European tradition, and attack on conventions. Finally, while contrasting and comparing the two trends of Modernism to which Eliot and Stevens respectively adhered, this chapter examines also the cultural atmosphere of the beginning of the Twentieth- Century in Europe and the United States of America.

### **A-Modernism: Artistic Innovation to Survive Social Change:**

The Twentieth- Century is ostensibly known for the radical economic, social, and political changes it witnessed, mainly owing to fundamental historical phenomena, industrialization and urbanization, backed by scientific progress and intense technological developments that would transform the face of the world forever.

Darwin's, Marx's, and Freud's theories revolutionized the late Nineteenth- Century entrenched ideas of anthropocentric self-confidence, and steered the destabilization in this way, of the then-accepted social beliefs. Sowing a deep doubt by interrogating the humanist confident attitude that positioned man at the center of the universe, and made of him the master of the world, revealing not only his inability to control forces outside his will, and beyond his knowledge, but showing also his close dependence on both internal, and external factors whether biological, psychological or social and environmental they may be.

Darwin's conception of evolution and natural selection completely thaws the boundaries differentiating humans from animals. It further positioned mankind as no more than the latest outcome of the very process of natural selection, man's dependence on internal forces or natural laws, such as heredity, and instinct reduced man's anthropocentric superiority to someone who is "derived from some lower animal form."<sup>35</sup> Marx, in his turn believed that the

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35. Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Works: The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (Boston: D. Appleton, 1896), 237.

“mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.”<sup>36</sup> With Marxian material determinism, it is argued that men’s consciousness is determined by their social existence and it is not their consciousness that determines their existence. Freud, for his part, elaborated on the forces of the unconscious and subconscious, and believed that man is governed and driven by the same basic instincts of fear, hunger, and sex that control animals, thus explaining that “the powers motivating men and women are mainly and normally unconscious”.<sup>37</sup> This theory of the unconscious helped to further understand the psychological repressed feelings man may feel when struggling against the conventional codes of conduct, and morality, imposed by traditional societies.

As a result, these findings in the natural sciences, biology, economy, and psychology not only threatened and disrupted that present-day humanist self-confidence, but generated circulating feelings of ideological anxiety and distrust. This suspicion was further intensified by social and political changes. Industrialization and urbanization as two pivotal Twentieth-Century occurrences, altered the face of the American nation, transforming the once agricultural, rural society into an industrial urban one. The shift was accompanied with the disrupting of the old quiet and peasant pattern of life to a more hectic and anxious way of thinking and living.

The industrialization of the United States of America “created great fortunes, widening the gap between the rich and the poor and creating a new bureaucratic hierarchy which gave business its recognizably modern form.”<sup>38</sup> Between 1890 and 1910, the country’s population increased by fifty percent together with thirteen million new immigrants. In 1860,

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36. Karl Marx, *Karl Marx on Society and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 5.

37. Ross C. Murfin, “What is Psychoanalytic Criticism?” *Heart of Darkness: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1969), 114.

38. Leonard Cassuto and Clare Virginia eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

immigrants made up 40 percent of the populations of major American cities. By 1910, the population of immigrants and their American-born children had increased to 70 percent in major cities. For that reason, the country became “less rural, less agricultural, less ethnically homogenous, and less divided into distinct male and female spheres of work – all the while growing . . . more racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse.”<sup>39</sup>

This broad era, referred to as “The Gilded Age” is a wide-ranging period extending from the Civil War (ended in 1865), and the Reconstruction Era (ended in 1877) to the U.S. entry into World War I (1917). In American history, the term was adopted by literary and cultural critics as well as historians in the 1920s, including Van Wyck Brooks, Lewis Mumford, Charles Austin Beard, and Vernon Louis Parrington to designate a time known for the economic boom it witnessed after the American Civil War up to the turn of the Twentieth-Century century, but also for the serious social problems, the era witnessed. The term “Gilded Age” was borrowed from Mark Twain's novel, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* a book co-written with Charles Dudley Warner where they satirized the promised “golden age” after the Civil War, and further portrayed by social critics as a time of deep social changes, masked by a thin gold gilding of economic success.

The changes were so radical that a real social revolution was to take place and a *Novus Ordo Seclorum* was yet born. Twain looked at the period 1860-1868 as a crucial period in the history of the U.S.A: “The eight years in America from 1860 to 1868 uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the century, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured.”<sup>40</sup>

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39. Ibid.

40. Mark Twain, Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-day Dreiser* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1887), 168.

In fact, as long and insistently presaged and warned against by social critics, historians and writers alike, those changes were nevertheless unavoidable, and the late Nineteenth-Century was a marking era for the forthcoming events and century. This dialectic tension between the pastoral ideal in America and the rapid transformation provoked by machine technology is expressed everywhere in literature by the recurring image of the machine in the garden, that is to say, the sudden and shocking intrusion of technology into a pastoral scene. Leo Marx best sums up the situation by explaining:

Within the lifetime of a single generation, a rustic and in large part wild landscape transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. It would be difficult to imagine more profound contradictions of value or meaning than those made manifest by this circumstance. Its influence upon our literature is suggested by the recurrent image of the machine's sudden entrance into the landscape. <sup>41</sup>

The Twentieth - Century was also infamous for the two world wars it knew. Indeed, two brutal and inhuman wars, WWI, and WWII, killing thousands of both military and civilian people convinced Europeans and Americans of the barbarism, cruelty and weakness of their social institutions. The first WWI brought swift changes that would result in the disorientation of humanity as a whole, scattering a deep suspicion in all the old institutions, even the church, that have directed Americans for a long time.

Furthermore, as Marlowe A. Miller remarked the Modernists reacted by questioning the moral and religious principles of their civilization as it was supposed to improve their life with

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41. Leo Marx quoted in Tamara Venit-Shelton, *Herbs and Roots* (London: Yale University Press, 2019), 164

the new technology not to destroy it, and “made it new in an attempt to respond to and reflect the radically, catastrophically altered world pre-, during, and post-World War I.”<sup>42</sup>

Sherwood Anderson describes this era as “the most materialistic age in the history of the world, when wars would be fought without patriotism, when men would forget God and only pay attention to moral standards, when the will to power would replace the will to serve and beauty would be well nigh forgotten in the terrible headlong rush of mankind toward the acquisition of possessions.”<sup>43</sup>

While the once confident view of history that science contributed to the general welfare of mankind, a view expressed by Beatrice Webb who wrote that “by science alone . . . all human misery would be ultimately swept away,”<sup>44</sup> the two world wars were further evidence that Western development rather leant towards loss, degradation and destruction. Many Europeans and Americans were persuaded that Western civilization went astray and in such a chaotic background, they questioned the validity of their Christian beliefs that had guided Western society for centuries. The sacred idea that the universe had been designed by a benevolent creator collapsed, further aggravated by Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God. Nietzsche’s fictional madman cried out: “After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too”.<sup>45</sup>

Consequently, a new understanding of human society and human nature conveyed by radical new scientific and social theories, new advances in technology, and new viewpoints of history and war subsidized a new outlook for the Twentieth-Century people in general, and

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42. Marlowe A. Miller, *Masterpieces of British Modernism* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2006), 9.

43. Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 40-41.

44. Beatrice Webb, quoted in Nicholas Drake, *The Poetry Of W.B. Yeats* (London: Penguin, 1991), 73.

45. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109.

pressed the modernist writers to look for new ways of expression, in style and subject matter, in particular. Therefore, although Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God provided an answer to the modernists, it created in Pericles Lewis's insightful formulation, a dilemma among them because they were faced by two alternatives: "on the one hand, the death of God [left] humanity facing an abyss of moral relativism; on the other hand, God's "gruesome shadow' continue[d] to haunt even those who proclaim[ed] their atheism."<sup>46</sup>

Ezra Pound, better than any other Modernist, coined the motto "Make it New" with the Modernist movement to simply infer that the Twentieth-Century reality could only be adequately rendered through new ways of expression which either questioned or rejected Romanticism. As he articulated it in his poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," the modern age could not any more function according to previous or old standards of thinking, and required a new mode of expression for:

The age demanded an image  
Of its accelerated grimace,  
Something for the modern stage,  
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace.<sup>47</sup>

As a new understanding of human society and human nature was introduced by the new advances in technology, radical new social theories, and so, a new style and new ways of approaching it were needed in the Modernist poetry, famously proclaimed, by Pound's "Make it new!". Before leaning on these new outlooks, it seems adequate to understand first, the motives that prompted such a change, and consider the literary background, founded by Romanticism, behind which such Modernist views were constructed and consolidated. The

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46. Pericles Lewis, "Religion," *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, eds. David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 21.

47. Ezra Pound, quoted in Vincent B. Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (New York:

extent to which Modernism is open to diverse interpretations, and even rife with apparent paradoxes and contradictions, is perhaps best illustrated by the uneasy juxtaposition of the viewpoints, of the Paleo-Modernists, and the Neo-Modernists.

While the Neo-Modernists were responding to Ezra Pound 's famous call to “make it new ” so to break with tradition, others followed his contemporary T. S. Eliot who was stressing the indispensable nature of tradition in art, insisting upon the artist's responsibility to engage with tradition. For Eliot and the Paleo-Modernists, the Modernist re-contextualization of the individual must be achieved within the received social heritage, and can be seen in the ‘mythic method’ which Eliot expounded in his discussion of James Joyce's *Ulysses*: “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 ... 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.”<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, the cultural history of humanity is a unique common history that connects previous generations to the current generations.

Indeed, the overtly complex, contradictory character of modernism is summed up by Peter Childs, who speaks of modernisms, and identifies “paradoxical if not opposed trends towards revolutionary and reactionary positions, fear of the new and delight at the disappearance of the old, nihilism and fanatical enthusiasm, creativity and despair”.

### **B- Modernism Versus Romanticism:**

In literature, it is difficult to define exactly Romanticism for it is an umbrella term that covers so many things. In fact, in its stylistic diversity and range of subjects, Romanticism defies simple categorization for many stylistic themes and values meet and interact such as the gothic, the sublime, or the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sentimental. In addition to the impossibility to provide a straight forward definition to the lexeme Romanticism, the second

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48 T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), 177-178.

difficulty lies in the ambiguity the term “Romantic” carries. The label “Romantic” is as puzzling as the term Romanticism is.

Romanticism , which is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement originating in the Eighteenth- Century, characterized chiefly by a reaction against neoclassicism and an emphasis on the imagination and emotions, and marked especially in English literature by sensibility and the use of autobiographical material, an exaltation of the primitive and the common man, an appreciation of external nature, an interest in the remote, a predilection for melancholy, and the use in poetry of older verse forms” accounts of the difficulty of formulating a short, concise and direct definition pinning down the movement.

Therefore, it is nearly impossible to give a straightforward definition to the terms Romantic and Romanticism. Romanticism seems to embrace so many things, especially in the Twentieth-Century, that T. S. Eliot abandoned the term in 1933 because it had become so overused. Considering the vast number of critical treatises on the subject-matter published in the last years, it can but account for the difficulty to have a straightforward definition. F.L. Lucas in *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal* counts 11.396 definitions of the lexeme “Romantic.” This is why instead of trying to define the so-called Romantic movement, it is better give some of the characteristics such as originality, individuality, and sincerity most commonly associated with Romantic poetry.

As a literary movement, Romanticism was pigeonholed by several traces which proved to be diverse and conflicting. In fact, the Romantics were “revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, individualistic and communitarian, cosmopolitan and nationalistic, realist and fantastic, retrograde and utopian, rebellious and melancholic, democratic and aristocratic, activist and contemplative, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystical and

sensual.”<sup>49</sup> These paradoxes infiltrated not only the movement as such but also “the life and work of individual authors, and sometimes even individual texts.”<sup>50</sup>

Because of these diversities and inconsistencies lying deep in the movement, it is therefore uneasy to state the theory of Romanticism that may cover the wide aesthetic range of such diverse talents who thus promoted a variety of styles within the movement. The array of poets is as inclusive and extensive to include poets from different strains and brands of Romanticism, extending from Light Romantics to Dark Romantics. Romanticist practitioners found their voices across all genres, indeed. For instance, William Wordsworth, and Waldo Emerson who are in perfect communion with nature, reflect a brand of Romanticism different from that of Henry David Thoreau, and Thomas Jefferson who are terrified in front of the sublimity of nature, or again William Blake, who is criticizing the encroachment of industrialization on nature, or again Lord Byron who expressed in his “Decadent” poetry, “certain states of mind and peculiarities of behavior” with his “erotic sensibility”, a sensibility that is inevitably characteristic of one of the most important strains of Romanticism, affirms Mario Praz.

The American scholar Arthur. O. Lovejoy attempted, for his part, to demonstrate the difficulty of defining Romanticism. In fact, the variety of its actual and possible meanings and connotations reflect the complexity and multiplicity of the term. In his seminal article “On The Discrimination of Romanticisms” in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) Lovejoy observed that the word “Romantic” has come to mean so many things that by itself it means nothing at all, and that people should give up Romanticism and instead use only the plural Romanticisms:

We should learn to use the word “Romanticism” in the plural. This, of course, is already the practice of the more cautious and observant literary historians in so

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49 Michael Löwy, Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1.

50. Ibid.

far as they recognize that the term “Romanticism” of one country may have little in common with that of another . . . . But the discrimination of Romanticisms which I have in mind is not solely or chiefly a division upon lines of nationality or language. What is needed is that any study of the subject should begin with recognition of a prima-facie plurality of “Romanticisms,” of possibly quite distinct thought-complexes, a number of which may appear in one country. <sup>51</sup>

Because of the difficulties to define the theory of Romanticism, instead of looking for a formulaic and fixed definition, I would rather consider a set of common features that most Romantic poets observe in their writings, after describing the historical causes favoring its emergence, such as The French Revolution of 1798 and the Industrial Revolution. What we are sure of is that Romanticism flourished from around 1750 to about 1870. Romanticism originated in Europe and spread quickly to the United States at the end of the Eighteenth-Century and well into the Nineteenth-Century. Actually, the period typically called Romantic varies greatly between different countries and different areas of thought. And perhaps, it is right to assume that its influence has been so infinite that it is still felt in the Twentieth and Twenty- First Centuries. To be sure, its ideals probing the creative, and subjective powers of the artist fueled avant-garde movements well into the Twentieth -Century and even after. Some scholars see Romanticism as essentially continuous with the present, some like Robert Hughes see in it the inaugural moment of modernity. This continuity in the present further clarifies the relation of both Romantics and Modernists and justifies why a clear understanding of Romanticism will help us comprehend the modernists’ responses and stances against it, or further expanding it.

Romanticism was part of the Counter-Enlightenment, a reaction against the Age of Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason, is generally accepted in current scholarship. As

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51. London: Arthur O. Lovejoy, quoted in Anthony Thorby, *Romanticism*, (London: Longmans, 1967), 18.

a cultural movement, Romanticism came as a counter-reaction to challenge the rational ideal held so tightly during the Enlightenment. This is why many others see it as the beginning of a tradition of resistance to Enlightenment rationalism associated most closely with German Romanticism.

The classic and neo- classic schools of Enlightenment relying on the power of reason to discover the truth about humanity and the world, valued reason, logic, and rationality as the only reliable sources of knowledge and discarded emotions, and feelings that would usher in the Romantic age of freedom and liberties not yet seen. Hence, the Classicist sensibility prioritizing the principles of order and external authority gave way to the cult of the individual by promoting the freedom of the human spirit. The Romantic artists emphasized that sense and emotions - not simply reason and order - were equally important means of understanding and experiencing the world. Unlike the Age of Enlightenment, which focused on rationality and intellect, Romanticism placed human emotions, feelings, instinct and intuition above everything else. While the poets in the era of rationality adhered to the prevalent rules and regulations while selecting a subject and writing about it, the Romantic writers trusted their emotions and feelings to create poetry.

As Romanticism embraced individuality and subjectivity to counteract the excessive insistence on logical thought, artists began then exploring various emotional and psychological states as well as moods. The emergence of Romanticism was further spurred by the German Romantic school, and the powerful philosophical stimulus of Emanuel Kant, Novalis, and the Shlegels, best summed up by Josiah Royce: "Trust your genius: follow your noble heart, change your doctrine, whenever your heart changes and change your heart often. Such is the practical

creed of the romanticists. The world, you see, is after all the world of the inner life...The world is essentially what men of genius make it. Let us be men of genius, and make what we choose.<sup>52</sup>

Romantics believed in the natural goodness of man, and so Romanticism was equally well verbalized and consolidated by the notion that “by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will have Progress.”<sup>53</sup>

One of the most important motivations for the flourishing Romantic movement and the lasting and enduring impact it had as a school of thought was The French Revolution of 1798. With its motto “liberty, equality, fraternity,” it was pretty inspiring to the Romantics who valued individuality and freedom, and rebelled against social and literary conventions of their day. In fact, The French Revolution had huge repercussions not only in France, but all over Europe, and the U.S.A. It was a time of huge social and political transformation: a revolution of ideas, an explosion of hope that ordinary men could build a just society if it is devoted to democracy, and ruled by a sense of equality. This may explain why most Romantics can be said to be broadly progressive in their views.

Next to The French Revolution, The Industrial Revolution was another important historical phenomenon which further molded Romanticism. One of the most important significances of The Industrial Revolution was the process of social, political and economic transformation, from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing. These new economic system, and social order fostered by Industrialization and Urbanization were not without heavy consequences for the growing population, and resulted in radical changes, for the most part disastrous for a new pattern of life

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52. Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An Essay in the Form of Lectures* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), 173.

53 . E. Hulme , “Romanticism and Classicism,” *Romanticism: Points of View* ed. Robert F. Gleckner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 57.

where the peasants and farmers left the country in search of jobs in the growing factories in urban centers, were met with poverty, shabbiness, and diseases. The Romantics, for their part, reacted against the Industrial Revolution. However, instead of confronting the unpleasant reality in town, they sought and found refuge in nature far away from the city's urban life. Additionally, in an effort to show their dissatisfaction of increasing industrialization, many of the Romantics emphasized the individual's connection to nature and an idealized past, distancing themselves from society and particularly to the real problems relative to towns and the urban life.

By distancing themselves from society and asserting their individuality through freedom the Romantics' veneration and celebration of nature made them acute observers of the natural world. Thus, nature was considered as both a source of inspiration and meaning, and a vehicle to translate their ideas. The Romantics turned to nature to read signs. They base their observations on the relationship between the human and the inhuman, and tend to center upon two prime realities: man and nature. They join the two entities in a dramatic meeting. This confrontation, or physical encounter called generally "the journey of the self" serves as a platform for the discovery of meaningful facts about not only man but the world surrounding him, and, and this happens most of the time through the symbolic use of epiphanies or sudden apparitions that enlighten the traveler, the stroller, or the Rambler.

They observe a monistic vision of man and nature where man feels in symbiosis with his environment because of the romantic confident and harmonious relationship he entertains with his physical world. This pastoral tradition of well-being and delight in the presence of nature where a harmonious unity of the subject with the object is realized is best exemplified in

Emerson's words who is in perfect harmony and communion with nature when he says: "they [the woods] nod to me and I nod to them."<sup>54</sup>

In those moments, the poet is confronted with a series of experiences that lead him to acquire knowledge. This knowledge one recovers through recollections, in being in close contact with the inner life and where intuition and imagination are used to the fullest. Those psychological experiences are uplifting and lasting. In his biography written in XV books in verse and entitled, *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind: An Autobiographical poem*, Wordsworth explained that "spots of time" were past experiences through which he could trace his own development as a man and a poet. In Book XII of the *Prelude*, subtitled "Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored," Wordsworth wrote:

There are in our existence spots of time,

That with distinct pre-eminence retain

A renovating virtue.<sup>55</sup>

These "spots of time" occur, Wordsworth says in the *Prelude*:

Among those passages of life that give

Profoundest knowledge to what part and how,

The mind is Lord and master!

.... And the spots of time :

Are scattered everywhere

Taking their date

From our first childhood.<sup>56</sup>

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54. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Complete Works, Volume I Lectures* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1888), 18.

55. William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, (New York: J. W. Lovell Company, 1881), 583.

56 Ibid., 540.

The Romantics' acute awareness of natural surroundings and religious veneration of nature as a teacher, guide, and nurse made them turn to nature as a source of knowledge. Accordingly, they used nature as a vehicle to convey the very personal emotion of the poet. David Perkins points out that the omnipresence and omnipotence of nature in the Romantic poetry is an important trait for "among the conventions of more traditional verse in England and the United States throughout the nineteenth century was obviously the use of nature and landscape as subject matter, setting, symbols, or metaphor."<sup>57</sup>

The Romantics were passionate about their subjectivism, about their tendency toward introspection. Rousseau's autobiography, *The Confessions*, began with the following words:

I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself. Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen. I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different.<sup>58</sup>

Even though it is often criticized for solipsism and escapism, Romanticism is prized at least for its awareness of the discord between man and his world which Eliot calls the "dissociation of sensibility." Instead of attempting to reconcile the disunity between the subject and the object, the "I", and the surrounding world, where they felt alienated, Romantics attempted through art that focused on the self to construct an ideal world where they sought refuge in a purely imagined nature. Hence, to veer away from Romantic art that celebrated the

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57. David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1976), 4.

58. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1896), 1.

individual as the source of great art, a group of poets led by Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle that Frank Kermode calls the “Paleo-Modernists,” reacted against Romanticism by formulating a poetic approach that relied on Classical European tradition. Against the Romantic asset of poetry as originating in the poet’s individual genius, they resorted to European literary tradition, which is replete with allusions as a more intelligible recourse to express their present-day preoccupations and translate their contemporary experiences. However, this reliance on tradition, inherited from the Old World, instituted more a burden, an impediment than a support to the nascent American culture that sought to initiate a literature that would afford and mirror the uniqueness of the American reality. Thus, another group of poets that Kermode calls “Neo-Modernists” headed by William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane moved in an opposed direction, to the “Paleo-modernists, and turned towards a literature that focused on the immediate experience of America. As Eliot’s ideological appeals to tradition made him a “Paleo-modernist” and Williams’s, Frost’s, and Stevens’s rejection of the European tradition, aligned them with Neo-modernism, their respective poetic theories reflect consequently the differences of these two trends of Modernism.

These characteristics such as the originality of the artist, and his individuality are central tenets of Romanticism. For the Modernists like Eliot, who reacted against Romanticism these ideas were central to them and constituted a basis against which the Modernists responded to Romanticism.

Romanticism celebrated the individual imagination and intuition. Another shared trait by almost all Romantics is the emphasis on originality and the poetic creation based essentially on feelings, emotions, and imagination. Accordingly, most Romantics agree on the power of feelings. An earlier definition came from Charles Baudelaire: “Romanticism is precisely

situated neither in choice of subject nor exact truth, but in the way of feeling.”<sup>59</sup> For his part, the English poet William Wordsworth, who became a major voice of the Romantic movement says in his “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” that “all poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”<sup>60</sup> For Wordsworth, emotion is the most vital prerequisite for any lyrical poetry. This latter finds its true expression only through and with powerful feelings without which it would be impassive. Elsewhere, Wordsworth says of the poet that “he is a man speaking to men: a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness a man pleased with his own passions and volitions.”<sup>61</sup> From the assumption that the Romantic poet is exclusive, different and unrivaled in his sensibility, passion and sensitivity, the notion of individualism is further reinforced. Unswerving with their prominence on the importance of feeling and emotion, the Romantics expressed their unique nature by avoiding obedience to social conventions, and following their feelings, because as Shelley came to argue:

Obedience,  
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,  
Makes slaves of men, and of the human frame,  
A mechanized automaton .<sup>62</sup>

To further illustrate and better understand the traditions of Romanticism, it is germane to apply these Romantic assumptions through the reading of William Wordsworth’s poem “I Wandered Lonely as A Cloud,” a poem, commonly called “The Daffodils” , and not only seen as a classic of English romantic poetry, but a poem that exemplifies all the above- mentioned Romantic tenets also.

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59. Charles Baudelaire, quoted in Christopher John Murray *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760–1850* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 28.

60. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98.

61. William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works*, 288.

62. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 23.

The first part of the poem describes the speaker's loneliness using such words as "vacant,"<sup>63</sup> "pensive"<sup>64</sup> and "solitude."<sup>65</sup> Away and far from home and his community, the speaker feels like a cloud, distant and separated from the world below. He is a lonely poet. But when he comes upon the daffodils, which are like little stars, he is no longer alone since he has learned how to keep himself company by being close to nature. The poet communicates through visual, kinesthetic, and organic imagery, his feelings and emotions of kinship with nature. Being alone with a host of daffodils he saw in a field, the poet demonstrates that all romantic poetry is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions" and that nature with its beauty puts him so far above everyone and everything else that he can't help but feel happy in loneliness. Thus, in the second part of the poem, the words "glee,"<sup>66</sup> "gay"<sup>67</sup> and "bliss"<sup>68</sup> show the speaker's joy while he is alone with nature.

The glorification of nature is another important Romantic tenet where the speaker in the poem establishes a real affinity with nature and feels empathy towards it by describing a natural setting full of life and vitality. He appreciates its wildness and beauty but he humanizes the landscape and fits it to his own mind. "A poet could not but be gay, / In such a jocund company."<sup>69</sup> After describing the daffodils, the poem shifts to concentrate on the mind of the speaker and especially his imagination, while again alone but this time in his room, he recalls the sight of the daffodils. The power of his memory revives the daffodils and thanks to his "inward," spiritual eye that seems more powerful than his regular vision, he sees again the dancing daffodils that "flash upon the inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude."<sup>70</sup>

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63. William Wordsworth, *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, in: 1801-1805 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008), 202.

64. *Ibid.*, 203.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*, 202.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*, 203.

69. *Ibid.*, 202.

70. *Ibid.*, 203.

For now, whenever he feels “vacant”<sup>71</sup> or “pensive,”<sup>72</sup> the memory flashes upon “that inward eye / That is the bliss of solitude,”<sup>73</sup> and his heart fills with pleasure, “and dances with the daffodils.”<sup>74</sup> With his vibrant imagination, he can recreate the effect made on him when he saw the daffodils for the first time and feels again happy.

This part tells us about the importance given to imagination in any Romantic poetry for as Rousseau said if “The world of reality has its limits; the world of imagination is boundless.”<sup>75</sup> It tells us also what pleasure the poet had gained after watching the daffodils dancing that day. Through the power of his imagination, the picture of the dancing daffodils came to his mind and produced an invigorating effect as if he regained life's treasure.

The notion of individuality is another vital Romantic tenet represented in Wordsworth’s poem. The repetition of the first person pronoun which is even the first word of the poem “I wandered” makes of the poem an account of the speaker’s subjective valuation of his personal experience of nature. The speaker is detached from the rest of the world, and his experience is subjective but unique and original as the “I” suggests.

The acceptance of the ideal of originality is therefore embodied in the ideals of Romantic individualism, particularly stated in German Romanticism where the notion of individualism is reflected in its creed of “self-development” and “self-realization”. In fact, German Romanticism positively accentuates the notion of how to develop and bring one’s original uniqueness into full play. On the opposite, French Romanticism negatively highlights an isolated ego, as in J.J. Rousseau’s famous saying: “I am not made like any of those I have seen.

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71. Ibid., 202.

72. Ibid., 203.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Jean- Jacques Rousseau quoted in Dick De Jonge, *Bits of History - from the Big Bang to Now* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2016), 59.

I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different.”<sup>76</sup>

Individualism basically confined within Romanticism further accentuated the idea that societal conventions hinder man from developing his individual character freely, and that the cultivation of one’s individuality should be performed in isolation from society, because for Rousseau "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains. " However, this withdrawal from society and escape to nature, made of this Romantic attitude a subject of attack by the early Twentieth-Century Modernists who blamed the Romantics of solipsism and escapism. The refuge to nature is a form of escapism from the harsh realities of modern urban life. Instead of facing the changes mainly due to the Industrial Revolution, the Romantics turned their back to urban life and ignored the life in the cities by seeking refuge in nature.

Besides escapism, solipsism was another Romantic feature most criticized, especially by the Modernists. Romantic solipsism is nothing more than the adoption of Rousseau’s principle about the natural and innate goodness of man. The belief that man is by nature good, and it is society that corrupts him led to the creed that the self is the only certain part of reality to be valued over the conventions of society. Reality being perceived through the self’s consciousness makes of the self a reliable source of knowledge. In the case of Wordsworth, the daffodils, and the emotions they evoke in the poet’s mind are the outcome of the poet’s self’s awareness. However, what is also relevant to point out is that “the poet does not merely describe objects of nature, but projects his own subjective state onto natural objects and then describes not the object itself but his own state.”<sup>77</sup>

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76. Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Confessions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1896), 3.

77. D. J. Moores, *Mystical Discourse in Wordsworth and Whitman: A Transatlantic Bridge* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006),58

If German Romanticism probed positive “self-realization,” French Romanticism on the opposite, favors negative “self-awareness.” The Romantic escapist attitude to reality is therefore unacceptable in an ever-changing world where nature, the source of man’s happiness is itself threatened by urbanization and industrialization. In addition, the political, economic, social, and cultural changes resulting from these two important modern phenomena make clear that the Romantic escapist approach to reality is no longer adequate to reflect these changing circumstances. A new sense of reality and of the self is therefore required. The findings of the radical new social theories further uprooted the humanist Nineteenth-Century deep-seated ideas of self-confidence, revealing mainly that the self is merely a prey in the hands of an uncontrollable and inaccessible unconscious play of forces. Romanticism could no longer be the best expression of reality and some Modernists, such as T.E. Hulme even rejected it. It became clear for Modernists that this new world could no longer be effectively reproduced by the existing modes of representation and that they had to look for new ways of expression. This is why all of them responded to Ezra Pound’s motto: “Make it New,” which became the “most frequent quotation from the period.”<sup>78</sup>

The debate about tradition and innovation is one of the hottest subjects of controversy among the Modernists. The place of literary tradition especially, has been the subject of dispute dividing Modernists and critics. Frank Kermode in his essay "the modern" sums up these contending attitudes toward literary tradition by formulating the division of Modernism into Paleo-Modernism and Neo-Modernism. According to Kermode, Paleo-modernism sought to rewrite its past, while Neo-modernism is anti-historical.

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78. Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19.

### **C- Paleo-modernism: The Return to Tradition:**

The place of history, and the past in culture were problematic subjects for Modernists. While the Neo-Modernists believed that any dependence on the past is a threat for the modern mind to relate with the world of the present, the Paleo-Modernists, on the other hand advocated a return to Classical culture and to antiquity. The German Classicist scholar Frederick Nietzsche, for instance, as the precursor of Paleo-Modernism, used the ancient world to draw some lessons for the modern one. For him, "Historical education is wholesome and promising for the future only in the service of a powerful new life-giving influence."<sup>79</sup> For Nietzsche, modernity lacks direction because it ignores the past. Furthermore, to build a future it is necessary to maintain the continuity with the gains of the past, those strong assets since history will serve to direct society by fulfilling its ultimate task of serving life and providing lessons. In addition, Nietzsche underlines also how history can be useful for modernity even with painful or bad experiences, because before all modern man must be able to select and appropriate the elements of the past that are usable and forget those that are not and therefore are unnecessary and harmful. It is important for him, however, to forget those elements of the past that are not life giving. This ability to forget the past is inherently necessary to the experience of happiness: "Whoever cannot settle on the threshold of the moment forgetful of the whole past . . . will never know what happiness is."<sup>80</sup>

One of the lessons that Nietzsche learns from the past is how to face fragmentation produced by modernity. For him, fragmentation is the outcome of the Enlightenment's reformist views which disparaged Classical myth as superstitious and as something to be overcome, and replaced them by science and rationality, as the dominant myths of modernity, believed to be alone able to find the answers to all the questions of humanity. He argues that the "prejudice in

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<sup>79</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 1980), 14.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

favor of reason compels us to posit unity, identity, continuity, substance, cause, tangibility, and being – when in fact all of those things are chimerical in a world hopelessly and inevitably beset, or perhaps set free, by contradiction and chaos.”<sup>81</sup> However, the emphasis on reason leads to the loss of the instinctive life-giving which is for Nietzsche a significant human aptitude. Accordingly, whereas the positivistic views of humanity concern themselves with morality, and notions of good and evil, Nietzsche believes that all which is life-giving even instincts should be valued. If instinct is seen as a sacrilege, because it exists it is therefore life giving; its repression means an attack on what is natural, or on the root of existence itself.

Therefore, to cope with fragmentation, modern society is in need of a new myth which considers both the rational and the instinctive facets of human nature. Ancient Greek culture with its rich array of mythology offers the most exhaustive example to contemplate. Nietzsche believes that Greek culture could best be understood as resulting from a conflict between the two central principles of the rational and the instinctive represented by the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Although the use of the concepts of the Apollonian and Dionysian is linked to Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, the terms were used before him in German culture.

The Apollonian and Dionysian is a philosophical and literary concept, or dichotomy, based on certain features of ancient Greek mythology that many Western philosophical and literary figures have invoked in critical and creative works, and which can justly clarify and explain Modernism. In Greek mythology, Apollo and Dionysus are both sons of Zeus. Apollo is the god of the sun, of rational thinking and order, and appeals to logic, prudence and purity. On the other hand, Dionysus is the god of wine and dance, of irrationality and chaos, and appeals to emotions and instincts.

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81. Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in Peter Marden, *The Authoritarian Interlude: Democracy, Values and the Politics of Hubris* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 64.

The Apollonian was a drive to create clarity and order. It was “the belief in the explicability of nature and in knowledge as a panacea.”<sup>82</sup> It is the “shell of logical schematism” through which the Apollonian drive tried to redeem the horrors of the real world by giving it the illusion of order and beauty thus making it tolerable. The philosophies of Socrates and Plato with their “blind faith in logic at the expense of art”<sup>83</sup> represented the Apollonian realm.

To face fragmentation, modern society is in need of a new myth that recognizes both the rational and the instinctive. Ancient Greek culture with its rich mythology provides the best example to follow. *The Birth of Tragedy* presents a new theory of the origins of Classical Greek culture. Nietzsche believes that Greek culture could best be understood as resulting from a conflict between two central principles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian was represented by Apollo, the god of the sun and order. The Dionysian was represented by Dionysus, the god of wine and intoxication. The Apollonian was a drive to create clarity and order. It was “the belief in the explicability of nature and in knowledge as a panacea.”<sup>84</sup> It is the “shell of logical schematism”<sup>85</sup> through which the Apollonian drive tried to redeem the horrors of the real world by giving it the illusion of order and beauty thus making it tolerable. The philosophies of Socrates and Plato with their “blind faith in logic at the expense of art”<sup>86</sup> represented the Apollonian realm.

On the other hand, Nietzsche criticizes Socrates’s and Plato’s rational manner of looking at life and “for bringing this rationality to excess, silencing the other aspects of life.”<sup>87</sup> For him, Socrates rejects the intrinsic value of the senses and life using reason to always negate life but

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82. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Clifton P. Fadiman (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 61.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid., 61.

85. Joan Stambaugh, *The Other Nietzsche* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 18.

86. Ibid.

87. Katrin Froese, *Rousseau and Nietzsche: Toward an Aesthetic Morality* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 98.

never to create. In contrast, the Dionysian existence constantly seeks to affirm life, and perpetuates the growth and flourishing of visceral life force. Among the Dionysian qualities are those which denote “the most savage natural instincts [which] were unleashed,”<sup>88</sup> and which encompassed spontaneity, irrationality, and the rejection of discipline. Nietzsche considers these qualities to embody the Hellenic character as a whole and its human values: The delight in drunkenness, delight in cunning, revenge, envy, slander, obscenity—in everything which the Greeks recognized as human and therefore built into the structure of society and custom. The wisdom of their institutions lies in there being no gulf between good and evil, black and white. Where did the Greeks acquire this freedom? Clearly from Homer.”<sup>89</sup>

Based on ancient Greek mythology, the Apollonian and Dionysian philosophical and literary concept, has since Nietzsche been invoked by many Western philosophical and literary figures in critical and creative works, and this can justly clarify and explain Modernism. Nietzsche’s understanding of human nature and his interpretation of history with the lessons we can draw from the past especially, would influence the Modernist writers in many ways. Although Modernists never formed a monolithic group and responded differently. For some Modernists, Hellenism and classical mythology were definitely out of place in writings representative of the Modern age; a good example will be Louis Untermeyer’s statement about American poetry and the American spirit in *American Poetry since 1900*. On the opposite, many of them answered Nietzsche’s call for the return to the past, particularly the literary past. Attentive to their societies’ contradictions, paradoxes, and intricacies and in search for social remedies they employed ancient myths to show by contrast the fragility and superficiality of modern culture. By drawing upon the tradition they sought to adequately express reality and give meaning to their life. T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle Pound, among others

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88. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 6.

89. Frederick Nietzsche, *the Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 90.

resorted to ancient civilization to draw historical parallels and learn from them. Archibald Mac Leish made an interesting and relevant comment on the use of mythology in American drama:

When you are dealing with questions too large for you, which nevertheless, will not leave you alone, you are obliged to house them somewhere -- and an old wall helps, which is perhaps why so many modern plays have proved, on critical examination, to be reconstructions of the myths of Greece.

Gilbert Highet for his part states that in poetry, the symbolist poets sometimes employed Greek myths to show by contrast with the heroism or beauty of classical legend, how sordid the men and women of today have made themselves. He writes:

Less filthily, more beautifully, but no less despairingly, T.S. Eliot has used Greek legend to cast a pure but revealing light on the meanness of modern life. The poets of the Renaissance used Greco-Roman myth and history as a noble background to dignify the heroic deeds they described. Eliot does the opposite. When the Renaissance poet compared his hero to Hector or his heroine to Helen, he made them more brave and more beautiful. By comparing Sweeney leaving a pick-up girl to Theseus deserting his mistress Ariadne, Eliot shows the modern infidelity to be vile—because the world which tolerates it is ignoble, coarse, repetitious, and complacent, and because even the actors lack that style which, in a heroic age, elevates a crime into a tragedy.<sup>90</sup>

Like many modernists, in her book of verse *The Walls Do not Fall*, Hilda Doolittle uses the classical past as a frame for the disordered, fragmented present. *The Walls Do not Fall* is the first book in her Trilogy, published in 1944, followed by *Tribute to the Angels* (1945) and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946). By fusing Egyptian, Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian

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90. Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 513.

myth, HD sends a strong message to humanity: civilizations endure despite the passing of time and its hardships.

From the opening section of the poem, H.D. begins by powerfully layering the speaker's impressions of the WW II with allusions to past civilizations and world mythology. In fact, the poem opens with the speaker walking through the devastated city after a bombing raid. In the face of this destruction, however, the poem is pervaded by a sense of hope. On the other hand, the summoning of ancient ruined architecture and surviving myths further strengthens the sense of endurance against the hard times. The speaker tells us that we have faced death, but all is not destroyed.

After surviving WWI and the bombing of London in WWII, H.D. offers one answer to the question as to why the survivors of the war have been saved: "The frame held: /We passed the flame: we wonder / What saved us? What for?"<sup>91</sup> The poet affirms that civilization can endure the worst, and the spiritual foundation on which she bases this claim has held up: the walls do not fall. For her, the war is fulfilling this universal pattern of civilization; she "explains symbols of the past / in to-day's imagery"<sup>92</sup> because history repeats itself. Therefore, to interpret contemporary life H.D. resorts to Classical mythology in search for historical parallels. First she merges ancient and new settings, as London and Karnak in Egypt, to tell us that London would survive in the same way that Karnak has endured time. She also connects stories of ancient time with events and circumstances taking place in her own time to teach lessons. As king of Egypt, Osiris taught his people who were sunk into barbarity the blessings of civilization, she invokes a divine Presence throughout the poem, or a spiritual savior who would save humanity.

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91. Hilda Doolittle, *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1988), 511.

92. *Ibid.*

In fact, the poem pays tribute to deities which all relate to universal myths and patterns of rebirth and resurrection, death and rebirth. All of the deities are defined as “healers, helpers / Of the One, Amen, All-father.”<sup>93</sup> By invoking these myths, H.D. offers the answer to the opening question of “what for” and why “us”. H.D. claims that poets are linking all humanity together; like the ancient scribes:

We are the keepers of the secret  
the carriers, the spinners/ of the rare intangible thread  
that binds all humanity  
to ancient wisdom.<sup>94</sup>

We can be sure to survive thanks to the old civilization, although the triumph is hard to reach for we are still at war, and how this historical pattern will end up is still left to be discovered:

We are voyagers, discoverers  
of the not-known,  
the unrecorded;  
we have no map;  
possibly we will reach haven;  
heaven.<sup>95</sup>

What is sure is that the pen is mightier than the sword. Despite the devastation created by the weapons of war, words are immortal, and will survive, because " we take them with us beyond death. "<sup>96</sup>

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93. Ibid. 529.

94. Ibid. 522.

95. Ibid. 543.

96. Ibid. 518.

She addresses the sword by saying: “You would not have been, O sword, / without idea and the Word’s mediation.”<sup>97</sup> She admonishes the sword to:

remember, O Sword,  
you are the younger brother, the latter-born,  
your Triumph, however exultant,  
must one day be over,  
in the beginning  
was the Word.<sup>98</sup>

The poet affirms that civilization can endure the worst, and the spiritual foundation on which she bases this claim has held up. Despite all the hardships, “The walls do not fall”.

As a Paleo- Modernist, Hilda Doolittle needed Classical mythology to interpret contemporary life. To make sense of her era, she mixes the characters and stories of ancient time with the people and actions occurring in her generation. In section fifteen of the poem “The Walls Do Not Fall,” she addresses her audience and stresses that the role of the poet is to bind “all humanity / to ancient wisdom / to antiquity.”<sup>99</sup> To accomplish this task, she urges the poets to give a historical sense to concrete objects since their meanings are timeless: “our joy is unique, to us, rape, knife, cup, wheat are symbols in eternity, and every concrete object has abstract value, is timeless in the dream parallel.”<sup>100</sup>

In the same poem, she reveals her optimism that the civilization can counteract the violence of the war through the healing power of writing. Addressing the sword, she reminds it that its “Triumph, however exultant, / must one day be over, / in the beginning / was the Word.”

<sup>101</sup> In the following passage, H.D refers to mythological figures credited with inventing writing

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97. Ibid. 519.

98. Ibid.

99. Doolittle, *Trilogy*, 15.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid., 10.

in order to suggest how writing may transcend death. These figures include the Egyptian Thoth, the Greek Hermes, and the Roman Mercury. Beyond death; Mercury, Hermes, Thoth invented the script, letters, palette; the indicated flute or lyre-notes on papyrus or parchment are magic, indelibly stamped on the atmosphere somewhere, forever; remember.”<sup>102</sup>

The reference to figures belonging to different eras and cultures implies that words are immortal, and “we take them with us / beyond death.”<sup>103</sup> Despite the devastation caused by the weapons of war, writing and civilization will survive.

#### **D- Neo- modernism: Attack on Conventions**

If many Paleo- Modernists, such as Pound, Eliot, and H.D. perpetuated European literary traditions and turned to Europe (mainly England and France) to produce a viable cosmopolitan poetry, others, Americanists and nationalists , such as, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Hart Crane, and William Carlos Williams felt the need to extricate themselves from their European counterparts and be distinctively American. They are the poets that Kermode calls the Neo- Modernists, and who willingly dissociated their works from the Paleo-Modernist group and even criticized strongly its elitism, and classicism. For instance, William Carlos Williams’s response to T.S. Eliot’s masterpiece, “The Waste Land” was that it was only “a great catastrophe to our letters”<sup>104</sup>

For the Neo- Modernists, relying on tradition, before all, means commitment to what is distant, extraneous, and consequently, irrelevant to the contemporary American conditions. While Eliot declared himself a classicist in literature, Williams’s subsequent quotation on the direction to which the Paleo-modernists had guided modern poetry, explains meanwhile, the attitude of each of the two groups: “I have maintained from the first that Eliot and Pound by

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102. Ibid.

103. Ibid.

104. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995 ), 75.

virtue of their hypersensitivity (which is their greatness) were too quick to find a culture (the English continental) readymade for their assertions. They ran from something else, something cruder but, at the same time, newer, more dangerous but heavy with rewards for the sensibility that could reap them.”<sup>105</sup>

What Eliot, Pound and other Paleo-modernists are looking for is alien and not representative of America. The “something” European is alienating Americans and depersonalizing them. The verb “ran” implies that any reliance on tradition other than American is seen as a form of cultural betrayal and diversion from the American reality. More importantly, for Williams, America with its spaces, cultural diversity, nascent literature offers an infinite reservoir for inspiration and gratification. For these reasons, the American Neo-modernists founded their new authentic American poetry on two fundamental assets: the neglect of the past and history, and the exploration and exploitation of the American reality to create a workable new American literary tradition. In this vein, William Carlos Williams in a letter to Kay Boyle states, “You know, I think, enough of me to understand that I have no belief in the continuity of history. To me the classic lives now just as it did then—or not at all. . . . Everything we know is a local virtue—if we know it at all.”<sup>106</sup>

In the absence of an established American literary tradition, these iconoclast poets turned to their American predecessors to look for models. They found encouragement and inspiration in the writings of Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson who are now seen as the fathers of the authentic American poetry. Walt Whitman as well as Ralph Waldo Emerson called restlessly and constantly for cultural independence from England. Mournful of the

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105. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Harold Kaplan, *Poetry, Politics, and Culture: Argument in the Work of Eliot, Pound, Stevens* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 10.

106. William Carlos Williams, *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1957), 130.

paucity of the American culture, Ralph Waldo Emerson laments the absence of a true American poet in his influential essay “The Poet”:

I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not, with sufficient plainness, or sufficient profoundness, address ourselves to life, nor dare we chant our own times and social circumstance. If we filled the day with bravery, we should not shrink from celebrating it . . . We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer. <sup>107</sup>

Further, he remarked that “the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.”<sup>108</sup> For Emerson, the poet that America was waiting for would have to turn to America, as a subject itself to find resources for his writings, since “Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boasts, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and the pusillanimity of honest men, the Northern trade, the Southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung.”<sup>109</sup> and are just expecting to be “sung”, to be exploited. Thus far, he eulogizes, “America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination; and it will not wait long for metres.”<sup>110</sup>

Emerson’s call for America’s cultural independence advocated a preoccupation with America as a subject -matter and the initiation of a new tradition based on the American reality and different from that of England. It is this type of poetry that would define and characterize the American character:

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107. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library

108. *Ibid.*, 450.

109. *Ibid.*, 465

110. *Ibid.*

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have poetry of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? . . . The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. <sup>111</sup>

In the midst of such an impoverished intellectual environment, and the lack of a proper American tradition, the American artists found themselves in a dilemma; to distance themselves from Europe when they themselves had European roots, and used English, as their language. Brander Matthews, professor of English at the Columbia University, diagnoses the problem by arguing that the use of the English language by American writers is tricky and makes their literature inseparable from English literature: “English literature is the record of the thoughts and the feelings and the acts of the great English-speaking race. . . . It is no matter what the nationality of the author may be, whether he is a citizen of the United States or a subject of the British crown; if he uses the English language he contributes to English literature.” <sup>112</sup> Likewise, Henry S. Pancoast thought of American literature as a “continuation of English literature” <sup>113</sup> not only because of the English language that they inherited from England, “but also because of the English character of their civilization.” <sup>114</sup>

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111. Ibid.,7.

112. Brander Matthews, quoted in Pavel Drábek, et al., *Theory and Practice in English Studies* (Brno: Masaryk University, 2003), 26

113. Henry S. Pancoast, quoted in Cary D. Wintz, *Analysis and Assessment, 1980-1994* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 128.

114. Ibid.

In front of the absence of a well-seated American literary tradition which may provide poets with handy models and exhaustive patterns of thought to follow, American poets have to face many challenges and show their abilities, and why not, superiority to their English peers. Among the difficulties encountered, was the lack of viable references, and paradigmatic models. Christopher Beach states that “in England, for example, a twentieth-century poet could refer to the work of Victorians like Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold to the poetry of Romantics like William Wordsworth and John Keats, and from there back to the even more firmly established canon of John Milton, William Shakespeare, and Geoffrey Chaucer.”<sup>115</sup>

Despite this cultural void, Emerson is optimistic and sees it as an auspicious historical opportunity to create a new poetry. For him, it is an age “of Revolution, when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old, can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era.”<sup>116</sup>

Emerson’s “The American Scholar”, as an ideological cultural manifesto has a twofold action : it maps and reports the wrongs and weaknesses of the American society and exhorts young artists and talents , to align themselves with the spirit of the age, that is to say, against the world of their fathers. Though it is a critique of the present, of how the society is working, how it is failing it nevertheless indicates how society could be changed and improved. Consequently, many American artists appealed by Emerson’s enthusiasm to create an original and authentic American poetry, responded to his call.

Whitman, particularly shared Emerson’s optimism and believed firmly that the United States would be able to produce great works of art and great authors when he wrote in the Preface to the 1855 Edition of *Leaves of Grass* that “the Americans of all nations at any time

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115. *Ibid.*, 4.

116. Emerson, *The Complete Works* , 187

upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. And that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.”<sup>117</sup> In the following passage from *In Democratic Vistas* Whitman reverberates Emerson’s will to initiate an idiosyncratic American poetry:

Our fundamental want to-day in the United States, with closest, amplest reference to present conditions, and to the future, is of a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade, than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life, giving it decision, affecting politics far more than the popular superficial suffrage, with results inside and underneath the elections of Presidents, or Congresses— radiating, begetting appropriate teachers, schools, manners, and, as its grandest result, accomplishing . . . a religious and moral character beneath the political and productive and intellectual bases of the States.

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Much of what is considered Modernist poetry can trace its origins to Walt Whitman’s enthusiastic embrace of America writ large: everything about America that was new, common, large, open, and, most importantly, free. In their turn and in their own ways, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams expanded on Whitman’s innovations. In doing so, all made contributions to the creation of a uniquely American poetics.

Whitman, following Emerson’s urgent call to initiate a national literature, distinct from the British replicas by declaring the intellectual independence of the United States, seems to find the solution by raising a new breed of artists and literary figures who would create more distinctive forms of American literature by abandoning their European counterparts ‘models.

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117. Walt Whitman, *Poems by Walt Whitman* (New York: Books on Demand, 2019), 5.  
118. Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 5-6.

He wrote: “I say that democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil, until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of art, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences.”<sup>119</sup>

As a matter of fact, in the history of literature, the American experience has been peculiar and unique in its endeavor to create a literary tradition of its own, American by definition and character, distinct from that of Europe, and particularly Britain. Although the reasons for such an Americanism are plausibly and historically justified, notably by the abusive British political administration of taxation without representation, and the “Stamp Acts”, when America was still a British colony, and even after independence. Since then, the Americans have had to face many challenges. First, from the beginning, a national consciousness to be Americans and different from Europeans was felt, and Americans have expressed often a collective unease and insecurity about themselves, about the differences, between their “New World,” inchoate, incipient, novice, undeveloped and unripe and the “Old World” experienced, veteran, expert, proficient, and adept. Second, shared by major literary figures like Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne and Henry James, and social critics, such as Waldo Frank, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, and George Santayana, this popular mode of self-consciousness was what Alan Trachtenberg called a kind of reflex, both aggressive and defensive healing feelings of cultural inferiority. The reflex consisted of not only adopting newness but also of struggling against what Santayana called the colonial mentality of the “genteel tradition”.

The cultural critic and author of *Our America* (1919) and *Rediscovery of America* (1929) Waldo Frank, in *Salvos* (1924) issued a “declaration of war”, “the war of a new consciousness, against the forms and language of a dying (European) culture”, announcing the death of “the experiential assumptions that held our (both English and American) culture

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119. *Ibid.*, 5.

together”. Frank, among many other American intellectuals, lamented the “ misery” in which his generation lived, its spiritual poverty, its emotional and intellectual “ chaos”.

Van Wyck Brooks’s *America’s Coming of Age* ( 1915), another revealing title offers only not a critique of spiritual poverty, the malaise of a society blindly divided but serves as a keynote of the first phase of cultural criticism introduced by Brooks. Also, it remains a vital originator of Twentieth-Century American criticism of culture. “ If we are dreaming of a ‘national culture’ today, “ he repeatedly wrote in his early essays, “ it is because our inherited culture has so utterly failed to meet exigencies of our life, to seize and fertilize its roots”.<sup>120</sup>

However, if the decision in theory seems legitimate and reasonable the difficulty lies in its application. For, by their history, ancestry, culture, and language the Americans are the output of the European ethno- socio-cultural mix, known as the “melting pot” no other nation in the world has known,

Ezra Pound , more than any other American was despaired about the cultural poverty of The U.S.A . In his poem “The Rest,” ( 1913) he echoes the Seventeenth- Century jeremiad, a rhetorical mode of lamenting, common among disillusioned American intellectuals since the days of Puritanism. From his exile in London, since expatriation was the only way to escape the cultural misery of his country, he cried to those Americans who remained behind in a philistine, “half-savage” America:

O helpless few in my country, remnant enslaved!

Artists broken against her,

A-stray, lost in the villages,

Mistrusted, spoken-against,

Lovers of beauty, starved,

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120. Van Wyck Brooks, *the Early Years: A Selection from His Works, 1908-1921* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968 ), 192

Thwarted with systems,  
Helpless against the control.<sup>121</sup>

In “The Rest”, Pound is lamenting the alienating condition of the American artist and is questioning what is his place in a society without established standards for a literary tradition.

In the previous century, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne before him accounted of what was “missing” in American life, and especially Henry James, who made a list of the “absent things” in Hawthorne’s biography. However, in the early decades of the Twentieth-Century, when exile or expatriation became a likely solution, perceptions like James’s have placed writers and intellectuals in an alienated situation, away from mainstream values and outside the popular consensus of American cultural life: a situation of alienation remarkably similar of the Blacks to what W.E. Dubois describes in *The Souls of Black Folk* ( 1903).

“Double Consciousness ,” a term coined by DuBois, is designed to describe an individual whose identity is divided into several facets. Although focusing on the specificity of Blacks only, “double consciousness” when used as a theoretical framework liable to be applied to other Americans, and even other individuals, it reveals not only the psycho-social divisions in American society but allows for a full understanding of those divisions in national and international lines.

The term was first used in an *Atlantic Monthly* article titled “Strivings of the Negro People” in 1897. It was later republished with minor edits under the title “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois describes “double consciousness” as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two

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121. Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1957), 29.

thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.<sup>122</sup>

This “double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others,” or in-betweenness, the feeling to belong to two cultures, and at the same time the sensation of alienation and estrangement towards the other culture, have become by the 1920S significant and symptomatic cultural manifestations between culture and literature.

In diagnosing the possible causes for such a disjuncture, Whitman as for Emerson before him found little in earlier American literature to help them substantiate and validate their work. Even though Whitman wrote a self-confident preface to the 1855 original “Leaves of Grass”, it nevertheless shows that his author is hesitant and self-reserved due to the absence of an American established and confirmed tradition. In “Nature” Emerson asked himself, “Why is there no genius in the Fine Arts in this country?” For Emerson it was just this lack of nourishing environment that America could not provide, that was to supplant. Henry James, anxious as Emerson complained “our great unendowed, unfurnished, unentertained, and unentertaining continent, where we all sit sniffing, as it were, the very earth of our foundations.”<sup>123</sup> In his biography of Hawthorne, James made a list of all that was absent from

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122. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk; Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903).  
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123 Henry James, *The Letters of Henry James*, Vol 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 37.

American life and culture. Hawthorne and James Fenimore Cooper before Henry James had described the special difficulties besetting the talent of invention and production in the U.S.

“Poverty of materials”<sup>124</sup> Cooper wrote in *Notions of the Americans* (1828) was one such difficulty. But there was also the absence of a distinctive authorial tradition, lack of American materials and resources. One has to notice then, that the flourishing Modernist movement of the early decades of the Twentieth-Century, that came to face the challenge, and defy the prejudices about the paucity of the American culture was not a monolithic movement, and Modernists because they were not a uniform group of writers with a single artistic vision, reacted differently.

Although criticized for his lack of form, Whitman was also acknowledged as the one who ignited the first sparkles for the new-born fire of Modern American literature with his deeply patriotic spirit, his brotherly empathy with the working, and common man, and his indisputably faith in the destiny and future glory of the United States. In this way, he triggered a tide of a new class of native writers and poets “sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life . ” In his poem, “Song of the Exposition,” he invites the inspiring muse to migrate from Greece to America: “Come, Muse migrate from Greece and Iona.”<sup>125</sup>

Emulating Walt Whitman and building upon the foundation of “a .new tradition” in their own ways, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams insisted on writing about American subjects in American English.

In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman published poems written in free verse, and that was a crucial innovation that Ezra Pound and the Imagists were to institutionalize more than fifty years later

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124 James Fenimore Cooper, *The Traveling Bachelor* (New York: James G. Gregory Successor to W.A. Townsend and Co. , 1862), 446. ,

125.Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2019), 226. ,

as a prime tenet of Modernism. For this innovation, he is considered as the father and the originator of the Neo-Modernist school of poets. He wrote in the Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, “The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to thing nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul”<sup>126</sup>

Whitman opened poetry to new subject matters by writing of the ordinary lives, occupations, and experiences of himself and his fellow Americans. He incorporated the common, the profane, the obscene, and the vulgar in his poetry. Above all, he encouraged the Americans to rely on themselves and trust their potentialities:

The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. ... Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations. ... Other states indicate themselves in their deputies . . . but the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors . . . but always in the common people. Their manners speech dress friendships— ... the picturesque looseness of their carriage . . . their deathless attachment to freedom— ... the fierceness of their roused resentment—their curiosity and welcome of novelty—their self-esteem and wonderful sympathy—their susceptibility to a slight—the air they have of persons who never knew how it felt to stand in the presence of superiors— ... their good temper and openhandedness—the terrible significance of their elections—the President’s taking off his hat to them not they to him—these too are unrhymed poetry. It awaits the gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it.<sup>127</sup>

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126. Walt Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1901),30.

127. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 396.

Whitman was fully aware that he was creating a new poetry for a new people. From the beginning of his career as a writer, Whitman as an experimental poet aligned himself with the great social and political experiments of American democracy. His style, he wrote in a letter to William D. O'Conner was a 'new style . . . necessitated by new theories, new themes . . . , forced upon us for American purposes'.<sup>128</sup> His ambition ... was "to give something of our literature which will be our own; with neither foreign spirit nor imagery nor form, but adapted to our case, grown out of our associations, boldly portraying the West, strengthening and intensifying the national soul, and finding the entire fountains of its birth and growth in our own country".

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Whitman's bold poetic theories and unabashed Americanism were later adopted and embraced, by almost all modernist American poets. Emerson and Whitman were not the first American writers to want to write American works. In American literary history, there had been many attempts to produce a national literature, particularly during and after the American Revolution such as Joel Barlow, Philip Freneau, and Hugh Brackenbridge. However, Emerson and Whitman were the first voices to proclaim their independence from the shackles of European tradition, and therefore, announced a new age where soon a national awareness of self-reliance and 'self-realization' was felt.

Not long after, a whole generation of writers would follow in the same vein. Focusing on American resources, and experimenting new forms of expression, William Carlos Williams validates his enterprise to neglect tradition, in a letter to Horace Gregory: "our chief occupation as artists, singly and jointly, should be the clarification of form, new alignments, in our own language and culture."<sup>130</sup> Thus, in Williams's view, American writers had to neglect the impeding tradition so that they would innovate, and create new forms of artistic expression. In

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128 . Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence, 1842-1867* (New York : New York Press, 2007), 56.

129. Ibid., 288.

130. Williams, *The Selected Letters*, 226.

1943, he explained to James Laughlin that tradition must be rejected in the making of poetry because it makes up "the dry mass of those principles of knowledge and culture which the universities ... have cloistered and made a cult" <sup>131</sup>

For Williams, linking tradition and academia together in the making of poetry constitutes a real threat. As a result, poetry has become stagnant, and frozen:

the craft  
subverted by thought, rolling up, let  
him beware lest he turn to no more than  
the writing of stale poems . . .

Minds like beds always made up, (more stony than a shore) unwilling or unable.<sup>132</sup>

This stanza from the Preface of *Paterson* reads like a warning to both his readers and future poets: poetry is in danger of becoming stale because of the minds that are willingly or not adhering to the principles of tradition. When the poet obeys the principles of tradition, poetry is in danger of becoming stale. In the following passage from *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, Williams expands his view: "The classics have done something to the words. They have fixed them into an apparent building which can do nothing but crumble and disappear like the Parthenon . . . Fixed in words-in the very classics are many-most if not all of the stupidities which enthrall us. . . . To read, while we are imbibing the wisdom of the ages, we are at the same time imbibing the death and the imbecility, the enslaving rudeness of the ages."<sup>133</sup>

To forge a poetics more fully responsive to the cultural and material impulses of modern American poetry, Williams repudiates the distant, "abjures the unknowable,"<sup>134</sup> and rather "places himself on the near side of reality."<sup>135</sup> In this context, he states, "There is a certain

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131. *Ibid.*, 214.

132. William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (New York: New Directions, 1985), 260.

133. William Carlos Williams, *The Embodiment of Knowledge* (New York: New Directions, 1977), 107.

134. *Ibid.*, 132.

135. *Ibid.*, 132.

position of the understanding anterior to all systems of thought, as well as of fact and of deed—that is common to all: it is that in which the thinker places himself on the near side of reality—abjures the unknowable and begins within a certain tacitly limited field of human possibility to seek wisdom.”<sup>136</sup>

As a response to the heavily traditional, internationalist poetics made prominent by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound during the formative years of the modern, Williams’s poetic approach, on the opposite is centered on two principles: first, his disbelief in “the continuity of history” and, second, the focus on “locality” From this initial focus on the local the poet offers a culturally relevant poetry rooted in the values of the present moment rather than the past. In a letter, Williams wrote to Horace Gregory in 1944, he extols the vital role of “local” “particulars” for the “maker[s]” of “culture”: “It is the poet who lives locally, and whose senses are applied no way else than locally to particulars, who is the agent and the maker of all culture. It is the poet’s job and the poet lives on the job, on location.”<sup>137</sup>

By grounding his work in the immediate, physical conditions of local places and landmarks, Williams shows a desire to privilege immediacy and concreteness in his verse. Williams further typically exemplifies the break from what Eliot called “tradition” through the use of “new forms (in Williams’s terms), specifically the radical departure from the formal poetic line and the revolution in language use which came to be a trait of American modernist writers.

Indeed, one of the most important contributions made to American poetry by Williams is linguistic. In his efforts to translate the American experience as faithfully as possible, he reproduced the everyday speech of the Americans including slang, colloquial speech, and words with distinctly un-poetic associations. By using everyday language in his verse, he succeeded

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136. Ibid., 132.

137. Williams, *The Selected Letters*, 225.

in liberating poetic diction from archaic forms. This was very exciting for him, because he sensed that American poetry was beginning to form an identity and sound of its own, very different from that of British poetry.

Perhaps more than anything, Williams wanted to capture the rhythms of American speech in "The Red Wheelbarrow", because he felt there was something uniquely delightful about the sound of American speech. Moreover, he felt like this sound was being neglected in favor of a British sound. In this context, Williams said, "The American idiom has much to offer us that the English language has never heard of."<sup>138</sup> In his search to revolutionize American poetry, he wrote to the editor of *Poetry* magazine in 1913, saying, "Verse to be alive must have infused into it something of the same order, some tincture of disestablishment, something in the nature of an impalpable revolution, an ethereal reversal."<sup>139</sup> In the end of his poem "To Elsie," Williams invites us to contemplate the dangers to American culture implicit in a poetry caught in another nation's rhetorical conventions: "as if the earth under our feet were an excrement of some sky and we degraded prisoners destined to hunger until we eat filth while the imagination strains after deer going by fields of goldenrod in the stifling heat of September Somehow it seems to destroy us It is only in isolate flecks that something is given off Pleasure at Home . No one to witness and adjust, no one to drive the car."<sup>140</sup>

Unlike the Paleo-modernist H.D.'s elitist poems, such as "Eurydice", "Cassandra", "Adonis at Ithaca", "Let Zeus Record", "Hermes of the Ways", "Leda", or "Helen", which as their titles suggest contain allusions to ancient myths, and were difficult to read and understand,

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138. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Stephan Delbos, *The New American Poetry and Cold War Nationalism* (Prague: Springer Nature, 2021), 43.

139. Williams, *The Selected Letters*, 24.

140. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Lawrence Rainey, *Modernism: An Anthology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing 2005), 526.

poems by Williams like “The Red Wheelbarrow” or “This is Just to Say” are written in simple language, and are themselves about ordinary things.

As an illustration of Williams’s poetic approach, let’s examine “The Red Wheelbarrow”, one of Williams' most frequently anthologized poems. "The Red Wheelbarrow" first appeared in Williams's collection of poetry and prose entitled *Spring and All* in 1923.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, T.S. Elliot, and Ezra Pound, who were writing difficult and obscure poems, William Carlos Williams wasn’t writing complex poems. Instead, Williams wrote poems that captured ordinary moments and ordinary objects, such as a red wheelbarrow. But because of its simplicity per se “The Red Wheelbarrow” may be called a revolutionary poem. The poem describes a red wheelbarrow in the rain. But it is about so much more. This poem may look short and simple but it has a lot to say, or, rather, it has a lot of questions to ask. In fact, “The Red Wheelbarrow” is one of his most famous poems for its ability to focus on the objective representation of objects and make the ordinary extraordinary.

The poem consists of four miniature stanzas of four words each. “The Red Wheelbarrow” is perhaps one of the shortest serious poems ever published by an American poet. Written in free verse, it is composed of four stanzas, each consisting of two short lines. The entire poem contains only sixteen words, four words in each stanza. By using such a minimalist style Williams sought to give notice to the things that often go unnoticed:

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens.<sup>141</sup>

The poet begins with an impersonal statement, composed of abstract words: “so much depends/ upon.” This stanza creates uncertainty by raising the question, What depends on what? Williams isn’t telling, but by leaving such an obvious question unanswered, he’s inviting us to figure the answer out on our own. This is partly answered in the second stanza: “a red wheel/ barrow.” In contrast with the words of the first stanza, each word here, except for the article “a,” evokes a sense of impression. By dividing the word “wheelbarrow” into its parts, “wheel” and “barrow,” and by breaking the line after “barrow,” the poet slows the reading, which helps to imprint the image on the reader’s mind.

The structure of the poem is fragmented and we may ask why those artificial line breaks. It’s not that the line breaks make a simple sentence look more poetic, it’s that the line breaks are actually essential to what makes this poem work. They force your brain to stop, even half-way through a word, dividing the scene into its components. And for something that presents itself as so simplistic, there is a lot going on in each of those components.

Hence, three images are involved: the wheelbarrow, described simply as red, the qualifying adjectival phrase “glazed with rain / water,” which dismisses the excessive strictness of the second stanza, and the contrasting white chickens of the final stanza. These images are presented one by one in short lines. This has the effect of slowing the reading and focusing the reader’s attention on each bit of information until the very last word.

The poem, or the moment of perception it records, is the description of an immediate experience. But the experience is told in a quite original way. It evokes neither cultural traditions nor literary associations. From an absolutely mundane, ordinary scene, Williams

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141. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Christopher Beach, *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 99.

discovers a new aesthetic pattern where pleasure can be felt from ordinary objects. The argument is the following:

“So much depends,” it says, on the object being there, but it also means that so much depends on the reader’s response to what is seen. In this way, anything, familiar or even plain, would become significant and moving when met with a full response. Because if one’s response is dull, the world takes on this quality, and the reverse is also true.

The poem tells us exactly what it is that depends on the red wheelbarrow: the glaze of rainwater, and the white chickens. So, these are enough to make us happy. Humanity depends on these things. Not just because of their usefulness, but because of their ordinary loveliness as well.

To conclude, this chapter has discussed the impact of Modernism on literature and its relationship with Romanticism. By highlighting the paradoxical nature of Modernism, with some modernists advocating for revolutionary ideas while others embrace reactionary positions, this reflects the complex and contradictory nature of Modernism, which is influenced by both the desire for change and the respect for tradition.

## **Chapter Two: T.S Eliot’s and Stevens’ Poetic Theories.**

From the start of the Twentieth-Century, Modernists were aware of their inability to convey their feelings and opinions according to Nineteenth-Century Romantic modes of thought, believed to be “irrational “and” subjective”, and even superseded, and ineffective. Above all, Modernists were then convinced that they could no longer mirror the reality nor reflect the experience of their actualities according to Romantic paradigms, where the self was

the only arbiter of judgment, and personal morality was the only true governing force, outside any external authority. These Romantic tenets were anathema with Eliot's, and all the Modernists' distrust in the Romantic confident anthropocentric view of man as the center of the universe. Among the Modernists, Eliot's approach was principally, a reaction against the Nineteenth-Century Romantic Movement which emphasized the importance of the individual and emotion. He pleaded predominantly against what he called the "Dissociation of Sensibility" which occurred in the history of English poetry. The phrase, "Dissociation of Sensibility" is a literary term first used by Eliot in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" from "Homage to John Dryden" (1921), to signify the separation of intellectual thought from the experience of feeling which he identified as an endemic weakness in English poetry from Milton onwards. Eliot, on the opposite, thought that good poetry must fuse thought and feeling, something he found in the Metaphysical poets. He identified Donne as the exemplar of the sensible poet for whom thought and feeling were one, the one who achieved in his words, the "Unification of Sensibility". For him, such fusion of thought and feeling is essential for good poetry. Bad poetry results when there is "Dissociation of Sensibility", or when the poet is unable to feel his thoughts and there is a split between thought and feeling.

The entire criticism of Eliot revolved around the view that poets until the Seventeenth-Century thought and felt, and knew that these two exist together, but in the Seventeenth-Century, a split occurred with the onset of scientific rationalism. Poets only thought, and after the romantic revolution, they only felt. Eliot pleaded for a reintegration of these two-thought and feeling.

Moreover, the Modernists' need to distance themselves from the Romantic heritage induced them to criticize it publicly. The Nineteenth-Century poets, because they only felt, and did not think, were attacked for both their aesthetics and morality. And this debate would continue throughout the first decades of the Twentieth-Century, directed in salvos of

conflicting essays and articles in various journals, with Eliot discussing the issue through “The Criterion”, the editorship of which he had assumed in 1922.

However, many of the Modernists’ poetic theories crafted as they thought against the distrust of Romantic individualism bear indeed traces of Romanticism per se, and reveal their dependence on Romanticism. In fact, the Modernists could not escape totally the strong impact exerted on them by the Romantic tradition where they had grown. Their relation with Romanticism, albeit characterized by their fear to fall under its influence and will to reject, or at least to distance themselves from their predecessors, is profoundly marked by its effects. In other words, it has tended to center on a Bloomian poetic “anxiety of influence.”

Indeed, as curious as it seems to be, Modernist poets still find themselves addressing the same issues and uncertainties as their forbears. The traditional concepts of Subject versus Object, Self versus Nature or Self versus Society where selfhood, individualism, subjectivism, the sense of isolation and the struggle to communicate with others, among others are still addressed. Thus, such traces of Romanticism can be easily identified in Modern poetry. Therefore, in place of a clear division between the Romantic and the Modern, I find instead a fundamental continuity between the two, evidenced by the works of scholars such as Albert Gelpi and John Bayley, who sustain this line of argumentation.

This anxiety of influence can be seen, indeed, in almost the Modernists’ just repudiation of the strong Romantic elements that are inescapably present, and color if not all their poetry, at least one of their phases of development as Modernist poets. Eliot’s anxiety, for instance, manifests itself in a fervent rejection of past Romantic influence and his criticism of the most influential poets in the English canon, despite various critics’ assertion that the Romantics and Shelley, he criticized most, were a great influence on his work, especially his early work. Indeed, Eliot in his essays and lectures, displayed his attacks on Romantic poets, the most violent attack being on the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Shelley and Keats”, given on 17

February 1933. In a way, or another, the Romantic poets were always crucial to Modernists, even if they were no longer to admire as good examples or approximately to aspire to, they served nevertheless, as counter-examples not to follow, and were rather to avoid.

Eliot, no doubt, wanted to distance himself from the Nineteenth-Century subjectivity of Romantic poetry, and achieve objectivity with his theory of “impersonality. However, as Gareth Reeves observes Eliot’s notion of impersonality owes more to important tendencies in Romantic poetry than he lets on. The oft-quoted sentence from “Tradition and the Individual Talent”: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from personality”<sup>142</sup> has affinities with the Romantics. Moreover, recent studies have convincingly argued that in many respects, and on the opposite to what Eliot pretends, Eliot’s criticism is continuous with and not antagonist to Romantic thought. Significantly, such arguments have been accompanied by a general revision of literary history that sees Modernism not as a break with, but on the contrary, an extension of Romanticism.

Against this Nineteenth-Century background, in this chapter, which is divided in two parts, I will attempt to define, in the first part, Eliot’s poetic theory derived from his criticism on Romanticism, and enacting a new theoretical and practical approach, to reading and interpreting poetry, inspired from Classicism. Eliot’s Paleo-Modernist program reveals his Classicist sensibility, where order and restraint are prevalent. Besides being a poet, and a thinker, Eliot is also famous for being a critic. Indeed, his theories were to become in the history of literary criticism landmarks by which subsequent readings of prose and poetry were compared and interpreted. His theories paved the way to the creation of the school of New Criticism, and helped interpreting works where the biographical context was not important and where the writer was separated from his work. Eliot’s theories and concepts are examined in

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142. T.S Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 52-53.

this chapter to show the place, and importance of Eliot's thinking in the history of Criticism. Even though, today he came to be regarded as conservative, elitist, obsessed with order and backward looking, until the middle of the Twentieth-Century, Eliot's idea of tradition was extraordinarily influential, and his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was a major contribution to the rise and hegemony of Modernism. Even when it is customary to regard the "Death of the Author" as a relatively recent theory, with Roland Barthes, as a major exponent, yet this theory actually has important common points with the "Theory of Impersonality" "usually associated with Eliot. The same is true, for many other Eliot's theories, such as the theory of the "Mythic Method", called also the "Allusive Method" where references, allusions and quotations from different previous sources are juxtaposed to his own writings. This makes us also think of what Julia Kristeva coins as intertextuality, where a text is read and interpreted in relation to other texts. Eliot's common use of allusions, quotations and references makes his poetry deeply influenced by and almost in dialog with other writers' existing texts. Finally, T. S. Eliot's ideas on impersonality contain key words and concepts which will keep recurring in the history of Twentieth-Century criticism. These are the references to the role and identity of the artist, the question of emotion and internal self, extended by younger critics, such as Michel Foucault.

The second part is related to the poetic theories of Wallace Stevens who responded also to Pound's Modernist motto "Make it New", but in a very opposite way to Eliot's Paleo-Modernism and represents a different brand of Modernism, Neo-Modernism. Because this poet represents the other end of the polarity, his approach and outlook to the concepts of poetry is crucial even though he may be not considered as a critic in the same way as Eliot is in the literary circle. Furthermore, his response to Romanticism is also valuable. Among many things, it enlightens us about the various aesthetic ways, Stevens adopted to account of the complex modern reality, and write about Modernism. The latter was in any case uniform and monolithic

but, as Peter Childs maintained, pluralistic and complex so that we cannot speak of Modernism but rather speak of Modernisms. What is worth pointing out is that the same remark formulated by Lovejoy on the plurality of Romanticism is also valid for Childs's Modernism. As the Modernists' responses were so wide-ranging, so we can speak of Modernism in the plural. All poets of the early Twentieth-Century, Paleo and Neo- Modernists, were the Modernists as each of them had responded to their times by their own unique ways of writing. Each of them came up with new ideas, methods, systems, concepts, and attitudes both towards literature and in producing literature. Their reactions can be graded from the moderate to the radical and it is significant therefore to see the degree and the intensity of each of these poets' attitude towards the new, the modern in form and style. The most radical instance of newness in Modernism may be the one suggested by Stevens and his meta-poetry. For this reason, I have selected him to represent this brand of Modernism.

#### **A -Eliot's Poetic Theory: Rejection of Romanticism:**

Eliot's preoccupations, which became ultimately the foundation for his subsequent theoretical, critical, and poetic development are concerned principally with his distrust of Romanticism, first, and, second, his personal search for unity and order in politics, religion, as well as in literature during the loss of faith, so characteristic of the first part of The Twentieth-Century. This can be easily evidenced in his well-known preface to "For Lancelot Andrews," where he openly described himself as a "classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion."<sup>143</sup> In other words, he always believed in the need of an external authority as a norm or a rule to restrict his inner voice. In this way, he stood against the implicit individual freedom of Romanticism, which he believed was improbable to make literary criticism scientific, rule based, and objective, because highly emotional outpourings and

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143. T.S. Eliot, quoted in Amar Nath Dwivedi, *T. S. Eliot: A Critical Study* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishing and Distributing, 2003),70.

personal confidences focus our attention on the poet rather than the poetry, and make poetry in this way more subjective and sentimental, and less objective and universal.

In fact, Eliot's rejection of Romantic literature which proclaims the individual will as the only arbiter of judgment may explain his Classicist attitude, and passion for order, and authority. In his "Preface to *Homage to John Dryden*," Eliot emphasizes that the Classical school achieved "elegance and a dignity absent from the popular and pretentious verse of the Romantic poets."<sup>144</sup> In another essay, "The Function of Criticism," he points out that the difference between the two schools is that between "the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic."<sup>145</sup>

**a. Eliot's theory of Impersonality:**

Eliot rejects the Romantic view that emotion is the fundamental condition of poetry. On the contrary, he believes that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." This fact further testifies of Eliot's belief in the perfection of Classical poetry, whose balance could be achieved through the respect of discipline and authority. Thus, Eliot's obsession with Classicism originates from his craving for order. The latter can be achieved only through the poet's eradication of personality, or in Eliot's words "impersonality", and his acknowledgment of tradition as an authority.

Eliot's distrust of the Romantic heritage, culminated in the work of Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater, his predecessors, who came to perceive art as something that could fill the void they saw resulting from the decline of religious faith. In this context, Matthew Arnold suggested that poetry might replace religion by arguing that "more and more mankind will

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144. T.S. Eliot, *Homage to John Dryden: Three Essays on Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Gordon Press, 1928), 197.

145. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Brace Jovanovich, 1950), 15.

discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.”<sup>146</sup> In his essay “ Arnold and Pater” ( 1930) Eliot attacked these thinkers who made art into a secular religion, and offered poetry as a substitute to religion, a notion further reinforced by other Modernists, in general, and by the poet Wallace Stevens, in particular. Eliot reacted by claiming that saying “Poetry ‘is capable of saving us’... it is like saying that the wall-paper will save us when the walls have crumbled.”<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, in his collection of essays “For Lancelot Andrewes,” to show the danger of intellectual chaos endangered by the Romantic “inner voice,”<sup>148</sup> and the decline of religion of the Twentieth- Century, Eliot offered as substitutes the return to Classicism and Catholicism against Romanticism and Non-belief.

Thus, Eliot. expressing the same anxiety about inner, subconscious impulses like many other Modernists, such as Hilda Dolittle, and Ezra Pound turned to “ Classicism ”, believed to signify reason, order, objectivity , and rejected “Romanticism” signifying the irrational and the subjective. Hence, if a subjective or personal literary work involves the author’s incorporation of personal experience and his judgments, values, and feelings, an objective or impersonal work, on the contrary, requires the author’s detachment and non- commitment in his presentation of the characters ’thoughts, feelings, and actions. Therefore, a romantic lyric is one in which we are requested to associate the subjective “I”, or lyric speaker, with the poet himself. A good example will be that of the Romantic poet Wordsworth and his personal poem, “Tintern Abbey”:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length

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146. Matthew Arnold, *Selections from the Prose Work of Matthew Arnold* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2019), 50.

147. T.S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, Volume 3: 1926-1927 (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 340.

148. T.S. Eliot, *The Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 71.

148. *Ibid.*, 48-49.

Of five long winters! And again I hear  
These waters, rolling from their mountain-spring  
With a soft inland murmur.-Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
That on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
The day is come when I again repose  
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view  
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard tufts.<sup>149</sup>

This poem speaks of a personal experience as the subjective pronoun “ I ” indicates, and shows that it has direct links to Wordsworth's ( the poet himself) personal life . Indeed, the poem begins with the speaker, Wordsworth himself, having returned to a spot on the banks of the river Wye that he has not seen for five long years. This place is very dear to him and is just as beautiful and mystical as it was when he left.

On the opposite, in an objective and modern lyric, the speaker is obviously an invented character, not the author himself, or simply a lyric voice without any personal specificities. T.S. Eliot in his Modern poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" seems to illustrate the point quite objectively:

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

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149. Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works* , 160.

Let us go, through certain half-deserted street,  
Of restless nights in one night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question... Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"  
Let us go and make our visit. (CPTSE, 13)

In "Prufrock," the ironic tone of the speaker establishes the insecurity and the lack of confidence the visitor of the town feels. The visitor's invitation to "A half-deserted street" in "one night cheap hotels / And sawdust restaurants" suggests that he is not very enthusiastic in this environment but rather apprehensive and feels no kinship like Wordsworth, and says cautiously : "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?' / Let us go and make our visit." He feels rather "Like a patient etherized upon a table", submissive to the doctor's orders, passive, and rather anxious of what is going to happen. The city imagery used is symbolic not just of Prufrock and his society, however, but of Twentieth -Century urban society and its inhabitants. The link bonding the individual to his environment of the Romantic poem "Tintern Abbey" is now disrupted and a feeling of loneliness and alienation gains the visitor. In " Prufrock", Eliot succeeds in presenting his personal views about the city, which can be those of any other citizen, without directly engaging in a personal expression of them.

Reacting against the Nineteenth-Century Romantic Movement which emphasized the importance of the individual and emotion, Eliot aims to appeal to the mind rather than to the emotions. In fact, T.S. Eliot remarks about poetry being "not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion . . . not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."

<sup>150</sup> This is why he dismisses the romantic definition of poetry given by Wordsworth in his

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150. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Sacred Wood* 52-53.

Preface to “ Lyrical Ballads,” where he equates poetry with “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”<sup>151</sup> that “it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility.”<sup>152</sup> Such Romantic theory of self-expression is best illustrated in the second stanza of “Tintern Abbey”:

These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and ‘mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind  
With tranquil restoration.<sup>153</sup>

The “beauteous forms” of the landscape have not been lost from his mind though. These landscape images which have stayed with him through his absence and supported him, present Wordsworth as a nature lover who feels kinship with nature, and a strong bond uniting the natural world and his inner self. Whenever he felt imprisoned in the modern world or downhearted by “dreary” life he would cast his mind back to this specific spot, and recall the pleasant moments he had there, for it is only there he finds solace.

In this stanza, the speaker describes how the images he is now seeing anew have never truly left him. Though the landscape has long been out of his sight, he has not been separated from it. The speaker has not completely forgotten it or been blinded to it. He describes it as

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151. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 98.

152. Ibid.

153 Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works* , 160.

having not been to him “As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye.” Often times, when he has been in “lonely rooms” in the middle of the “din / Of towns and cities,” the memories of this sight have come to him. He is able to revisit the landscape within his mind and find comfort in it, thanks to his imagination. It has brought him pleasure in times of “weariness.” Replacing frustration with “sensations sweet” that penetrate to his “blood...and ...heart.” These thoughts are even able to possess his “purer mind” and bring it to a state of “tranquil restoration.”

On the contrary, Eliot regards the poetic medium more important than the poet's personality and feelings. For this, in his best-known essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” which was first published in 1919 and soon after included in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920) , he already states the new critical position of the Twentieth-Century critic on the relationship between the author and his work . In this essay, Eliot attempts to do two things: first, to redefine “tradition” by underlining the importance of history to writing and understanding poetry. Second, to maintain that poetry should be essentially “impersonal,” that is separate and distinct from the personality of its writer, by declaring that “The progress of an artist is a continual self – sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.”<sup>154</sup> By appealing to “self- sacrifice,” he believed that the poet should not reveal his personality in his writing, for “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.” Eliot does not deny personality or emotion to the poet. Only, he must depersonalize his emotions for, the emotion of art is impersonal. This can be done by the use of a set of conceptual symbols or correlatives which endeavor to express the emotions of the poet.

It is in his first book of criticism *The Sacred Wood*, and especially in his essay “Hamlet and his Problems” that Eliot finds for his theory of poetic impersonality his most classic formulation in the concept of the ‘objective correlative’. According to Eliot, the poet cannot

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154. Eliot, *Sacred Wood*, 47.

communicate his emotions directly to the readers, but must find some object or medium suggestive of it to evoke the same emotion in his readers. It is through the objective correlative that the poet communicates with the reader and expresses his poetic emotion. Eliot states: “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 situation, 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.”<sup>155</sup>

Eliot’s concept of the objective correlative is based on the notion that the poet must not present his emotions directly but rather represent them indirectly through the “objective correlative” which becomes the formula for the poet’s original emotions. The example of Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth* has often been chosen by Eliot himself to illustrate the use of the objective correlative. In *Macbeth*, instead of communicating the emotions directly to the reader, the dramatist has embodied them in a situation or a chain of events, which suitably communicate the emotion to the reader. In “the sleep-walking scene,” for instance, Shakespeare in order to convey the mental agony of Lady Macbeth and how she feels proceeds not through a direct description, but through an unconscious repetition of her past actions. Her mental agony has been made objective through an objective correlative: the burning torch, so that it can as well be seen by the eyes as felt by the heart. The external situation, that’s of the torch burning is adequate to convey the internal emotions, the agony of Lady Macbeth.

Therefore, as a reaction against the Nineteenth-Century Romantic Movement which emphasized the importance of the individual and emotion, Eliot argues that poetry should be essentially “impersonal,” that is detached and discrete from the personality of its writer, and the artist must continually surrender himself to an external authority, i.e. the literary tradition which is more valuable than the poet’s self, since it is universal.

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155. *Ibid.*, 92.

In this context, Eliot maintains that the poet instead of expressing personal emotions, he has to transform what is personal into something universal: "the poet has not a personality to express but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experience combine in a peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality."

### **b. Eliot and Literary Tradition:**

For this reason also, Eliot shows great significance to tradition and history. For Eliot, true art has nothing to do with the personal life and subjectivity of the artist, but should be the result of a greater ability to synthesize and combine from the precursors' texts. For this, he must allow his poetic sensibility to be shaped and modified by the past, and must continue to acquire the sense of tradition throughout his career. Thus, Eliot's concern centers on the role of the poet as simply a medium for expression. Thanks to the poet's "self-sacrifice" to the particular awareness of the past, objectivity and impersonality are achieved in a work of art.

Gareth Reeves, in an essay entitled, "T.S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition" highlights Eliot's preoccupation with the historical sense with reference to Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The essay's preoccupation with the historical sense explains that any understanding of experience has its origins in the continuity of history and civilization. However, the idea of order behind his second essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," only updates his previous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in terms of history, and art. For Eliot, past works of art form an order or "tradition"; however, that order is always being altered by a new work which modifies the "tradition" to make room for itself.

Eliot gives a new import to tradition when he links it with his meaning of historical sense, and stresses its continuity in history. Through the individual evaluation of each poet's role in the making of a literary tradition, and his awareness of the historical sense, he confirms the idea

that a poet constitutes a constructing, and valuable part of the entire literary tradition. His contribution so slight it may be can pay on both national and international planes to enrich humanity, and make civilization. The historical sense involves perspicacity, not only of the pastness of the past, but also of its presence. The historical sense makes the poet comprehend that the past and the present form one simultaneous order for the past exists in the present. It also requires from the poet to write convincingly that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer down to him, including the literature of his own country, forms one continuous literary tradition. Eliot explains: “The historical sense compels a man 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 own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”<sup>156</sup>

Not only does a poet’s work, but the whole of the literature of his own country, and the literature of all Europe “ has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”<sup>157</sup> Eliot’s historical sense is a “sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal, and of the timeless and the temporal together.”<sup>158</sup> Eliot’s idea of tradition involves, then, the poet’s awareness of “the historical sense” which is a perception of “the pastness of the past” but also of its “presence.” This view, in which “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past,” requires that a poet must be familiar with the whole “mind of Europe”, i.e, almost all the literary past, available to him from the Greeks onwards and not just the literature of his own country only. This argument means that every work of art is a new moment but that cannot be achieved without the larger perspective of all such other moments throughout history:

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156. Ibid., 68.

157. Ibid., 68.

158. Ibid., 44.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new ( the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered. <sup>159</sup>

The sense of tradition is three- dimensional: first, it makes the poet be fully conscious of his place in the present, and his own generation contributions for the continuity of literature; second, it makes him aware of the significance in the present of the writers of the past. Third, it makes him finally be aware of his relationship with his predecessors. To evaluate the real worth and significance of a new writer and his work, one has to compare it with works of the past, because no writer has his value and significance in isolation. But just as the past directs and guides the present, so the present alters and modifies the past. When a new work of art is created, if it is really new and original, the whole literary tradition is modified, though ever so slightly. The past directs the present, and is itself modified and altered by the present. Every old poet has added something to the literary tradition out of which the future poet will write and add something in his turn.

In this way, Eliot's aesthetic program involves the reconciliation of the synchronic and diachronic perceptions of time: It brings both a synchronic view of history, where the poet is always present with us, and a diachronic view where we sense that the past is passed. It also combines the individual and the common efforts, the national and international contributions to art: Part of our experience of the world is what we bring to it, our personal point of view. But the attempt to reconcile the knowledge that there are and there have been countless other

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159. Ibid., 44-45.

different points of view from other people, with our private experience produces the concepts of originality and tradition altogether.

Tradition by this account is not what is commonly taken to be, something unconsciously handed down. On the opposite, it is a strenuous process and “cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour,”<sup>160</sup> a labor entailing “the historical sense”. For this reason, Eliot associated the creative process with pain, suffering, and even extinction. Surrendering the self as a necessary price for creative success is a leit-motif in Eliot’s many descriptions of how poetry evolves. Creation is linked to the poet’s ability to immerse his personality and give in to the control of external authority, a literary influence, or even a particular tradition. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, creation which is a struggle between the poet’s personality and external authority, can be achieved only if the author “surrenders”<sup>161</sup> himself to the past in a “continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.”<sup>162</sup>

Tradition must avoid a slavish imitation and a blind obedience to the ways of the preceding generations. For Eliot, tradition is a matter of much wider significance, for it cannot be inherited; it can only be obtained by hard labor. This labor is the critical labor of not only the knowledge of the past writers, but also of the discriminating between the useful and the useless, the good and the bad. Therefore, tradition can be obtained only by those who have the historical sense.

This argument which defines a poet’s poetic value and originality, within the historical sense helps to reconcile two different notions: the “tradition” and the “individual”. This means that every work of art is a new beginning that cannot be achieved alone. And it is accomplished

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160. Ibid., 43.

161. Ibid., 47.

162. Eliot, *Sacred Wood*, 47.

only in relation, and continuity to all the other works throughout history. A work of art and a poet have no meaning alone. But a poet gains significance only within the larger perspective of, and in relation to, all such precedent works throughout history and which constitute a tradition.

Too much emphasis, indeed, upon the personality and the individuality of the poet can hinder the artist from discerning the order and unity offered by tradition. Consequently, throughout his career, the artist must surrender to tradition, and mold his poetic sensibility from the past. Accordingly, for Eliot, the best part of a poet's work is that which displays the continual influence of the writers of the past: "not only the best, but the most individual part of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." <sup>163</sup>

The larger personality which is made of the "dead poets and artists," <sup>164</sup> is part of a still larger entity which he calls "the mind of Europe." That mind is what the poet "learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind."<sup>165</sup> Thus, "the mind of Europe" serves as a guide for the poet throughout his own critical career. Eliot further elaborates, "No poet, no artist has a complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone, you must set him from contrast and comparison among the dead."<sup>166</sup>

Though tradition is and remains a fundamental prerequisite for the poet's self-realization, Eliot acknowledged that the part and the role taken by the poet in the creative process, where the "Individual Talen" manifests itself, is what makes the difference between an innovative and

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163. Ibid, 43.

164. Ibid., 69.

165. Ibid., 70.

166. Ibid., 44.

imitative poet. For a poet must not only acquire the sense of tradition but also be able to modify it, when necessary, within the continual and dynamic course of tradition.

Then, in his criticism, and expounding his distrust of Romantic individualism, Eliot insisted that the artist should submit to tradition, and his role is to rise above personal feelings, and create impersonal art. With his theory of impersonality, and its renunciation of the self, Eliot puts forward his conception of a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. The theory of impersonality does not deny subjectivism, but sets to liberate the poem from his poet, when he writes: “only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to escape from these things.”<sup>167</sup> In other words, the poet’s emotions and passions must be depersonalized; he must be as impersonal and objective as a scientist.

As the Romantics epitomized the loss of control of emotions, to Eliot’s own critical thought, which stressed the need for order and tradition, this Romantic emotional abandonment was to criticize strongly, and to avoid in his poetry. Then, Eliot encourages literature to respect authority, or “tradition ” and the artist should submit to it. How should the artist submit to tradition? Eliot answers that it is through “self” renunciation” and “self- eradication” in a process of “self-depersonalization” that this submission to tradition can be attained.

To develop further his theory of impersonality, and make the relationship between the process of depersonalization and tradition clearer, Eliot borrows from chemistry. For this, he gives us the example of a chemical reaction, a catalyst, by using a chemical metaphor, when he compares the mind of the poet to a catalyst and the process of poetic creation to the process of a chemical reaction. The two gases involved in the chemical reaction, oxygen and hydrogen represent the poet’s experiences, and the catalyst represents the mind of the poet. The catalyst which induces and allows the chemical reaction to take place remains unaffected and unchanged.

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167. Ibid., 43.

In a like manner, the poet's mind (the catalyst) forms fragmented emotions into new wholes, but these latter bear no trace of the poet's mind. This implies that the poet should not integrate his emotions in his work. In Eliot's words, "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates."

The creation of art is like the action which takes place when platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide. The latter form sulphurous acid, in which there is no trace of platinum; nor is the platinum affected. The mind of the poet is this platinum. The emotions and feelings are oxygen and sulphur dioxide. The more perfect he is as a poet, the less involved is his own personality. The artist's mind keeps forming new compounds, but he remains separate in the whole process of creation. The man that suffers is different from the mind that creates. The imagination functions like a catalyst in a chemical reaction. It is necessary for the reaction to take place but it is not itself the product of the reaction.<sup>168</sup>

**c. Eliot's Mythic Method:**

In addition, Eliot's need for stability and coherence, especially felt in a disintegrating post-war world and collapsing culture was rightly expounded in his essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", (1923) where he refers to the present as "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy, which is contemporary history."<sup>169</sup> Taking his cue from James Joyce's book *Ulysses*, which he considers "to be the most important expression which the present age had found... a book to which we are all indebted, and from which none of us can escape,"<sup>170</sup> Eliot clarifies the purport of using what he calls "the Mythic" or "Allusive" method:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must

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168. *Ibid.*, 48-49.

169. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 177.

170. *Ibid.*, 48-49.

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. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward that order and form which Mr. Aldington so earnestly desires. And only those who have won their own discipline in secret and without aid, in a world which offers very little assistance to that end, can be of any use in furthering this advance.<sup>171</sup>

Hence, present anarchy can be comprehended only in the light of an ordered past. For Eliot, tradition originating in the Middle Ages is “the more pure”<sup>172</sup> because its “bond was with the Church, with tradition.”<sup>173</sup> Then, the break with such an intellectual and spiritual past has caused such contemporary emptiness where modern man feels at a loss. Therefore, only the reliance on a stable past, with a timeless pattern of order and continuity could help humanity to face the present chaos, and by analogy and contrast, produce a historical perspective. In many of his poems, Eliot emphasizes the break of modern society with its past and the sense of conflict that results from this rupture by means of images from the past and the present. This allusive technique which consists of juxtaposing images from the stable past and the chaotic present serves the purpose of finding historical parallels to better understand contemporary history, and draw lessons from the past. This is what he calls “the Mythic Method.” These images contribute, above all, to contrast the happy ordered steady lives of the past with the life

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171. *Ibid.*, 78.

172. *Ibid.*, 352.

173. *Ibid.*

of futility, immorality and impotence that characterize the modern world. Poems, such as, “Burbank”, “A Cooking Egg”, “Mr Eliot’s Sunday Morning,” “Sweeney Among the Nightingales” and “The Waste Land,” by excellence, can be read as Eliot’s illustration of this method, he theorized in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, and in which tradition is said to involve the “historical sense”. The function of the allusions is to evoke the historical sense and connect the poems with a literary tradition, and hence, explain the juxtaposition of past and present.

**d. Eliot’s Status in Modern Poetry and Criticism:**

In conclusion, the introduction of Eliot’s ideas and views on poetry to the literary world helped pave the way for subsequent criticism. The emphasis Eliot’s ideas put on impersonality and objectivity held great significance, mainly for two related movements, Practical Criticism and the New Criticism, and their critical approach. Practical Criticism, which originated in England, was given theoretical support by the New Criticism. In the writings of I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, and others of this school, the focus was on the work itself as an artefact independent of authorial intention. New Criticism, formulated by a group of American poet-critics, called the Southern Agrarians, such as, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Allen Tate, elaborated a system describing the text as a self-contained and self-sustaining organic structure, a formal unity and autonomous object, to be examined without regard to any contextual considerations, historical, authorial, biographical, intentional, affective, or ethical. The New Critics view the text as an auto telic artifact, an autonomous entity, which has its own life. They try to direct the reader’s attention towards rather the text itself, away from the historical and social contexts that might interfere in the interpretative process. It is a way of reading a text with no other consideration than the text itself. What they call “close reading”. Thus, the author’s life and his intentions, which are likely to influence the interpretation of the literary work, should not be taken into account as Eliot’s theory of Impersonality suggests.

Eliot's theory of impersonality makes the role of the author in the text decrease. He urges the reader to consider literature apart from the author's emotions and feelings. In his essay, "Dante," Eliot maintains that knowledge about the author and his life is likely to impede rather than facilitate literary interpretation. He writes:

In my experience of the appreciation of poetry I have always found that the less I knew about the poet and his work, before I began to read it, the better. A quotation, a critical remark, an enthusiastic essay, may well be the accident that sets one to reading a particular author; but an elaborate preparation of historical and biographical knowledge has always been to me a barrier.<sup>174</sup>

Eliot's first book of criticism, *The Sacred Wood* established him already as a discerning and erudite literary critic. His essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" has been widely anthologized, and highly influential. Its position as the single most important essay in Eliot's criticism, and a key text in relation to the *Waste Land* and the whole of modernist literature, justifies amply his fame and notoriety as both a poet, and critic.

Another important influence exerted by Eliot on Modern poetry is the appearance of Confessional poetry in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This kind of poetry is associated with poets such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and W.D. Snodgrass. Confessional poetry is the poetry of the personal whose main characteristic is the use of the pronoun I, and often tackles subjects such as depression, trauma, and death. This kind of poetry emerged as a result of poets wanting to go against or break the conventions of what was then established as the accepted Academic-Modern style of which T.S. Eliot was popular for.

Confessional Poetry opposed so directly and vociferously the impersonality argued for by T. S. Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that some scholars consider it to be poetry that emerged as a response to the Eliotic school of extinction of personality. The

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174 . Ibid., 144.

shift from the doctrine of impersonality that defined the poetic canon of Modernism under Eliot and Ransom to the very personal and autobiographical poetry of the Beats and Confessional poets reflects a profound shift in modern culture, indeed. The Confessional poets of the 1950s and 1960s pioneered a type of writing that forever changed the landscape of American poetry. The tradition of Confessional poetry has been a major influence on generations of writers and continues to this day.

In the end, Eliot's introduction of these important ideas and discussion of some implicative issues such as poetic impersonality, the role of tradition, the poet's individuality, and the presence of past literatures to the literary world helped open the way for the development of other upcoming theories in the history of literary criticism, and paved the way for the Reader /Response theory, for instance. Although he belonged to New Criticism which considers the text as a self-regulating system, or an auto telic artifact, and dealt with the poet's struggles with the creative process and the unity of culture, he was also preoccupied with issues related to reception theory, the relationship between artist and audience, and especially the role of the author.

Against the Europhile Eliot, who revered the culture of Europe for its universality, and pleaded for a universal poetry where the cosmopolitan artists are understood and appreciated in relation to their predecessors, the second Modernist Stevens, on the contrary, thinks of "rejecting European aestheticism and asserting that all poetry must be native to its region."<sup>175</sup> Since man is "is the intelligence of his soil" (WSCPP, 22) as Crispin, the quest hero of "The Comedian as the Letter C" came to realize, after a series of hardships and experiences on the American soil, so reality is the one you live and confront every day, not the one Crispin imagined or dreamed of in Bordeaux ( France, Europe), before he left for Yucatan, and the

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175. Helen Vendler, ed., "Wallace Stevens," *Voices and Visions: The Poet in America* (New York: Random, 1987), 133.

Carolinas , (America) . In the New World, Crispin could reverse his previously acknowledged motto that that “his soil is man’s intelligence” (WSCPP, 29).

When Eliot thinks that the artist must have the “historical sense” and perpetuate tradition by synthetizing and memorizing the cultural heritage made available to his disposal by the “dead poets,” Stevens , on the contrary, thinks that the American poet, through a constant stripping away of different versions of reality, should start from the “first idea” and “take the varnish and dirt of generations off” to incessantly produce new and fresh poetry. Here, Stevens uses the example of removing layers of varnish and dirt accumulated over generations on the surface of a painting in order to get at this first idea.

Profoundly skeptical of history, and the past, Stevens asks the ephebe, a poet-apprentice, to cast off old ways, “As morning throws off stale moonlight and shabby sleep” (WSCPP, 330). Stevens believes in the necessity of always beginning anew and is ready "To discover an order . . . / Out of nothing as he put it in” Canon Aspirin” (WSCPP, 349). Since “The past (would be) a souvenir” (WSCPP, 218) for Stevens, he had therefore “to create a new stage” (WSCPP, 218).

If Eliot relied on the stable and ordered past as an ideal model to draw lessons by comparison and contrast with the confused and chaotic present, Stevens considered the European past, obsolete and unfit to the American reality. In “Notes Toward Supreme Fiction”, the poet tells the ephebe that “Phoebus is dead,” (WSCPP, 329) and thus the god of sun and poetry is dead as all other gods are dead. With the gods gone, “there is a project for the sun. The sun / Must bear no name ... but be / In the difficulty of what it is to be.” (WSCPP, 96) The old ways are out, and here Stevens is providing his own version of being new, and responding to Pound’s celebrated modernist dictum, “Make it new.”

Stevens’ meta- poetic masterpiece “Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction,” written on the art of poetry is not only an important, and influential work in the literary world, but one of his

most famous lyrical poems. It is remarkable in the ways he informs an understanding of Modernism by not rejecting Romanticism like Eliot, but resurrecting and accommodating it, to his poetry. Indeed, Stevens's ideas on poetry and its function make of him not only a representative figure of the Neo- Modernist poetry of the Twentieth- Century American Literature, but also a distinctive and respectable truth-seeker for the new theoretical ideas about the art of poetry he put forward. As a whole, the position held by both his theories and poetry makes of him a leading figure among the poets of the American Modernist movement.

### **B- Stevens's Poetic Theory: Adoption and Adaptation of Romanticism**

When Eliot rejected and criticized Romanticism openly and publicly, Stevens, on the opposite, was aware that Romanticism formed the immediate background to his life's work as a poet, and thought that if he could neither adopt it entirely nor apply it directly to his work, he could at least accommodate it to his own purposes.

#### **a- Stevens' New Romanticism:**

Stevens saw Romanticism not just as a single historical period of the Nineteenth-Century, completed and over, but as a recurrent mode in poetry, and therefore still usable in his time, and in Modernism. As such, he was able to sketch out a comprehensive theory of poetic history as a cycle. According to Joseph Carroll, the cycle begins in Romanticism, as a vital creative phase, then moves to deterioration and even collapse, and then returns back to Romanticism. In a letter of 1940, he wrote when he was 60 years old, he expounds the different stages of the cycle with their positive and negative implications for a comprehensive account of all poetic history: "I suppose that the way of all mind is from romanticism to realism, to fatalism and then to indifferentism, unless the cycle re-commences and the thing goes from indifferentism back to romanticism all over again" (LWS, 350).

Stevens's theory of the Romantic cycle provides, in fact, a central clue to Stevens's views on Romantic poetry and his own mission as a Post-Romantic poet. In the middle phase of his career, he felt that his culture was coming to the end of the historical cycle, and he believed that his mission was to create a new Romanticism. He could write in one of his letters: "At the moment, the world in general is passing from the fatalism stage to an indifferent stage: a stage in which the primary sense is a sense of helplessness. But, as the world is a good deal more vigorous than most of the individuals in it, what the world looks forward to is a new romanticism, a new belief" (LWS, 814).

The loss of religious faith of the beginning of the Twentieth-Century was profoundly disturbing and disorienting for all Modernists, for Eliot and Stevens alike. However, while Eliot maintained that only the return to religion could save humanity of this sense of loss, confusion, and perplexity, in the disposition of the last Victorians, such as Walter Pater, , Stevens, on the contrary, tried to find a substitute for traditional religious belief, and elevated poetry to the status of religion. This is the reason for which he equates "new romanticism" with a "new belief," as it offers him a new spiritual vision of the world. In his essay "Two or Three Ideas" (1951), Stevens describes his personal feelings about the loss of faith:

To see the Gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences. . . . It is simply that they came to nothing. Since we have always shared all things with them and have always had a part of their strength and, certainly, all of their knowledge, we shared likewise this experience of annihilation. It was their annihilation, not ours, and yet it left us feeling that in a measure we, too, had been annihilated. It left us feeling disposed and alone in a solitude, like children without parents, in a home that seemed deserted ... What was most extraordinary is that they left no mementoes behind, no thrones, no mystic rings, no texts either of the soil or of the soul. It was as if they had never inhabited the earth.

There was no crying out for their return. They were not forgotten because they had been part of the glory of the earth. At the same time, no man ever muttered a petition in his heart for the restoration of those unreal shapes. There was always in every man the increasingly human self, which instead of remaining the observer, the non-participant, the delinquent, became constantly more and more all there was or so it seemed; and whether it was so or merely seemed so still left it for him to resolve life and the world in his own terms. (WSCPP, 842)

In the absence of some stable faith, Stevens thinks that poetry may give moral support to people who cannot endure the bitter reality. In a way, as a rescuer, poetry becomes not only the vital element of life that helps people understand and accept the world but it is also the supreme fiction, the substitute to religion, which comforts the intellectual stress of modern people. Stevens reinforces his idea by stating, “The relation of art to life is of the first importance especially in a skeptical age since, in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them, not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for the support that they give”. (WSCPP, 329)

In *The Necessary Angel*, he offers, therefore, poetry as a compensation for old religion, when he writes : “The paramount relation between poetry and painting today, between modern man and modern art is simply this: that in an age in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent or, if not disbelief, indifference to questions of belief, poetry and painting, and the arts in general are, in their measure, a compensation for what has been lost” (WSCPP, 748) . He further presents poetry as a way to redemption by stating that “After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life’s redemption.” (WSCPP, 901) Adagia.

Stevens, in this way, made a unique response to Twentieth-Century Nietzsche’s assertions that “God was dead.” He confronted the destruction of the old, and the loss of faith in a strikingly positive manner. What other Modernists, and Eliot particularly saw as Twentieth-

Century dilemma, he, on the opposite, saw as an opportunity. For him, “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly” (WSCPP, 901).

Stevens’s views on the loss of faith, and his quest for a substitute are insightful enough as to inform us on his poetry, and his criticism, as well. They would give a sense of spiritual purpose to his life, and are echoed everywhere in his poems. For him, a literary substitute for traditional religious faith is an ideal of poetry. In his early poem “ Sunday Morning”, from 1915, Stevens raises the issue of faith by offering “Sunday Morning”, as an argument for spirituality without God, then a substitute to Christian religion, when he questions: “Why should she give her good things to the dead? / What is divinity if it is only imaginary?/ Shall she not find in this world things that are as deserving of her care and attention as “the thought of heaven” (WSCPP, 53). The answer he offers is “Divinity must live within herself” (WSCPP, 53) .

As a poet, hence, Stevens’s central preoccupation is the loss of belief. In another letter of 1940, he writes: “I ought to say that it is a habit of mind with me to be thinking of some substitute for religion. I don’t necessarily mean some substitute for the church, because no one believes in the church as an institution more than I do. My trouble and the trouble of a great many people, is the loss of belief in the sort of God in whom we were all brought up to believe” (LWS, 348). In another letter, Stevens concludes that he believes “the major poetic idea in the world is and always has been the idea of God” (LWS, 348). In this context, he wrote to Bernard Heringman, in one of his letters: “The poet supplies the whole spiritual life . . . the idea of God is a poetic idea... poetry is everything on that ‘side’” (LWS, 369). Therefore, when he speaks of creating” a new romanticism, a new belief”, he means creating “a poem equivalent to the idea of God” (LWS, 369). Creating that poem becomes his own central mission and ambition

as a poet. In a poem “Evening Without Angels” from his collection, “Ideas of Order,” of 1936, he envisions a world freed and exempt of angels:

Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare,  
Except for our houses, huddled low  
Beneath the arches and their sprangled air.  
Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire,  
Where the voice that is in us makes a true response.  
Where the voice that is great within us rises up  
As we stand gazing at the rounded moon. (WSCPP, 112)

In “Evening without Angels,” Stevens presents a world freed from religious supernatural additions and traditional preconceptions of history. He seems to say in these lines that now is the time for people to make of the world what they would, independent of received ideas, and “Where the voice that is in us makes a true response” and “Where the voice that is great within us rises up”. What Stevens proposes instead is a kind of individualism, based on a sense of the self, where humanism and secularism replaces divinity, and idealism.

#### **b- Stevens’ Supreme Fiction:**

However, there is one crucial difference between the old Romanticism, and Stevens “New Romanticism”. If for the old Romantics, there is a universal spiritual omnipotent presence, and the divine mind simply exists, for Stevens and for the modern world, the notion of “belief” is fictive. In Stevens’ view, we have to recognize that all beliefs are imaginative conceptions, the products of the imagination. Therefore, Stevens’s New Romanticism incorporates the modern belief that all metaphysical ideas are simply constructs of the imagination, man-made, that is to say they are human and, therefore, there is nothing divine in them. In an early poem “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman,” Stevens declares that “Poetry is the supreme fiction” (WSCPP, 47) and he contrasts poetry with traditional Christian religious belief. What he means in this

context is that poetry is the supreme medium of imaginative activity and can replace religion. He challenges Christianity, in this way, by proposing to the 'high-toned old Christian', a highly - principled woman, a means of saving her soul without recourse to religion. "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" is viewed by many critics, by the way, as a means of "poking fun at religious orthodoxy." **176**

For this purpose, Stevens created a complete secular or hedonistic example of paradise on earth, through the imagination, and tried to revive a wild joy and "bawdiness" that has been crushed by severe moralism:

Take the moral law and make a nave of it  
And from the nave build haunted heaven.  
Thus, The conscience is converted into palms,  
Like windy citherns hankering for hymns.  
We agree in principle. That's clear.  
But take The opposing law and make a peristyle,  
And from the peristyle project a masque  
Beyond the planets. (WSCPP, 47)

The speaker in Wallace Stevens' "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" attempts to convince the woman, a true believer that since religious faith and poetry all stem from the human imagination, and poetry and religion are both fictive constructs of the mind, that poetry primarily reflects the values of the individual, and is just as supreme as her Supreme Deity, in fact more supreme, than God. As such, the speaker maintains, "Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame" (WSCPP, 47).

In Stevens' opinion, the human is the supreme agent of fiction not God. For this reason, the speaker admits in the first five lines of the poem that the hymns and psalms devoted to the

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176. J. Bates Milton, *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985), 208.

supreme being of God have been created by the individual conscious mind, “The conscience is converted into palms, / Like windy citherns hankering for hymns. / We agree in principle. That’s clear” (WSCPP, 47). The religious stories are merely fiction created by human imagination, and thus, to the speaker, these myths or fictions have no higher validity, nor value than any other fictions or stories created by the human imagination and conscious mind.

In the next lines the speaker proposes other alternative fictions to God that are no less supreme to the supreme universe of God. As the speaker tells the Christian woman, “But take / The opposing law and make a peristyle, / And from the peristyle a masque / Beyond the planets” (WSCPP, 47). The speaker maintains that if the fictions of religion of the human mind are valid, then, so too, must be the fictions that originate from our human desires.

In Stevens’ later thinking, the idea of poetry as the supreme medium becomes more and more intermingled with the idea of God. As he explains in a letter, “The idea of God is a thing of the imagination. We no longer think that God was, but was imagined. The idea of pure poetry, essential imagination, as the highest objective of the poet, appears to be, at least potentially, as great as the idea of God” (LWS 369). In Stevens’s work, “pure poetry” (WSCPP, 231) or poetry of the mind, what he calls the “central heart and mind of minds” (WSCPP, 229) which is transcendental, and metaphysical, this “highest objective of the poet” (WSCPP, 369). is the mode of writing through which Stevens seeks to create a new romanticism, affirms Joseph Carroll.

Together with the Romantics, Stevens believes that through the use of the imagination the poet can bridge the gap between the self and external reality. Such a Romantic concern led many critics to place Stevens in the Romantic tradition. Lucy Beckett, George Bornstein, M. H. Abrams, Helen Vendler, and Harold Bloom<sup>177</sup>, among others, align Stevens with the Romantic

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177 See Lucy Beckett, *Wallace Stevens* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974). George Bornstein, *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976). M. H. Abrams, *Natural*

tradition for he shares with the Romantics the belief that imagination is fundamental for the creative process. He, in fact, places a high value on the imagination, and asserts its authenticity in “Imagination as Value” in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (1951) as follows:

The imagination is one of the great human powers. The romantic belittles it. The imagination is the liberty of the mind. The romantic is a failure to make use of that liberty. It is to the imagination what sentimentality is to feeling. It is a failure of the imagination precisely as sentimentality is a failure of feeling. The imagination is the only genius. It is intrepid and eager and the extreme of its achievement lies in abstraction. The achievement of the romantic, on the contrary; lies in minor wish -fulfillments and it is incapable of abstraction. (WSCPP, 727)

To clarify what Stevens means by the 'romantic' it will be helpful to quote his explanation of it from his “Adagia” alongside the letter of 1935 written after “The Idea of Order at Key West” (1934):

It should be said of poetry that it is essentially romantic as if one were recognizing the truth about poetry for the first time. Although the romantic is referred to, most often, in a pejorative sense, this sense attaches, or should attach, not to the romantic in general but to some phase of the romantic that has become stale. Just as there is always a romantic that is potent, so there is always a romantic that is impotent. (WSCPP, 915)

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*Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 69. Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (1961; rev. and enlarged edn. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1971) xxiv-xxv. Helen Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' 'Autumn' in *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration* (eds). Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 171.

The above quotes explain why even when Stevens adopts Romanticism, he adapts it to what he calls “New Romanticism”, which shows that Stevens’ reaction to this movement is neither simple nor easy, but double, and so, remains controversial and conflictual. In the following lines from "Sailing After Lunch," Stevens addresses ambiguously the question of how predominant the Romantic should be in poetry:

The romantic should be there.

It ought to be everywhere.

But the romantic must never remain. (WSCPP, 99)

In another letter to Ronald Latimer, Stevens shows here, his attraction to Romantic spontaneity when he explains the reason behind this statement:

When people speak of the romantic, they do so in what the French commonly call a pejorative sense. But poetry is essentially romantic, only the romantic of poetry must be something constantly new and, therefore, just the opposite of what is spoken of as the romantic. Without this new romantic, one gets nowhere; with it, the most casual things take on transcendence, and the poet rushes brightly, and so on. What one is always doing is keeping the romantic pure: eliminating from it what people speak of as the romantic. (LWS, 277)

Even though many critics align Stevens with the Romantic tradition for he shares with the Romantics the belief that the poet can bridge the gap between reality and the self through imagination, he yet disagrees with the Romantic detachment from reality and a refuge into the self which, according to him, result in the separation of the imagination from reality. He, then, rejects the Romantic notion of imagination because for him the Romantic poet, simply fails to achieve a union between reality and the imagination. He explains that “the imagination is the liberty of the mind. The romantic is a failure to make of that liberty . . . The achievement of the romantic . . . lies in minor wish-fulfilments and it is incapable of abstraction” (WSCPP,727).

M. H. Abrams 's definition of Romanticism and its limits in the following terms, helps us to understand the Romantics' difficulty to reach an ideal communion between imagination and reality: "It was at the same time an attempt to overcome the sense of man's alienation from the world by healing the cleavage between subject and object. . . . To establish that man shares his own life with nature was to reanimate the dead universe of the materialists and at the same time most effectively to tie man back into his milieu." <sup>178</sup> In much Romantic poetry, and particularly in Wordsworth's poetry this failure is visible. The poet attempts to fulfil his desire to bond the imagination with reality, but this can be attained only if one of the two: either imagination or reality takes over the other. When the imagination takes over reality, the usurpation of reality by the imagination occurs, and in this case, the poet finds himself valuing the fallacious world of his imagination in which reality implicitly disappears. The supremacy of the imagination over reality ends up with a solipsistic world of dreams and fantasies that denies reality, and where inevitably, one side dominates over the other.

For all these reasons, we understand that Stevens ' relation to Romanticism, is critical, and ambivalent, and two meanings are attributed to Romanticism, one positive, the second negative. When he says that 'poetry is essentially romantic' here, the Romantic is positively used to admit the fresh and pure nature of poetry. On the other hand, he rejects 'some phase of the romantic that has become stale'. Here, he sharply points out the failure of the imagination in Romantic poetry to cope with reality. Therefore, Stevens seeks to create a new Romanticism that will solve the problems of solipsism, escapism, and creativity which troubled the Romantics and that arise from their attempts to reconcile their inner vision and the outer world through the creative power of the poetic imagination. For this purpose, he demonstrates a double

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178 . Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 65.

view of Romanticism as having positive and negative aspects and he relates this double view to the development of his poetry and theories of poetry. Because poetry loses its vitality and freshness when the imagination that conceives it adheres to what is not real, Stevens thinks that through the power of imagination this problem of dualism, the split between art and reality can be solved.

**c- The Imagination/ Reality complex:**

Stevens engaged his life time with the relationship of what Brogan calls the “violence within and the violence without”<sup>179</sup> or the tension that exists between the poet’s inner life and the outer world. Hence, he was able to introduce the “Imagination-Reality” concept in Modernism. In fact, almost all of his poems deal with the exploration of reality and imagination to determine the perfect nature of poetry. For this reason, he came to consider poetry as the associating power of the intercourse of imagination and reality. His entire work explores the interaction of reality and what a poet can make of it in his mind. He argues that imagination can be a powerful force, even more powerful than reality. His idea about the concept of imagination, its existence, and force, are revealed in the following lines, taken from “Another Weeping Woman: “The magnificent cause of being, / The imagination, the one reality In this imagined world ( WSCCP, 19).

For Stevens, since poetry is the interaction between reality and the imagination, it is, therefore, the power of the poet’s imagination to transform this reality. According to Stevens, to attain this transformation, poetry should fulfil three conditions: abstraction, change and pleasure. To sum up Stevens’ ideal for poetry, the titles of the three sections of his long poem “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” recommend respectively these conditions: “It Must Be Abstract,” “It Must Change,” and “It Must Give Pleasure.”

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179. Brogan, Jacqueline Vaught. *Stevens and Simile: A Theory of Language*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1986.

#### **d- Stevens' Abstraction of Reality: The First Idea**

To create a fiction, then, it is essential to begin with abstraction. Stevens believes in the power of the imagination to abstract reality so as to create fiction, and refers to abstraction in the first part "It Must Be Abstract" of the poem, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," by inviting the ephebe, a young poet, to "become an ignorant man again / And see the sun again with an ignorant eye / And see it clearly in the idea of it" (WCPP,329 ).

Thus, the mind, since it is itself a source of creative power, and in order to match up perfectly with reality must become a blank mind free of preconceptions. This notion of abstraction is rendered by Stevens where he compares in "The Snow Man," this blank mind to a "listener, who listens in the snow" and who is nothing himself:

For the listener, who listens in the snow,

And, nothing himself, beholds

Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. (WSCP 8)

Like the snowman, the listener can feel and know what winter in its strict reality is. Without any previous knowledge nor preconceptions about winter, he can know what is winter, for he is living it physically, and experiencing winter with a mind of winter. Stevens terms this deliberate stripping of preconceptions and cognitive experience from the poet's mind as "the first idea". Stevens further expounds what he means by the "first idea," when he writes:"If you take the varnish and dirt of generations off a picture, you see it in its first idea. If you think about the world without its varnish and dirt, you are a thinker of the first idea"(LWS, 427).

In order to behold reality without any false preconceptions from the dubious past, a poet must first commit himself to the abstraction of reality, far away from all the possible accumulation of human meanings through literary history. Yet, Stevens is doubtful about the possibility of "abstraction". In a letter, he explains what the abstract is: "The abstract does not exist, but it is certainly as immanent: that is to say, the fictive abstract is as immanent in the

mind of the poet, as the idea of God is immanent in the mind of the theologian. The poem is a struggle with the inaccessibility of the abstract.” (LWS, 434).

Thus, the process of abstraction involves the effort to see what is called “the first idea” (LWS, 427) of naked reality. The return to “the first idea” of naked reality involves “decreation,”<sup>180</sup> that is to say the return to a reality reduced into a purely abstracted form: “How clean the sun when seen in its idea,/ Washed in the remotest cleanliness of a heaven / That has expelled us and our images” (WSCCP,329).

In the sixth poem of the section “It must be Abstract” Stevens describes what he means by “abstract” by choosing the weather as the symbol for abstraction:

The weather and the giant of the weather,  
Say the weather, the mere weather, the mere air:  
An abstraction blooded, as a man by thought. (WSCPP, 333)

For Stevens, thanks to the poet’s imaginative power reality can be transformed. Unlike, the Rationalists of the Eighteenth-Century, who valued reason and logic as the only reliable sources of information about the world, Stevens believed the human mind is capable of abstracting reality. To strip thus, reality of “its varnish and dirt,” the poet can use his imagination to transform the crude, ugly, and sad reality into a metamorphosed, more embroidered reality. Consequently, Stevens writes in reaction to the rationalist tradition of his time. In this context, he protests against the Rationalists in the last stanza of his poem “Six Significant Landscapes” as follows:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,  
Think, in square rooms,  
Looking at the floor,  
Looking at the ceiling.

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180. Stevens borrows the term from Simone Veil to refer to what the Russian Formalists and Victor Shlovsky call deconstruction

They confine themselves  
To right-angled triangles.  
If they tried rhomboids,  
Cones, waving lines, ellipses—  
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon—  
Rationalists would wear sombreros. (WSCCP,61)

Here, Stevens makes a cheerful critique of rational minds, whose lives, he believes, would be more thrilling, more colorful if they just allowed themselves to be amenable to the endless possibilities offered to them by the universe and their imagination. The square hat, made with the same careful measurements of square rooms and perfect triangles, is boring and unimaginative. Therefore, he would much prefer the excitement of the sombrero, which is more inspiring and exciting.

The rationalists like Descartes, believe that all knowledge comes from reason only. They don't trust sensory experience because our senses can be misleading and deceptive, but pure reason cannot be. Contrary to Descartes' view, a central idea of Lockean thought is his notion of the *Tabula Rasa*, or the "Blank Slate". John Locke, in fact, believes that all human beings are born with a barren, empty, malleable mind, and that there are no innate, or God-given ideas in the mind, only the capacity to have them. So, all of our knowledge is not innate, and must come from experience of the physical world through sensory perception.

Like Empiricists, who believed that all knowledge comes from our senses, and from actually physically experiencing the world, and do not think there are any innate ideas, ideas that are held in the mind a priori, or independently of experience, so Stevens firmly adheres to Empiricism as an epistemological theory that is primarily concerned with sensory experience. In this way, he participates in the old philosophical debate dividing humanity into two sects, Materialists or Empiricists, and Idealists; the first class founding on experience, the second on

consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the senses are not final. His aphorisms, 'Poetry is the expression of the experience of poetry and "To read a poem should be an experience, like experiencing an act" (WSCCP, 905) justify amply his attitude.

However, John Locke's theory of the human mind and epistemology hold that the mind which is like a non-distorting mirror, or a blank sheet upon which experience inscribes ideas, is passive to the outside world. From here, poetry's only legitimate role is to depict reality as it is. Stevens rejects this model of relation between the mind and the outside world. He claims that the human mind is capable of abstracting reality.

Stevens rejects Locke's view that what is inside, like the imaginative thinking, is suspect because it brings a false view of what is real. Locke's concrete dualism exalts reason but not imagination. On the other hand, the poetic world of Stevens, or his mundo, as he likes to call it, lies, as he puts it in *The Necessary Angel*, beyond "the gaunt world of reason"; it is "the mundo of the imagination" in which the imaginative man delights and not "the gaunt world of reason." The pleasure is "the pleasure of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation" (WSCPP, 679).

Stevens rejects this Lockean concrete understanding of dualism which satisfies only the reason without the imagination. According to Stevens, "the poet, in order to fulfill himself, must accomplish a poetry that satisfies both the reason and the imagination . . . Thus poetry, which we have been thinking of as at least the equal of philosophy, may be its superior"(WSCPP, 668).

#### **e- Imagination and the Power of the Transformation of Reality**

Stevens believes in the power of the imagination to transform reality. He then rejects the logic derived from universal norms based on pure and absolute reason by substituting the power of imagination for it. For him, imagination recreates the objective world by synthesizing it.

When perceived, the object, having been nullified, is reinterpreted and attributed meaning through the mechanism of imagination. By this way, man brings order and meaning to the disordered and chaotic universe with the ideas he develops. Therefore, imagination is a plane of reality whereby the object is present through concrete perception and absent through abstract perception.

The second section, "It Must Change" of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" shows the difficulty, that poetry, as a modern artistic mode, has in order to correspond to an ever-changing reality. For this purpose, Stevens can transform reality through the imagination and overcome the struggle between reality and the imagination. How? Stevens finds a way by reconciling what is divided, opposed and conflicting, and accepting the world as a system of lively opposites. In this way, change between the imaginary and the real originates in a dialog between opposites, as in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" where : man and woman, day and night, , winter and spring, north and south, the captain and his crew, the sailor and the sea, the self and an alter-ego are reconciled. All the dialogs, whether the dialog between a planter and his island of poem V, or between a pair of lovers of poem VII, or between Nanzia Nunzio and Ozymandias of poem VIII, or again the dialog of a man and a park lagoon of poem X, all illustrate the principle of wedding two different things:

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend

On one another, as a man depends

On a woman, day on night, the imagined

On the real. This is the origin of change. (WSCP,339)

So, as it is also obvious from the above lines, imagination becomes almost pure reality for Stevens, and he believes that reality must be perceived through imagination. According to him, poetry is the supreme fusion of the creative imagination and objective reality, and the poet's purpose is to interpret the external world of both thought and feeling through

imagination. He, thus, tries to mirror reality and relies on imagination chiefly as it transforms reality and makes it available for perception. His poetry then, is centrally concerned with the search for reality, but the reality of the moment only, since reality always changes. This notion of mutability is the second fundamental condition of Stevens' poetics as stated in his poem, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" under the title: "It must Change". In addition to abstraction, poetry must fulfil two other closely related conditions: change and pleasure. The following lines from "An Ordinary Evening In New Haven," illustrate the notion of flux:

The poem is the cry of its occasion,  
Part of the res itself and not about it.  
The poet speaks the poem as it is  
Not as it was. (WSCCP, 404)

For Stevens, poetry must be "The freshness of transformation" (WSCPP, 344) which is needed for "the freshness of ourselves" (WSCPP, 344). Consequently, poetry must constantly change. Because what does not change becomes stale and even obsolete.

As the Supreme Fiction is an alternative world, a world of the imagination which is always changing over the world of reality, therefore, the poet, who can no longer find neither nourishment nor solace in stale modes of religious joy, regards his supreme fiction as the most suitable mode for modern times. This is why Stevens' Supreme Fiction of loss of belief, offers a contrast between the "jubilation at exact, accustomed times," whose religious pleasure sounds obsolete to the modern mind, and a sudden encounter or a new discovery in our present circumstances:

The marriage between imagination and reality through a supreme fiction gives us a new discovery of reality, which is a significant and pleasurable experience in the modern world. Influenced by the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, Stevens believed that conventional ideas relating to God and religion were essentially dead and that the Arts,

specifically poetry, could act as a substitute for those spiritual losses. Therefore, the combination of the imagination with reality can guarantee the fulfilment of spiritual need:

To sing jubilas at exact, accustomed times,  
To be crested and wear the mane of a multitude  
And so, as part, to exult with its great throat,  
To speak of joy and to sing of it, borne on  
The shoulders of joyous men, to feel the heart  
That is the common, the bravest fundament,  
This is a facile exercise. (WSCCP,344)

In addition, in treating reality, the poet is concerned with providing a fiction that will please in the same way that once a belief in a religious deity gave spiritual joy. Stevens implies, moreover, that pleasure is another name for the kind of fulfillment that we have experienced historically in religion and hope to experience again in surrender to a supreme fiction. Fiction provides a certain kind of pleasure with its exposition to reality and its delightful contact with it:

Whereon it falls in more than sensual mode.  
But the difficultest rigor is forthwith,  
On the image of what we see, to catch from that  
Irrational moment its unreasoning,  
As when the sun comes rising, when the sea  
Clears deeply, when the moon hangs on the wall  
Of heaven-haven. These are not things transformed.  
Yet we are shaken by them as if they were.  
We reason about them with a later reason. (WSCCP, 344)

In a letter, Stevens remarks that “the essence of poetry is change,” and the essence of change is “that it gives pleasure” ( LWS,430 ). Thus, the first three poems of “It Must Change” deal with change, illustrate the difference between change and changelessness, and the difference in approaching them. As an extreme example of changelessness, Poem III describes satirically the statue of General Du Puy, presumably a French war hero, who is immortalized in bronze, while his contemporaries fall in oblivion once they have gone directly from their funerals to the cemetery. It becomes "rubbish in the end" (WSCPP, 388) because it does not change. Unfortunately, instead of eliciting respect and admiration, as a vestige of the past, the general prompts contempt instead.

Subtler instances of changelessness are presented also in poems I and II. Unlike General Du Puy, who is situated in a sterile public square, the old seraph of poem I, which is also a statue, is located, however, in an Italian garden. Flowers, doves, bees, and girls from different generations have passed and changed before the seraph’s unblinking eyes. Nonetheless, every generation merely reproduces the actions and movements of the previous generation. Their activity is repetition rather than change. The “obvious acid” of decay suppresses the “erotic perfume” (WSCPP, 337) of regeneration.

Genuine change begins with perception. Poem II, picking up the “booming” bees in the seraph’s garden, reports the resurrection, of a dead bee. This, too, is a false form of change, a comic version of the gospel story in which Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.<sup>181</sup> Here, as in his early poem “Sunday Morning” (1915), Stevens sustains the need for death as a constituent of change. Death, not resurrection or immortality, is the mother of beauty, because death clears the way for new life. Without the winter of death there will be no spring “for lovers at last accomplishing / Their love” or the “booming of the new-come bee” (WSCCP, 338).

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181. Milton J. Bates” Stevens and the supreme fiction “ in N. Serio, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to W. Stevens* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985), 48-61

Poem IX using the dialogic model suggests how the poet meets the challenge of relating ordinary speech or what Stevens calls the “gibberish of the vulgate,” or the “lingua franca et jocundissima”( WSCCP, 343) to poetry.

The idea of change is further reinforced in *The Necessary Angel*, where Stevens writes, "It seems, nowadays, what it may very well not have seemed a few years ago, a little overpowering, a little magnificent" (WSCPP, 647). Thus, there is nothing fixed or absolute, and poetic contingency is related to particular periods.

Stevens’s approach to the question of “imagination-reality” concept is subtle. He perceives reality as it really is, not as it appears. But reality cannot be as it really is without the power of imagination. Reality, because it is hidden underneath the traditional associations is not the real one, even though it is easily available to human perception. Thus, Stevens’s principal theme centers on imagination and its transforming role in life. Imagination alters reality and changes it into something else as in “The Man With The Blue Guitar”: “Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar” (WSCCP,135).

Then, even though imagination and reality are two opposite things, Stevens’s poetry aims to reconcile them. It is through the interaction of opposite things or opposite relationships that we attain reality. Opposition is necessary for it leads to progression, development, and evolution, and therefore to change as “ things of opposite natures seem to depend / ... This is the origin of change.” (WSCCP,339).

To correspond to an ever- changing reality, the poem itself must change. For this, he has the form of an ever-changing and unfinished product, and embodies a process of continuous exchange between imagination and reality, through continuous abstraction:

There was a will to change, a necessitous  
And present way, a presentation, a kind  
Of volatile world, too constant to be denied . (WSCCP,343)

The concluding section of 'It Must Change' celebrates the poet's "will to change" (WSCCP,343) and ends assuredly:

... The freshness of transformation is  
The freshness of a world. It is our own,  
It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves,  
And that necessity and that presentation  
Are rubbings of a glass in which we peer.  
Of these beginnings, gay and green, propose  
The suitable amours. Time will write them down. (WSCCP, 344)

The necessary condition for poetry, change, is emphasized by the repeated use of the word 'freshness' which conveys not only a sense of the freshness of poetry, but a sense of the freshness of ourselves, and vividness of life. To sustain the freshness of poetry, Stevens constantly blends reality with imagination, and so through the embrace of 'the imagined' and 'the real', 'the particulars of rapture' come forth:

Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace  
And forth the particulars of rapture come

#### **f- Stevens' Supreme Fiction as an Alternative World or "The Fluent Mundo"**

This wonderful moment of rapture, is the subject of 'It Must Give Pleasure', the third part of "Notes toward A Supreme Fiction." In "It Must Give Pleasure," Stevens expresses his conviction that poetry must always be

A thing final in itself and, therefore, good:  
One of the vast repetitions final in  
Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round  
And round and round, the merely going round,

Until merely going round is a final good,

The way wine comes at a table in a wood. (WSCCP, 3 50)

The poem ends with a celebration of the natural and sensual world in the same way that “Sunday Morning” ends, giving pleasure finally, since the purpose of poetry is to contribute to man’s happiness. In the final stanzas, Stevens, further evokes “the fiction that results from feeling” as the highest good:

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.

We shall return at twilight from the lecture

Pleased that the irrational is rational,

Until flicked by feeling, in a gilded street,

I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.

You will have stopped revolving except in crystal. (WSCCP, 3 51)

Following a lecture at the Sorbonne, during a twilight walk, Stevens is happier in his world, what he calls “my fluent mundo” (WSCPP, 679). He even chooses the “irrational” or sensual moment of his encounter with the world over the lecture at the Sorbonne, and its systems of rational or philosophical discourse. The poet delights in the world of the imagination rather than in the “gaunt world of reason,” (WSCPP, 679) creating “a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation.” (WSCPP, 679) The purpose of poetry, then, would be to give the reader a glimpse of such a world, to provide a sense of reality transformed by the poet's imaginative powers. The irrational and the rational, the imagined and the real are fused.

Overcoming the antithesis of imagination and reality by reconciling the two, Stevens comes out with a theory of poetry which is also “the theory of life” because such fiction or theory of poetry provides a faith by which every man, even a soldier in wartime, can live and die normally. This theory of life is contained in the concluding verses of “Notes Toward a

Supreme Fiction” describing the poet’s pursuit of supreme fiction as “a war that never ends.” Stevens, although addressing these verses to an imaginary warrior, seems to describe us his own sense of self and at the same time his assessment of the poet’s duty:

Soldier, there is a war between the mind  
And sky, between thought and day and night. It is  
For that the poet is always in the sun,  
Patches the moon together in his room  
to his Virgilian cadences, up down,  
Up down. It is a war that never ends. (WSCCP, 3 51)

In conclusion, the chapter unfolds as a nuanced exploration of the evolving relationship between Modernist poets and their Romantic predecessors. The tension between rejection and influence, innovation and continuity, underscores the intricate connections shaping the literary landscape of the early Twentieth Century. Ultimately, Eliot and Stevens, each in their distinctive ways, contribute to the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity, leaving a lasting impact on the trajectory of literary thought and practice.

### **Chapter Three: Eliot as a Paleo-Modernist and Internationalist Poet**

In the light of Eliot's views on poetry, and his veneration for the European culture, he demonstrated in his essays, it is easy to understand why Eliot, was viewed within the English canon, and not classified as an American poet. At his best, he was rather confirmed as a poet of world literature, internationalist and cosmopolitan instead of a nationalist poet whose poetry makes use of and reflects the diversity of the world cultures. In "The Function of Criticism", Eliot explains his notion of literature in the following way: "I thought of literature then, as I think of it now, of the literature of the world, of the literature of Europe, of the literature of a single country, not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as 'organic wholes,' as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance."<sup>182</sup> His concept of literature is universal; it transcends the thinking and the writing of a writer of a given country, and so

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182. Eliot: *Selected Essays*, 12.

endeavors to become part of a worldwide collective project of writing. Besides, he believes that “A common inheritance and a common cause unite artists consciously or unconsciously”<sup>183</sup> and that “Between the true artists of any time there is, I believe, an unconscious community.”<sup>184</sup>

In fact, as early as 1918, he expressed his life-long obsession with the unity of European culture, when he wrote in an essay, entitled “Henry James: The Hawthorne Aspect”: It is the final perfection, the perfection, the consummation of the American to become, not an Englishman, but a European – something which no born European, no person of any European nationality can become”.<sup>185</sup> Later, the Nobel Prize for Literature awarded to him in 1948 confirmed him as a poet of international poetry. In fact, Eliot’s poetry is both unique and transatlantic in its settings, themes, and techniques than most of his American counterparts’ poetry, and thus, sheds light on its European origins, and the foundation of its inspiration. Apart from his early poems, that mention New England or Boston, or late poems, “The Four Quartets” which are set in American locales, few of his poems name American places, deal with American subjects, or turn to American models, Emerson or Whitman. *The Waste Land*, for instance, is set in the city of London, and displays various ideas and techniques brought from Europe, mainly France and England. Eliot himself does not show allegiance, at least neither overtly, nor publicly to American poets, but does not hesitate to display his debt to European literary figures, such as the Metaphysical English poet, John Donne, the Italian master, Dante Alighieri, and the French Symbolist, Charles Baudelaire. Therefore, it seems quite natural to affiliate him within the European tradition.

In fact, European roots can easily be traced in Eliot’s poetry since he draws his inspiration from European culture, and classical mythology. Furthermore, he himself acknowledges his debt to many European literary figures in essays, where he extols their talent and contribution

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183. Ibid., 13.

184 . Ibid.

185.T.S. Eliot, “In Memory of Henry James.” *The Egoist* SA (Jan. 1918): 1-2 1

to poetry. Accordingly, this chapter will examine the European roots of Eliot's poetry and its relation to, Italian, English and French poetry. It seeks also, to demonstrate that his poetry itself has an international import for the universal themes it treats, regardless of men's nationality, or religion, and bears traces from the European influences it received.

In the first part of this chapter, Eliot's connection to classical literature, and mythology is studied in order to demonstrate the influence of such European source on his poetry. The traditional myth of the hero's quest, and the legend of the Grail, both European sources are examined to show that while he juxtaposes classical subjects, and characters, to modern ones to contrast and compare the ordered and religious past with the chaotic and immoral modern time, he, in his effort to innovate and create a new work, diverges from the original pattern by adapting it to the modern situation, and giving it a personal twist. In this way, in his anxiety not to be a mere imitator, he performs in Harold Bloom's words, a *clinamen*.

In the second part, the Italian influence on Eliot is further established by pointing out his respect and admiration to the Florentine poet, Dante. For Eliot, Dante is a master to be imitated, and he showed his debt to Dante by turning to him for stylistic and spiritual purposes. He indeed considers Dante as a model to restore the medieval authority of the Church in Modern times. Eliot's intertextual relationship to Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is studied to show, the master's and ephebe's defense of faith.

In the third part, the English influence of the Metaphysical Poets is established. Eliot's intertextual relationship with John Donne is particularly significant for their respective use of similar technical devices. Donne's use of conceits and Eliot's use of objective correlatives, as stylistic devices are used to break up with an established tradition. To avoid the obsolescence of too common themes and subjects, Donne diverged from the Elizabethans who used conceits for decoration simply, and made his subjects look fresher. Eliot for his part, diverged from the Romantics to protect his poetry from the subjective mode of representation, and objectify it. In

addition, although Eliot was American- born, most critics view him as English, and this is not only because of his adoption of the English citizenship he took in 1927, or his conversion to Anglicanism, but also of the importance of the English influence on his poetry.

Finally, in the fourth part, The French influence of the French Symbolists, mainly Baudelaire is under study. Critics, such as, René Taupin, Allen Tate, Edmund Wilson, and Louis Untermeyer insist on Eliot's debt to the French Symbolists. In "Notes Towards the Definition of Culture", Eliot acknowledges that symbolism, and the influence of the French Symbolists, Baudelaire, and Valery have been important on modern poetry, and his poetry particularly:

In the second half of the nineteenth-century the greatest contribution was certainly made in France. I refer to the tradition which starts with Baudelaire, and culminates in Paul Valery. I venture to say that without this French tradition the work of three poets in other languages --- and three very different from each other---I refer to W .Yeats, to Rainer Maria Rilke, and if I may, to myself--- would hardly be conceivable.

The aim is, thus, to reveal the intertextual relation between Eliot's and Baudelaire's poetry. Intertextuality, as a theoretical support, is applied to investigate how Eliot deploys and transforms the principles of French Symbolism to free his poetry from subjectivity, solipsism, and escapism of Romanticism.

### **A -The Classical and Mythological source of Eliot's Poetry**

Throughout his career as a poet and critic, Eliot has shown his fascination, and attachment to Classical mythology, in many of his essays, and in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," particularly, where he praises James Joyce's use of the Classical myth of Odysseus, and stresses its relevance and significance to futile contemporary history. He also often turns to the medieval Christian Grail legend to juxtapose order, unity and spiritual solace of the medieval period with fragmentation, chaos and secularism of modernity. In this context, Joseph Campbell's concept of monomyth on which I structure my discussion on the intertextual relation between Eliot's

“The Wasteland” and the Grail legend, establishes the basis of this analysis. “The Wasteland,” being the most distinguishable illustration of this method, in this poem, Eliot, indeed, follows the same classical patterns of departure, initiation, and return that feature the traditional myth of the heroic quest. However, while he re-visits the heroic quest, in the midst of the chaos of modern life, he recognizes himself the limitations of such an enterprise in modern times, and works it with a difference.

Before moving to the use of myth in Eliot, and highlighting the influence of Classical mythology and its incorporation in his work, it is essential to introduce, first, what is meant by myth and to explain its significance in literature. In fact, there has always been a close relationship between myth and literature on varying shapes and arrangements, throughout time. Because myths seek to account of the world, just as other literary genres do, so Western literature has often borrowed myths.

For Malinowski, myth "expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man." By the same token, the rewriting of myth became a common practice in most Modernist texts for its universal application, and weight in modern times. The restoration of the ancient myths by Modernist poets, helped elucidate indeed, the predicament of modern man by forming part of what Jung calls “Collective Unconscious.” Philip Rahv, for his part stresses the timeless function of myth by arguing that “the mythic is the polar opposite of what we mean by the historical, which stands for process, inexorable change, incessant permutation and innovation. Myth is reassuring in its stability, whereas history is that powerhouse of change which destroys custom and tradition in producing the future . . . Hence what the craze for myth represents most of all is the fear of history.”<sup>186</sup>

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186. Philip Rahv, *The Myth and the Powerhouse* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 6.

The appeal to myth is justified by its permanent quality which makes it pertinent at all times. To the Modernists, its seeming universality is more than attractive, it also explains by analogy and contrast the reality of their time. Therefore, the use of myth knew an increasing popularity among Modernists, such as William Butler Yeats, and Eliot who extended it to denote the chaos of their world. Yeats, for instance, in “Nineteen -Hundred and Nineteen,” uses images of modern art succeeding to images of Ancient Greek culture to show what he thinks of art and its degradation through time. In the first stanza, he juxtaposes majestic sculptures of the Classical artists, such as “Phidias’ famous ivories / And all the golden grasshoppers and bees famous ivorie,”<sup>187</sup> and the modern works of “toys.”<sup>188</sup> He laments the prevalent discredit of Classical art in front of the groundless grandeur of modern aesthetics; consequently, “many ingenious lovely things are gone / That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude.”<sup>189</sup> Eliot also uses myth, for which he particularly maintains great reverence, and packs his work full of allusions, quotations, footnotes, and scholarly exegeses. However, before discussing the way Eliot incorporates myths and legends in his poetry, it is worth highlighting Joseph Campbell’s concept of monomyth on which basis I structure my discussion on the intertextual relation between Eliot’s “The Wasteland” and the Grail legend.

#### **a- Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth as Common Structure of Myth:**

Joseph Campbell terms “the monomyth” one of the traditional basic patterns of the hero’s journey with three stages: separation, initiation, and return. In the first stage, the hero receives the call to adventure through revelation. Often assisted by supernatural forces, the hero answers the call and, must cross the passage into the realm of night, or what Campbell calls “the belly

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187. William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Volume I: The Poem* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997),10.

188. Ibid.

189. Ibid.

of the whale,”<sup>190</sup> or “night-sea journey.”<sup>191</sup> In the second stage, the hero excited by discovering a new world “moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials.”<sup>192</sup> The final phase is called the return. Having faced all sorts of trials and adversities, and accomplished his duty successfully, the hero must “return to its true state they are all reassumed.”<sup>193</sup> Consequently, at the end of his quest, the hero has not only overcome the hardships he met, but gained in the meantime maturity and wisdom.

After reviewing briefly the stages of departure, initiation, and return, of the classical hero’s quest on which Eliot builds his poem “The Waste Land”, I have to mention, at least two mythological sources: Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and Jessie L. Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* which found the basis of his poem. In his notes on “The Wasteland,” Eliot acknowledges himself his debt to Frazer: “To another work to anthropology I am indebted in general, one which influenced our generation profoundly: I mean the *Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognize in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies” (CPTSE, 80). In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer studied fertility cults and vegetation myths in an attempt to find the origin of religion. Jewel Spears Brooker, while trying to elucidate the origin of Eliot’s sources, clarifies delicately the killing and the plucking of the golden bough:

He [Frazer] concludes that all myths derive from a single myth, a monomyth. . . . In the parent myth . . . the vitality of the land and of the people is intertwined with that of the king. When the king is healthy, the land is prosperous; when he is sick, the land is blighted, becoming a wasteland. The

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190. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2004), 83.

191. *Ibid.*, 227.

192. *Ibid.*, 343.

193. *Ibid.*, 227.

greatest misfortune would be sexual weakness or impotence in the king for in the primitive agricultural economy, the king's reproductive abilities are inseparable from those of his people. To preclude the certain disaster that would accompany his physical decline, he has to be killed and replaced before his vitality wanes. In order to insure the transmission of the king's vitality, his successor must pluck the golden bough, for the life force was associated with the energy of the sun and was thought to be contained in the golden bough of an oak tree.<sup>194</sup>

In addition to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Eliot expresses his gratitude to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. He says, "Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*."<sup>195</sup>

#### **b- Eliot and Classical Mythology: The Grail Legend as an Organizational Device in Eliot's "The Wasteland"**

If the previous section serves to provide a theoretical background to understand the myth of the hero's quest, and the Grail legend, this section looks at the intertextual relationship between Eliot's "The Wasteland" and the Grail legend. In fact, one essential question arises: Can myth, which was used to reflect the ordered, stable and intrinsically meaningful worldview of the past, recount the chaos of modernity? I will try to answer this question while analyzing the three stages of the heroic quest in "The Wasteland."

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194. Jewel Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Elliot* (Massachusetts: the University of Massachusetts, 1994), 117.

195. *Ibid.*

According to Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, an ephebe misreads his master, when at a certain point; he diverges from his master by performing the first ratio of "misprison". In fact, Eliot does not apply in "The Wasteland" exactly the patterns of the hero's quest in the same way as "The Grail legend" uses them. Hence, he misreads the Grail legend to create new meaning in his poem. Therefore, I intend to indicate the change by comparing and contrasting the basic pattern of the hero's quest which consists of departure, initiation, and return in Eliot's "The Wasteland" and the Grail legend.

In the Grail myth, a kingdom goes desolate because his king is either ill or becomes impotent. As a result, the land is devastated and inevitably needs to be cured. So, a brave knight heads off on a quest to obtain the Holy Grail, which will bring life and prosperity back to the kingdom. After confronting a series of impediments, and almost near the end of his journey, he must go through a mysterious chapel, where the Grail Symbols are kept. It is a terrifying place that concurs with his ultimate test. According to the countless versions of the Grail legend, and the secrets of the Grail, the quester is able to ask a saving question about the significance and the symbol, once he has gone through all the trials on the chapel and attained the final phase of the quest. In this way, the king is cured and the wasteland is restored to fertility. The mysterious Chapel is referred to as the chapel perilous. It is interesting to observe that the term "waste land" that Eliot borrows for the title of his poem, appears many times in Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. Weston, herself borrowed material from Frazer and other anthropologists, while attempting to discover the relationship between the ancient vegetation myths and fertility ceremonies. She traced further the relationship of the myths and the rituals with the Holy Grail legend. She found a pattern of the fertility myth in the story of the Fisher King whose infirmity caused the infirmity of his land, becoming a barren waste land.

### **c- Departure: Individual Sin versus Community's Sin**

In Eliot's poem, the setting depicts the same features of sterility and sin than those present in Weston's Grail stories. This similarity recalls what Northrop Frye calls in *The Great Code*, the "demonic" settings. In his analysis of biblical imagery in *The Great Code*, Frye applies the term "demonic" to the settings inhabited by the peoples who do not worship the god of the Israelites (chiefly Egypt), or to the inevitable degradation of idyllic nature, that of the garden of Eden. According to Dídac Llorens Cubedo, such settings may include images of "drought, withering vegetation, barren earth, dangerous fauna, suffocating heat"<sup>196</sup> and "signals the future degradation."<sup>197</sup> The description of Eliot's "The Wasteland" in the first and the last sections of the poem being particularly hot, dry and stony pleads the unforgiving aridity of the setting in the "Grail legend":

What branches grow  
What are the roots that clutch,  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. (CPTSE, 63)

In the fifth section of the poem, "What the Thunder Said," the lack of water, being the essential cause of the landscape's aridity is also alleged:

Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road  
The road winding above among the mountains  
Which are mountains of rock without water

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196. Dídac Llorens Cubedo, *T.S. Eliot and Salvador Espriu* (València: Universitat de València, 2013), 51.

197. *Ibid.*

If there were water we should stop and drink

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If there were the sound of water only

Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees

Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop

But there is no water. (CPTSE, 76-77)

Although the two settings share the same features of sterility and drought, the reasons stimulating the quest in Weston's Grail legend and "The Wasteland" are different. In the Grail legend, the Fisher King is the sinner. As a result, all members of his community are punished. In Eliot's "The Wasteland," the contemporary chaotic world with its sordidness, sterility, and emptiness replicates every individual alienation from the community. "The Wasteland" highlights both this loss of individuality within a community, and feeling of loneliness, and isolation in contemporary life.

The first section, the "Burial of the Dead" depicts a community of the dead who have lost a sense of belonging to a group and where everyone avoids looking to the others:

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,

And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (CPTSE, 55)

The theme of individual isolation recalls Baudelaire and the interchangeability of his terms, multitude and solitude, where one can feel alone while being in a crowd. In "What the Thunder Said" Eliot emphasizes further the theme of loneliness, when he writes: "We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison" (CPTSE, 69).

In the Grail legend the king's illness is the real motivation for the knight to go on a quest for a healing grail. In Eliot's "The Wasteland," each reference to a king, which should be

associated with Fisher King, is preceded or followed by a sin committed by a member of the modern community, not the king. Hence, arises the difficulty of curing the ill: when once, only the king was involved, and his cure subject to the healing grail, now in Eliot's modern version of the Grail legend, things are more difficult, since every member of the community is a sinner. The implication of one person is replaced by that of countless people, and a sin of one individual is multiplied by the number of the sinners. Each individual becomes therefore, a sinner involved in a particular immoral action, causing the victimization and damnation of the Fisher King.

In the "Wasteland," the king is described either violent and weak, absent and hopeless, or immoral and dead to mirror obliquely or openly the inhabitants' characteristic flaws and vices of Eliot's waste land.

The first section of the poem, the "Burial of the Dead" tells of the love story of the hyacinth girl which ends unhappily:

Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  
Od' und leer das Meer. (CPTSE, 54)

In this section, though the reference to the king is not explicit, the last line in German: Od' und leer das Meer, however is an allusion to a frustrated love, as a result of adultery. Likewise, in the Wagnerian opera version, Tristan waits for Isolde to come to heal him, but she does not come on time and Tristan dies. The reference to the king being cuckolded and the tragic end of Tristan and Isolde is significant; it implies that even though the couple in the hyacinth garden show passion for each other, their love is bound to die in the same way as that of Tristan and Isolde.

Besides being framed by quotations from Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, which deals with adultery and loss, the passage is also charged with sensual and sexual connotations. When the hyacinth girl appears, the image of the hyacinth, which is a fertility symbol, is phallic in shape, and suggestive of male gender. It stems from the Greek myth of Hyacinthus. The reference to the Greek Hyacinthia, an outdoor festival, commemorated the mythical Hyacinthus, a boy beloved by Apollo and slain by the jealous act of Zephyrus. (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*). Once killed the flower grows from his blood. The hyacinth and fertility are also echoed in lines: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout?" (CPTSE, 55) It has been suggested that due to the fact that the flower originally stems from a male body, the hyacinth girl is in fact male, or at least androgynous, thus proposing a homoerotic reading of the passage.

The girl or the boy recalls an assumed sexual encounter in a garden: "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago" (CPTSE, 54). The speaker, again lacking a male pronoun, recalls the garden incident which left him speechless and blind. The passage is highly sensual and sexually suggestive: Her or his arms full of flowers of fertility and her or his hair wet with life-giving rain, the sexually willing girl or boy leaves the speaker emotionally and sexually paralyzed. The implied sexual failure hardly allows for doubts about the speaker's gender; impotence is initially associated with the male sphere. The sense of failure to connect is further underlined by the closing Wagner quotation: "Oed und leer das Meer" (CPTSE, 54).

As a poem, *The Waste Land* offers a diversity of views on the same theme, which concerns the male-female relationships and the lack of true love in modern times. In fact, the three women in the poem Marie, Lil, and the unnamed woman, exemplify new versions of mythological figures, and as their historical counterparts, before them, Cleopatra, Dido, and Philomela, become victims of their own love. In the past, Cleopatra committed suicide after the death of Antony, Dido the Queen of Carthage set herself on fire after the departure of Aeneas

in order to establish the new city of Rome, and Philomela was raped by Tereus, and then has her tongue cut out. The women in the poem represent modern versions of Cleopatra, Dido, and Philomela, drawn and adapted from old stories, such as those of Antony and Cleopatra, Aeneas and Dido, and Tereus and Philomela, where they fall preys to males' predation. Men's selfishness and concern with sex only bereft from love and affection make women feel wronged, bored, and disenchanting.

In the second section, "A Game of Chess," the similarity between the king referred to as violent and brutal, and the King Tereus who rapes Philomela in the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is perceptible. Likewise, the two modern women, raped by their male partners, end up with the same degree of victimization as Philomela. The first is a rich upper-class unnamed woman. The second is the Poor Lil. Yet, both women's stories combine to suggest marital failure, due to the absence of true love, and lack of true communication.

The upper-class woman, whose "nerves are bad to-night" (CPTSE, 57), is a wife who lives with an insensitive and indifferent companion. Their relation suggests a complete failure in the couple. The woman pleads, "stay with me. / Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak" (CPTSE, 57), but the husband remains cold and impassive. To further reinforce the disappointment in which the rich woman finds herself, she is made unable to communicate with the external world. Hence, the song that she sings is nonsensical as a way to propose that though the woman herself and her surroundings are quite pleasing, yet, she lacks true, life-giving interaction with her husband. And this leaves her with a feeling of meaninglessness and emptiness.

The woman is hardly portrayed at all, but just sits there bored, and the focus then, is rather on material objects, so as to hint that materialism has overtaken morality and spirituality in the modern world. What is observable and sorrowful at the same time is the couple's one-sided conversation, where the woman asks a series of disturbing questions which remain unanswered.

This results in her complaint that her “nerves are bad to-night” (CPTSE, 57). Yet, her partner never apparently responds to her complaints directly but thinks, nevertheless, about how bored he is. The wealthy woman and her husband seem to be good at doing nothing but getting at each other’s nerves.

For Lil, the second woman of the poem, sex is ignobly forced, ending with abortion and the fear of death. Albert’s and Lil’s relation denotes another kind of marriage failure under another form of anger. Lil is now anxious because her husband does not feel any sexual interest in her. She is now desperate as she is no longer able of giving birth as a consequence of her abortion drugs consumption. Besides losing her natural sex- appeal, she has also lost her femininity, and health. Both the upper-class woman and working-class women’s voices complain of the same difficulties: covetousness, impotence and the irrelevance of sexual love that have replaced the romantic love of the past. Even when all these voices advocate no connectedness between them, their contents revolve around the same goal: the quest for spiritual rebirth in the modern waste land.

In the third section, “The Fire Sermon” three kings are presented as weak and corrupt to foreshadow the vulgar scene that depicts the clerk and the typist. The two lines “Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck / And on the king my father’s death before him” (CPTSE,60) allude to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* . In Wagner’s opera, the knight Parsifal fails at first to find the grail to heal the king Anfortas . Yet, the reference to Parsifal is followed by lines recalling Philomel’s rape by the king Tereus: “So rudely forc’d / Tereus” (CPTSE, 61). Antonio’s betrayal of Prospero, causing harm to both Prospero and Miranda, the seductive power of the story of Kundry cuckolding her husband the king, and the story of the barbarous king raping Philomel suggest the disintegration of the king and his kingdom.

This negative image of the king is significant since it foreshadows the failure of love in the episode involving the typist and the clerk. The scene is close to a scene of rape, similar to Philomela's rape:

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired  
Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
Which are still unreprieved, if undesired.  
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
His vanity requires no response,  
And makes a welcome of indifference. (CPTSE, 62)

He carefully calculates his moves. He considers "The time" and decides it "is now propitious" for action. The woman is "bored and tired" but does not try to avoid him. She considers his moves "unreprieved" though they are "undesired." The behaviour of the man is described as an "assault," and the woman is markedly without any resistance or reciprocity to the man's appetite:

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,  
Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:  
'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'  
When lovely woman stoops to folly  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone. (CPTSE, 72)

In "The Waste Land," sexuality is devoid of emotion and spirituality. The reference to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* in "When lovely woman stoops to folly" is meant to contrast Goldsmith's character Olivia with Eliot's typist. While Olivia sings of shame after the seduction, the typist overlooks the attack and even "puts a record on the gramophone."

#### **d. Initiation: The Failure to Redeem the Community**

After having seen how the community of sinners has provoked the sterility of the modern world, the fifth section "What the Thunder Said" argues that though the two quests look similar structurally, they do not serve the same goals. When the Grail legend offers a model for a successful quest which ends with the king's healing and rejuvenation, in Eliot's poem, the factors determining the success of the quest in the original Grail legend are absent. A first indication that in the modern waste land the quest is no longer effective is the lack of prophecy. In the romance of Percival, another version of the "Grail legend" in which the king and his impotence are reflected on the land, the quester's journey and the regeneration of both king and land come in the form of prophecy.

In Eliot's poem, the first indication of the failure or the absence of prophecy lies in Eliot's choice of the epigraph which describes the Sibyl of Cumae. The importance of the prophetess is to introduce the descent of the hero to the underworld, but the sibyl fails as a prophetess. She provides no vision or help to the questor who sets out to the adventure to redeem the wasteland. To the question about what she wants, she answers "I want to die" (CPTSE, 51). In her desire for death, she provides no help, and therefore does little for the quest.

In the first section "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot introduces the reader to another famous prophetess Madame Sosostris, presumed "to be the wisest woman in Europe" (CPTSE, 54), but with little ability to foretell the future. Her prophecy "fear death by water" (CPTSE, 54) appears in the fourth section to confirm her blindness to recognize in water a source of regeneration:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,

Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell

And the profit and loss.

A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. (CPTSE, 75)

The death of Phlebas, the Phoenician Merchant, further illustrates Eliot's different and ironic use of the fertility rituals. Phlebas, the drowned sailor appears then as a symbol of failed spiritual redemption, since he dies, without any resurrection, and the bones of his dead body still sway under water. Basing his understanding on Jessie L. Weston's passages *From Ritual to Romance* Cleanthes Brooks elucidates the above lines. In the Grail legend, the fertility rituals that involve water usually herald regeneration both for the king and the land. However, in "The Waste Land," they fail to bring any form of rebirth or rejuvenation.

The fertility ritual's uselessness in the modern wasteland is further found in the last section "What the Thunder Said" when even Jesus's death, like that of Phlebas, brings no resurrection. The following lines recapture the moments when Jesus Christ was crucified:

After the frosty silence in the gardens

After the agony in stony places

The shouting and the crying

Prison and palace and reverberation

Of thunder of spring over distant mountains

He who was living is now dead

We who were living are now dying

With a little patience. (CPTSE, 66)

The journey to Emmaus, where Christ was crucified, "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying." signals the decay of civilization as evidence of infidelity to Christian revelation.

a. Return: A Quest for only Individual Redemption

Another reference to the failure of the quest is “the empt[iness] of the chapel” (CPTSE, 68) which is supposed to be the resting place of the Holy Grail . In Eliot’s poem, the Perilous chapel is empty and contains nothing, except wind: “There is an empty chapel, only the wind’s home” (CPTSE, 68). Now that the hero has reached the final phase of his journey, he has bitterly realized that the Holy Grail and its miraculous powers to heal the Fisher King, and thus to heal the land as in the Grail legend are no longer possible in the modern world. Instead, a different likely cure to the illness of the community is suggested by the thunder , the voice of God, revealing the three fundamental virtues of the Upanishads, treatises on theology and part of the Vedas, the Ancient Hindu sacred literature: “Datta” (CPTSE, 68), “ Dayadhvam” (CPTSE,69) and “Damyata” (CPTSE, 69). The equivalent words in English are “give,” “sympathize,” and “control. ” The first word calls for brotherhood, and generosity in combatting egotism and selfishness. The second word, recommends to the inhabitants of the “wasteland” to be less egocentric and interact with others. The last word “control” invites the people to be masters of themselves and control their desires and impulses. Yet, the replacement of the Grail by the Hindu virtues of “give,” “sympathize” and “control” leaves the question whether the quest in “The Wasteland” is fulfilled or not.

It is true that the sickness of modern world is diagnosed and the cure may be the realization of the three values coming in the voice of the thunder. In the original Grail myth, gaining the grail to heal the infirm king is the only condition to restore fertility to the land. However, in Eliot’s “The Wasteland,” in which all the members of society are sinners, each individual can heal only himself. The solution to the meaninglessness and hopelessness of the present day can only be achieved by the participation of every individual who makes up that community. The Grail quest undertaken by the lone protagonist is not enough to bring fertility to the waste land.

## **B- The Italian Influence of Dante - Eliot's intertextual relation to Dante**

Eliot's long-standing admiration for Dante has not gone unnoticed by critics who have discussed Eliot's indebtedness to Dante that Eliot recognizes himself in many of his essays. They have examined Eliot's poetic work in relation to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, have established resemblances between the two works, and equated the three stages of Eliot's poetic development to Dante's "Inferno," "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso." Mohit K. Ray, Alzina Stone Dale, and Reed Way Dasenbrock divide Eliot's major poems into the great sections that make up the *The Divine Comedy*, "The Wasteland" being Eliot's "Inferno," "Ash Wednesday" his "Purgatorio" and "Four Quartets" his "Paradiso." Consequently, this section examines the intertextual relation between Eliot's poetry and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.

### **a. Dante's Influence on Eliot:**

T.S. Eliot recognized how important the influence of the medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri on his work is. When Eliot was asked in 1949 what his favorite writer is, he answered, "Dante, and then Dante, and then Dante. No one has had a greater influence on me than Dante." Later in 1961, he confessed his lasting gratitude for Dante's poetry and the persuasive part it exerted on him throughout his life: "There is one poet . . . who impressed me profoundly when I was twenty-two and with only a rudimentary acquaintance with his language started to puzzle out his lines, one poet who remains the comfort and amazement of my age although my knowledge of his language remains rudimentary. . . . the poet I speak of is Dante."<sup>198</sup> In fact, frequent allusions to Dante throughout his poetic career indicate how great Eliot's admiration, and how solid his commitment are for Dante. Eliot acknowledges his esteem to the medieval poet in his essay, "What Dante Means to Me." This essay is "a treatise on the literary

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198. T.S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writing*, (London: Faber, 1965), 23.

198. T.S. Eliot, quoted in Murphy, *Critical Companion to T. S. Eliot*, 145

accomplishment that his masterpiece, *La divina commedia* . . . constitutes”<sup>199</sup> in which Eliot respectfully praises Dante for being a real craftsman in the art of poetry, and the most European of all the poets. Additionally, Eliot regards Dante’s poetry as the most persistent and deepest influence upon his verse. All these reasons explain why Eliot considered Dante as a master and turned to him as a model to imitate. Among the gains that Eliot took advantage from Dante’s poetry is the articulation of his theory of depersonalization, grounded on his belief that the poet should distance himself from his own emotions. In Dante, Eliot draws stylistic and spiritual lessons. In Eliot’s words, “Dante, I believe, had experiences which seemed to him of some importance . . . [not] because they had happened to him and because he, Dante Alighieri, was an important person . . . ; but important in themselves; and therefore they seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value.”<sup>200</sup> Dante’s sense of impersonality is achieved through “clear visual images.”<sup>201</sup> Eliot also turns to Dante to establish a relationship between the medieval period, and modern life.

Affected by the rise of materialism, and loss of spirituality prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth-century, Eliot found in Dante, solace to the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”<sup>202</sup> The lack of faith, and decline of moral values in modern times provoked a pessimistic view of history, which Eliot crystallized in his essay “The Social Function of Poetry.” However, this spiritual emptiness which Eliot calls “cultural breakdown”<sup>203</sup> may cause pessimistic feelings for the poet, serves for Eliot as a challenge towards cultural regeneration through Christian religious orthodoxy or through the influence of

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199. *Ibid.*, 145.

200. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1950), 233.

201. *Ibid.*, 204.

202. T.S. Eliot, *The Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 177.

203. T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 182.

“the Church itself, in which orthodoxy resides.”<sup>204</sup> For a modern poet, like Eliot whose own era lacks the necessary moral support, and religious authority, in an increasingly materialistic world, finds compensation in the recovery of the medieval values with Dante. However, if Dante was lucky enough to take advantage from “a mythology and a theology which had undergone a more complete absorption into life,”<sup>205</sup> on the opposite, Eliot has to face “the compartmentalization of life in general ... the sharp division between our religious and our ordinary life. I know that in the world in which we live this compartmentalization is constantly being forced upon us.”<sup>206</sup> Cleanth Brooks provides a cue to Eliot’s predicament in modern times: “Since ours is a secular society, Eliot’s poetry was frankly moving against the hard currents of such a society. In view of this fact, he deserved special credit as a man who had to win his way against difficulties and perhaps his basically non - Christian audience deserves some credit too for as much tolerance as it accorded him.”<sup>207</sup>

### **b. Eliot’s Early Poetry and Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*:**

Eliot’s early poetry and Dante’s “Inferno” describe two contrasted characters. Though Eliot conjures Dante’s “Inferno” to show the parallel between the medieval hell and modernity, the significance of hell, and punishment for a secular society, such as Eliot’s are irrelevant in modern times. Dante’s Hell is divided into nine circles, to show the seriousness and gravity of the sins. The gravity of the sins increases as one descends from one circle to another and punishments grow more severe. While Dante’s damned characters are mindful and aware of their sins and seek repentance, their modern counterparts, on the contrary not only are they unaware of their immoral and irreligious behavior, but dread no chastisement since Hell, and punishment have little or no significance at all, for them. When, the characters in the “Inferno”

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204. T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), 32.

205. T.S. Eliot, “Dante,” *Sacred Wood*, 147.

206. T.S. Eliot, “Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern,” *University of Edinburgh Journal* 9, no.1 (1937): 13.

207. Cleanth Brooks, “The Serious Poet in a Secularized Society: Reflections on Eliot and Twentieth-Century Culture,” *The Placing of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1991), 110.

know pertinently the reasons for their punishment, admit their sins, and even communicate them, the inhabitants of modern London are “unaware of the horror, or spiritual hell in which their souls roam.”<sup>208</sup> Therefore, Eliot’s task to redeem the present from chaos is harder than Dante’s.

Eliot’s characters instead are rather victims of the loss of spirituality in the city where they live. Though their city partakes the same characteristics of loneliness and paralysis, as in Dante’s Hell, their predicament, nonetheless is different. They are not sinners who receive punishment in a metaphysical world as the damned souls in Dante’s hell. Rather, they are alienated modern men who fall victims to the intellectual, spiritual and social emptiness together with the decline of moral values. Whether Sweeney, Gerontion, Prufrock, or the inhabitants of “The Wasteland,” all are not punished by Christian standards, for and according to the gravity of their sins, but suffer from a state of psychological paralysis which makes them unable to communicate. Contrary to Guido who manages to speak of his sin, Eliot’s Personas suffer from inarticulateness and inertia, are unable to communicate effectively, even when they use words, they fail to express meaning. However, the loss of religious faith is the principal cause for the failure to communicate. Eliot explains that this “belief in which you no longer believe is something which to some extent you can still understand; but when religious feeling disappears, the words in which men have struggled to express it become meaningless.”<sup>209</sup>

At the beginning of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” the epigraph taken from Dante’s “Inferno,” and spoken by his character Count Guido da Montefeltro reinforces the influence of Dante’s “Inferno” on Eliot’s early poetry, especially in the depiction of the characters. This epigraph reads from the original Italian: “If I were to believe that I was speaking to anyone who would ever return to the world, this flame would cease to stir any further, but

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208. Andrija Matic, "Eliot, Dante and Irony," *T. S. Eliot, Dante, and the Idea of Europe*, ed. Paul Douglass, 90.

209. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, 25.

since no one ever returned alive from these depths, if what I hear is true, then without fear of infamy I respond to you.” These lines are the translation of Guido who meets, the character, Dante in the eighth circle of Hell, where imprisoned in a flame, is expiating his sin. Guido feels free to speak about his wicked life because he thinks Dante is dead and cannot return to earth to report it. Even though Guido is paralyzed in fire, he is aware of his predicament and still remembers the sin he committed for which he is condemned in Hell. Moreover, he still has the energy and the will to tell his story to Dante.

Unlike Guido in Dante’s hell, who can express himself freely, Prufrock is unable to express his predicament to either men or women. In “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” though the urban and nightly setting of the city with its “half- deserted streets” (CPTSE, 13) is reminiscent of the Dantean Hell, however, the real hell is internal, and focuses on the alienation of the individual from his environment. Prufrock’s internal psychological torment makes of him an inhibited and crippled individual who fears life and does not “dare / Disturb the universe” (CPTSE, 14). He is extremely self-conscious, and sensitive to the others’ opinions; so, he hesitates all the time and is unable to take the slightest decision: "Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" (CPTSE, 17).

Prufrock's dumbness, and failure to communicate is the consequence of his excessive, and pathological shyness, and his lack of spontaneity, doubled with his calculated thoughts. His fears of being misunderstood and misinterpreted by the lady paralyze his thoughts. He thinks, she would say, “That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all” (CPTSE, 17). For these reasons, Prufrock never tries a conversation and remains silent. In fact, Prufrock is himself aware of the women’s inability to engage in real communication, although it seems they are having conversations as “In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo”(CPTSE, 14). In reality, they do not participate in a genuine, and natural conversation, but into stereotyped talk about Michelangelo, to avoid confronting the others

openly and interacting socially. He seems to be willing to express what he has inside, but he thinks “It is impossible to say just what I mean” (CPTSE, 16). Eliot briefly summarizes Prufrock’s communicative paralysis: “Full of sentence, but a bit obtuse”(CPTSE, 10).

Similarly, the characters in “The Wasteland” suffer from the same spiritual impotence and are stripped from any effective communication as a result of their sexual sterility. Even when they seem close to one another, they fail to exchange real kinship. In the second section, “A Game of Chess,” an omnipresent sense of isolation and absence of communication dominates. The woman described in this section, is tortured by the cold relationship she entertains with her partner. She mainly laments from neglect and begs for attention:

.. .Stay with me.

Speak to me. Why do you never speak.

Speak. What are you thinking of?

What thinking? What?

I never know what you are thinking.

Think. (CPTSE, 57)

The woman’s requests “Stay with me” and “Speak to me” are imploring the insensitive, selfish, and cruel man to pay attention to her as a woman, a lover with the hope to end isolation and restore back the hitherto love relationship. The man, however, remains estranged from her supplications and instead of having a true exchange, what they content themselves to do is just hear the same noise of “the wind under the door” (CPTSE, 67).

### **c. Eliot’s Middle Poetry and Dante’s “Purgatorio”:**

Eliot states that Dante’s Vita Nuova served as a model for his poem, “Ash Wednesday”, but “Purgatorio,” essentially has also a strong incidence on this purgatorial poem. In his middle poetry, Eliot, then, draws upon a vast range of Dante’s “Purgatorio” to mark his interest from spiritual emptiness of his early poetry, and “The Waste Land,” to another theme, which is the

theme of redemption, and the hope for human salvation. By evoking Dante in “Ash Wednesday,” Eliot not only shows the influence of the Italian poet on his work, but also the worth of incorporating the purgative process, and affirming the need for religious submission. The love that Dante celebrates in the Vita Nuova reconciles human emotion with the divine love, and therefore stresses the need to transcend carnal passion that submits the soul to the body: “Although her image that continually abode with me, were Love’s exultancy to master me, nevertheless it was of so noble a virtue that no time did it suffer Love to rule over me without the faithful counsel of reason, in those things where such counsel were useful to hear.”

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After ascending through the purifying flames to “Paradiso” Dante meets with Beatrice for the first time in the Divine Comedy, at the peak of Mount Purgatory. There, she reprimands him for pursuing this wrong worldly quest:

His steps turn’d into deceitful ways  
Following false images of the good, that make  
No promise perfect.<sup>211</sup>

The love for a woman Dante wrote in the Vita Nuova now has a divine breadth in The Divine Comedy. In canto XXXI, Beatrice tells Dante, rightly that his love for her is synonymous to loving God: She straight began: “When my desire invited thee to love: The good, which sets abound to our aspirings”<sup>212</sup>. Likewise, the renunciation of earthly pleasures and the aspiration to attain spiritual fulfilment through spiritual discipline is made more manifest in “Ash

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210. Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, trans. Thomas Okey (London: Dent, 1906), 5.

211. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Henry F. Cary (New York: P. F. Collier and Son Company, 1909), 270.

212. *Ibid.*, 271.

Wednesday.” The title itself recalls the first day of the religious season of Lent, a day of penitence when the penitents have their foreheads marked with a cross made of ash. It is intended to be a time of self-denial, moderation, fasting in commemoration of Christ’s fast in the wilderness (Matt, iv.2), and the forsaking of sinful activities and habits. It is a period when a Christian repents for his sinful activities and turns away from worldly and mundane doings towards God, using dust and ashes as symbols of repentance and/or mourning (2 Samuel 13:19; Esther 4:1; Job 2:8; Daniel 9:3).

The ambition to renounce to earthly pleasures evoked in the religious title is reinforced by the desire of repentance suggested through the abundant references to the word ‘turn’ in the opening lines of the poem:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Because I do not hope  
Because I do not hope turn  
Desiring this man’s and that man’s scope  
I no longer strive to strive towards such things  
(why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)  
Why should I mourn  
The vanished power of the usual resign? (CPTSE, 95)

Thus, Eliot read and absorbed Dante’s work to such a great extent that he reproduced elements of it in his own work, particularly in “Ash -Wednesday.” Dante’s strong literary influence remained alive in Eliot’s work. For instance, in Dante’s “Purgatorio”, the symbol of the “stairs”, is used to account of the pilgrim’s ascent to the seven terraces on Mount Purgatory. As soon as the pilgrim reaches a new terrace, one of his specific sins is punished and purified. Here, again the image of a man ascending, pausing at every turning, and constantly rejoicing at the comforts and pleasures, he has left behind him towards the possibility of his spiritual

salvation, is a strong image of the penitent's spiritual progress. In both "Ash-Wednesday" and "Purgatorio," this upward ascension represents the many stages the penitent has to take to forsake his sins and rises to God.

Both Eliot and Dante admit that suffering is a necessary stage that leads to spiritual submission. Nevertheless, while Dante knows a complete spiritual transformation after suffering, discarding worldly matters, and preparing himself, in this way, to enter the "Paradiso", in "Purgatorio", the speaker in "Ash Wednesday," seems to have been purged only partially. Despite his efforts to renounce to worldly things, and to lift himself, he is still distracted from God by various temptations. Temptation in Eliot's poem may be any kind of distraction that can divert the speaker from God. In Part VI, for example, even the inoffensive and natural sea images can represent a danger for the speaker's religious realization:

Though I do not wish to wish these things  
From the wide window towards the granite shore  
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying  
Unbroken wings  
And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices  
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices  
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel  
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell  
Quickens to recover. (CPTSE, 94)

For Eliot, all forms of physical pleasure are kinds of temptation, even the innocent contemplation of nature. Poetry, itself can be delusive if it distracts from God, and does not contribute to evade from earthly attachments. Thus, even poetry should serve religion. However, even though Eliot condemned the Romantics' attempt to make art into a religion, as Walter Pater, Matthew Arnold, and Percy Bysshe Shelley did, and disparages the status of

religion to poetry, Eliot nonetheless, thinks that poetry should not be independent from religion. In “Notes Towards the Definition of Culture,” Eliot argues that “Aesthetic sensibility must be extended to spiritual perception, and spiritual perception must be extended into aesthetic sensibility.”<sup>213</sup> Poetry and religion are two independent fields but one should contribute to the promotion of the other.

In “Ash Wednesday,” Eliot presents a speaker who fears that his artistic ambitions may hinder him from attaining the state of spiritual fulfilment he aspires to. On the third stair, he confronts a temptation:

At the first turning of the third stair  
Was a slotted window bellied like the figs’s fruit  
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene  
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green  
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.  
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,  
Lilac and brown hair;  
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps  
of the mind over the third stair,  
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair  
Climbing the third stair. (CPTSE, 99)

While climbing the stairs, he is distracted and captivated by the music of the flute. The flute with its charming melody constitutes an obstacle for his spiritual fulfilment, and therefore should be rendered silent for him to reach a complete purgation. As a matter of fact, repentance demands the total renouncement of all sensual pleasures. The speaker in “Ash-Wednesday”,

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213. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture*, 102-103.

however, cannot entirely free himself from the temptation to listen to the music of the flute, and in this way goes back to his old ways. In his purgatorial ascent towards God, he still remembers the music of the flute.

**d. Eliot's Late Poetry and Dante's "Paradiso":**

In his late poetry, Eliot, preoccupied with modern man's predicament, tries to find solutions for his damnation in Dante's "Paradiso". He, thus, adjusts many elements from Dante's "Paradiso" in order to suggest that eternity can be reached for humanity, regardless of its sinful character. Dante's purgatorial project, and Christian belief that suffering is an inevitable path to redemption are adopted by Eliot, who in "The Quartets" consents that man must accept the inherited burden of the Original Sin, and the suffering required by purgation as in "East Coker":

Our only health is the disease  
If we obey the dying nurse  
Whose constant care is not to please  
But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,  
And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse. (CPTSE, 201-2)

Suffering is a necessary path to redemption, but sin itself is a prerequisite for redemption too. Man has to sin, first, to know the way to God. Along this corrupt process, man develops feelings of love to God. Dante's love of God, is expressed in the following lines:

I in one God believe  
One sole eternal Godhead, of whose love  
All Heaven is moved, Himself unmoved the While.<sup>214</sup>

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214. Dante, *Divine Comedy*, 390.

The divine love, which is at the core of Dante's thought and poetry is transferred by Eliot. Likewise, Eliot integrates physical love into love of God. Eliot's acceptance of the body, which is at the basis, a Dantean feature, is reflected also in "East Coker," for example, when he describes the people dancing around bonfire:

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, necessarye coniunction,  
Holding eche other by the hand or the arm  
Whiche betokeneth concorde. (CPTSE, 197)

Dante's perception of God is beheld in a single and central point of time toward which all times meet. It is a converging point, or center "where all time and place are present."<sup>215</sup> In a similar way, Eliot's discernment of time is explained in the opening lines of "Burnt Norton", the fourth poem of "Four Quartets":

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.  
What might have been is an abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation.  
What might have been and what has been

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215. Ibid., 407.

Point to one end, which is always present. (CPTSE, 189)

Redemption occurs only when mankind meets with God "At the still point of the turning world" (CPTSE, 191) which is the point of juncture of the timeless with time. These moments are apprehended when one is knowledgeably aware that past and future are also extant in the present moment:

Time past and time present

Are both perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present

All time is unredeemable. (CPTSE, 189)

After all, since "the past is all deception" (CPTSE, 206) and "The future [is] futureless" (CPTSE, 189), all a man can concern himself with is the present. In "Four Quartets," the value of the present is underscored by numerous references to everyday life experiences and activities, to imply that the experience of these timeless moments, where the temporal unites with the timeless, or the eternal ("nowhere"), is made accessible in the present. In "Four Quartets," Eliot is far from the renouncement of earthly and physical pleasures of "Ash-Wednesday, and on the opposite does not rebel against, but rather accepts them in the divine order.

The absolute redemption through divine love that Dante celebrates in *The Divine Comedy* makes Eliot change his attitude towards the body and the flesh: he now believes that the soul cannot achieve a state of spiritual uplifting without the body. He also moves beyond the penitentiary character of *The Divine Comedy* to concentrate on the role of divine love in the redemption of sins. This corresponds to Dante's earthly love for Beatrice which is in due course transformed or reformed into divine love.

In "Little Gidding," for example, Eliot calls for "not less of love but expanding / Of love" (CPTSE, 219), so that it will "become renewed, transfigured"(CPTSE, 219) into a divine love.

These lines demonstrate that Eliot does not any more discard or rebel against the body, but incorporates it in any form of redemption. The poem therefore presents the body as a meeting point of flesh and spirit. If the Fall corrupted the body, Incarnation will restore it.

### **C. The English Influence on Eliot: Eliot and The Metaphysical Poet John Donne:**

This section centers on the influence of The Metaphysicals, and John Donne, in particular on Eliot's poetry. Eliot, devoted an essay, entitled "The Metaphysical Poets" where he praised the Metaphysicals for their wit, and showed particular interest in the poetry of Donne. Whereas he criticized the Romantics in other essays he , in this essay, pays a particular tribute to Donne. This explains why the influence of the English poetry, and particularly the Metaphysical poetry is so intense on Eliot, and how Eliot, inspired by Donne displays some of Donne's poetic features in his own poetry. Many critics have noted the similarities between Donne's use of conceits, and Eliot's use of objective correlatives, as stylistic devices. In fact, the use of such devices is an attempt to renovate devices that become wonted, and break with an established tradition. Donne's move from the Elizabethans, who used conceits simply for ornament, is further evidence that Donne is a very modern mind that Eliot regards as a model to follow.

#### **a. Eliot and the Metaphysical Poetry: Donne, Eliot, and the Impersonal Theory of Poetry:**

Before giving the reasons behind Eliot's interest in Donne and The Metaphysicals, I have to say that this group of seventeenth-century writers that included as its principal figures John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughan were criticized, especially during the 18th and 19th centuries. John Dryden, for instance, reproached to the group of poets of being too proud of their wit, and blamed Donne for "affecting the Metaphysics . . . in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds

of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts.”<sup>216</sup> For the critic Samuel Johnson, who rather used the expression “Metaphysical Poet” in a depreciating way, “the Metaphysical Poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour.”<sup>217</sup> Thus, their comparisons are “a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together.”<sup>218</sup> The Romantic poets also turned their back to this heavily intellectualized poetry, and favored simplicity, impulsiveness, and spontaneity. Dr. Anamika provides a cue why the Romantics rebelled against the Metaphysical school: “The Romantic criterion of good poetry is its capacity to please always and please all by its power of imagination or the poet intuitive and emotional response to his subject. Donne’s intellectual jerks naturally displease them at times.”<sup>219</sup> However, at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, interest in this group picked up. For a Modernist, like Eliot who himself criticized the Romantics, found special interest in this group, thanks to Sir Herbert Grierson’s anthology *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the 17th Century*. It was, indeed, Grierson who notices the importance of their poetry and having compared it to other kinds of literature, he resolves that:

metaphysical poetry in contrast to the simpler imagery of Classical poetry, of medieval Italian poetry; the more intellectual, less verbal, character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression; their learned imagery, the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all the peculiar blend of

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216. John Dryden, quoted in Dr. Anamika, *John Donne at Jaunpur* (New Delhi: Sunban Publisher, 2010), 98.

217. Samuel Johnson, *Selected Writings*, ed. Peter Martin (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), 397.

218. *Ibid.*, 398

219. Anamika, *John Donne at Jaunpur*, 145.

passion and thought that [1], feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement . . . All these qualities are in the poetry of Donne, and Donne is the great master of English poetry in the seventeenth century.<sup>220</sup>

Grierson also referred to the academic and philosophical aspects of the term Metaphysical and its positive connotations in enriching the language and deepening thought. Strongly influenced by Grierson, Eliot appreciated the value of this kind of poetry, particularly for its ability to fulfil the unification of sensibility.

**b. Eliot and the Metaphysical Poetry: The Unification of Sensibility:**

The phrase was first used by Eliot in his essay “The Metaphysical Poets”. By unification of sensibility, T. S. Eliot means what has been said by critics, a fusion of thought and feeling, or “a recreation of thought into feeling”<sup>221</sup>. In the Metaphysicals, the Modernists found a support to rebel against an established tradition and to found new ways of expression to adequately account of their experience.

Grierson found appreciable similarities between the 17th and 20th century groups of poets : “Like . . . modern poets, they [Metaphysical poets] needed a new way of thinking and writing, and like them they turned to a poetic form already existent and made it over. They took the Elizabethan conceit, which was a bit outworn, and remodelled it into the 'metaphysical' conceit recognizing in it the natural qualities of succinctness, intellectual stimulation, emotional appeal, and pictorial suggestiveness, in which they wished to clothe their philosophy.”<sup>222</sup>

Eliot himself, overwhelmed by Grierson’s new attention and understanding of Metaphysical poetry of the 17th century, not only praises Donne’s poetry, but admires especially his ability to unify the intellectual thought with the sensation of feeling. While

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220. Sir Herbert Grierson, quoted in A. J. Smith, ed. *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1996), 421.

221. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets.” *Selected Prose*, 64.

222. *Ibid.*

studying the Metaphysical era, Eliot succeeds in drawing a parallelism between the age of Donne and the modern age, by considering the tremendous changes that occurred in both eras. Like the advocates of Donne's school, the Modernists experienced an increasingly prevalent life force of doubt, pessimism, and frustration which provoked an urgent need for the poets to account of it. Eliot admits that ,”Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.”<sup>223</sup>

Like The Metaphysicals who lived in complex and rapidly shifting times, and had to be difficult and find new ways, and techniques to express their witty poetry, so in the modern age, the poet is equally destined to be difficult. Hence, the modern poet also resorts to the use of conceits and methods very much comparable to those of the Metaphysicals. In fact, a close connection between the Metaphysical poets' adoption of groundbreaking techniques and Eliot's rejection of Romantic principles is shrewdly observed by Amar Nath Dwivedi who writes: “Eliot's rejection of the 19th century canons of poetry, his attitude to the material of poetry and the use of everyday speech and rhythm recall the metaphysical rejection of the elaborate poeticality of Spenser and the magniloquence of Milton.”<sup>224</sup>

Eliot praises the Metaphysical Poets for their successful attempt to unite thought and feeling, what he terms “Unification of Sensibility”. The phrase was first used in his essay on the Metaphysical Poets of the early 17th century where he lays emphasis on the synthetic quality

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223 . T. S. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1950), 248.

224. Dwivedi, T. S. *Eliot: A Critical Study*, 64.

in these poets of uniting the poetic and unpoetic, form and content, which was, in fact, their main quality.

By unification of sensibility, T. S. Eliot means “a fusion of thought and feeling which is essential for good poetry. This poetry results when there is, “dissociation of sensibility” i.e. the poet is unable to feel his thoughts. Eliot finds such unification of sensibility in the Metaphysical poets.

By “sensibility” Eliot does not merely mean feeling or the capacity to receive sense impression. He means much more than that. By “sensibility” he means a synthetic faculty, a faculty which can amalgamate and unite thought and feeling, which can fuse into a single whole the varied and disparate, often opposite and contradictory experiences, the sensuous and the intellectual. Eliot assigns primacy to the poetic sensibility which for him is the basis for writing poetry. This is why John Donne appealed to the Modernist poets for the “unification of sensibility” which implies a recreation of thought into feeling. Eliot blames the “dissociation of sensibility” that Milton and Dryden had brought in the seventeenth century. Subsequent English poetry had lost that immediacy. By the time of Tennyson and Browning, Eliot’s Victorian precursors, a sentimental age had set in, in which feeling had been given primacy over, rather than balance with, thought.

To cure poetry from “dissociation of sensibility,” Eliot finds in the Metaphysical method a valuable way to adapt what Eliot calls an “impersonal theory of poetry” which objectifies emotion. Eliot wrote in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that the “progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.”<sup>225</sup> He crystallized his ideas about how to achieve this extinction of personality in another essay, “Hamlet and His Problems”: “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective

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225. Eliot, *Sacred Wood*, 47.

correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.”<sup>226</sup>

As all Eliot's critical works, whether it is his concept of tradition, his theory of depersonalization, or his views on metaphysical poetry are closely related to his own poetry, at this point it seems justifiable to ask how Eliot's view of John Donne as a metaphysical poet is demonstrated in his own poetic work. Since it is the task of all metaphysical poets to transmute thought into feeling, and this is also specified by the definition Eliot gives of Metaphysical poetry, by insisting on the fact that there should be philosophy and mysticism in the background of each metaphysical poem, therefore I am going to examine what stands in the background of John Donne. For Eliot, philosophy makes possible to apprehend and refine the world of thought, while mysticism is there to transcend it; only after that it is possible to transmute a thought into feeling. Eliot defends the thesis that Donne's thinking instead of being related to traditional medieval philosophy is rather influenced by the new philosophy of his time, and that his mind is modern. I will attempt to find common features of Donne's and Eliot's ways of thinking and to show how they are reflected in their poetry.

### **c. Donne's Mysticism and Eliot:**

Eliot considers mysticism as a necessary prerequisite of metaphysical poetry. The desire to approach the transcendent is an essential part of mysticism, which is the quest to attain union with God. He regards mysticism, or the experience of direct communion with ultimate reality, as a distinctive feature of metaphysical poetry. That is why it is necessary to ask at first: Why Eliot speaks of the union with the divine or absolute, and mysticism? What is the specific role of mysticism in relation to the poetry of Donne and Eliot? After answering these questions, I would like to focus on the specific kind of mysticism which Eliot detects in the background of Donne's work.

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226. Ibid., 92.

## 1. **Mystical Dimension of Donne's Poems:**

As a matter of fact, Donne's and Eliot's poetry contains the same kind of thinking which helps them move from one world to another naturally, from the world of experience to the world of thought and vice-versa. The terms describing two different worlds which metaphysical poetry connects are the real world versus the metaphysical world, two different terms from the area of theology which could be: "transcendence" and "immanence." For our purpose it is adequate to accept the theological meaning of the terms as Christianity fashions the background of both Eliot's and Donne's thinking, so the words correspond to the world-view of both poets.

Donne's poetry interconnects the immanent world with the transcendent and vice versa. While his religious poems are full of images from the experience of everyday ordinary life, his secular poems often go beyond the level of a merely secular experience. A good example of the metaphysical skill of Donne to transform an ordinary experience into a transcendent state of meditation is the poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Although the main theme is about something which is not in itself special and belongs to common experience of many people: the parting of two lovers, Donne, however, is able to elevate the whole theme to the level of transcendence.

The poem contrasts two kinds of lovers: "dull sublunary lovers" (SPJD, 23) and the lovers whose souls are united (SPJD, 23). The first kind of love is earthly and sensual, while the second crosses the boundaries of senses to the union of minds. Nevertheless, this is not all. The second kind of love transcends to a divine metaphysical level as it is raised above the earth, where there are "harmes and feares" (SPJD, 23), to the cosmic space. In this poem, Donne uses the image of the circle to make sense of his Ptolemaic conception of the universe, where the Earth is in the center and the other planets go around it. This conception is reinforced by Donne's famous conceit introduced in the seventh stanza, which compares the two lovers to a pair of compasses. The image of a circle, which is noticeable throughout the poem, is highly symbolic. A circle symbolizes fullness, completeness, perfection and eternity. The lovers create a circle, which is

rotating around a fixed center. Therefore, their unity tends to perfectness, which is wholly dependent on the gravitation of the central point.

While the preceding poem leads from immanence towards transcendence, the following example, on the contrary proceeds from transcendence to immanence. It is the Fourteenth of Donne's nineteen *Holy Sonnets*, or known also as *Divine Sonnets* or *Divine Meditations*:

Batter my heart, three-person'd God ; for you  
As yet but knock ;  
breathe, shine, and seek to mend ;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,  
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy ;  
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. (SPJD, 64).

The main theme of the sonnet is the fear of freedom. The speaker knows that it is up to him to make a decision as God does not force him to take his path, but only invites . It remains only a matter of choice if he responds or not. At the same time, the speaker is aware of his own weakness and the inclination towards the evil, which actually harms his ability of a free choice. That is why he asks God to use his power and force him to go in the right direction.

Thematically, we start with the image of transcendent God, but we gradually proceed to the depiction of human weakness. Nevertheless, although the topic is essentially religious, Donne uses secular imagery throughout the poem. Besides the personification of God, there is an extended conceit comparing winning of a human heart to battering a town.

## **2. Mystical Dimension of Eliot's Poems:**

Similarly, to Donne, T. S. Eliot also often fuses the ordinary and the extraordinary, immanence and transcendence. One of the most significant themes of *The Waste Land* is the struggle to cross the boundary towards the transcendent, and the poem contains imagery from both areas. Secular imagery prevails, but also religious imagery appears, mainly in the references to Dante and to the Bible.

The fifth section, "What the Thunder Said" of *The Waste Land*, is a good example where Eliot fuses the ordinary with the extraordinary. In fact, ordinary landscape descriptions are used to refer to Christ's death. The passage, from lines 322 to 330, though essentially describing gardens and mountains, in fact recapitulates the events of Christ's Passion: the agony of Gethsemane, the betrayal, imprisonment, trial, crucifixion, and burial. One of the gardens is Gethsemane representing the scene of Christ's final temptation, prayer, and dedication. The other is a garden on Golgotha, the hill of the Crucifixion, where the disciples buried Christ in a new tomb:

After the frosty silence in the gardens

After the agony in stony places

The shouting and the crying

Prison and palace and reverberation

Of thunder of spring over distant mountains

He who was living is now dead

We who were living are now dying

With a little patience. (CPTSE, 76)

The following thirty-six lines describe a dry and sterile landscape, but in reality, deal with the journey to Emmaus. On the third day after he was crucified, Christ first proved his resurrection to his disciples by appearing to two of them. But the country traversed by the bereft and grieving disciples recalls another “waste land” described by Ezekiel and Ecclesiastes as resulting from human infidelity to God, thus blending the ordinary with the extraordinary.

What branches grow

What are the roots that clutch,

Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water. (CPTSE, 63)

Here, God addresses Ezekiel, as usual, “Son of man”, and tells him that “they and their fathers have transgressed against me ( god)”. In this and the following verse Eliot tells us in the note to the waste land that “the Preacher paints a desolate waste land crushed by sin.

After “The Waste Land,” religious themes and imagery get more and more dominant, but the secular never fades out. For example, the poem “Journey of the Magi” approaches transcendent world only in hints:

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,

Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation,

With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,

And three trees on the low sky.

And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow. (CPTSE, 99)

At the first sight, it is an ordinary description of a country landscape, but it hides two important symbols from the Bible; “three trees” refer to the crucifixion, and the “white horse” reminds us of The Book of Revelation. The color “white” is indicative of and symbolizes righteousness and purity. The rider of the white horse in the book of Revelation is Jesus in both instances.

Contrastingly, “Four Quartets” include extensive meditations on religious themes, and secular imagery is there to provide an analogy for transcendent world, as it is in “East Coker”:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,  
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama  
And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away –  
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations.

(CPTSE, 186)

Eliot’s poems find the unity of the transcendent and immanent world in the doctrine of Incarnation, as it is indicated by the speaker of “The Dry Salvages”:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.  
Here the impossible union  
Of spheres of existence is actual. (CPTSE, 199)

Christian understanding of Incarnation is for Eliot the fixed point, in which the transcendent and immanent touch. As Jesus is truly man and truly God, he embodies two hypostases in one person. The relation of these two hypostases is perichoretic. It means that the two natures of Christ create a perfect union, but they are not mixed. In other words, the transcendent creates the union with the immanent. Analogically, Incarnation makes a meeting

point between God and the world, although they are two distinct entities which cannot mingle, in opposition to what pantheism believes. In Eliot's poetry incarnated Word is the still centre, which unites the disparateness of his rich imagery. The essential role of the Word is expressed in the poem "Ash Wednesday":

And the light shone in darkness and.  
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word. (CPTSE, 92)

The image, which reminds us of Donne's metaphor of a pair of compasses, shows the Christocentric direction of Eliot's later poems, which resolves the feeling of desolation of *The Waste Land*. It is true that both Eliot and Donne are able to connect the material world and spiritual world, the world of senses and the world of ideas or, as we say, the immanent and the transcendent. From my point of view, neither of them felt a strict dichotomy between the transcendent and immanent world. Their poetry contains the disparateness in unity and the unity in disparateness, as it is introduced in the dogma of the Trinity.

### **c. Donne's philosophy and Eliot: Shared Ground of Donne's and Eliot's**

#### **Thinking:**

Even though there is a gap of three hundred years between Donne and Eliot, it is possible to find some patterns of thought, which these two poets share. As it stands, this common ground of thinking is mirrored in the similar features of the poets' work, and their approach to the external world. Barbora Šmejdo<sup>š</sup>vá in her dissertation, *The Poetry of John Donne: T. S. Eliot as Critic and Poet*, states that Eliot claims that Donne's thinking was influenced by Jesuitism, which marks the shift of attitudes from ontology to psychology. This passage from ontology, the study of things as they really exist, to their perception emotionally and psychologically, allows Donne to focus rather on his own perception of objects than on the objects as such: "instead of ideas as meanings, as references to an outside world, you have suddenly a new world

coming into existence inside our own mind and therefore, as we crudely fancy it, inside our own head.”<sup>227</sup> .

Another feature that Eliot mentions with regard to Donne’s philosophy is that he actually does not have any philosophy at all, because he maintains “in suspension of a number of philosophies, attitudes and partial theories which are enjoyed rather than believed.”<sup>228</sup>

Donne’s detachment from various kinds of experience reminds of Eliot’s thesis about depersonalization. In Donne’s poetry, there are numerous emotions connected to various ideas and experiences; however, his poems are not primarily focused on expressing them in isolation. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot emphasizes the coveted separation of “the man who suffers and the mind which creates.”<sup>229</sup> The phrase “the man who suffers” suggests a direct response to the external facts; in other words, it stays on the level of ontology. For example, in the case of Donne’s poem “A Feaver,” it is an emotion of a man who is worried about his ill beloved. In contrast, the phrase “the mind which creates” reminds us of Eliot’s statement about psychology: “To turn the attention to the mind in this way is to create, for the objects alter by being observed. To contemplate an idea, because it is my idea, to observe its emotional infusion, to play with it, instead of using it as a plain and simple meaning, brings often curious and beautiful things to light.”<sup>230</sup>

It is exactly what Donne does in “A Feaver,” where the idea of a dying mistress serves as a ground of rational reflection:

But yet thou canst not die, I know;  
To leave this world behinde, is death,  
But when thou from this world wilt goe,  
The whole world vapors with thy breath. (SPJD, 10)

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227. T.S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 80.

228. *Ibid.*, 120.

229. Eliot, *Sacred Wood*, 48.

230. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* 85.

Eliot's view of Donne thus follows his theses about poetry in general. It is also what Williamson observes, when he points out that the great hold of Donne and the Elizabethans upon Eliot and other contemporary poets lies in this: "They provide the greatest instance in our literature of poets moulding language to new developments of sensibility.... Eliot's dictum that emotion is made precise and definite by intellect probably owes much to the study of Donne."<sup>231</sup>

Eliot illustrates how Donne's maintenance of "a number of philosophies and partial theories"<sup>232</sup> mirrors in the form of his poems: "the metaphysical mind in poetry, with the background of the seventeenth century ... tends toward the conceit; and on the other hand common tricks of language tend to induce common habits of thought and feeling, and any poet who is conceited is likely to be more or less metaphysical."<sup>233</sup>

It means that a conceit serves as a tool connecting diverse kinds of experiences, which are equally dominant in the mind of a poet, to a new whole. A conceit is therefore a concrete application of Eliot's dictum that the minds of metaphysical poets are "constantly amalgamating disparate experience."<sup>234</sup> Eliot's time presents also an extensive range of various ideas, approaches and experiences, which affect the minds of contemporary poets. Therefore, it makes similar demands on poetic language to the time of John Donne; however, the world of thought in the beginning of the twentieth century is more complex than in the world of the seventeenth century. Eliot is fully aware of this likeness, when he writes in "The Metaphysical Poets" that:

Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.

Hence we get something which looks very much like the conceit – we get, in fact,

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231. Eliot, Selected Essays 287.

232. Eliot, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry 120.

233. Ibid.,13.

234 Eliot, Selected Essays 287

a method curiously similar to that of the ‘metaphysical poets’, similar also in its use of obscure words and of simple phrasing.<sup>235</sup>

In both cases, this variety in thought is accompanied by the clash between the traditional and modern, representing “the revolution of the sphere of thought”<sup>236</sup> mentioned in The Clark Lectures. Donne lives in the time marked by the transition from the medieval world to the early modern one; likewise, Eliot lives on the crossroad of the Victorian England and the modern post-war world. As Eliot himself claims, these similarities in the way of thinking result in a striking resemblance of a poetic diction. As the concern of this paper is not to stay only on a theoretical level, it is contributive to illustrate this thesis on particular poems. Therefore, the following subchapter is devoted to the comparison and contrast of Donne’s and Eliot’s use of a conceit.

#### **d. Harmonizing Experience: Donne’s and Eliot’s Use of Conceits:**

Helen Gardner defines the term “conceit” as “a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness, or, at least, is more immediately striking. ...A comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness.”<sup>237</sup> She also adds that “in a metaphysical poem the conceits are instruments of definition in an argument or instruments to persuade. The poem has something to say which the conceit explicates or something to urge which the conceit helps to forward.”<sup>238</sup> Interestingly, Eliot formulates a different definition, in which he says that “a conceit is the extreme limit of the simile and metaphor which is used for its own sake, and not to make clearer an idea or more

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235. Eliot, “Metaphysical Poets,” *Selected Essay*, 248.

236. Eliot, *Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* 52.

237. Helen Gardner, “Introduction,” *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), xxiii.

238. *Ibid.* xxvi.

definite an emotion.”<sup>239</sup> At a glance, it seems that he would not agree with Gardner’s view; however, examining the matter further, we find out that the statements are not contradictory.

In the fourth Clark lecture, Eliot compares Dante’s metaphor: “they knitted their brows at us, like an old tailor threading a needle” to Donne’s conceit in the first stanza of the poem “Funerall” :

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm  
Nor question much  
That subtle wreath of hair, which crowns my arm;  
The mystery, the sign, you must not touch,  
For 'tis my outward soul, Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,  
Will leave this to control  
And keep these limbs, her provinces, from dissolution. (SPJD, 10)

He shows that in the first case, the metaphor is for the whole image essential. Without it, the tenor would lose an important attribute, and the final image would be different. In contrast, Donne’s conceit does not add anything new to the described object. Eliot even says that the conceit in the first stanza of “Funerall” “is irrelevant,...it diminishes rather than develops the thought, ...it represents an inward chaos and disjection.”<sup>240</sup> The difference between Gardner and Eliot is mainly in the way they approach the function of conceits. Gardner investigates the role of a conceit with regard to the context of the whole poem, while Eliot focuses on the way in which a conceit works as a metaphor.

For instance, let us look at Donne’s poem “The Flea,” which draws an analogy between this small animal and marital union. The flea sucked the blood of both lovers, and thus it is a symbol of this intimate act. The whole poem is trying to persuade the reader about this similarity. In this aspect, the role of the conceit is indispensable and it corresponds to Gardner’s

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239. Eliot, *Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* 138.

240. *Ibid.*, 124.

definition. Nevertheless, concentrating on the metaphor as such makes us agree with T. S. Eliot. The comparison of a flea and marital union does not specify the image in any way. It stands on the level of a mere word play. However, this does not make the poem less worthy, because this comparison is witty, surprising and pleasing.

Despite his criticism of this figure, we can also find numerous examples of the use of conceit also in Eliot's poems. For example, in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the comparison of an evening to "a patient etherized upon a table" (CPTSE, 13) is near to Donne's fashion; nevertheless, Eliot plays with his images in a different way. Donne usually takes hold of an idea, from which he derives other images and makes interesting connections between them. Contrastingly, Eliot does not explain the connection between the disparate images; he only piles them. The extreme example of this technique is *The Waste Land*. Steven Matthews says that "The Waste Land... can be taken from this context, to deploy wit as a way of linking a series of conceits, which, in turn, record, without transforming poetically, the devastations of modern history."<sup>241</sup>

Nevertheless, *The Waste Land* includes also extended conceits, which are very similar to Donne. For instance, Eliot's character Tiresias has almost the same unifying function as Donne's flea, because he connects male and female voices of the poem in a similar way to the flea, which unites two lovers. Both the character of Tiresias and Donne's flea represent the microcosmic miniature of the whole world of the poems. Nevertheless, while Donne's tone is intimate and personal, Eliot aspires to depict universal human experience. It is true that also Tiresias is firstly connected to a particular story of a young man and the typist, but the story is just a piece of a mosaic creating a large picture made of similar pitiable accidents of other characters. Tiresias says: "And I Tiresias have foresuffered all," (CPTSE, 72) and thus he

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241. Steven Matthews, *T. S. Eliot and Early Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 93-94.

hints at his general function within the poem. In “The Flea,” Donne is satisfied when the whole poem is devoted to the explication of the conceit.

In contrast, Eliot uses Tiresias only to supplement other images to create the final emotion of decay and hopelessness. Donne in his conceits works only with two ideas, but Eliot gives a new dimension to the link through his allusive technique. Not only does he connect two disparate ideas, but he adds the complex of the feelings, ideas and scenes from the works the allusions refer to. What is more, the number of images and connections between them differs from one reader to another, as the reader who is not educated in literature and philosophy reads the poem in a different way from the reader who is an atheist interested in Buddhism or from a Christian who loves the poetry of Dante. Each allusion opens a new world of images and connections for those who recognize it, but attains a pure meaning for those who don't.

#### **D. The French Influence on Eliot: Eliot's intertextual relationship with Baudelaire:**

This section while accentuating the influence of the Symbolists on Eliot, in general, it seeks to reveal Baudelaire's presence in Eliot's search for his urbanized poetry, in particular. When Eliot was first introduced to the French Symbolists in December of 1908, it was through Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. The effect of Symons' s book was immense on Eliot that he showed his indebtedness by saying “ I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt: but having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbiere.” <sup>242</sup> The following passage Eliot wrote is a further testimony showing once more how great the influence of the French Symbolists was on him:

I think that from Baudelaire I learned first, a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly

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242. John J. Soldo, “T. S. Eliot and Jules LaForgue,” *American Literature* 55, no. 2 (1983): 137.

realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic. From him, as from Laforgue, I learned that the sort of material I had, the sort of experience an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America, could be the material for poetry; and that the source of new poetry might be found in what had been regarded hitherto as the impossible, the sterile, the intractably unpoetic.<sup>243</sup>

Needless repeating how much Eliot was influenced and inspired by the Symbolists and Baudelaire, particularly. When constantly acknowledging the influence of the French Symbolists on him, Eliot wrote three essays on Baudelaire. In 1921, Eliot published his first essay “The Lesson of Baudelaire” in which he discusses how Baudelaire’s “first-rate poetry is occupied with morality.”<sup>244</sup> In the second essay “Poet and Saint,” which appeared in 1927, Eliot defends Baudelaire’s “preoccupation with religious values”<sup>245</sup> and calls him a “Saint.” Eliot’s third essay is the introduction to Christopher Isherwood’s translation of Baudelaire’s *Intimate Journals* published in 1930. In this essay, he defends Baudelaire’s theological innocence and argues that Baudelaire did not “practise Christianity, but—what was much more important for his time—to assert its necessity.”<sup>246</sup> Baudelaire appears importantly in four other essays by Eliot: “A review of Peter Quennell’s *Baudelaire and the Symbolists*,” “From Poe to Valery,” “Introduction to Chiari’s *Contemporary French Poetry*,” and “Symbolism from Poe to Valery.”

Thus, thanks to the Symbolist poetry which offered Eliot, the best demonstrative examples, he was able to validate his own theoretical views on poetry. Hence, to explain and

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243. T.S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, 126.

244. T.S. Eliot, “The Lesson of Baudelaire,” *Tyrol* (1921): 4.

245. T.S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928.), 90.

246. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986), 421-422.

illustrate his theory of impersonality, for example, Eliot selects “Le Serpent” by Paul Valéry. Here, Eliot differentiates between “the first order impersonality forged out of intense personal emotion and passion”<sup>247</sup> and impersonality of inferior order which is “the impersonality of a mere craftsman.”<sup>248</sup> Eliot maintains, that “Like all of Valéry’s poetry, it is impersonal in the sense that personal emotion, personal experience is extended in something impersonal - not in the sense of something divorced from our feelings, but the pattern we make of our feelings is the center of value.”<sup>249</sup>

In fact, the Symbolists’ influence on Eliot was so vast, and his praise as well as his interest for the Symbolists were so manifest that many critics noted them. Ronald Schuchard is one critic who attracts the readers’ attention on Eliot’s moral and spiritual interest in Baudelaire. He explains that in the “blasphemy” of Baudelaire which is “the manifestation of a morbid spiritual condition,”<sup>250</sup> Eliot saw “a characteristic of the most profound religious quests in modern literature.”<sup>251</sup> Schuchard concludes that Baudelaire ‘s search of God with a blasphemous moral imagination, allowed Eliot “to accommodate his moral criticism to the difficulty of belief in an increasingly fragmented world.”<sup>252</sup>

Another critic, R. Galand underlines the similarities and affinities binding the two poets, Baudelaire and Eliot. In “T. S. Eliot and the Impact of Baudelaire,” Galand argues that Baudelaire’s influence on Eliot is not only crucial in their “identical themes and in the similarity of poetical methods,<sup>253</sup> but also in Eliot’s interest in Baudelaire’s temperament. Galand clarifies that both poets view poetry and morality as two distinguishable entities, and that poetry is more

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247. Mohammad Hanief, *The Dynamics of Criticism in T.S. Eliot* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000), 73.

248. Ibid.

249. T.S. Eliot, quoted in Ronald Schuchard, “First-Rate Blasphemy: Baudelaire and the Revised Christian Idiom of T. S. Eliot’s Moral Criticism,” *ELH* 42, no. 2 (1975): 283.

250. Ronald Schuchard, “First-Rate Blasphemy,” 276.

251. Ibid.

252. Ibid.

253. R. Galand, “T. S. Eliot and the Impact of Baudelaire,” *Yale French Studies* 6, (1950): 27.

concerned with beauty than teaching. Poetry, for them, does not have to teach morality and has no other end than art<sup>254</sup> , rallying the notion of “Art for Art’s sake”. Both of them further approve that “the true aim of art is to create beauty, not to advocate moral, religious, social or political ideas: this does not mean that the poet must exclude them, but that he should subordinate them to his artistic purpose.”<sup>255</sup>

The two poets see beauty in the most trivial things of ordinary life, or in “the most transitory aspects of contemporary life,”<sup>256</sup> such as “beds with curtains, shelves with flowers, lamps which go out and coal fires.”<sup>257</sup> Moreover, Galand argues that both poets discard bare passions or emotions and that the poet should have the ability to “transmute ideas and feelings into sensation.”<sup>258</sup> Finally, Eliot “was immensely attracted to Baudelaire the man”<sup>259</sup> who, by his Satanism and his blasphemy attempted “to get into Christianity through the back door.”<sup>260</sup>

Likewise, another critic, Wallace Fowlie stressed the many common points between Baudelaire and Eliot. He argues that while both poets believe that “there is poetry and beauty in the most trivial aspects of modern life,”<sup>261</sup> they also share the will to objectify poetry: Baudelaire, through his prolonged metaphor and Eliot, through his “objective correlative”. The two devices function as an “image capable of translating his intimate emotions, his personal anguish, into a strange and impersonal work.”<sup>262</sup> He observed that in the way they “underscore the parallelism between the contemporary event and the myths of Antiquity” both poets also share the same belief in the importance, and relevance of the historical sense to modern times.

The influence of Baudelaire on Eliot is therefore even greater on his selection of the ugly modern metropolis, as the accepted setting and subject-matter for his poetry. Eliot’s attraction

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254. Ibid., 29.

255. Ibid., 30.

256. Ibid.

257. Ibid.

258. Ibid.

259. Ibid.

260. Ibid., 33.

261. Wallace Fowlie, Baudelaire and Eliot: Interpreters of their Age, *The Sewanee Review* 74, no. 1, (1966): 300.

262. Ibid., 309.

to the” Unreal” city, and urban temperament grew and developed as a logical consequence of his natural contact with both the urban landscape and its people, where he grew and lived, and his admiration for Baudelaire and the city poetry he wrote. G.M. Hyde, in an article titled, “the poetry of the City” also confirms that “All Modernist literature was born in the city and with Baudelaire.”<sup>263</sup>

In fact, Hyde opens his essay, “The poetry of the City”, by stating that “it could be argued that Modernist literature was born in the city and with Baudelaire--- especially with his discovery that crowds mean loneliness and that the terms’ multitude’ and ‘solitude’ are interchangeable for a poet with an active and fertile imagination”.<sup>264</sup> In fact, he translates a quote from Baudelaire, for whom: Multitude, solitude: equivalent and interchangeable terms to the shaping spirit of the poet. If you don’t know how to people your solitude, you don’t know either how to be alone in a busy crowd.

Eliot’s experiences in St Louis, Boston, Paris, first, and then in London played an important role in the development of his urban temperament. Eliot, was, in fact born in St. Louis, Missouri, at the end of the nineteenth century, a period marked by a swift industrial growth. Ellyn Sanna describes the industrial and the polluted St. Louis as “not a particularly beautiful place: its sewers were inadequate for factories’ waste products and the air was filled with sulfur fumes.”<sup>265</sup> Likewise, the city Baudelaire wrote of is the Old Paris and the changes that were taking place under the Second Empire by the Haussman’s project of renewing the old city.

In June 1906, Eliot arrived at Boston and entered Harvard University to complete his bachelor’s degree. In 1910, Eliot travelled to Paris to study French poetry. Sanna explains the

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263. G. M. Hyde, “The Poetry of the City,” *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890 - 1930*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976. 337 - 348.

264 Ibid.

265. Ellyn Sanna, “Biography of T.S. Eliot” *T.S. Eliot*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 6.

significance of Boston and Paris on the formation of his urban landscape: "Just as he had in Boston, he began to hunt out the darker, seamier neighbourhoods in Paris. He explored the streets at night, when the prostitutes and drunks walked the alleys, and he took a perverse pleasure in contemplating human beings who lived without morals and dignity."<sup>266</sup> He also witnessed the economic changes brought by industrialization and urbanization. The smoke that blew out from the chimneys of factories and industries across the Mississippi river became a source of inspiration for his poetry.

The third important city which contributed to the development of Eliot's urban temperament was London. It was the city onto which he projected his personal crisis: "London provided a credible screen for such a projection as the effects of industrialization, suburbanization and social mixing . . . produced a new kind of city"<sup>267</sup> which "fail[ed] to cohere."<sup>268</sup>

Eliot's acquaintance with the city was, however, a crucial and necessary stage in the development of his urban poetry. Indeed, Eliot found some of his most powerful inspiration for his poetry in the urban landscape and the cityscapes. Writing to Conrad Aiken in 1914 from London, Eliot expresses both the attraction and repulsion he feels toward city life. Tired of Oxford, he felt more alive in London though the city seemed threatening:

In Oxford, I have the feeling that I am not quite alive—that my body is walking about with a bit of my brain inside it, and nothing else.... Oxford is very pretty, but I don't like to be dead. I don't think I should stay there another year...but I should not mind being in London.... How much more self-conscious one is in a big city!.. Just at present this is an inconvenience, for I have been

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266. Ibid., 16.

267. Malcom Miles, "Cities of the Avant-Garde" *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, ed. Kevin R. McNamara (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 159.

268. Ibid.

going through one of those nervous sexual attacks which I suffer from when alone in a city . . . this is the worst since Paris.<sup>269</sup>

The content of the letter is so revealing that it may serve as a directory to Eliot's response to both the physical environment and the city. Throughout his poetry, Eliot expresses his denial of the Romantic principles of nature benevolence and divulges his fixation with the urban space. This response is the outcome mainly of his fascination in the Symbolists' poetry.

Therefore, Eliot, like Baudelaire, uses the urban environment to reinforce a feeling of alienation from the modern city. Distancing himself from the harmony, and kinship, the Romantics felt in the presence of nature, he, in "Preludes," for instance, explores the alienation of individuals in the urban environment, where solitude and monotony inhabit their lives. This is shown through the use of sordid and dirty images describing the city and the feeling of isolation and depression it entails. This poem depicts the meaningless society of the urban space both at night and in the morning. In the first section of the poem, a winter evening, with its smoky character, is described in a house in the back of the street, and through a sad and unhealthy mood:

The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steaks in passageways.  
Six o'clock.  
The burnt-out ends of smoky days,  
The burnt-out ends of smoky days,  
And now a gusty shower wraps  
The grimy scraps  
Of withered leaves about your feet  
And newspapers from vacant lots;

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269. T.S Eliot, *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, 1898-1922, ed. Valerie Eliot (San Diego: Mariner Books, 1990), 74.

The shower beats

On broken blinds and chimney-pots. (CPTSE, 23)

“Withered leaves,” “vacant lots,” “broken blinds,” and “chimney-pots” pile up to emphasize the dirtiness and ugliness of the city life. Then the morning comes and brings smells of beers from the streets covered with “sawdust” and trodden by “muddy feet” of the crowd. The daily monotonous existence in the city is made more intense by the mechanical movement from home to work through a beer kiosk that Eliot calls a masquerade:

The morning comes to consciousness

Of faint stale smells of beer

From the sawdust-trampled street

With all its muddy feet that press

To early coffee-stands.

With the other masquerades

That time resumes. (CPTSE, 23)

The “Masquerades” suggest that city-dwellers’ routines are a subterfuge, a pretense to cloak the general overwhelming feeling of gloom and hopelessness that fills their lives. In the third section of the poem, an unidentified “you” laying in a private room might be one of the city-dwellers:

You lay upon your back, and waited;

You dozed, and watched the night revealing

The thousand sordid images

Of which your soul was constituted. (CPTSE, 24)

After spending a restless night haunted by tormenting memories of the “thousand sordid images,” the described character comes to his senses finally. But the morning did not bring anything new to him. He still performs the same mechanical acts without any significance. He

exists certainly, yet without any passion or hope. He has been waiting for nothing, except for the time to pass.

The same perception of the insignificance of human life in the modern city of London can be felt, particularly, in “The Wasteland.” In the last stanza of the first section, “The Burial of the Dead,” to intensify this sense of paltriness of human life and its interaction in modern society, the speaker calls the city of London “Unreal City” (CPTSE, 65). This is a direct allusion to Baudelaire’s poem “The Seven Old Men” which describes a “city full of dreams, / Where ghosts by daylight tug the passer’s sleeve” (FECB, 339). Likewise, Eliot uses many strategies to reinforce the Baudelairian sense of the “unreal” in the city of London. His description of London is marked, also by the same phantasmagorical dimension which characterizes Baudelaire’s Paris.

While describing London, Eliot refers to specific and genuine locations in London, such as London Bridge, King William Street and, Saint Mary Woolnoth church. Yet, the familiar setting of London becomes strange due to the emotionless and mechanical people that inhabit the city. The crowd of people that “flowed over London Bridge” (CPTSE, 55) comprises people “undone” (CPTSE, 55) by death. What “undoes” these people is not biological death but the mechanical, meaningless death-in-life of their daily routine. Besides focusing on the alienating character of the city, and the inability of its dwellers to cohere with, Eliot also associates the city of London with other foreign cities. The final section of “The Wasteland,” “What the Thunder Said,” indicates several cities:

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria

Vienna London

Unreal. (CPTSE, 77)

Eliot evokes several cities, Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London, but refers to them all as “unreal.” This strategy consists of grouping many cities together, familiar,

like London, with unfamiliar European cities, like Jerusalem Athens Alexandria and Vienna, and making the city of London, which is supposed to be familiar to Eliot's readers, look unfamiliar, remote and strange as the other alien cities are.

This is the new kind of poetry, modern and anti-romantic that Eliot wrote under the influence of Baudelaire. The city of London is as estranged as the city of Paris where all their inhabitants feel alienated, due to all the changes brought by Industrialization, Urbanization, and Immigration. Hence, in the Waste Land, the different ethnological groups including the Russian, the Lithuanian, the German, the Turkish Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant, the Phoenician sailor, the displaced lovers in the Hyacinth garden, the Theban prophet, Ferdinand of Naples, mingling with the British war veterans, Albert and Stetson, all contribute to form an estranged population, marking the city of London by their differences. In fact, the absence of genuine, common traditions and moral values in London echoes Baudelaire's population which inhabits Paris.

As we can observe, most of Baudelaire's poetry takes its impetus from the city of Paris and its ugly industrialized urban environment. Opposing the Romantic tenets that consider man and his relationship to Nature, the physical world as a source of beauty, and harmony, he, on the contrary, takes the other end of the polarity by focusing on the life of the city. It is precisely the focus on the urban, the city, the metropolis, and its manifestations of the ugly, sordid, and profane rather than the rural, or the country that Baudelaire succeeded in initiating poetry of the city, and attracting many modernist poets such as Eliot to its relevance and significance to modern poetry. One of Baudelaire's contributions to modern poetry is precisely his discovery of an aesthetics derived from the ugly, sordid, and un-poetic. Poetic beauty can be found not only in the retreat to wild nature, as the Romantics believed, but even in a big and dirty town.

#### **a. Baudelaire's Theory of Beauty: Its Influence on Eliot's Poetry:**

Counter-acting the nineteenth-century Romantic notion that nature was the dominant artistic ideal of beauty, Baudelaire's theory of beauty, instead, urged the modern artists to look for beauty somewhere else, because in nature, he saw evil, instead of beauty, as he made it obvious in his essay, "The Painter of Modern Life". In this essay he claims that "Mother Nature who has created patricide and cannibalism, and thousand other abominations that both shame and modesty prevent us from naming.

Nature benevolence which is omnipresent in all Romantic poetry, is absent in Baudelaire's poetry. Instead, nature is often associated with the corruption of the urban life. In Baudelaire's poetry nature is violent and shows no sign of kinship with man. In his *The Flowers of Evil*, nature and its hostility is presented to show the irreconcilability of man with his physical world. In the "Man and the Sea," the sea is the mirror for man to contemplate his soul. However, the sea is a bitter abyss where the poet's soul is filled with sadness very similar to the bitter of the salted sea:

Free man, you will always cherish the sea!  
The sea is your mirror; you contemplate your soul  
In the infinite unrolling of its billows;  
Your mind is an abyss that is no less bitter. (FECB, 4)

The negative image of the sea is also a leit- motif in Eliot's poetry that recurs constantly in many of his poems. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the sea is shown as inviting and alluring to a point that modern man has capitulated to it. Now, he becomes the prisoner of the deceitful pleasure coming from the voices of the siren that the sea offers:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (CPTSE, 7)

It is also present in the section “The Burial of the Dead” of “The Wasteland.” In this passage, the love of two lovers, initially a passion for each other epitomized with an exchange of Hyacinths, now ends up with failure. This failure is made evident in the last line of stanza two, in German, from the opera *Tristan und Isolde*. Indeed, The last line “Od’ und leer das Meer” (CPTSE, 54) that “can be translated as “Wide and empty the sea” are the last words uttered by Tristan as he waits looking for the ship that would bring Isolde to him. The image of the sea and its emptiness symbolizes the failure of their love.

In the third section of “The Wasteland” entitled “The Fire Sermon,” the Thames River like the sea, in “The Burial the Dead,” presents a negative image. If the sea was wide and empty, the river looks polluted by people’s waste: “empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends” (CPTSE, 60). The river nymphs are now gone and strange creatures replace them. A rat “crept softly through the vegetation / Dragging its slimy belly on the bank” (CPTSE, 70). This degraded description of the Thames River exemplifies the alienating quality of modern urban life.

In the Third stanza of “Preludes,” the poem describes the filthy urban areas represented by the city gutters which overwhelm even the beauty of the sun and the bird: “And the light crept up between the shutters, / And you heard the sparrows in the gutters” (CPTSE, 24). The light of the sun is not enlightening; it creeps and is clogged. The birdsong comes not from a traditional songbird, but from the sparrows in the gutters of the street.

Predictably, Baudelaire competes against classical Romantic notions of beauty. He suggests rather poetry in search of beauty in the strange and the uncanny: “Beauty is always bizarre. I do not mean to say that it is voluntarily, coldly bizarre . . . I mean that it always contains a bit of strangeness, naive strangeness, not intentional but unconscious, and it is this

strangeness that causes it to be particularly Beauty. That is its matriculation, its characteristic. Reverse the proposition, and try to conceive of a commonplace beauty.”<sup>270</sup>

In addition to his taste for the strange and the sordid, what typifies Baudelaire is truly his relation with the city, and his search for Beauty in urban ugliness. As odd as it seems to be, at least, in his time, Baudelaire “ Revers (ed) the proposition and tr( ied) to conceive of a commonplace beauty,”<sup>271</sup> Baudelaire finds beauty in the city. Opposing the Romantics who found beauty especially in the wild, and the country, it is in the city of Paris, and especially the “old Paris” with its poverty, ugliness, sordidness, but also attraction, that he developed the theme of the life in Paris and the effect of the city life on the poet. *The Flowers of Evil* precisely emphasizes these strange and mixed feelings of repulsion and attraction altogether.

“Evening Twilight” is one of the eighteen poems in the second section of *The Flowers of Evil* entitled “Parisian Scenes,” which exemplify what came to be known as the poetry of the city. In this section, the attention is paid on the suffering of modern Parisian life which Baudelaire finds ugly but attractive. Prostitutes, beggars, cripples, and criminals who live in the large ugly Paris made of poverty and decay constitute by themselves nevertheless a source of inestimable beauty. The poem begins by a quasi-romantic and “delightful” description of the nightfall for it brings relief to the tired labourers whose “arms can tell” (FECB, 359) and who think “Today [they]’ve laboured well.” Yet, with the night appear the threatening images of the “criminal”, “wolf”, and “accomplice”. Paris is a threatening and dangerous place, where death and insecurity prevail. “Insalubrious demons,” “Prostitution,” “thieves,” “cardsharps,” and “burglars” occupy the city and commit crimes. Words such as “attack,” “steal” and

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270. Charles Baudelaire, quoted in Louis Aguetant, *Lecture de Baudelaire : Vie, Psychologie, Poétique : l'Invitation au voyage, Spleen, Tabealux parisiens, La mort* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 63.

271. *Ibid.*, 63.

“accomplices” reinforce the gravity of the city life, while others such as, “ant-hill,” “worm” and “dens” reveal its dehumanization by stressing its bestiality:

Prostitution catches alight in the streets;  
Like an ant-hill she lets her workers out;  
Everywhere she blazes a secret path,  
Like an enemy who plans a surprise attack;  
She moves in the heart of the city of mire  
Like a worm that steals from Man what he eats. ....  
The gambling dens, where games of chance delight,  
Fill up with whores and cardsharps, their accomplices;  
The burglars, who know neither respite nor mercy. (FECB, 359)

The final image the poem ends with is the image of the hospital, conjuring disease, suffering, and death. Night is the very moment “when men’s sick pains increase” (FECB, 360), and “Death grips them by the throat “ (FECB, 360). The patients’ even most enduring suffering and most frustrating experience is that most of them have never known family love, “Joys of the hearth” (FECB, 360), and consequently have never really lived.

“The Swan,” is another poem about Paris, or rather what is going to be left of Paris after the realization of the Haussmann project. In the 1850’s, the Baron Haussmann, indeed, started a project of renovating Paris. This architectural urban project was called Haussmannisation, after the Prefect of Paris who was responsible of demolishing and reconstructing the “old Paris” in the purpose of modernizing the city. He was, in fact, “broadly responsible for sweeping away the higgledy-piggledy old city, with its maze of narrow, winding streets, and replacing them with the pattern of broad boulevards, large open squares and long vistas we associate with Paris today.”<sup>272</sup>

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272. Ross Chambers, “Baudelaire’s Paris,” *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, eds. Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 143.

In "The Swan," the poet feels nostalgic about the "old Paris" as he "wanders through the new Place du Carrousel, in front of the Louvre, conscious of the houses and streets that had to be demolished to make way for the new order of things."<sup>273</sup> The poet feels lost and completely displaced, and notices that all that is left from the old Paris is "jumbled bric- a-brac."<sup>274</sup>

The two main other characters of the poem, Andromaque and the Native African woman suffer also, like the swan, because of the sorrow and mourning caused by the memory of what they have lost. Andromaque laments the death of her husband, Hector, before the Simois, a river near Troy. The river, "swollen by [her] tears" (FECB, 333), reflects her grief rather than her beauty. The poet cries her degraded state as she has fallen from her "great husband's arms, to be /A beast of freight for Pyrrhus (FECB, 335), the son of Achilles.

The black woman feels estranged and exiled as she seeks with haggard eye / The palms of Africa" (FECB, 335). Now, neglected in a foreign land, she is almost invisible behind "great black wall of foggy sky" (FECB, 335). In fact, the swan and Andromaque together with the Native African woman strengthen the poet's distress about the incredible changes that transform Paris:

Paris has changed, but in my grief no change.

New palaces and scaffoldings and blocks,

To me, are allegories, nothing strange.

My memories are heavier than rocks.

Passing the Louvre, one image makes me sad:

That swan, like other exiles that we knew,

Grandly absurd, with gestures of the mad,

Gnawed by one craving! (FECB, 335)

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273. Ibid., 103.

274. Ibid., 109.

The poet cannot and will not forget the “heavier memories than rocks” of the Old Paris which are still intense despite the change. The new Paris does not remove the poet’s “memories,” on the contrary, drops his mind into sadness and melancholy. Now, like the swam, the poet hardly feels any harmony with the new Paris. The poet’s estrangement from his urban environment gives rise to the most characteristic of modern vices, boredom.

As a conclusion, we can say that the intricate tapestry of T.S. Eliot's literary journey becomes more pronounced, marked by a dynamic interplay between his poetic theory and the profound influences of Dante, Donne and the French Symbolists, particularly Baudelaire.

#### **Chapter Four: Stevens as a Neo-Modernist and Nationalist Poet**

Up to now, chapter three has verified and illustrated Frank Kermode’s classification of the poet, Eliot in the camp of the Paleo Modernists. Most of Eliot’s poems were shown to be

impacted by the European literary influence, indebted and inspired by the international inheritance, French, English, and Italian, among the most important European influences. However, Eliot's conception of modern poetry as an extension of the Western tradition failed to afford an appropriate uniqueness to the American modernist situation, according to many Americans, and to Wallace Stevens, in particular.

Such a Eurocentric conception of culture, from the exiled American, Eliot--- who took British citizenship and converted to Anglo-Catholicism ---does not go in line with that of the "Stay-At Home" American writer, Wallace Stevens, who never went to Europe, even when he could afford it, and was profoundly convinced that "Nothing could be more inappropriate to American literature than its English source since the Americans are not British in sensibility" (WSOP, 201). Against this Eurocentric, historically and religiously based Paelo-Modernist view that Modern poetry must be perpetuating the European literary tradition and relying on the "European Mind," in Eliot's words, and beliefs, of the third chapter, another trend in Modernism, the Neo- Modernist, seeks to create a Modern nationalistic American poetry, free from the dependence and domination of the European culture, and will be developed in this fourth chapter.

In the first part of this fourth chapter, a desire to break free from the stultifying European influence and write poetry accountable first and foremost to the conditions of the contemporary world makes Stevens assume that he must construct his own literary models to take the place of those that he rejects. As he grapples with his Americanness, Stevens' experimentation of a new and distinct form of poetry typically indigenous is highlighted. To achieve such a project, Stevens has to turn his back to Europe and its poetry and endeavors to find American solutions to Post-Romantic issues that are still alive in his time, and demand a new response. Stripped of European patronage, he has to redefine his own function as an American poet, by finding his own path or by "cut( ting) a trail through the American jungle without the use of a European

compass,”<sup>275</sup> as William Carlos Williams put it. This already shows a mindset that is the hallmark of the great poet that Stevens would become.

This part retraces then, the pathfinder Stevens and the different kinds of experimentations as well as innovations he came with throughout his meta-poetry. It shows Stevens’s attempt to construct a “supreme fiction” and to articulate the terms by which his poetry can best be evaluated. Positioning himself against Eliot’s Anglophile stance, Stevens criticizes, mocks or answers back Eliot in a continual intertextual debate on how modern poetry should be written.

This part shows also the poet’s development from his early poems that draw away from locality and topicality to his latest poems that became more and more concerned with abstraction and aesthetics. This first part examines accordingly, Stevens’ typical concern with the local and national identity that preoccupies so many of his American contemporaries also. It shows Stevens’ efforts, as an Americanist, to wrest the dominant conception of modernism away from Eliot and Pound, while answering this latter’s motto of “Make it New”. It is against the Paelo- Modernist backdrop, that some of Stevens’ poems will be read and explained, in this chapter. Eliot ‘s views and classicist poetry will serve as indexes to read this chapter on Neo- Modernism, and answer how and why such a trend of Modernism developed so rapidly, opposing and contradicting Paelo-Modernism. Stevens’ response to Paelo-Modernism is characterized by his predecessors, Emerson’s and Whitman’s anti-historicism, non-conformism, and solipsistic individualism predisposing him to enter the American tradition of rebellion and discontent.

In the second part, while placing Stevens firmly in the American tradition of Emerson and Whitman, I will show how Stevens grapples to forge a literary tradition more fully

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275. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Jay Parini, *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2004.

responsive to the cultural imperatives of the New World: an American tradition encouraged by Emerson's call for cultural independence and stripped of European tutelage. Stevens and Whitman, are shown, both influenced by Romantic poetry and thinking despite the historical events and cultural developments that obviously separate them. Although Stevens rejected any specific debt to Whitman, an anxiety of influence is traceable in his poetry in the way he responds to Whitman's concerns. They both deal with the same themes of national cultural identity, easily discernible in Whitman's "Song of Myself" and "Stevens' Connoisseur of Chaos", for instance.

Many other thematic similarities can be found in both poets' work, as the relation of the poet with his world, or the place of art in life. However, Stevens' attitude toward Whitman, especially in poems such as "A Plot against the Giant," "The Comedian as the Letter C," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird", and "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" are at once deferent and challenging. While I read some of these poems as a tribute to Whitman, I will demonstrate that though Stevens places Whitman as a forerunner and a master, he also diverges from Whitman's conception of an American Aesthetics. While refuting Whitman's sensual aesthetics, Stevens is shown to wrestle with an established American aesthetics to forge a different literary tradition that meaningfully reflects the world and the time in which he lives—with the equally prevalent modernist desire to achieve greater immediacy and concreteness in the poetic work, one based on abstraction and cognition, instead of sensualism.

#### **A. Stevens' American Sensibility: Breaking Free from the Stultifying European**

##### **Influence:**

As a response to the heavily Eurocentric, internationalist poetics made prominent by the expatriates T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound during the formative years of the modern period, and their deeply reliance on classical European literary sources as the only standards by which to judge the accomplishment of contemporary poetry, those American poets, especially those

belonging to “the stay at home” faction, answering the call of their Nineteenth-Century predecessors, Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, developed a new and different, if not antithetical poetic approach by deliberately disassociating their work from the ideological appeals to tradition made explicit by Eliot and Pound.

As they had to take upon themselves the task of redefining American culture through the reification of American values, ideals and social practices, their approach to a new system of national letters was challenging and contradicting that of Pound and Eliot, and tainted with Americanism.

#### **a. American Literary Nationalism: Chauvinism or Americanism**

In fact, Americanism, or Nationalism, as a national obsession has swept the literary as well as the ordinary aspects of the American life. At the beginning of the Twentieth- Century, it was in itself an important cultural issue. Ezra Pound’s remark in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1921) about having been “born in a half-savage country, out of date”<sup>276</sup> is so famous and strange that it makes us ask a lot of questions about American poets and their relation to their native land, or lack of it, and to Europe. A sense of cultural inferiority was certainly felt towards the British, and amid the cultural void, a hot debate about the urgent questions of the time was held: What will American culture become without the leanings on its English counterpart? What does it need? What will be its heroes? Models? And how will an American cultural identity be forged?

Even with the complaints of the paucity of the American Art, its dependence on the European past, and the remarks made by European and American observers alike on the state of its thinness, a lot of Americans were confident that the true American artist will see the day in America, and America will emerge as a flourishing nation. Even if the cry for intellectual independence was announced by Emerson and Whitman in the Nineteenth-Century, it is,

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276. Ezra Pound, *Personæ: Collected Shorter Poems*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2001),185.

nonetheless in the Twentieth-Century that the true authentic cultural revolution was to take place. Following Gertrude Stein's and Henry Lutz's prophecy that The Twentieth-Century will be American, a host of American writers are going to defy the world, and prove that they can write as well as the British if not better. For instance, Williams and Stevens, who considered themselves the architects of American culture, felt the need to rethink what national American literature should convey, and what forms it should take. To do so, they along with Hart Crane, and other Americanists, defined what was American in their verse by distancing themselves and their poetry from traditional notions of history, literature and other disciplines, attacking conventional norms of thinking, and traditional ideas of representation.

**b. Eliot's Transatlantic Status and the Complete American Reverse of Steven's Poetic Direction:**

Eliot's success as the leading figure of High Modernism, triggered a lot of counter-reactions among his contemporaries, especially those Americanist poets, such as William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane, who wanted to create a typically American literature, and attempted to establish a background for such a literature, one which T. S. Eliot declared was inexistent in the necessary foundation for a literary tradition.

Explicitly against the direction in which Eliot and Pound had guided modern poetry, Hart Crane, for instance, though he recognized the undeniable importance of Eliot's work, expressed nevertheless openly his desire to move in a different direction: "There is no one writing in English who can command so much respect, to my mind, as Eliot. However, I take Eliot as a point of departure toward an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his own case. But I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble toward a more positive, or (if [I] must put it so in a sceptical age) ecstatic

goal.”<sup>277</sup> Crane’s resolution to use Eliot’s position of authority as “a point of departure” for his own work proves the great influence, and fame that Eliot had achieved. Yet for Crane, as well as many of the American poets who were his contemporaries, Eliot’s approach to literary modernism became the version against which to work. William Carlos Williams, for his part, considered “The Waste Land,” Eliot’s masterpiece, and one of the most influential and praised work of modern poetry, a “great catastrophe to our ( American ) letters,” for it “gave the poem back to the academics.”<sup>278</sup>

**d. Stevens’ Americanist Response to Eliot’s Internationalist Poetry:**

As far as Stevens is concerned with the debate on Eliot, the relationship between Eliot and him was virtually non-existent as Stevens affirms in a letter of 25 April 1955 that: “After all, Eliot and I are dead opposites and I have been doing about everything that he would not be likely to do” (LWS, 277). While Williams was openly furious and publicly bemoaned that the appearance of “The Waste Land” “wiped out our world, as if an atom bomb had been dropped, and our brave sallies into the unknown were turned to dust,”<sup>279</sup> Stevens, on the other hand, was rather cautious in his comments on Eliot, at least publicly. But in his correspondence with friends he could easily express his opinion. Writing to Henderson in 1922, shortly after the publication of “The Waste Land,” Stevens says of Eliot’s poem, “As poetry it is surely negligible. What it may be in other respects is a large subject on which one could talk for a month. If it is the supreme cry of despair it is Eliot’s and not his generation’s. Personally, I think it’s a bore” (WSCPP, 940).

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277. Hart Crane, quoted in Brian M. Reed, *Hart Crane: After His Lights* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 161.

278. William Carlos Williams, quoted in Jay Parini, *William Carlos Williams*, 2004.

279. William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New Jersey: New Directions Publishing, 1967 ),174.

Therefore, it is in his poems, that Stevens most expressed his antagonist position towards Eliot, though rather obliquely in “Esthetique du Mal”, and in shorter poems like “The Lack of Repose” and “The Creations of Sound,” for instance. Europe and its cultures were appealing to Stevens, but as he decided to never set foot in Europe, it is through the cultivation of his imagination that he preferred to visit them. Stevens was at once, attracted and repulsed by Europe. If in a letter of June 25, 1945, he complained that America was nothing more than “a hamlet among elm trees and farms,” (LWS, 507) provincial and uncivilized, he elsewhere, justified his aversion as a fear of being “ossified by the stare of an Englishman” (LWS, 691). in another letter of Aug. 25, 1950. So what kind of relationship will Stevens entertain with Europe? how is he going to define his poetic project and free himself from the European cultural domination? And Where does Stevens begin to think about how to be an American poet, once stripped of a viable literary tradition?

Stevens does not consider American culture or poetry as a compound unit of the English culture, as Eliot does. In response to a Modern American Poetry questionnaire on American and English poetry Stevens would write that since American and English poets lived in two different physical worlds they would naturally be different. Being vividly aware of the difference between the United States and Britain, he often marks that difference in his poems. The idea of the nightingale as an Old World bird, coming from a geographical and cultural elsewhere is crucial to the poem “Autumn Refrain,” for instance. Alluding to Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”, he says that:

the nightingale

In measureless measures, not a bird for me

But the name of a bird and the name of a nameless air

.....

Though I have never -- shall never hear that bird. (WSCPP, 129)

The nightingale, Stevens decides is a bird that never has he and never will hear. Rejecting the nightingale, as a symbol closely and emblematically associated with romantic British poets, Stevens will look for another kind of bird symbolism, more akin to the American context, and to Whitman than to Keats. In reference to “Autumn Refrain,” Eleanor Cook says, “the yellow moon of words about the nightingale”<sup>280</sup> might suggest Whitman's mocking-bird song in “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.” Yet, in this poem, in particular, he seems to prefer grackles to nightingales and mocking-birds.

Notions of cultural nationalism and national identity obsessed Americanist poets, and Stevens was no exception. His verse is haunted by such cultural concerns and often ponders how a true American poetry may take over the manacles imposed by the European tradition. In his poem “The American Sublime” (1936) Stevens contemplates how does one stand to behold the American sublime?

The cultural nationalism that would overthrow the burden of these European inherited institutions, laws, and literary modes of expression is contained in the question of the first stanza:

How does one stand  
To behold the sublime,  
To confront the mockers,  
The mickey mockers  
And plated pairs? ( CPPWS, 106)

The answer Stevens’ poem offers is that it is only by rejecting old and received ideas, and seeing things anew that a fresh poetry can be produced. It is only by de-creating prior notions

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280. Eleanor Cook, *Against Coercion: Games Poets Play* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998),144.

and received construction of the sublime, that the spirit of an American sublime, which passes beyond the limitations of pre-established rules, can be created or re-created.

By deconstructing and negating classical, romantic, and transcendentalist formulations of the sublime, Stevens' poem as well as Stevens' poetry elsewhere reflect the essence of the American sublime. Embodying the spirit of both the sublime and the Emersonian American scholar, which emphasizes liberation from the restrictions of given norms, authority, and conventions, Stevens' poetry, in general, and the poem "The American Sublime," in particular, attempt to relieve themselves from conventional norms, the imposed order, absolute truth, divine thoughts and high thoughts. Free of European influence, such type of poetry introduces the reader to different and new approaches to knowledge and reality, and new modes of perception and representation.

This explains why Stevens' poetry like Crane's, Moore's, and to some extent, Frost's is meta-poetry. He shares with these Modernists the sense that poetry has to always involve an investigation into its own rules: How it works? What does it do? What is it capable of? What are its potential uses? And he leaves all these questions in a sense open and available to re-definition at a fundamental level. He says, in one of his epigrams or adages, or statements "All poetry is experimental poetry" (WSPS, 161)<sup>281</sup> and there is a feeling in any Stevens poem that Stevens is experimenting, and going in some new direction, not just at the beginning of the poem, but throughout the poem. This is how he proceeds.

To write a true American poetry, Stevens has, as he puts it in his half a poem and half a theory, to tell us how to write poetry. The poem "Of Modern Poetry," can be considered as a little essay on the subject of what is modern poetry, for the poet uses "has to" (WSCPP, 218) and "must" (WSCPP, 218) when talking about modern poetry, clearly expressing how he perceives modern poetry, as a Neo-Modernist, or a Nationalist poet.

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281. Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, 161.

As an extended metaphor for modern poetry, the whole poem compares traditional poetry to a theater where “the scene was set” and the actor repeats “what was in the script.” Whereas modern poetry uses a new stage and inspires many new ideas. Comparing to the past, the poets of the time, were simply writing to a set pattern. The poet compares the old poet to an actor, who simply repeated what was ‘in the script’ on the preset stage:

It has not always had  
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what  
Was in the script. (WSCPP, 218)

Now the situation has changed for modern poetry. Modern poets must energetically compose their poems according to the present situation of their time. It is no longer the same case .

Then the theatre was changed  
To something else.  
Its past was a souvenir. (WSCPP, 218)

The modern poet has to discount the established past of poetry as a “souvenir,” for the task of the modern American poet will be that of “finding / What will suffice”. Since the poet is concerned himself with the existential need of finding, and since this cannot be done only by fiction, “the act of finding” becomes itself the focus of interest. He says: Once the “past / was a souvenir / It has to construct a new stage,” (WSCPP, 218)it means in a way it has to be on it too.

The poet continues to supply his rules in the second section of “Of Modern Poetry.” He insists that the poem has:

To be living, to learn the speech of the place  
It has to face the men of the time and to meet  
The women of the time. It has to think about war

And it has to find what will suffice. It has

To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage. (WSCPP, 218)

Once the “past / was a souvenir”, once Stevens turns his back to the European past, he sees his own task as the maker of a specifically American sensibility since the “Americans are not British in sensibility,” and Western literary European inheritance does not automatically create an American culture. While trying to make himself a place in the Twentieth -Century literary world, and founding a poetic home for himself, Stevens ‘reflections on how he should write an authentic American poetry are worth observing and will be then examined.

**e. Stevens ’Americanness: Placing Embryonic and Budding American Art Versus its Mature and Veteran European Counterpart:**

To create an original, nationalist poetry, Stevens, first, placed America against Europe. Repudiating the European monuments and symbols as the only models of identification and reference to civilization, Stevens is going to create his own references by opposing America to Europe. Stressing “ againstness,” as a principle to define Stevens’ especially early poetry , Vendler is not the only critic to defend this view, we have also Eleanor Cook, who , like Vendler reads Stevens’ poem “ The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage” as the confrontation of the nascent and novice American art to its experienced and veteran counterpart”. Accordingly, Helen Vendler, takes it as obvious that the poem is about “our impoverished American Venus, who has none of the trappings of Botticelli’s Venus, but who will eventually accumulate aura and mythological fullness through new American art.”<sup>282</sup>

“The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage” which is a poem from Wallace Stevens's first book, *Harmonium*, announces as early as 1919, the birth of American Art and assures

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282. Helen Vendler, *Words Chosen Out Of Desire* (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press),82.

Americans to be confident for they will have a golden Goddess themselves even if she's not quite ready yet. In this poem, a new American Goddess like Venus, who is a Roman goddess, and whose functions encompass love, beauty, desire, sex, fertility, prosperity and victory is expected to arise in the New World.

Here, Stevens, even though he tries to create a fresh American poetry, he, nevertheless resorts to use a European source, and treats of a theme oft-treated in art and literature, the Rising of Venus from the Waves, as in *The Birth of Venus* c. 1485–1486., by the Italian painter Sandro Botticelli of the Early Renaissance. Though Vendler believes firmly the poem to be indebted to Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, Stevens' Venus, however, rises in spring from weeds, not from waves. When compared to the waves, the weeds are simple beings. But Stevens would find subject-matter for his poetry in ordinary things, like the weeds. This signals a feature of the Modernists' innovations, the concern with the common, and the ordinary.

The first lines of the poem suggest a contrast between a cultured, and refined, but “archaic” Europe and an inexperienced but vigorous America. In this poem, Stevens fixes a new Venus who will arise in America, not from a sea-shell like in Botticelli's painting but out of the foam and so calling her “the goldener nude / Of a later day” (WSCPP, 5):

“But not on a shell, she starts,  
Archaic, for the sea.  
But on the first-found weed  
She scuds the glitters,  
Noiselessly, like one more wave. (WSCPP, 4)

Botticelli's Venus, decorated with shell and flowers is an inert and placid figure, whereas the paltry nude, even when reduced to “a first-found weed,” still “scuds the glitters / Noiselessly” as she is visible in the first glittering apparitions of spring. The Paltry Nude is

associated with spring, the classical season of rebirth and regeneration. Spring is welcome because it announces the return of Summer, “the goldener nude / Of a later day,” the season of Venus’ fulfilment of pleasures : lush beauty, ease and sexuality are announced with it . “She too is discontent” (WSCPP, 4). Even though she feels “discontent,” in spring, she soon “would have purple stuff upon her arms,” (WSCPP, 4), and would become prosperous, her arms covered with rich cloth. Summer, “the centre of sea-green pomp,” (WSCPP, 4), will succeed to Spring, and hand on, in turn, ‘upon her irretrievable way for Summer is a time for fulfilment:

And would have purple stuff upon her arms,  
... The wind speeds her on,  
Blowing upon her hands  
And watery back.  
She touches the clouds, where she goes  
In the circle of her traverse of the sea....  
Yet this is meagre play. (WSCPP, 4)

Yet the poverty of the imagery inferred in the line “Yet this is meagre play” is counterbalanced by the action of the American Venus who “ touches the clouds, where she goes / In the circle of her traverse of the sea.” The final lines of the poem suggest that American poets are convinced that they can still achieve a vital and dynamic art for themselves, even when divorced from European history and tradition. And thus, nothing can stop the Paltry Nude who will resolutely and boldly go, like the centre of sea-green pomp, / Upon her irretrievable way”:

( She ) Will go, like the centre of sea-green pomp,  
In an intenser calm,  
Scullion of fate,

Across the spick torrent, ceaselessly,

Upon her irretrievable way. (WSCPP, 4)

**a. Stevens' Americanness: Stevens' Quest for an American Indigenous Art through the Rejection of the European Tradition:**

Another Stevens's poem "Bantam in Pine-Woods," a poem from his first book of poetry, *Harmonium*, and published in 1922, also makes a statement about the new American art. But this time, Stevens instead of opposing America to Europe as he did in "The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage," looks rather for something else. He wants to define America by making use of indigenous, primitivist, and nativist material. In the South American Aztecs, their costumes and culture, he finds interestingly fodder for his poem "Bantams in Pine-Woods."

In this poem, he imagines a little bantam rooster confronting a great big rooster and he addresses the rooster as an Aztec chief in a caftan of feathers. Here, Stevens wants to define the new America against the indigenous America of the Aztecs, or the Mayas, all those who were before the white settlers peopled America. The little rooster in Appalachia addresses the big rooster:

Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan

Of tan with henna hackles, halt!

Damned universal cock, as if the sun

Was blackamoor to bear your blazing tail.

Fat! Fat! Fat! Fat! I am the personal.

Your world is you. I am my world. (WSCPP, 60)

In this poem, it seems that the nonsense of other cultures, and here particularly the Aztec culture, is objected to. Nevertheless, and more interestingly, the poem can be also read metaphorically, as a rejection of Eliot's and Pound's poetics, and their attitude to patronize poetry, and impose their established canon to other poets.

“Bantams in Pine-Woods” is a rejection of the traditional literary canon so praised by Eliot, and can be read as a declaration of independence for American poetry. The speaker, the poet’s cock, or the cock as, an Appalachian bantam cock, says his aggressive “hoo” to “Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in Caftan / of tan- an exotic cock” (WSCPP, 60) because the speaker “fears not portly Azcan nor his hoos” :

Fat! Fat! Fat! Fat! I am the personal.

Your world is you. I am my world.

You ten-foot poet among inchlings. Fat!

Begone! An inchling bristles in these pines,

Bristles, and points their Appalachian tangs,

And fears not portly Azcan nor his hoos. (WSCPP, 60)

The poem can be compared to “The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage” on Helen Vendler’s interpretation of it as an expression of confidence in new American art. The New World poet, or “the Appalachian inchling” being confident about his freedom and power of innovation in the New World, is not only defiant towards the traditional literary canon but especially defiant against the arrogant, conceited “Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan” who pretends to hold for himself the canon, and claims in this way its control. Though the richness of tradition is accepted and approved “Fat! Fat! Fat! Fat! I am the personal,” it is however relativized “Your world is you.”

If “Bantams in Pine-Woods” may convey the idea of the free and self-reliant affirmation of the nascent American art, in particular, it may also present, in general the conflict between the subjective and objective world view, here dramatized in the personas of the chieftain of Azcan and the inchling of the pines. Being uncommitted to either of the two points of view, Stevens’ real concern is to what the true relationship of the artist to his environment is, or indeed, ought to be. This theme of the relationship of the individual with his environment or the confrontation of the self with reality will preoccupy Stevens almost all his life and I will

have something to say about it later, in the second part of this chapter when I relate Stevens' poem "The Comedian as the Letter C" to his precursor, Whitman and his poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." In "Bantams in Pine-Woods", then, the dramatic tension is between the externalized philosophical position, the "Your world is you," which the inchling attributes to Azcan, and the inchling's own affirmation that "I am my world". Azcan believes himself to be the center of the world and claims universality. Azcan's pride is suggested by the pomp and magnificence of his physical appearance, and the allegation that he sees the sun as no more than "black moor to bear ( his) blazing tail" (WSCPP, 60). This suggests the foolishness of man who believes that the universe is created for him only and by him, and alludes to Eliot's and Pound's pretention and claim to impose on other poets their own views on how poetry should be written. Finally, the question of the artist's relationship to his environment finds an answer in the inchling's irascible assertion: "I am my world". The expression "I am my world" confirms once more Stevens' determination to trace his own path and not follow blindly Eliot's and Pound's European penchants.

A poem like "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" antedates the path Stevens would take later in the thirties, as self-canonizing, and shows us already two important things: first, the desire for Stevens to escape entirely from any form of influence (European or other) and the need to self-fashion a world from his own experience, which is indicative of one direction of modernism; second, despite his claim to make his self more "his self", nonetheless, traces of the impact and the presence of Whitman on Stevens' poetry, are easily discernible. With its use of "I" "me", "myself" in the last stanza and throughout the poem, Whitman's "Song of Myself" "instantly comes to mind, and recalls his anti-conformism and individualism:

And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.

I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw

Or heard or felt came not but from myself;

And there I found myself more truly and more strange. (WSCPP, 51)

Even though the idea that the poem conveys is about the poet's experience of self-discovery through imaginative construction of himself and his own creativity, these lines echo strangely Whitman and his verse. In the modern world of the Twentieth-Century, teeming with questions and uncertainties, Stevens, yet confident in the American potentialities, and optimistic in its future, uses the self and the mind as a point of stability and reference to express his Americanness.

Even though, Whitman was attracted by the highly individualized Romantic vision of the poet-legislator—best arrested by Percy Bysshe Shelley's interpretation of poets as the “unacknowledged legislators of the World”, he ultimately rejected the vision to see the poet as an authority. If Romantic writers tended to have a unitary vision of the poet, for Whitman, his relationship with the outer world is not one, but many as he is himself large and contains multitudes. Even the poetic “Me” or “I” is not one for Whitman, but many; it is pluralistic . As Whitman famously asks in *Leaves*, “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then ... I contradict myself; / I am large ... I contain multitudes”<sup>283</sup> . This suggests that Whitman eventually resisted this familiar Romantic unitary vision of the poet as an authority and rather looked for another more democratic model of poet.

The principle of “self-reliance” famously described by the Transcendentalist Emerson, and embodied in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and especially in his poem “Song of Myself,” is before all marked by a nonconformist spirit towards the European conventions and a belief that the best way to be truly American for Americans is to do things in their own way. In this sense, Whitman and Stevens share a lot in common. They both are optimistic and confident in

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283. Walt Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman: Leaves of Grass* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1902),

the American as a self-reliant individual, and consider the individual as the only reliable source of truth and knowledge. For this reason, in their works while they advocate the turning away from the past, and the “European Mind”, they call for a cultural nationalism that would overcome the weight of these inherited institutions, laws, and literary modes of expression.

Whitman in the initial declaration of “Song of Myself” destined to the “you,” the reader as well as a would-be poet, urges him to “ Stop this day and night with me and you shall see possess the origin of all poems:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,  
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)  
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the  
dead, nor feed on the spectres in books.<sup>284</sup>

As the European books are inhabited by the poetic dead, the envisioned model “you” for which the poet “will be waiting” and that is on his way to become fully, so “shall no longer... look/ through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in / books,” in order to be essentially American. So does literature provoke the reader’s own poetic potential and contributes in forming its robust individuality.

In “Song of Myself,” specifically Whitman’s persona cautions the reader and the future poet to perceive things not only by avoiding to look through the eyes of the dead, but also sense things fully by themselves because he fears that he himself may—or has already—become such a bookish specter: “you shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me”<sup>285</sup> but “look to all sides and filter them from your self.”<sup>286</sup>

To accomplish an original cognitive and sensitive relationship to the world, the poet needs not only to leave the comfort and the safety of the “houses and rooms,”<sup>287</sup> “full of perfumes”

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284. Ibid., 35.

285. Ibid.

286. Ibid.

287. Ibid., 34.

<sup>288</sup> but should rely on himself in “look(ing) to all sides and filter(ing) them from himself”<sup>289</sup>  
o he has to “Unscrew the locks from the doors, / unscrew the doors themselves from their  
jambs!”<sup>290</sup>

The emphasis put on the individual only, and not based on an external authority, nor on the past to reach knowledge, is a Whitmanian stance. This Whitmanian call for self-reliance in perception and expression, echoing Emerson’s and its urge for independence and freedom will be a constant presence in Stevens’ poetry too. Furthermore, the idea of the self and the poet’s relationship with his world, explored in “Song of Myself” will not only constitute the vital substance feeding almost all Stevens’ poetry, but cultivate his life-long preoccupations with this theme in his poetry, which is his subjective confrontation with reality or the complex, Imagination/ Reality, he created.

#### **f. Stevens’ Americanness: Rejecting the European Past of Eliot’s Poetry:**

One of Stevens’ poems “Connoisseur of Chaos”, is a pertinent instance both of Eliot’s reliance on the European culture, and Stevens’s rejection of the type of poetry to which Eliot was famously committed:

After all the pretty contrast of life and death  
Proves that these opposite things partake of one,  
At least that was the theory, when bishops’ books  
Resolved the world. We cannot go back to that.  
The squirming facts exceed the squamous mind,  
If one may say so. (WSCPP, 195)

Here, Stevens is persuaded that now “We cannot go back to that “bishops’ books” which once “Resolved the world”. Their time has expired in the same way as Whitman in “Song of

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288. Ibid.

289. Ibid., 35.

290. Ibid., 62.

Myself” advises us not to “take things at second or third hand, nor look / through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in / books.”

In these lines, Stevens was convinced that in the Twentieth-Century, people and Americans, particularly, could not go back to “bishop’s books” and that Eliot’s poetry was incongruous in the modern world. The speaker uses a collective voice which states the impossibility for Europeans and Americans of returning to a simpler world order—to the “old order,” say, that of the church probably. There are things in this part of the poem which indicate that humans in the secular and chaotic Twentieth-Century are at an impasse leading to despair in Western thinking and that the old order cannot fit any longer to modern times.

In Stevens’ view, Eliot had failed to respond appropriately to “the squirming facts” of Twentieth-Century modernity and had retreated to “bishops’ books. Stevens was persuaded that Eliot’s type of poetry was incompatible with the demands of modern world, and particularly of America, and consequently that Americans could no longer go back to “bishops’ books,” to an old order, expressly when readers remember how enveloped, encased, and, enclosed, or “squamous” human minds become when confronted with all the wriggling, complicated, and twisting facts or “the squirming facts” in a world that can never be ordered.

#### **i. Stevens’ Critique of Eliot’s Theory of Impersonality**

Stevens’ Americanist poetry takes the form of opposition and contradiction to Eliot’s poetry. In this poem precisely, Eliot’s theory of Impersonality is the subject of Stevens’ parody. The idea of the extinction of the poet’s personality, exposed in Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is strongly attacked by Stevens who argues against Eliot, that “there can be no poetry without the personality of the poet” (WSCPP, 670). As Stevens further explains, “It is often said of a man that his work is autobiographical in spite of every subterfuge. It cannot be otherwise. Certainly, from the point of view from which we are now regarding it, it cannot be otherwise, even though it may be totally without reference to himself (WSCPP, 717).

Stevens adds that “The truth is that a man’s sense of the world dictates his subjects to him and that this sense is derived from his personality, his temperament, over which he has little control and possibly none, except superficially. It is not a literary problem. It is the problem of his mind and nerves” (WSCPP, 718).

Unlike Eliot, Stevens affirms that poetry is a process of the personality of the poet, reflecting the physical and mental factors that condition him as an individual. This is why the persona of Stevens is present in his work, and his poems reflect his personal and his growth as a poet.

In “The Creations of Sound,” precisely, the argument is directed against Eliot and his followers, yet is kept implicit by the stratagem of referring to Eliot as “X, the pernoble master” (WSCPP, 230) and using the algebraic formula X. Hence, in “The Creations of Sound”, Stevens criticizes a poet, named “X” - and that Harold Bloom in his book on Stevens *Poems of Our Climate* identifies as Eliot. He calls this derisive characterization: “a palpable irony against a poet who asserted that his verse excluded mere personality.”<sup>291</sup> Stevens’ strategy consists in using X as an inflated and exceedingly simplified opponent, as a to explicate his own views on poetry and poetics. By sharpening two flaws in X’s work and correcting them, he establishes his own criteria for good poetry: The poet ought to struggle for invisibility, first, and then, seek to intensify the complexity of human vision.

The first half of the poem centers on the poet’s necessary invisibility. The first five stanzas are dominated syntactically by a single complex sentence, setting up a hypothetical proposition” if...then”, substituting in this way, X for Stevens’ opponent:

If the poetry of X was music,

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291. Harold Bloom, Wallace Stevens: *The Poems of Our Climate* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980),151.

So that it came to him of its own,  
Without understanding, out of the wall

Or in the ceiling, in sounds not chosen,  
Or chosen quickly, in a freedom  
That was their element, we should not know

That X is an obstruction, a man  
Too exactly himself, and that there are words  
Better without an author, without a poet,

Or having a separate author, a different poet,  
An accretion from ourselves, intelligent  
Beyond intelligence, an artificial man

At a distance, a secondary expositor,  
A being of sound, whom one does not approach

Through any exaggeration. From him, we collect. (WSCPP, 275)

If the poetry of X were music, the results may be better for X, but we, the readers, would not be afforded the opportunity to learn what good poetry requires by observing his mistakes. Stevens speculates that X's hypothetical musical composition would develop naturally, "out of the wall / Or in the ceiling, in sounds not chosen" coming to their creator "in a freedom / That was their element". In this situation, X's role is passive, he receives the music that comes to him "without understanding" and if he must choose, he chooses "quickly" instinctively rather than reflectively. Here Stevens is making a point that with music, a creator of sound would find

it more difficult to impose his presence, his self into the view or awareness of the readers than he might as a poet. Because X writes poetry instead of music, his presence is strongly felt, and so we do, in fact, “know that X is an obstruction”(6-7).

Stevens inserts a subtle critique in the enjambment of “we should not know”, which grammatically should read as “we would not know,” at the end of the second stanza. Here, it means if X wrote music instead of poetry, we would not know he was an obstruction.

A poet like X, “a man / Too exactly himself” cannot get out of his own way, and so prevents the sounds from moving through him, by continuing to assert his own role in their creation, and after all poet X’s mistake is useful: if he were not an obstruction, then “we should not know” that there are words / Better without an author, without a poet.” A poet too certain of himself, too eager to beckon his creation, give it his imprint, and whose words are made in his own image because he is their creator, cannot know the truth as “we” do.

Therefore, unlike Eliot, demonstrating humility and self-effacement, instead of pretention and self-importance, Stevens argues in favor of a poet’s invisibility. The further one can remove the poem’s words from the poet himself, the better the poetry will be for “there are words / Better without an author, without a poet/ Or having a separate author, a different author.”

In this poem, X or Eliot is enormously and foreseeably dismissed as “an obstruction, a man / Too exactly himself” (WSCPP, 275). The charge is a deep irony against Eliot’s type of writing and his theory of depersonalization which stipulates that the poet must obliterate his own personality. Stevens mocks the poet who asserts that his verse excludes mere personality, and contradicts himself in his own words describing his other poem, “The Waste Land” as “the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life.”<sup>292</sup> The lines:

That X is an obstruction, a man

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292. T.S. Eliot quoted in Harold Bloom, *T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007),54.

Too exactly himself, and that there are words

Better without an author, without a poet,

refer to Eliot's contradictory concept of impersonality

In the second half of the poem, X is further dismissed through the indirect imperative:

Tell X that speech is not dirty silence

Clarified. It is silence made dirtier.

It is more than an imitation for the ear.

He lacks this venerable complication.

His poems are not of the second part of life.

They do not make the visible a little hard

To see nor, reverberating, eke out the mind

Or peculiar horns, themselves eked out

By the spontaneous particulars of sound.

We do not say ourselves like that in poems.

We say ourselves in syllables that rise

From the floor, rising in speech we do not speak. (WSCPP, 275).

Rather than using words or poetry to cleanse a "dirty silence," Stevens unashamedly and daringly argues that to create sound, to write poetry is to make silence "still dirtier". For Stevens poetry is "more than an imitation" and complications are "venerable". Then, Stevens criticizes poet X's inclination for tidying up for "imitation", for avoiding "complication," and focusing exclusively on the first "part of life." These are things not to do because to write as X does is to limit oneself, and X's poems fail to achieve anything, according to Stevens.

Stevens recapitulates X's limitations by saying of his poems, "They do not make the visible a little hard / to see." This image is at the heart of Stevens's philosophy of poetics: that poetry's role is to take the things that are familiar, deconstruct, and reorganize them in a way that makes them slightly strange. Stevens does not ask the poet to see differently. He asks the poet to make muddy.

But what do we make of this willful obscurantism? Willful difficulty? Poets should not attempt to make the world clearer; on the contrary, poets should make the world less clear. Clarity is the enemy of the poet. Why? Well, for me this is the whole reason one endeavors to construct literature: to complicate, to obfuscate, to make additions to reality rather than attempt to re-present reality or interpret reality. Stevens did nothing for the interpretation of reality; he did everything for the creation of reality. What am I saying? Was Stevens not a Modern poet? Was Stevens a postmodern poet? Was Stevens a poet of ontology? I cannot know what it means to exist in this world. What world? Which world? The switch between these questions flickers back and forth, which is which, which is first, which is primary, which comes before which? Could there be two of everything

The very next image embodies the core of his poetics and is one that is certainly "hard / to see": the failure of X's poems is their inability to resonate, to "eke out the mind / On peculiar horns". A poem should, Stevens implies, sustain the mind, keep the thoughts reverberating, in Stevens' own terms "resist intelligence".

The final image, recapitulates Stevens' criteria of good poetry: to take something visible, and make it harder to see. Most particularly, Stevens invites us to embrace the ambiguity, the "dirtiness" of our silence, to resist the urge to "clarify" it, and to avoid strong manifestations of self in poetry, that is to say, to eschew X's tendency to be "too exactly himself." Stevens is chiding Eliot for his imposition and presence in his poetry, for there is no need for the poet to interfere, to obstruct the reader's view with awareness of the poet's peculiar life. What is more

important, for Stevens is that the reader can forget all about the poet and focus on what matters: the poem's words, the way that they show us what we know in a way we've never known before. (the construction of "say ourselves" is foreign and slightly uncomfortable) and also removed the speaker from the sound ("speech we do not speak").

#### **j. Stevens's Americanness : Stevens' Supreme Fiction Versus Eliot's Christianity**

When other poets and Eliot look to poetry to serve different functions of religion, Stevens thought of poetry as a substitute to religion. He felt that it was the job of poetry to fill the void left by the collapse of religious faith. In 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', he writes: Poetry Exceeding music must take the place

Of empty heaven and its hymns,  
Ourselves in poetry must take their place,  
Even in the chattering of your guitar. (WSCPP, 137)

For Stevens, "Poetry takes the place of religion because after one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption" (WSPS,158).

As a serious Christian poet, Eliot is concerned with poetry as a model for ethical action, as a kind of guide for conduct in the world. For instance, he is concerned with ritual and community and in ways in which poetry might establish and constitute them. "The Waste Land" is about the difficulty of relations between men and women due to their lack of faith and echoes past situations, similar to that lived by Philomel. Stevens' "Sunday Morning" is a poem set in the present, about the relations of the poet with himself and concerned with discarding the past in order to enter more fully into the present. For Stevens poetry stands in the place that religion once did, and takes over Christianity's traditional concern with redemption. He says: "Poetry is a means of redemption" (WSCPP, 972).

Unlike Eliot and Marianne Moore, for Stevens poetry takes over another dimension of religious experience. And when he speaks of redemption, he is concerned with questions about

the afterlife, paradise, and the transcendental. Questions such as: How can culture imagine the transcendental in a non-transcendental world and the metaphysical in a non-metaphysical world? And how can we have Heaven if we don't have God ?

These are questions quasi-present in Stevens's secular poetry. And when he answers them, he answers them in a way that puts him on Hart Crane's side of the debate with Eliot. In "The Waste Land," the decay of sacred authority originates a crisis of the community and its meaning. For Crane, this religious decline, rather than a crisis, this condition is an opportunity for poetry to "lend a myth to god"<sup>293</sup> Crane's epic poem "The Bridge" begins with a poem, "To Brooklyn Bridge", which concludes by advising the bridge to "lend a myth to God"—in other words, and opposing Eliot, Crane thinks that modernity is not a deterioration from an older spiritual wholeness, but instead a force capable of making its own spirit and forms of worship. Eliot is disturbed to see God as something constructed something we lend a myth to. For Crane and Stevens God was a myth, a metaphor, and metaphors can and need to be exchanged and renewed all the time. In this, Crane and Stevens are very close together. However, Eliot, and Crane need both a mythic and a historical past. Stevens wants the present instead.

"Sunday Morning" is a poem from Stevens' first book of poetry, *Harmonium*, that helped launch Stevens's career and reputation as a major and influential modernist poet . It was, first published in part in the November 1915 issue of Poetry, then in full in 1923 in *Harmonium*. Compared to Eliot's poems, "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men," the light tone of "Sunday Morning" contrasts heavily with the two previous poems' despair and disillusionment. "Sunday Morning" does not express skepticism, but simply the impossibility of believing in Christianity or any other established religion.

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<sup>293</sup>. Joseph N. Riddel, quoted in Christopher Beach, *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, 70.

The nihilistic tone of “The hollow Men” depicts individuals as figures filled with straw lacking substance and devoid of emotions or spiritual faith. Their lack of morality and their outward suffering is further reinforced in the lines “We whisper... as wind in dry grass or rats feet over broken glass” (CPTSE, 79). The vivid and sordid images of decay contrast powerfully with those of the woman in “Sunday Morning” presented leading a life of ease in domestic bourgeois luxury, a kind of earthly paradise. While the images in “The Hollow Men” illustrate the emotionally devoid psyche of these characters, and thus reinforces their lack of spirituality, in “Sunday Morning,” the woman feels carefree, untroubled, and happy.

The literary critic Yvor Winters called “Sunday Morning” the greatest American poem of the twentieth century and . . . certainly one of the greatest contemplative poems in English.”<sup>294</sup> Helen Vendler in the Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens summarized the poem as Stevens's search for “a systematic truth that could replace the Christianity of his churchgoing childhood.”<sup>295</sup> For Vendler, the subterfuge which Stevens employs in attempting to reach this objective is “of writing of himself in the third person, not as “he” but as “she,” adopting a female persona for opinions that might at the time have seemed too “unmanly” to be uttered with a masculine voice: “Divinity must live within herself,” declares the woman who has decided to celebrate Sunday at home with “Coffee and oranges” instead of going to church. Wallace Stevens himself wrote: “This is not essentially a woman’s meditation on religion and the meaning of life. It is anybody’s meditation.”

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294. Yvor Winters, quoted in George, S. Lensing, “Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop: The Way a Poet Should See, The Way a Poet Should Think” *The Wallace-Stevens Journal*, 19 (1995), p.127.

295. Helen Vendler “Stevens and the Lyric Speaker,” *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, ed. John N. Serio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 135.

The first stanza introduces the reader to a scene painted so vividly by Stevens where a woman on a Sunday morning relaxes in her peignoir or dressing gown, enjoying coffee and oranges in the sun, in the company of a cockatoo, instead of presumably going to church :

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late  
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,  
And the green freedom of a cockatoo  
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate  
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice. (WSCPP, 53)

Stevens is writing about the end of the Christian era like Eliot did in “The Waste Land” and W. B. Yeats in “The Second Coming.” But while, Yeats, for instance, presents a nightmarish apocalyptic scenario, with an unsettling atmosphere that suggests a world on the brink of destruction, Stevens simply presents a woman doing something else on Sunday morning than going to church, to introduce the topic of Christianity. “The Second Coming” describes a deeply mysterious and powerful alternative to the Christian idea of the Second Coming, Jesus's prophesied return to the Earth as a savior. In the last two lines of the poem, Jesus's heroic return is, in fact, replaced by the bleak vision of a beast “slouching to Bethlehem”: “And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, /Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”<sup>296</sup>

Although the woman in “Sunday Morning” is going through a minor crisis or loss of faith, the speaker in the poem, is there to reassure her that a new approach to the natural world, paganism or humanism will be enough to sustain her spiritually. There is a complete absence of the Christian emphasis on fear, and guilt.

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296. W.B. Yeats, quoted in Michael Levenson, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

This poem takes for granted the fact of not going to church, of doing something else on Sunday morning, and announces a great change in the cultural order where Sunday is no longer spent or need not necessarily to be spent at church. Stevens explains that: “The poem is simply an expression of paganism” (LWS 250). It mirrors the fading away of established religion and the establishment of a new belief -system.

The poem declares the end of the Christian era smoothly while it introduces a new reality through the great change in culture. As belief in the divine as well as in the supernatural is breaking down, humans have to reinvent fresh modes of belief, based in this new reality. Old beliefs of fear and guilt, sacrifice and future rewards in heaven need to be replaced through the use of the imagination by new sensual experience in the real, emotional world. In this context, Stevens says: “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.” (WSCPP, 903)

When “Sunday Morning” records simply a change in culture, and where the Christian era only dissolves, or dissipates, “The Hollow Men” describes the suffering accompanying the loss of spiritual faith to illustrate the futility of existence. Due to their lack of morality, the hollow men are leading a futile and meaningless life, they are far from enjoying a pleasant life like the woman of “Sunday Morning” who is spending her Sunday mornings in a luxuriant, carefree and secular manner. This notion is evident in the lines from “The Hollow Men”, “Under the twinkle of a fading star” (CPTSE, 80), the fading star being a biblical allusion to the star of Bethlehem and illustrates the individual’s fading spiritual faith; as a result , the state of the individual’s mind is in a state of inertia due to their immoral and secular psyche, “For thine is the kingdom / For thine is for thine (CPTSE, 82). Their inability to finish prayer emphasizes their spiritual inertia, they are unable to pray and are stuck in a paradox of “paralysed force” (CPTSE, 82). Thus, the world ends due to lack of action “This is the way the world ends, not

with a bang but with a whimper.”<sup>297</sup> Their lack of morality and spiritual inertia emphasizes the futility of existence as they make no impact on the world and pass into nothingness.

In the second part of “Sunday Morning” here we have the speaker setting up the tension between the woman who begins to doze off into dream, and her religion which she still has an interest in, despite her lapsed condition, and where the ideal of Paradise is replaced by earthly pleasures:

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?

What is divinity if it can come

Only in silent shadows and in dreams?

Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,

In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else

In any balm or beauty of the earth,

Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

Divinity must live within herself. (WSCPP, 53)

But why should she sacrifice that bounty for the dead? Why should she give up those earthly pleasures for a doubtful and obscure sense of divinity? Such fundamental questions start to arise from within. Is it not possible that the real world she is a part of holds “Things to be cherished” (WSCPP, 53) pertaining to the divine?

Such a philosophical approach to belief makes the woman's conscience tells her that divinity lies within herself, within her own psyche: as an individual living on earth she must have a tangible connection to it. The final seven lines, describing a landscape full of animals and birds suggest that we might become one with the natural world and let these natural entities replace the old beliefs. The speaker concludes that old religions and their gods bring chaos, and

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297. T.S. Eliot quoted in Harold Bloom, *T.S. Eliot* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 108.

isolation to modern man, yet we're still influenced by them and cannot escape them. The call for abstraction of belief and use of nature, death and religion will be the subjects of many of Wallace Stevens's poems. Mainly, Stevens' later major poem *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* sets out in detail this philosophical approach to belief where Stevens in three separate titled sections: *It Must Be Abstract/It Must Change/It Must Give Pleasure*, discusses that religion can be replaced by a supreme fiction.

#### **k. Stevens's Americanness : American Africanism and Use of Africanist material**

Another important trait of Stevens' poetry is his Africanist constituent. Rachel Beau Duplessis in *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry*, draws our attention on another Modernist and improvisational experiment of the Africanist element in Stevens' poetry.

Pointing out those Stevens' poems peopled with blacks, Jazz, and Africanist material, such as "Ploughing on Sunday" ( 1919), " The Jack-Rabbit" (1923), " The Virgin Carrying a Lantern" ( 1923 "Sea Surface Full of Clouds", ( 1924) ), and "Some Friends from Pascagoula"( 1935), she reveals Stevens' interest in black culture. According to Duplessis, the desire to make use and appropriate the Africanist material, and take possession of the "Black space" was made available by Vachel Lindsay, with his poem "The Congo". This is what Toni Morrison calls, a form of "American Africanism"

Vachel Lindsay's poem "The Congo" was, for Duplessis, such an influential poem that it triggered the writing of many other poems containing Africanist material. As a matter of fact, several responses to this poem, from Black and White American poets, either open and direct such as Sterling Brown's "The New Congo" Langston Hughes' " The Negro Speaks of Rivers," or implicit and oblique such as T.S .Eliot's "The Waste Land" ( 1922) can be all identified as being inspired or provoked by the generative hypotext "The Congo." Stevens, too showed his interest in Blackness as a way of creating a typically national American poetry, and

by accounting of an exclusive American experience: the race relationships of African Americans and White Americans.

Stevens' early poem of 1923, "Two Figures in Dense Violet Light", is about black speech and the American ideology constructed around it. It is presented along an ideological contradiction: though black speech is silenced and absent, it is, yet evoked and, then necessary. The speaker of the poem urges his addressee, the sexualized puerile figure to:

Be the voice of the night and Florida in my ear.

Use dusky words and dusky images.

Darken your speech.

Yet, the poem also argues that the poem's speaker already "spoke for you perfectly in my thoughts / conceiving words" :

Speak, even, as if I did not hear you speaking,

But spoke for you perfectly in my thoughts,

Conceiving words. (WSCPP, 53)

And here, in the third stanza, the imperative tone of the second stanza, deflates, because the dusky words of the puerile figure are not even necessary, for inside the speaker's thoughts and mind, dusky words were already "conceived", denoting that they are generative and reproductive infinitely.

These creative powers of Africanist resources, made particularly available at the beginning of the Twentieth- Century, wherein white writers use the " dusky" substance, black motifs, Africanist figures, nurture Stevens' ambition also to create a quintessential American poetry.

Like his contemporaries, Stevens witnessed the racial climate of his times, the turbulent politics and raging prejudices of the twentieth century, and responded to what was taking place

around him. Although Stevens insisted that the poet's role is "Certainly not to lead people out of the confusion in which they find themselves", (WSCPP, 660-661) nor carry social, political, or moral obligation, and that a poet must resist the pressure of reality, many of his poems are infiltrated by this atmosphere and the reality of early twentieth century racism that a poet, even as apolitical as Stevens can hardly resist.

Such poetic depictions describing nonwhite characters, recording black dialect, and recounting African American experience, have led some critics, such as Aldon Lynn Nielsen, Mark Mayer, and Lisa Du Rose, to conclude that Stevens, holds a racialized discourse, and typically identifies nonwhites in a prejudiced way. And as Nielsen affirms, Stevens like his fellow modern poets, shares "the vocabulary of racial images,"<sup>298</sup> a language typically identifying nonwhites as exotic, primitive, and sexualized. Even though, Stevens' racial prejudice is not the instant purpose of this thesis, while analyzing his Africanist poems, a particular interest to his imaginative possession of blackness through the stereotypes of Blacks as primitive, and uncivilized will be shown.

As a matter of fact, Lisa du Rose lists more than twenty- seven stereotypically framed poems that most construct and employ African American identity in a fixed and categorical manner. The poems that characterize African Americans as primitive and often associate them with the forces of death and decay include, to list just some of them, "O Florida, Venereal Soil," which describes a "negro undertaker / Killing the time between corpses / Fishing for crayfish" (WSCPP, 38), "Two at Norfolk," which begins with the ordering of the Black characters to, "Mow the grass in the cemetery, darkies", (WSCPP, 92) and "Mud Master," and "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" which all deal with Blackness.

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298. Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Reading Race: White American Poets and the Racial Discourse in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 92.

## **I. Stevens's Americanness: American Africanism: Stevens' Primitivism:**

Before dealing with Stevens' poetry of blackness and analyzing one or two of his Black poems, mainly two questions arise :Why does Stevens include African Americans in his poetry? And what do they offer him using them? The answers are given by Du Rose and Toni Morrison.

First, Du Rose claims that Stevens "appreciated" his black characters, but for "their lack of sophistication, their investment in the mythical instead of the scientific, and their closer proximity to the earth . . . all attributes stereotypically associated with nonwhites" .<sup>299</sup> In this reading, she argues, "putting on blackface . . . accomplishes two important tasks for Stevens: it is a vehicle by which he can explore the Other in the safest possible manner (on his own terms) and it is a mechanism to critique the white world from which he comes."<sup>300</sup> Stevens is criticizing white society from a racialized distance. Instead of showing social injustice, or the ill-treatment of the Blacks by the whites, Stevens, De Rose argues, through an extended blackface performance seeks to question white culture. Hence, "Black figures . . . are often used in categorical and racist fashion—as symbols of primitive and savage imagination—to criticize or even celebrate white American wealth, religion, and morality by providing a standard by which to judge the larger white culture."<sup>301</sup>

Toni Morrison best provides the answer to the above questions when she writes, "American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom"<sup>302</sup> This quotation helps to explain that Stevens uses African American characters and images to portray white society.

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299. Lisa DuRose, "Racial Domain and the Imagination of Wallace Stevens," *Wallace Stevens Journal* 22, no. 1 (1998) 11.

300. *ibid*

301. *Ibid.*,8.

302. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992),7.

Stevens, himself observes in “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” that “The poetic process is psychologically an escapist process” (WSCPP, 662), it is yet one that ultimately must adhere to some reality. Thus, the use of African American characters afforded him an opportunity to escape the white social conventions while having a critical eye on his own society. Employing his metaphorical strategy of blackface allows him a certain measure of freedom, a way to transgress white society safely.

The following poems “Exposition of the Contents of a Cab,” and “The Virgin Carrying a Lantern,” for instance, serve as mirrors for white characters, and permit Stevens to express ideas impossible to embrace in white skin. Employing his metaphorical strategy of blackface allows him a certain measure of freedom, a way to transgress white society safely. Thus, the use of African American characters afford him an opportunity to escape the white social conventions while having a critical eye on his own society.

Hence, in the figures of Victoria Clementina of “Exposition of the Contents of a Cab” and the negress of “The Virgin Carrying a Lantern”, for instance, while describing these characters vitally and beautifully, they are yet described as stereotypes in a racially connotative vocabulary that represents blacks as more common and rough than whites. Stevens’ poetry of blackness, is mixed, and displays at the same time, fascination with and stereotyping of the other. Furthermore, these black figures serve as foils, and are portrayed in dichotomies, in black and white, in a rather Manichean way as opposed to the white characters. But at this point, a third question arises: what is the nature of Stevens’s social critique?

Instead of showing the social injustice and the tension existing between the White and non-White Americans and their racist relationships, Stevens is concerned with primitivism, morality and sexuality.

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Perhaps Stevens' strongest critique of the white culture comes more effectively in the poem "Exposition of the Contents of a Cab," where he reveals his view against white Victorian morality and prudishness. In this poem, Stevens uses a black female figure, Victoria Clementina, to critique sexually inhibited white women characters, like the ones he has already used in poems such as "The High-Toned Old Christian Woman" and "Mrs. Alfred Uruguay," prude and reserved characters with Victorian values, and Christian beliefs.

In "Exposition of the Contents of a Cab", he endows in a stereotypical fashion the black female with a primitive and wild sexuality, one that he contrasts with the white women's. But interestingly enough, the representation of the black figure is ambivalent, for in the same moment that he uses her as a symbol of sexual power and freedom in order to incriminate white women, he also elevates her as an individual force, content and happy with herself:

Victoria Clementina, negress,  
Took seven white dogs  
To ride in a cab.  
Bells of the dogs chinked.  
Harness of the horses shuffled  
Like brazen shells.  
Oh-hé-hé! Fragrant puppets  
By the green lake-pallors,  
She too is flesh,  
And a breech-cloth might wear,  
Netted of topaz and ruby  
And savage blooms;  
Thridding the squawkiest jungle  
In a golden sedan,

White dogs at bay.

What breech-cloth might you wear,

Except linen, embroidered

By elderly women? (WSCPP, 52)

From the first, the speaker seems to embrace the black culture in Victoria Clementina, this figure of vitality and creativity, who may ride in golden cars with white dogs. Victoria Clementina, is dressed in an underclothing netted of topaz and ruby, savage blooms in contrast to the collective “Fragrant puppets” who wear ordinary linen embroidered by elderly women. He even taunts these old white Victorian-minded ladies who often dismiss this “negress” by saying: “Oh-hé-hé!” and reminding them that “She too is flesh”, is human like you. Although the poet’s obvious admiration for the black female figure can be easily seen in the way she is celebrated, both the role Victoria Clementina holds in the poem and Stevens’ word choice and conception of character indicate and reiterate his racist inclination. The images and words Stevens associates with this powerful black woman—“savage blooms” and “the squawkiest jungle”—are historically racist and depreciating.

Although Stevens admires Victoria Clementina for her wild imagination and her savage beauty, he equates her with characteristics of primitivism, savagery, and sexuality, characteristics that have been traditionally placed upon African Americans in stereotypical and racist perceptions to maintain them in an inferior and oppressed state. Presented as primitive, savage, sexually uninhibited, African Americans have appeared as the Other, entirely different, obscene and ultimately savage, less human than the whites. Even though she is the only named figure in the poem, the poet uses Victoria Clementina, not as an individual, a proper character, but almost exclusively as a point of reference to speak about the white women. She becomes the Other from which he can contrast and define the white women in the poem. The presence of Victoria Clementina serves the purpose of critiquing these inhibited and prude Victorian

women only, and not describing her as a character worth of attention. In “Exposition of the Contents of a Cab” Victoria Clementina’s presence, therefore, becomes a way to reflect on the sexuality, morality, arrogance, self-righteousness, and mundanity of high-toned Christian women, and at any rate to embrace Black culture or celebrate the beauty and vitality of Victoria Clementina, the black figure.

#### **b. Stevens’s Americanness : Use of Jazz Music**

Along with the use of black characters, Jazz music is also an important component potentially present in Stevens’s poetry. Unlike Eliot who avoided using black characters, motifs, or topoi in his poetry, at least in his published poems because we learn that in earlier versions of “The Waste Land” and in “King Bolo and the Queen,” precisely, he dealt with black characters. After his death and against Eliot’s own instructions to keep these poems hidden from the public, these poems bawdy, with racist imagery that describe, among other things, the encounter of a highly sexed Christopher Columbus with King Bolo, a well-endowed black monarch, were torn from Eliot’s notebook but recovered in Ezra Pound’s papers at Yale, and then published in a thickly annotated volume called “Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917.” When Stevens makes an explicit use of Black culture and Black Americans, albeit through a racist rhetoric, Eliot, on the contrary, erased voluntarily from his early poetry any trace of his American past, origin, experience, and dismissed from his poems any direct reference to his American background, and particularly any indication about the Afro-Americans that peopled St Louis, his hometown. A passage that existed in the original draft and that spoke of the Mississippi river and his old remembrances of Negroes being transported along the river was suppressed from his poem “Four Quartets”. So even when the Africanist element is used in Eliot’s poetry it is not treated directly and openly, it is implied and veiled. However, in “The Waste Land”, Eliot does make use of Jazz, a music typically associated with the black culture, and predominant in St Louis. The passage about the Shakespearean Rag is responding

to Vachel Lindsay's poem "The Congo", and its muted character is telling enough of the Black cultural impact on Eliot even if he tended, as a white to ignore the Black heritage on American culture.

Although critics often, and rightly, demonstrate that experimentation with music occurs in Stevens's poetry, they very often align his verse musical qualities with classical motifs, not jazz. However, Stevens, like his contemporaries was also influenced by Jazz, and experimented with it. Stevens's modernist preoccupation with music, and with creating something "new," led him, to assert most eloquently a theory of improvisation in his poetry. Of course, Stevens is not a Jazz poet but rather an improvisational poet. In her 1986 biography on the poet, Joan Richardson explains how the young lonely and jobless Stevens was attracted by the music played by African Americans in New York City in 1900, and how listening to ragtime music, Stevens felt a kinship with the black musicians. and considered music, and Jazz music in particular, as a model for poetic language. Poems from throughout his career, especially in *Harmonium* and *Ideas of Order* do contain jazz elements and can be read as jazz texts.

The idea of jazz appeared also in Hillis Miller's argument in "Stevens' Poetry of Being," of 1964, where he suggests that Stevens after the thirties, elaborated a different kind of poetry than that of his earlier style, a style representing the fragmented, contradictory flux of modern reality. While invoking Jazz music as a quintessentially American form of expression highlighting the solo improvisation it is also worth noting that it is also a model for poetic language. Consequently, the notion of Jazz as a hybrid form of experimentation and expression, can enable us to grasp its use by Stevens. Without ever mentioning the music by name, Stevens employs techniques similar to Jazz musicians such as linguistic repetitions, thematic variations, improvisatory flourishes, allusions, and wordplay that indicate the influence and presence of jazz.

To illustrate such Stevens' use of Jazz, the poem "Mozart, 1935" seems to be a good example. The first thing that attracts our attention when reading this poem is the discrepancy indicated in the title's constituents: Mozart and 1935, two distinct entities, well separated by a comma, and that the poem needs to bring together. The second incongruity lies in the association of Jazz with Mozart as intensely incompatible with the sounds to be "played" on it:

Poet, be seated at the piano.  
Play the present, its hoo-hoo-hoo,  
Its shoo-shoo-shoo, its ric-a-nic,  
Its envious cachinnation. (WSCPP, 107)

These sounds seem unfamiliar and non-sensical with Mozart's classical music, unless a clue of their French origin is supplied to us by Peter Brazeau. In Brazeau's interview, with Judge Arthur Powell, a close friend and companion of Stevens, Brazeau explains that in February, 1935, Powell and Stevens were at Key West on a trip and that while Stevens was elaborating the poem "Mozart" for sound effect, he uses the phrases, "hoo-hoo-hoo," "shoo-shooshoo," and "ric-a-nic." Another interesting view on the nature of these non-sense sounds is provided by Riddel's idea in 1965 that "Mozart, 1935" illustrates Stevens' readiness "[t]o embrace the jazz discordance of his age and supply the softening but not evasive tones of the imagination."<sup>303</sup>

Contrasting with older forms of traditional poetry, Stevens finds in Jazz, with its improvisations and free executions, a modern experimental mode of expression, really calling to imagination and freedom. Rather than to indicate chaos and disjunctiveness, as it could have been appeared to contemporary ears with its provocative and noisy sounds, jazz, on the contrary, with its central element of improvisation, is also a mode embodying the overpowering

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303. Joseph N. Riddel, quoted in Stefan Holander, *Wallace Stevens and the Realities of Poetic Language* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 50.

of social, religious and political cleavages. Riddel helps us to understand that Stevens uses “jazz discordance,” as an aspect of chaotic urban modernity. Ultimately, Stevens can be considered a poet who experimented with jazz, giving his work additional sonic and contextual resonance. In fact, the poem can be understood as an encouragement to artists to keep working even in hard times. It is a kind of invitation to keep writing poetry, keep producing art even in a violent world. Stevens seems to tell us that despite the hardships of the present, art is rewarding because art is eternal, and lives forever, as in Mozart who is still relevant with us today. This is why in the poem the artist is instructed to remain seated at his piano, ignores what is happening around him, either a corpse being carried down the stairs, or stones thrown upon the roof, and keeps playing.

The poem is a reply to many Stevens critics who accused him of being 'out of tune', or too much concerned with sound and rhythm in his poetry in a time where more serious issues, and the Great Depression, in particular, should uniquely preoccupy him, as a poet. The poem seems actually quite connected to the moment in which it was written, the year 1935. In a letter of November 5, 1935, to Lord Lane Latimer, his most important correspondent in the thirties, Stevens mentioned a couple of poems, “Mozart, 1935” and “A Fading of the Sun,” which deal with an issue “very much at heart,” (LWS 292) “the status of the poet in a disturbed society, or,” (LWS 292) he adds, “for that matter, in any society” (LWS 292). Stevens’ comment shows that when he composed the poem, he was not completely aloof of the reality, and concerned only with sounds and rhythms, but he had in mind, the current pressure of his time: the Depression.

But is the poet confronting critics who are criticizing him? Or is the poet /pianist confronting the terrible things happening in the world? Whatever the answer is, the poet /pianist is playing the present (hoo-hoo-hoo, shoo-shoo-shoo, ric-a-nic,) and must remain seated at the piano.

Stevens answers to his disparagers: 'Be seated at the piano', play arpeggios, even when people throw stones at your roof. Whatever the tune of the moment is, the poet /pianist must remain seated at the piano. Why should he remain seated at the piano and playing? Simply, because grief and time pass, but art remains in the end. Even if Mozart (1756-1791) lived in the Eighteenth-Century, people in the Twenty-First Century still listen to his music. Therefore, he is still young, because with his music "sorrow is released / dismissed, absolved" (WSCPP, 108). This is what art is for. Even when it cannot always change things in the world, it can at least relieve our minds from the bleakness of everyday life.

"The streets are full of cries" (WSCPP, 108) , the last line says, and yet it is placidly snowing, Mozart is playing. Poet, be seated at the piano! In Stevens' poem, the sounds coming from the outside, and reaching the musician are conveyed in a poetic image of the anti-poetic, the noise coming from the street, nonetheless already immersed in a poetic discourse that Stevens uses to represent reality poetically. Without ascribing any definite semantic meaning to these nonsensical sound patterns and pulsating, syncopatically interrupted, rhythms, they are clearly meant to bear something quite different from the beauty, harmony and grace often associated with Mozartian music. For this purpose, and in a Jazz-like manner, the poem often avoids a definable and regular metric patterning, but establishes rhythms that are syncopated.

Finally, to conclude this chapter, I can say that the challenge for Americans to create an authentic literature was met. Starting from Emerson, who defied the Americans in his 1837 "American Scholar" address with his declaration of cultural independence: "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close.... We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe,"<sup>304</sup> to Whitman who responded to the call in *Leaves of Grass*, in the middle of the Nineteenth-Century and was carried on by many other

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304. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971),

American writers, long after till the Twentieth-Century. Stevens, like Whitman, and Emerson sees that the European inheritance does not create an American culture. Whitman clarified for his followers, and Stevens in particular, the need for an original literature, one that was made already explicit in Emerson's essay "The Poet" where he declares: "Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics,... the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung."<sup>305</sup> Consequently, American artistic expression must be essentially American, springing from the New World, and not from Europe. Emerson called for a wholly new American literature, one that would define and describe from America only, the as-yet undefined American culture, character, identity and sensibility.

Whitman's as well as Stevens' optimism, anti-traditionalism, and anti- historicism suggest an epistemological desire that American poetry should no longer be a thing of second or even, third hand experience, but must be defined by the newly discovered potentialities of the Americans. Stevens is asking the Americans, like Whitman to reconsider what they have been taught to believe in, reevaluate what their inherited European culture deems significant, and eventually find an American substitute to represent the American reality which is far more different from the European one.

The Americans' confidence in the birth of an American art was highly stirred by their potentialities. Didn't Whitman assert in *Leaves of Grass* that "the Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature,"<sup>306</sup> and that "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem?"<sup>307</sup> Their projection in a promising, yet undefined future, was equally motivated by Whitman, who asserts self-confidently:

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305. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 465.

306. Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* 18.

307. Ibid.

I count with such absolute certainty on the great future of the United States—different from, though founded on, the past—that I have always invoked that future, and surrounded myself with it, before or while singing my songs. (As ever, all tends to followings—America, too, is a prophecy. What, even of the best and most successful, would be justified by itself alone? By the present, or the material ostent alone? Of men or States, few realize how much they live in the future. That, rising like pinnacles, gives its main significance to all You and I are doing today.<sup>308</sup>

It was not simply that the American people, and land would provide rich material for poetry, but their writers also would defy the world by producing concretely American, and genuine poetry. Stevens, following after Whitman and Emerson would meet the challenge, and I have tried, in this first part to show his effort to write an American poetry different from that of the European poetry, and especially that of Eliot, the leading figure of Paleo-Modernism. However, even if Stevens is walking in the path traced by Whitman and Emerson, and is affiliated to the American tradition, what is his relation to his predecessors? And what is his personal contribution to American poetry? The following part will examine Stevens' intertextual relationship with Whitman and highlight his anxiety towards his precursor.

### **B - Stevens, Whitman, and the American Tradition:**

In fact, the thesis that Wallace Stevens' poetry is deeply influenced by Walt Whitman's, has been since the 60s established. First, by Joseph Riddel who told critics to consider Stevens' "American roots, for Stevens has been an articulate spokesman of the poet's essential identity with his native soil."<sup>309</sup> Likewise, Helen Vendler has repeatedly argued, "Stevens is resolutely

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308. Walt Whitman, *Complete Prose Works: Specimen Days and Collect* (New York: D. Appleton, 1909), 278.

309. Joseph N. Riddel, quoted in Marie Borroff, *Wallace Stevens* (New Jersey: Princeton-Hall, 1963), 30.

American in his poetics”<sup>310</sup> and a poet who both sought to “fill in the blanks on the American map”<sup>311</sup> and invent “a flexible American meter.”<sup>312</sup> In an interview by Imre Salusinszky, J. Hillis Miller has explained his preference for Stevens in blatantly nationalist terms: “For many of us Americans, the obvious fact about Stevens is that here is a twentieth-century American poet who didn’t sell out to England and become an English citizen, or do the worse thing that Ezra Pound—who is clearly part of world literature—did. Stevens is very provincial. You read it, and it’s terrific: it’s like Paul Valéry or Goethe or something, but he worked in Hartford, Connecticut.”<sup>313</sup> (Salusinszky 233)

Finally, in 1966, Harold Bloom began to insist on the fact that the principal heir to Emerson and Whitman was “Wallace Stevens, whom it is no longer eccentric to regard as the ironically yet passionately balanced fulfillment of the American Romantic tradition in poetry”.<sup>314</sup> Indeed, numerous thematic affinities between the two poets, shared tropes and images, even direct verbal echoes, have been compellingly offered by Harold Bloom and his student the late Diane Middlebrook. Middlebrook published a book-length study of the subject, *Walt Whitman and Wallace Stevens* as long ago as 1974. As Bloom is best known for his theory of poetic influence, which portrays literary history as a series of agons between earlier and later poets, he then offers many discussions of the Whitman-Stevens relation in his books. In fact, the Whitman-Stevens relation has been a central concern in his work throughout his career,

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310. Helen Vendler, ed., “Wallace Stevens,” *Voices and Visions: The Poet in America* (New York:Random, 1987), 125-126.

311. *Ibid.*, 131.

312. *Ibid.*, 137.

313. Imre Salusinszky, *Criticism in Society: Interviews with Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, Edward Said, Barbara Johnson, Frank Lentricchia and J. Hillis Miller* (New York: Methuen 1987), 233.

314. John Timberman Newcomb, *Wallace Stevens and Literary Canons* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 233.

from his early essay “The Central Man: Emerson, Whitman, Wallace Stevens” (1966) to his retrospective summary of his literary theory in *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (2011). A fierce exponent of Stevens, Bloom has long endorsed his view of the poet as a major twentieth-century inheritor of the romantic tradition as a whole. In his first writings on Stevens, Bloom tends to align him with the British romantics, especially Wordsworth and Shelley. But in his 1977 study, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*, however, he unequivocally identifies Whitman as Stevens’s major heir to the American tradition. Even when he positioned Emerson in the central location of the American canon, it is Whitman’s imprint that he detects in Stevens. Consequently, this section examines the intertextual relationships binding, but also distancing the two poets: Whitman and Stevens.

**a. Stevens’s Views on Whitman:**

Unlike Eliot, who deliberately rejects the influence of Whitman in his Anglocentric history of poetry, Stevens, on the opposite is dialoging with his predecessor at times paying him tribute, at other times criticizing him. Like Eliot, Stevens’s stance towards Whitman is doubtful, but instructively different. When Eliot, never acknowledges the role and the importance of Whitman in the making of the modernist poetry by silencing his voice to the benefice of either the French Symbolists, or the English writers, Stevens, nevertheless, acknowledges his valuable contribution to American poetry, and, recognizes that Whitman makes part of the world even though Stevens thinks that Whitman” is disintegrating as the world, of which he made himself a part, disintegrates” (LWS, 871). Therefore, Stevens’ views on Whitman are ambivalent. At times, he conjures him directly as in his poem “Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery.” As many other critics, Stevens questions the value of Whitman’s catalogues, and makes a few critical remarks about his poetics, what Stevens calls “Americana”, or Whitman’s inventories of the American heritage. In a letter he wrote in 1955, the year of his death and one hundred

years after the first publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Stevens expressed his ambivalence toward his predecessor, in this way:"

I can well believe that he (Whitman) remains highly vital for many people. The poems in which he collects large numbers of concrete things, particularly things each of which is poetic in itself or as part of the collection, have a validity which, for many people, must be enough and must seem to them all opulence and elan" (LWS, 871).

For others, I imagine that what was once opulent begins to look a little threadbare and the collections seem substitutes for opulence even though they remain gatherings-together of precious Americana, certain to remain precious but not certain to remain poetry. (LWS, 870–71)

Here, Stevens is obviously reacting to Whitman's notorious catalogues, reading his poetry as a curious inventory, from which "precious" items out of America's past are exhibited. Though Whitman's collections of "large numbers of concrete things" can retain a certain historical interest, they are, according to Stevens, essentially relics that, over time, have been stripped of their vitality. While he admits that the "elan "of the essential Whitman is still deeply poignant, he thinks Whitman and his art as disappearing, for it seems to him, then, that Whitman is " disintegrating as the world, of which he made himself a part, disintegrates" (LWS, 871). For Stevens, though Whitman's poetics is characterized by a tolerant, democratic and egalitarian open poetic mind appears, nevertheless, to have tied him all too closely to his own historical moment. For him, Whitman's poetry was only a historical document, and that this type of poetry has to be change.

However, we might expect a nationalist poet of Stevens' disposition to feel a more natural affiliation than the internationalist Eliot with Whitman's Transcendentalism. But Stevens finds "Tradition" a more ephemeral concept than Eliot does, as evidenced by a 1939 piece in the

Partisan Review, which presents Stevens' answers to seven questions. Here is the first: Are you conscious, in your own writing, of the existence of a "usable past"? Is this mostly American? What figures would you designate as elements in it? Would you say, for example, that Henry James's work is more relevant to the present and future of American writing than Walt Whitman's? (WSCPP 803)

Stevens replied: The material of the imagination is reality and reality can be nothing except the usable past. However, it does not follow that this or that particular figure of the past is relevant to the future. It is just as easy to be diffident about James as it is to be diffident about Whitman. I suppose you have chosen these two figures as symbols; neither of them means anything to me. The projections of the past are as incalculable as the stock market; otherwise it would be nothing but a bore (WSCPP 803).

Even when Stevens rejects any specific debt to James and Whitman, that is to say to the American tradition, many critics, such as Stephan Holander, James Logenbach, Leggett, Eleanor Cook, Helen Vendler, and Harold Bloom link him to his American predecessors and place him within the American tradition of Emerson, Whitman, and Emily Dickinson.

#### **b. Whitman- Stevens Intertextual Relationship:**

Harold Bloom is one of the critics who helpfully summarizes the key assumptions about the Whitman-Stevens relation by asserting that "for Stevens, Whitman represents an American Sublime and that such poems as "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," and "The Idea of Order at Key West" are "crisis-poems"<sup>315</sup> recording his struggles with his great American precursor".<sup>316</sup>

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315. Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 75.

316. Ibid.

Bloom's observation that Stevens' poems are struggles with their predecessor direct, already my attention to read and interpret them according to Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence, where a young poet is misreading his forerunner. In Stevens's poems, the act of misprision, is at once a tribute to Whitman as the chief American forerunner, and a challenge to Whitman himself, and to Stevens. The poem that I think most fully embodies the Stevens-Whitman relationship of influence, and affinity, and Stevens's struggle with his predecessor is inevitably Stevens' poem "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" first published in Poetry magazine in 1935, and subsequently included in Stevens' 1936 volume *Ideas of Order*. Its opening stanza projects a powerful vision of Whitman:

In the far South the sun of autumn is passing  
Like Walt Whitman walking along a ruddy shore.  
He is singing and chanting the things that are part of him,  
The worlds that were and will be, death and day.  
Nothing is final, he chants. No man shall see the end.  
His beard is of fire and his staff is a leaping flame. (WSCPP 121)

Stevens' lines are a hymn of praise, a paean to Whitman "mythologizing him"<sup>317</sup> as a "prophetic figure"<sup>318</sup> in Helen Vendler's words, as the embodiment of an American sublime, and likening him to the sun and the seasonal cycle. The sun simile assimilating Whitman to the diurnal rotation is a clear celebration of Whitman's solar power. As part of nature, Whitman is part of the American reality, and the Americans' lives. However, the poem begins with "the sun of autumn," and ends "in snow" (WSCPP 128). But since Vendler reminds us, that the "sense of death and fatal chill"<sup>319</sup> is the subject 'of Stevens' poem. This opening stanza may also be interpreted as an elegy to a predecessor whose sun has set, whose time has passed. This

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317. Helen Vendler, *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 66.

318. *Ibid.*

319. *Ibid.*

stanza both invokes and revokes Whitman's self- appearance. Whitman may chant that "Nothing is final," yet the poem's supposed self- importance dictates that its stanzas are also dealing with death, his own death. Stevens' homage is not to Whitman's sunrise but to his sunset, to a post mortem Whitman, and therefore becomes an elegy to Whitman, and his poetry.

In this first stanza, Whitman's most powerful enunciation of the indivisibility of birth and death, or "death and day," recalls itself Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" , first published in 1859. Perhaps the image in " Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" of Whitman "walking along a ruddy shore," thinking of "death" if not of "day" is inspired by "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." Even though significant differences of almost eighty years separate the two poems, placing Whitman's poem within the romantic tradition and Stevens's in the modernist tradition, both poems use the same symbolism (especially bird symbolism), imagery, ( especially sea imagery), and elegiac mode.

The sea imagery, in particular, for both poets symbolizes the spiritual and the imaginary world of poetry. This is also true for the use of the seasons, the sun and the moon, the land and the sea, and the stars and the sea waves, and the wind which are common images and symbols to both poets. This might be a mere coincidence, however when we relate not only the use of these stylistic devices but their relevance to Stevens's poetry, the Whitmanian emprints become more visible. The too often difficult verse of Stevens makes more sense and the often-baffling lines become clearer, indicating their Whitmanian origin, in this way. The image of the sun and the moon particularly and its translation by Stevens to the concept of reality and imagination is going to be his life-long theme and preoccupation throughout his career. The image of the sea as a metaphor for art is also a shared image by the two poets.

The reading and the comparison of the two poems, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" become necessary steps to understand Stevens' development as a poet and his shift of style from his first imagistic poems of *Harmonium* in

the 1920s to his second more abstract, sophisticated and aesthetically innovative poems of Ideas of Order more than a dozen years later, in 1934.

If “Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery” is an elegy to Whitman, “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.” is an elegy by the he-bird in the death of the she-bird which did not return to the nest. The bird's lament, or "aria," which is an elaborate melody sung by one voice, in opera, affects the boy deeply, whose presence is not fortuitous.

Whitman imaginatively recreates the childhood experience of this inquiring boy who goes “out of the cradle, wander(ing) alone, bareheaded, barefoot”<sup>320</sup> in search of the mystery of life and death. This experience has been deeply instructive first, by observing two mocking birds mating and listening to their love song, he now recalls; then, by sharing the male's anxiety awaiting in vain the return of the female, addressing the wind:

Blow! blow! blow!

Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore;

I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.<sup>321</sup>

The bird song penetrates the heart of the curious boy who "treasur'd every note and understood" the meaning of the bird, whom he calls “brother.” The lonely bird singing to relieve his pain becomes a metaphor here for arousing the poetic spirit in the poet. Finally, the boy - poet realizes that he will be a poetic bard, but a solitary singer, like the solitary bird. Therefore, art is the painful outcome of experiencing sorrow. So, the implied and basic theme of the poem is the connection we can make between grief and art. It shows how a boy matures into a poet through his experience of love and death from the bird. Art is but a sublimation of frustrations and death is a release from the stress and strains caused by such frustrations.

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320. Walt Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman: Leaves of Grass* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1902),

321. Ibid.,7.

Through the childhood experience, the boy becomes a man, and the man, a poet. This time sequence is as much the crux of the poem as is the growth of the consciousness of the poet. In this experience the boy attempts to fuse the vision of the sea with that of the bird, and this knowledge marks the beginning of the poet in him. The bird, the solitary singer, is a projection of the boy's consciousness. And the sea like the "old crone rocking the cradle," while it gives hints of the she-bird disappearance, it also whispers the key word in the boy's ears, and the future to be poet:

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here somewhere,  
O if I am to have so much, let me have more!  
A word then, (for I will conquer it,)  
The word final, superior to all,  
Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;  
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?  
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?  
Where to answering, the sea,  
Delaying not, hurrying not,  
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before day-break,  
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,  
And again death, death, death, death,  
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,  
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,  
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,  
Death, death, death, death, death.<sup>322</sup>

After hearing the sea whisper its sonorous, mystical, "low and delicious" prayers, Whitman recalls:

My own songs, awaked from that hour,  
And with them the key, the word up from the waves,  
The word of the sweetest song, and all songs.<sup>323</sup>

Instructive enough to the reading of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" is Mark Bauerlein's analysis of the poem. In his article, Bauerlein places the poem itself with its love-loss poetry pattern in a traditional genre of poems recounting the birth of poetry out of death. That is "'Out of the Cradle' dramatizes an archetypal experience of loss and reaches a familiar outcome: verse. While this poem raises the prospect of bitter death, it concludes stoically that there is nothing to do about it but sing it. We can just open the parenthesis by saying that death is an important topic for Stevens and many of his poems deal with death. One can just quote a poem like "Sunday Morning", where Stevens concludes his poem by confirming that "death is the mother of beauty" (WSCPP, 55).

Echoing Whitman in "The Jack-Rabbit," Stevens views death as a symbol of beauty too. So death is an important theme for Stevens who sees it as a source of beauty. On death, particularly, he wrote: "Death is the mother of beauty. Only the perishable can be beautiful, which is why we are unmoved by artificial flowers."<sup>324</sup>

In the first stanza of "The Jack-Rabbit," the jack-rabbit looks happy singing:

In the morning,  
The jack-rabbit sang to the Arkansaw.  
He carolled in caracoles

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323. Ibid.

324. Daniela Castelli, *The QuoteBooks - 5*. (Milano: Simonelli Editore, 2014), 5.

On the feat sandbars. (WSCPP, 40)

However, the jack-rabbit's joyful dance of the first stanza contrasts with the prospect of its death, in the second stanza, anticipated by the black man who invokes a symbol of death that applies both to his grandmother and her burial garment, and to the dancing jack-rabbit: The black man said,

Now, grandmother,  
Crochet me this buzzard  
On your winding-sheet,  
And do not forget his wry neck  
After the winter. (WSCPP, 40)

The poem ends with the apparition of the buzzard which is a harbinger of death and destruction:

The black man said,  
“Look out, O caroller,  
The entrails of the buzzard  
Are rattling” (WSCPP, 40)

However, Death is inevitable and we must not be scared of it, seems Stevens to tell us. Even though buzzards are scavengers, they represent positive symbols as purificators since by consuming dead organisms that have died either from predation, or other causes, they are playing an important role in the ecosystem. Death is a beautiful reality of life that no one can deny.

Evoking buzzards, R. Buttell notes that the buzzard appears frequently in native folk and humorous literature, and that Stevens uses it several times in his poems, “along with bantams,

grackles, and turkey-cocks.”.<sup>325</sup> I will have something to say about the bird symbolism that Stevens uses in his poems and its connotations with Whitman. Here, for instance, Stevens uses buzzards as a harbinger of death and destruction, and bantams in “Bantams in Pine-Woods” as a symbol for arrogance. This point will be developed in the second part of the chapter, where Stevens is seen as a poet belonging and altogether perpetuating the American tradition of Whitman’s bird symbolism. I open here a brief parenthesis about Stevens’ use of certain words and expressions, such as “ He carolled in caracoles”, “ O caroler” in the poem “The Jack-Rabbit”, by pointing out that they are characteristically drawn from the Whitmanian vocabulary.

Shake out carols!

Solitary here, the night’s carols!

Carols of lonesome love! death’s carols!

Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon!

O under that moon where she droops almost down into the sea!

O reckless despairing carols.<sup>326</sup>

“Death” likewise in “Out of the Cradle” is conceived as a positive entity which creates the matter from which “the thousand responsive songs [ were sung] at random” <sup>327</sup>and at the same time the launching of the boy’s poetic career. Hence, the word “death” is “delicious” because it is a prerequisite for rebirth. And the secret of life which the boy grasps from the sea is the recurrent pattern of birth-death-rebirth. Death, therefore, is not a terminal point, instead, death is incorporated into life. The entrance into life, suggested by the “old crone rocking the cradle” proposes that the coming into life is similarly an introduction to death, which, in turn, forewords more life. The cycle of life and death, important in all of Whitman’s poems, is thus

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325. R. Buttel, *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968),199.

326. Whitman, *Complete Writings*, 10.  
Ibid., 13.

emphasized in the conclusion of this poem, and will be equally important in most of Stevens's poetry.

In this vein, the poem asserts the triumph of the eternal life over death. The truth is that death is the final destiny of any creature. Death rocked the cradle of life endlessly. The key for understanding the poem is in its title: the word cradle metaphorically, means: a mother's womb and at the same time, it can be a life which is rocked by the death. So, the title has a dual meaning: one refers to the birth from mother's womb, and if the cradle is taken as the life, it refers to the death.

Here death is shown to be the one lesson a child must learn from nature: life, no matter how charming and exciting, it may be, it has to come to an end nevertheless. Every living creature has to taste death. Even so, only the realization of death can lead to emotional and artistic maturity. Thus, the poem speaks of two things: the speaker's meaningful transformation from an immature child to a mature poet, and the transience of life, lived through emotions, and death.

The end of the poem focuses upon this image of the "solitary me"—the solitary poet—hearing the sea sing to him of death. The elder poet remembers his youth; the old crone rocks the cradle; and the sea whispers to the aging poet of past, present, and future.

The basic theme of the poem is the relationship between suffering and art. It shows how a boy matures into a poet through his experience of love and death. Art is a culmination of frustrations and death is a release from the pains and strains caused by such frustrations. Here death is shown to be the one lesson a child must learn, whether from nature or from an elder. Only the realization of death can lead to emotional and artistic maturity. Death, for one as interested as Whitman in the place of the individual in the universe, is a means for achieving perspective: while your thoughts may seem profound and unique in the moment, you are a mere speck in existence. Thus the contemplation of death allows for one to move beyond oneself, to

consider the whole. Perhaps this is why the old crone disrupts the end of the poem: she symbolizes an alternative possibility, the means by which someone else may have come to the same realization as Whitman. In the end the bird, although functionally important in Whitman's development, is insignificant in the face of the abstract sea: death, which is the concept he introduces, remains as the important factor.

"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" with its elegiac mode and its concern for the place of art in the real world provides a fruitful theme for Stevens. This theme of the relation of the poet with the world has been, indeed, the subject of most of Stevens' poems. It is the central theme of his earlier poem "The Comedian as the Letter C" as well as the later poems, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery." Even his essay, *The Necessary Angel* tries to explain the interrelations of art and life, or as Stevens put it, "an interdependence of the imagination and reality as equals" (WSCPP, 657).

We know already that both of Whitman and Stevens are deeply concerned with common subjects: the place of art in the real world; the relationship of the poet and his surrounding world; and the experience of grief with art. However, what can a romantic poem like "Out of the Cradle" have in common with a highly and technically innovative and modern poem like "Like Decorations"? What is the relation between Whitman as a Nineteenth-Century Romantic poet and Stevens's aesthetic development as a Twentieth-Century Modernist craftsman? How each one of these poets treats the same theme of the place of art in the real world within almost one century of interval? What is the place of Whitman in the making of Stevens' poetics and American aesthetics? These questions will find an answer if we look deeply at Stevens's second phase of poetry, that's of the 1930s, and in a poem explicitly, such as "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery." In a perpetual dialog, Stevens is responding to Whitman, sometimes negatively, at other times adopting revisionary methods, and showing the energy of his swerve, in this way.

**c. Stevens 'aesthetic theory in "Like Decorations":**

Stevens's familiarity with the aesthetic experiments in the visual arts of the 1910s and 1920s prepared him perceptibly, for the aesthetic sophistication of "Like Decorations" in 1935. Glen MacLeod in *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art*, and George Lensing in *Wallace Stevens: A Poet's Growth* shed light on the "aesthetic theory" behind Stevens' poem "Like Decorations" and his growth as a sophisticated poet and abstract poet, "a poet of Ideas".

In the opening chapter of *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art*, Glen MacLeod, discusses the parallels between the aesthetic developments of cubism and the poetic innovations of Harmonium. MacLeod assumes that Stevens's knowledge, and familiarity with the work and techniques of Braque, Picasso, and Duchamp were replicated in his poems, and in "Like Decorations," specifically. His close connection with the complicated aesthetics of the cubist paintings, the collages, and the "readymades" of the post WWI aesthetic vanguard, and of the Arensberg circle, mainly, with their radically anti-art establishment purposes provided him, indeed, with an exclusively intellectual, and emotionally aesthetic background for his poetry. In this way, all MacLeod's discussion of Stevens's poetry is equated with cubism:

Critics have often discussed Stevens' poetry in terms of cubism. The analogy is appropriate if we think of cubism in general terms as the crucial break with the Western tradition of painting. Viewed from this perspective, it is the watershed of modernism because it abandoned standard notions of perspective and spatial orientation. It is typically "modern "because it is experimental, radically self-questioning."<sup>328</sup> Even if the analogy between the aesthetic techniques of a typically cubist painting and Stevens' poems is recognized, MacLeod observes that even "so generalized an analogy, however, is not very helpful in defining Stevens's particular poetic qualities."<sup>329</sup>

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328. Glen MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 11

329. *Ibid.*

For MacLeod, “Thirteen Ways” is cubist for its “separate, haiku-like stanzas suggest a variety of possible viewpoints like those in a cubist painting.”<sup>330</sup> In addition, “the individual stanzas [of Stevens's longer poems] are not conceived of as part of a conventional narrative or dramatic sequence; instead, they are juxtaposed in varying relations of similarity and contrast like elements of a cubist painting. Their relation to one another is primarily spatial rather than temporal”<sup>331</sup>

“Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” and “Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery” are two poems which seem to conform to this immediate visual, spatial rather than to the temporal orientation of the poem. In fact, cubism alone cannot explain all the difficult and particular Stevensian poetic qualities. Why? Cubism, as a way of looking is as much a visual as an intellectual process. Consequently the primary concern of a cubist artist, whether a painter or a poet he may be is the aesthetic theory behind the work. Stevens, whose affiliation with the Arensberg circle, and their cubist techniques was exerting a strong influence upon his work, sought to write, therefore, a cubist poetry, yet poetry driven by theory. In addition to considering the poems in a modernist, and cubist manner- like, in their juxtapositions without any reliance on their conventional narrative, a special focus is placed on the theory backing them. The attention placed on the aesthetic assumptions we make in assigning artistic beauty to objects than about the beauty of the objects themselves, which can themselves be readymades, like the urinal of The Fountain, for instance, will be the only criterion to judge Stevens’ “Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery”.

In fact, Aesthetic theory has certainly been the primary concern for Stevens. George Lensing, in *Wallace Stevens: A Poet's Growth* demonstrates the importance Stevens placed

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330. Ibid.

331. Ibid. 11-12.

upon a poetry driven by “aesthetic theory” by quoting from a letter Stevens wrote to Ferdinand Reyher:

The fact is that notwithstanding the large amount of poetry that is written over here at the moment there is practically no aesthetic theory back of it. Why do you scorn free verse? Isn't it the only kind of verse now being written which has any aesthetic impulse back of it? Of course there are miles and miles of it that don't come off. People do not understand the emotional purpose of rhythm any more than they understood the emotional purpose of measure. I am not exclusively for free verse. But I am for it.<sup>332</sup>

As a cubist, Stevens is convinced that theory-driven poetry would seem more captivating than poetry with “no aesthetic theory back of it.” But in this letter to Reyher, Stevens is far from copying blindly cubism. In addition to the prevalence he gives to aesthetic theory, he also recognizes the necessity of “emotional purpose,” which is unfamiliar to the principles of cubism. In section XI of “Thirteen Ways,” for instance we find in addition to a cubist perspective, this emotive quality, which is part of his meta-poetry, present:

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds. (WSCPP, 76)

This is not pure emotion of an intense fear only. Rather, the fear arises out of a mistaken sensual perception. Therefore, what gives value to this passage is the intellectualization of such an emotion, than the emotion of fear itself. When we contrast this passage from “Thirteen

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332. Ferdinand Reyher quoted in George Lensing, *Wallace Stevens: A Poets Growth* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1986), 102.

Ways” to sections seven and twenty-three of “Like Decorations,” we see that emotion is not just the result of pure emotion but a direct result of content:

VII

How easily the feelings flow this afternoon

Over the simplest words:

It is too cold for work, now, in the fields. (151)

XXIII

The fish are in the fishman’s window,

The grain is in the baker's shop,

The hunter shouts as the pheasant falls.

Consider the odd morphology of regret. (WSCPP, 124)

Like most cubist works, “Like Decorations” offers multiple perspectives. What is new with “Like Decorations” is that it appeals to emotion and even reaches an unprecedented level of pathos for a work of art so closely allied with the emotionally disinterested assets of Cubist works and readymades. Pathos is not incidental but becomes intrinsic to the poem. Like Duchamp's readymades are more about the cognitive processes behind art, that is to say, more about the aesthetic assumptions we give to objects than they are about the “beauty” of the objects which comprise the readymades: the urinal of *The Fountain*, for instance. Similarly, “Like Decorations” is not about the actual Key West cemetery it describes, than it is about Stevens himself, his status of a marginal poet, his meta-poetry, and its reception.

In fact, we learn from Stevens’s letters and from his critics that in the 1930s Stevens suffered from the aesthetic prejudices of his time. As Stevens indicates to Harriet Monroe, his poetic process at the time was very similar to the process of decorating the cemetery: “I looked round and round and found a few scraps” (LWS, 262). James Longenbach, in *The Plain Sense of Things* informs us that Stevens experienced a period of imaginative poverty and knew a time

when writing poetry was difficult for him. During this time he observed a twelve- year silence and the near-death of his poetic career, what Logenbach calls “the second silence.”<sup>333</sup> With the inadequate and scarce sort of poetry he wrote at that time, Stevens was more concerned with finding poems and choosing from his poetic leftovers rather than composing new poetry. Following the African- American tradition of grave adornment, the cemetery’s example, “Like Decorations” turns “scraps” into poetry and helps Stevens makes an analogy between the cemetery decorations and his diminished state of a marginalized poet. We learn also that while on a trip to Key West with his friend, Judge Powell, and passing near the cemetery, Powell described the cemetery’s decorations as “broken pieces of glass, old pots, broken pieces of furniture, dolls heads, and what not.”<sup>334</sup> In “Like Decorations,” Stevens applies his “well-developed mean streak” to an “olio” of his own poetic scraps ( LWS. 262)

Robert Farris Thompson, in *Africanisms in American Culture*, explains that Stevens had already engaged in a poetic method closely similar to the African -American tradition of decorating cemeteries in *Harmonium*. With the arrangement of poems, such as “The Plot Against the Giant”, “Six Significant Landscapes,” “New England Verses” or “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” and their “unusual juxtapositions” from section to section, Stevens had already started experiencing the process of a ready-made and applying it to his poetry. However, in “Like Decorations,” he takes a radical departure from these earlier sequence poems, and accomplishes a level of pathos, emotional effect, unprecedented in any of his previous sequence poems, probably connected to and stirred by his feelings surrounding the state of his poetry. Alan Filreis calls the result of this compositional process, “a structural trope

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333. James Longenbach, *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 117.

334 . Judge Powell, George S. Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University, 2004), 91.

of found art” and says further that the poem “challengingly consists of stanzas-as-found – objects”<sup>335</sup>

**a. From Imagism to Multiple Perspectivism : Departure from Conventional Aesthetics:**

To better appreciate the aesthetic achievement of “Like Decorations,” it will be useful to trace its roots in two poems that antedate it. “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” and “The Comedian as the Letter C” (1922) share the same qualities of style and content that Stevens carries forward into “Like Decorations” in 1934. All these poems propose new definitions and evaluations of beauty, or dislocate conventional concepts of beauty. Stylistically, “Like Decorations” associates the poetic technique of Stevens's early imagistic experiments along with the techniques of the longer modernist lyric. Each individual section, of “Like Decorations” is written with imagistic sharpness and condensation, highlighting the Imagistic mode of expression. At the same time, however, “Like Decorations” is Stevens’s longest poem since “Comedian” in 1922. As such, “Like Decorations” is both a combination, a sort of a hybrid form of two combined stylistic modes: Imagism and modernist lyricism. What adds to the interest of “Like Decorations” is that Stevens shares with his predecessor, Whitman, the same attention to themes, such as, the place of art in the real world, the relationship of the artist with his surroundings, and the aesthetic development of the artist.

“The Comedian as the Letter C” is such a poem that deals directly with one shared theme: the poet’s growth, Stevens’ development as well as that of the main protagonist, Crispin whose conception of beauty evolves. In this poem, we witness Crispin's aesthetic sensibility developing as he travels from Europe, Bordeaux in France to America. Crispin becomes

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335. De Alan Filreis, *Modernism from Right to Left: Wallace Stevens, the Thirties, and Literary Radicalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 91.

immersed in an aesthetic process which causes him to continually change his conceptions of beauty. “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” too, demonstrates a departure from conventional aesthetics. Here Stevens, instead of assigning sensual beauty to “gold birds,” in a conventional way, suggests rather, that there is another perceptive and intellectual approach to beauty even to a blackbird:

## VII

O, thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine gold birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you? (WSCPP, 75)

In this brief passage, the blackbird becomes more aesthetically attractive through mental reasoning and not through the sense of sight. By questioning the men’s rather conventional aesthetic judgment that gold birds are innately more good-looking than blackbirds, the poet is suggesting alternative ways to look for, to find, and assess beauty. In this section among thirteen, Stevens is not asserting the primacy of this one particular “way of looking” as much as he is showing that there are different and many ways of judging beauty, disordering, in this way conventional concepts of beauty.

### **d. Stevens’ Aesthetic Development: from Sensualism to Cognition:**

“The Comedian as the Letter C” more directly handles aesthetic development as one of its themes and anticipates “Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery” in its evocation of Whitman. “The Comedian as the Letter C,” Stevens’s first long poem, traces and follows the different stages of the progress of Crispin as he develops from a European clown/ valet/ poet émigré to an American settler, father of several daughters with curls. This poem can be read and interpreted as Stevens's ironic version of the growth of a uniquely American aesthetics,

perhaps a version of what Stevens saw as his own aesthetic development. As Crispin travels northward in America, he is confronted to a new reality which makes his aesthetic sensibilities conform to his changing surroundings. This migration takes the shape of an aesthetic program and the most significant part of this program which has a direct impact on “Like Decorations” is when Stevens presents to us Crispin as a poetic figure reminiscent of Walt Whitman. At this stage of his aesthetic development, Crispin begins to disdain all former European aesthetic conceptions. Like Whitman, Crispin is absorbed in his own world sensually, yet with Stevensian irony:

Tilting up his nose,  
He inhaled the rancid rosin, burly smells  
Of dampened lumber, emanations blown  
From warehouse doors, the gustiness of ropes,  
Decays of sacks, and all the arrant stinks  
That helped him round his rude aesthetic out.  
He savoured rankness like a sensualist.  
He marked the marshy ground around the dock,  
The crawling railroad spur, the rotten fence,  
Curriculum for the marvelous sophomore. (WSCPP, 29)

Whitman’s “rude aesthetic” and its associated sensuality, while it may celebrate the enthusiasm and diversity of an expansive United States, also gives way to a “rankness” that for Stevens is ripe for satire. Stevens is commenting on what he considers to be “aesthetic rudeness”. In a way, Whitman had linked art to life as Stevens wanted. And all Whitman’s sensual experiences passed in his poetry so that art and life were linked instantly. For Stevens, however, this manner of linking art to life is too demanding and comes at too high a sacrifice. In Stevens's judgement, the senses are untrustworthy and unreliable aesthetic standards because

they don't discriminate, they are uncritical. For such a reason, Stevens insists that the assessment of beauty should be a cognitive act rather than a sensual one. Stevens' emphasis on the sensual beauty of cognition demarcates him as one of the most modern poets of the Twentieth-Century and shows his swerve from Whitman's pure sensualism.

**e. Stevens' Cognitive Approach to Beauty Versus Whitman's Sensualism:**

Stevens' sensual beauty of cognition is evoked throughout "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" also. It is not simply the sensual act of looking at the blackbird that is beautiful; it is the more cognitive "way of looking" that makes the blackbird beautiful and, hence, gives sensual pleasure. In contrast, when Crispin imitates Whitman he "inhal[es] the rancid rosin and "burly smells" unfacilitated by cognition. Crispin is a "marvelous sophomore" because he is not yet taking an adequately cognitive approach toward beauty. These things are a part of him without the more aesthetically sophisticated cognitive distance with which Stevens regards the blackbird:

VIII

I know noble accents

And lucid, inescapable rhythms; But I know, too,

That the blackbird is involved

In what I know. (WSCPP, 75)

In Whitman the senses are the aesthetic criterion by which to evaluate poetry. Yet, an aesthetic which is based upon purely sensual criteria allows no room for development other than a stronger enhancing of the senses. The expansion of the self so dear to Whitman in "Song of Myself" which includes everybody and contains everything is at odds with Stevens. Stevens, on the other hand, feels troubled with the intoxicating expansion of the self with which Whitman is so familiar with. If everything the poet senses becomes a part of the poet, as Whitman believes then, the poet's self becomes a universe unto itself as it incorporates everything

indiscriminately. And conversely, the self also becomes infinitely diffuse among everything it senses.

In “Like Decorations,” Stevens though he compares himself to the cemetery's decorators, the Afro- Americans, he nevertheless feels uneasy in this identification. While Whitman would have readily embraced them, by singing about the decorations and the decorators as though they were parts of himself, Stevens ‘self remains detached. If Stevens applied Whitmanian sensual absorption to the grave adornments, then the figure of the black decorators, could become a part of Stevens's self. Yet, Stevens keeps the figure of the black decorator, the nigger entirely other, thanks to his more distanced and detached, but cognitive process. Whitman is a sensualist and the things of which he sings become a part of his self. On the other hand, Stevens is a modernist, and the things of which he sings become perspectives, different frames of mind. This difference is crucial; it shows that while Stevens's self remains distinct, and separate, his mind is capable of multiple perspectives. Accordingly, the relationship between Whitman ‘s sensual and romantic poems and Stevens’ cubist poems “ Thirteen Ways” and “Like Decorations” becomes logical , since Stevens uses the first section of “Like Decorations” and the title of the poem to rein in the sensualism of Whitman and replace it by a more aesthetically acceptable, cognitive approach.

In essence, this chapter has provided a comprehensive analysis of Stevens' divergence from the Paleo-Modernist tradition and his efforts to establish a Neo-Modernist, nationalistic American poetry. It has explored the intricacies of his relationship with Europe, his dialogue with Eliot, and his nuanced engagement with Whitman, showcasing the complexity of Stevens' position in the tapestry of American literary history.

## **Chapter Five: Eliot and The American Tradition**

If Chapter Three placed Eliot within the frame of World literature, and investigated Eliot's internationalist poetry, by insisting on his indebtedness to the classical, and Italian, English and French influences, and showing their effect on his Paleo-Modernist poetry, this chapter seeks, on the contrary, to show the too often overlooked American character of his poetry. Since Eliot identified himself so deliberately with either the British or European culture, his Americanness is often played down by critics in their studies of his work. In fact, his leaning on "The mind of Europe" and the European literary tradition made many critics see him as a central figure to the literary English canon, and a significant influence of the modern Symbolist-Metaphysical tradition, but not necessarily perpetuating an American tradition, nor correlating with American writers. For many years it was customary to ignore Eliot's American roots and to regard him as English, not an authentic American writer, and so many critics simply dismissed him from the American tradition.

He was not even included in the annual review of criticism, *American Literary Scholarship*, until 1974. Helen Vendler, for example, devoted the first twenty-two pages of

The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry to Stevens, and she included no poem by Eliot. Among the reasons that may explain the denial of Eliot's Americanness by these critics are, first his public fascination with the European culture, and open rejection of the American poetic legacy, especially of New England, second, his attempt to find models and ancestors in Dante, Baudelaire, Donne rather than Whitman and Emerson, third, his deliberate suppression of any American indication, locale, place-name, or any other details in his poems, especially those written in the 20s, when he became well-known, fourth, his dismissal of any American influence on his work, adding to that his conversion to Catholicism, and the British citizenship he took in 1927, which complicated the matter. Yet, the main reason is and remains that he deliberately affiliated himself to the British writers, and rejected any native influence. In his 1936 lecture, "Tradition and the Practice of Poetry", he noted his affinities with British and not American poets of the 1890s, when he declared: "I certainly had more in common with them than with the English poets who survived to my own day. . . there were no American poets at all."<sup>336</sup>

In addition, Eliot tried to resist the infiltration of his American past into his poetry. He even omitted many passages related to the American culture. The original drafts of his poems before and after their publication attest of this deliberate will and act to erase any American trace. The suppression of the passage, "Next Boat for Natchez, Cairo, and St. Louis"<sup>337</sup> from the original draft of his poem, "Ash-Wednesday," for it discloses a lot of American place-names, and many American cultural details, is just an example among many to remove any American trace in his poetry. This explains why many critics view Eliot as English.

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336 T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Practice of Poetry," *Essays from the Southern Review*, ed. James Olney. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 13.

337. Eric Sigg, "Eliot as a Product of America," *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. A. David Moody (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28.

Eventually, however, scholars began to pay attention to his American background, especially after his death in 1965. Since the 70s onwards, and over the past fifty years, a shift of attention has occurred in Eliot studies away from a predominantly English and European Eliot, toward a predominantly American one. Thanks to critics, such as Lyndall Gordon, James E. Miller, A. David Moody, Eric Sigg, Ronald Bush, and Lee Oser who have opened up a rich strain in Eliot scholarship, still explorable, and far from being entirely exhausted, new readings of Eliot's poetry as being quintessentially American are appearing. However, the first book to give an extended analysis of Eliot's relations with American poets is Lee Oser's *T.S. Eliot and American Poetry* (1998), which considers Eliot's debts to Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Walt Whitman. Oser turns also his attention towards several younger American poets who were influenced by Eliot, John Ashberry, Elizabeth Bishop, and Robert Lowell. Thus, Oser's examination of the poet's American literary heritage from the above cited American writers constitutes a reliable source to look at the intertextual relationships binding the poet to his predecessors and successors, and establishing him, in this way, as an important figure of the American tradition.

The first part of this chapter highlights the denied influence Edgar Allan Poe had on Eliot's poetry in terms of form, and how the notion of "pure poetry," the emphasis on aesthetic expression regardless of meaning, attracted so much Eliot and The New Critics. It shows also that though Eliot expressed ambivalent ideas on his predecessor's work, he nonetheless shares with him, his rebellion against "the genteel tradition" and the provincial culture of New England. Both of them, through satire and irony react against the established Nineteenth-Century notions of the "Manifest Destiny," "The American Dream," and the myth of "America," as the utopian site of Western civilization planting. Like Poe, Eliot succeeds in revolutionizing the Nineteenth-Century Romantic poetry by introducing elements of Gothicism, fear, and horror to travesty traditional myths and themes, and music

. The second part deals with the most important American influence on Eliot: Walt Whitman. Like Poe, Whitman inspired Eliot despite Eliot's hostility towards one of the most American of all American poets, and who is "America itself" in Ezra Pound's words. When speaking of Whitman, Eliot confessed that he "had to conquer an aversion to his form as well as to much of his matter"<sup>338</sup> ; however, Whitman's influence on Eliot was immense. Many critics, such as Harold Bloom, have already stressed the strong influence Whitman exerted on American poets, in general, and on Eliot, in particular. However, no critic, up to now has considered Eliot's affinity with Whitman. Here, I undertake to show through the intertextual relationship linking the two poets that the Whitmanian influence on Eliot's poetry is of two levels and two sorts: one public, and the other private, and one literary, while the other is psychological.

Many indications of Eliot's anxiety toward his American precursors are permeating his work, and his allusions to them are pure evidence that he is dialoging with them. While discussing Eliot's intertextual relationships to his predecessor American poets, I place Eliot's poetry definitely rooted in the American tradition. By looking at his Americanisms, unconscious, ( in his early poetry) or deliberate ( in his late poetry), his use of landscapes, and above all his American temperament and thinking, his habitual skepticism, his Americanness is vindicated. Although Eliot maintained complicated relationships towards his nation, nationality, identity, and culture in general, in this chapter, I demonstrate that he does display some idiosyncratic American traits in his poetry.

#### **A. Edgar Allan Poe's Influence on Eliot : Eliot's Intertextual Relationship with Poet:**

Even though Eliot never acknowledged overtly and publicly the American influence on his work, dismissed American models and predecessors such as Emerson and Poe, recent

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338. "Introduction," *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), viii-ix, xi; rpt. in part in *Ezra Pound: A Critical Anthology*, ed. J. P. Sullivan (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970).

American critics, nonetheless succeeded in establishing strong relationships of similarity, and influence in terms of form and content between Eliot's poetry, and Edgar Allan Poe's poetry.

Whereas Eliot acknowledges publicly the influence of European and English writers on his work in many essays and lectures, he, on the opposite furnishes no hard evidence of Poe's influence. Nonetheless, just after receiving the Nobel Prize of Literature, Eliot delivered a lecture entitled "From Poe to Valéry" at the Library of Congress, in Washington, in November, 1948. In this lecture, Eliot presented Poe as a riddle and spoke with uncertainty of him: "One cannot be sure that one's writing has not been influenced by Poe."<sup>339</sup> He continues: "I can name positively certain poets whose work has influenced me, I can name others whose work, I am sure, has not; there may be still others of whose influence I am unaware, but whose influence I might be brought to acknowledge; but about Poe I shall never be sure."<sup>340</sup> Examined in detail, Eliot writes, Poe's work seems to show nothing but "slipshod writing,"<sup>341</sup> "puerile thinking,"<sup>342</sup> and "haphazard experiments."<sup>343</sup> He proceeds further that Poe's "diction is sometimes inexact, as in "my most immemorial year"<sup>344</sup> and "a stately raven."<sup>345</sup> From these denigrating comments it is evident to think that Eliot never really appreciated Poe, and felt superior to him. As Eliot's interest in the French Symbolist poets, however, came as early as 1908, and their debt to Poe was inescapable, he evaluated Poe indirectly through the prism of the three French poets, Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry.

As a matter of fact, these French poets' views helped him to see Poe as congenial to him in his own attack on American provincialism, and the "genteel tradition". Despite the criticism he put forward in this lecture of 1948 on Poe, Eliot gradually developed an intellectually

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339. T.S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writing* (London: Faber, 1965), 23.

340 Ibid.

341 Ibid.

342 Ibid.

343 Ibid.

344 Ibid. 32

345 Ibid. 33

explained acceptance of Poe, when he writes that Poe's work as a whole is "a mass of unique shape and impressive size."<sup>346</sup> He adds referring to himself that the "ordinary cultivated reader"<sup>347</sup> recalls a few short poems "which enchanted him for a time when he was a boy, and which do somehow stick in the memory."<sup>348</sup> Such a reader also recalls "the tales, and notes their influence on detective and science fiction. But the impact of Poe on three Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry has been much more profound.

In fact, Poe was for The Symbolists the ideal model of poet to imitate. For Baudelaire, he was the type of *le poète maudit*, "the rebel against society and against middle-class morality."<sup>349</sup> For Mallarmé, Poe's innovative and experimental technique of his *vers libres* which contrasts with traditional verse, was to replicate. Poe's theory of poetry insisting on the poem as an end in itself, predictive of *la poésie pure*, and "art for art's sake" attracted Valéry. Despite the fact that Poe has played an important part for the Symbolists and the New Critics in influencing their views on poetry, and the theory of poetry, he was misunderstood in his time, and often criticized negatively.

In *T.S. Eliot and American Poetry* (1998), Lee Oser observes that "recent criticism has ignored his (Poe) relation, as an American, to Eliot and American modernism."<sup>350</sup> This acute observation while demonstrating that a wide gap exists in the picture we make of Eliot, and modernism, it also spurs an incentive to look at Eliot in relation to Poe: that is to say in relation to American modernism. In fact, a closer look at Eliot's especially early poetry and use of city imagery recalls certainly Baudelaire and his "Tableaux Parisiens." However, as Oser suggests, if we read Eliot's poetry in connection to Poe, who had a strong influence on the French Symbolists, and on Baudelaire himself, it will be easy to notice the influence that Poe had on

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346 Ibid. 27

347 Ibid. 29

348 Ibid.

349 Ibid. 37

350. Lee Oser, *T.S. Eliot and American Poetry* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 1.

Eliot. Oser maintains that Poe was for Eliot, a model who inspired him and influenced his poetry and his views on poetry. Eliot was indeed not only responsive to Poe's poems, but to his critical works as well.

**a. Poe's Aesthetic Views : Sound Effects and The Liberation of Free Verse:**

"The City in the Sea" (first published in 1845) is one of Poe's poems which shows that Eliot was influenced by Poe's style, themes, settings, and poetics. Likewise "The Rationale of Verse" (1848), Poe's most influential critical work, as I will show in this section impacted Eliot's aesthetic views on poetry. A close look at the poem will reveal that it exemplifies many of the ideas on how to write good verse expressed in "The Rationale of Verse" (1848), and found later in Eliot's "Reflections on Vers Libre," Eliot's profoundly influential article of 1917.

As a matter of evidence, the following passages from Eliot's "Reflections on Vers Libre," and Poe's "The Rationale of Verse" follow faithfully the same reasoning. Here is Eliot's passage: "[The] liberation from rhyme might mean as well a liberation of rhyme. Freed from its exacting task of supporting lame verse, it could be applied with greater effect where it is most needed. There are often passages in an unrhymed poem where rhyme is wanted for some special effect, for a sudden tightening-up, for a cumulative insistence, or for an abrupt change of mood."<sup>351</sup> And here is Poe's passage: "It would require a high degree, indeed, both of cultivation and of courage, on the part of early versifier, to enable him to place his rhymes--- and let them remain---at unquestionably their best position, that of unusual and unanticipated intervals."<sup>352</sup>

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351. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, 189.

352. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Hearst International Library, 1914), 280.

The second passage from Poe's "The Rationale of Verse" shows clearly the influence it had on Eliot's thinking and poetry. A case in point to exemplify the "liberation of rhyme" described by Eliot and, which recalls Poe's idea of the "best position," and "unusual and unanticipated intervals" is expressly shown in Poe's poem "The City in the Sea". The poem which is divided into four stanzas, illustrates Poe's "unusual and unanticipated intervals" as each stanza has its own rhyme scheme. This accounts of Poe's desire to free verse from conventionalities.

The end rhyme in the poem consists mainly of couplets (two successive rhyming lines). However, triplets (three successive rhyming lines) occur in the first and second stanza. In addition, in the first stanza, line 7 rhymes with lines 9, and 11; in the last stanza, line 50 rhymes with line 52, and line 53 rhymes with line 54. The first stanza contains all three types of the end rhyme described above, and describes what Poe calls the "best position", and "unusual and unanticipated intervals." For instance, in the first stanza, the end rhyme throne/ alone consists of a couplet, two successive rhyming lines ( line 1 with line 2 ); We find also a triplet, three successive rhyming lines: West/best/ rest ( lines 3, 4, and 5 ). We find also that line 7 rhymes with line 9 in not/ forgot; line 6 rhymes with line 8 in towers/ours, and finally line 10 rhymes with line 11 in sky/ lie:

Lo! Death has reared himself a throne  
In a strange city lying alone  
Far down within the dim West,  
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best  
Have gone to their eternal rest  
There shrines and palaces and towers  
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)  
Resemble nothing that is ours.

Around, by lifting winds forgot,

Resignedly beneath the sky

The melancholy waters lie.<sup>353</sup>

Many other examples of figures of speech can be found in the poem. Alliteration, or the re-occurrence of the same letter, or sound is used throughout the poem from beginning to end, as shown below: “ In a strange city lying alone (line 2) , “Far down within the dim West” (Line 3) ,“No rays from the holy heaven come down” (Line 11) and “The viol, the violet, and the vine” line23) . This close -knitting connection between words procures such a special effect to the rhythm of the lines that Eliot in his 1948 lecture remarked:“Poe had, to an exceptional degree, the feeling for the incantatory element in poetry, of that which may, in the most nearly literal sense, be called ‘the magic of verse’. ... It has the effect of an incantation which ... stirs the feelings at a deep and almost primitive level.”<sup>354</sup> Previously, in his Norton lectures at Harvard in 1932-1933 Eliot had described this “magic of verse” as the work of the “auditory imagination”: “What I call this “auditory imagination” is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.”<sup>355</sup>

A second example from Poe’s style will be the use of Anaphora, where here the word up has been repeatedly used at the beginning of successive clauses : “Up domes, up spires, up kingly halls / Up fanes, up Babylon-like walls, / Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers.”<sup>356</sup> Poe’s

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353. Ibid.,57.

354. T.S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, 31.

355. T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 111.

356. Poe, *Complete Works*,57.

use of prosodic effects that contribute to the incantatory quality and force of the poem are many in “The City in the Sea”: end and internal rhyme, a fluid four-beat line, a refrain, alliteration, anaphora, and many other poetic devices. In addition, Poe’s use of elevated language and internal rhyming pattern of “down, down, the town shall settle hence,”<sup>357</sup> and alliteration like “gasping graves,”<sup>358</sup> and “slightly sinking”<sup>359</sup> add to the gothic setting and atmosphere of the poem.

The cultivation of style in Poe’s poetry translates his ultimate conviction that art is primarily concerned with form, or beauty, regardless of content, or any other function of poetry. This is the kind of verse that aims “to delight rather than to instruct the reader,” as defined in the *English Encyclopedia*. It is Poetry that does not try” to educate, instruct, or convert the reader - as opposed to didactic verse.” It is also what we call “pure poetry,”<sup>360</sup> or “art for art’s sake”. Pure poetry, or “message-free verse that is concerned with exploring the essential musical nature of the language rather than with conveying a narrative or having didactic purpose”<sup>361</sup> is the term that has been associated particularly with the poems of Edgar Allan Poe, since he developed this notion in his critical work, *The Beginning of Poetry* of 1850. This concept, which inspires Baudelaire is implicit in the French symbolists, Mallarmé, and Valéry, and refers to a poetic creation based on the musicality and magical suggestion of language, through a search for effects resulting from the relationship of words, or rather from the relations of the resonances of the words to each other. It is also the sort of poetic effects that Eliot’s verse seeks to achieve. Throughout his poetry, the musical quality of his style lies in his method of employing repetitive sound patterns, a synesthetic strategy which relates his conceptions of

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357. Ibid., 58.

358. Ibid.

359. Ibid.

360 Ibid., 53.

poetry and music, and which he derives from the French Symbolists, or perhaps from Poe directly or indirectly for in *The Poetic Principle* Poe writes:

Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected - is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance, I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music perhaps that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles - the creation of supernal Beauty. It may be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained in fact. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which cannot have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minnesingers had advantages which we do not possess - and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.<sup>362</sup>

The main aspect of Poe's criticism is the references he makes to music and poetry. This point is vital to a consideration of the influence of Poe on Baudelaire and Mallarmé but Eliot also. When Poe wrote that the music of poetry should be indefinite and suggestive, by its very vagueness producing a spiritual effect, he was laying the foundation of Symbolist thought, and triggering Eliotian interdisciplinary poetics.

In "Music of Poetry," for Eliot indeed a "musical" poem, "is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and . . . these two patterns are indissoluble and one."<sup>363</sup>

A central argument here is that part of what is called the "music" in poetry derives from the sounds and rhythms of common speech. According to Eliot, this is so because of the

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362 Ibid., 9.

363. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, 26.

dichotomy that exists between sound and meaning. A poem's sounds must make sense, or have meaning, but we do not need to apprehend this meaning before we recognize it as poetry.

“Sounds without meaning can be music, but in poetry they are the musical component which accompanies the meaning.”<sup>364</sup> Another musical feature of poetry is its similarity to ordinary speech: “So, while poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains, all the same, one person talking to another; and this is just as true if you sing it, for singing is another way of talking”<sup>365</sup> Here Eliot is identifying the musical properties of poetry which do not make the poetry analogous to music in any equivalent sense, but which are necessary elements if it is to be distinguished from prose. This is what Chancellor calls “a kind of musicality not heard by the ear”<sup>366</sup> (when comparing poetry to music.

The following lines from “The Waste Land” illustrate Eliot’s use of the rhythm as exposed in “The Music of Poetry” :

But sound of water over a rock  
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees  
Drip drop drip drop drop drop  
But there is no water. (CPTSE, 76-77)

The place of music in almost all Eliot’s poetry is undeniable, and is, thus present in Eliot’s work from beginning to end. The musical titles of his poems, such as “Preludes,” “Rhapsody on a Winter Night,” “Nocturne,” and “Four Quartets” reverberate with musical terms. Even when the titles do not always betray his kinship to music, there are still traces of sustained interest in music. In his lecture “The Music of Poetry” (1942), he said “that a poet may gain much from the study of music.”<sup>367</sup> But if the titles of the aforementioned poems hint at the

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364 . Ibid., 31.

365 . Ibid., 29-31.

366 Paul Chancellor, “The Music of ‘The Waste Land’,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol.6, 1 (1969), 24.

367 Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, 32.

European classical music , and the opera of Wagner, for which Eliot showed a great curiosity, it is especially Chintz' s important new research material linking Eliot and the popular musical culture of the turn of the Twentieth-Century that brings to light Eliot's debts to his American roots.

**b. Eliot's relationship to African- American culture: incorporation of Jazz to Poetry:**

In his article, "A Jazz- Banjorine, Not a Lute," David Chinitz notes and explores Eliot's interest and relationship to music. In recent years, the publication of his letters reveal that not only Eliot's interest in, and love of music began early in life, but also give indications about his personal taste, preference, and style against the London literary establishment of the early Twenties. Eliot's deliberate association with popular culture, and with its largely African-American roots provides a way of laying claim to both an American, nativist, poetry, questioning in this way, his ambivalence about his relationship to classicist Paleo-Modernism, and challenging Kermode's classification. Chinitz encapsulates Eliot's musical inclination in the following image: "Eliot bases himself in America rather than England, in the contemporary rather than the classical, and in the 'Jazz movement' of modernism rather than the Great Tradition."<sup>368</sup>

Eliot incorporated the American music genre, ragtime to his poetry, symbolized by the banjo. An instance of this incorporation is found in the second section, of *The Waste Land*, "A Game of Chess":

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—

It's so elegant

So intelligent

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"

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368. David E. Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 21.

“I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

“With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?

“What shall we ever do?” (CPTSE, 57-58)

Eric Sigg further informs us, “That Shakespeherian Rag” , is borrowed from a title of a rag song “That Shakespearian Rag,” written by Gene Buck and Herman Ruby, and Stamper for the 1912 Ziegfeld Follies. Eliot probably heard its lyric, “That Shakespearian rag, most intelligent, very elegant,”<sup>369</sup> in a Boston vaudeville house. The line “O OOO that Shakespeherian Rag,” suggests metonymically that Shakespeare as England’s national writer, and representative of Englishness and even the cultural climate of London has been “ragged” out of its former shape. Restructured through syncopation into novelty, fashioned anew, and transformed into a Shakespeherian form, the new form shows that the solidity of established culture and tradition is deconstructed into “fragments,” “ragged” out of its original context, and transformed, in other words, made “Shakespeherian.”

By publishing “The Waste Land” with “OOOO Shakespeherian Rag” and its ragging; teasing, taunting, mocking of Shakespeare, Eliot, thus elevates popular culture over art. The blending of popular music with art afforded him the opportunity to experience a new arrangement of musicality, syncopations, sounds, and voices, fragments reconfigured in a new Shakespeherian form. In *The Waste Land*, “the pleasant whining of a mandolin” (CPTSE, 63) of the third section “The Fire Sermon” is in counterpoint with this “jazz-banjorine.” The purpose is to juxtapose tradition to innovation. The dynamism of the rag song is meant to contrast with the anxious, malevolent tension of the couple in “A Game of Chess” who lead a routinely dull and meaningless life.

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369. Eric Sigg, “Eliot as a Product of America,” *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. A. David Moody (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

Ragtime, and the genre developing from it, jazz, inspired “The Waste Land”’s sharp, piercing rhythms and sudden, insistent rhymes. “The Fire Sermon,” the third section of *The Waste Land*, describes a diminished sexual encounter between a “ragtime” couple, the typist and her “young man carbuncular” rendered in the mode of the music they might favor:

He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,  
A small house agent’s clerk, with one bold stare,  
One of the low on whom assurance sits  
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.  
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,  
Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
Which still are unreproved, if undesired. (CPTSE, 62)

Eliot’s lines short, syncopated, tightly rhyming have the characteristic “swing” of ragtime, and display his thrill of the new, for the style is fresh and modern as in section three “The Fire Sermon”. Once her lover has departed, the typist “smooths her hair with automatic hand / and puts a record on the gramophone” (CPTSE, 62).

With Ragtime the use of everyday speech became a means for lyrical expression. As states Ragtime “licensed the vernacular as a lyrical idiom,”<sup>370</sup> its lyrics characterized by “short, juxtaposed phrases marked by internal rhymes and jagged syntactical breaks.”<sup>371</sup> To the African-American writer Ralph Ellison, “*The Waste Land*” was remarkable in that “its rhythms were often closer to jazz than those of the Negro poets.”<sup>372</sup> Eliot described himself to Herbert Read, in 1928 as “a southern boy with a nigger drawl.”<sup>373</sup> For Eliot to play the “Jazz banjorine”

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370 Philip Furia quoted in Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, 37.

371 Ibid.

372 Ralph Ellison, quoted in Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, 37.

373. T.S. Eliot, quoted in James Edward Smethurst *The African American Roots of Modernism: From Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 193.

was then not only a sign that he was different from the mainstream of the then-established English culture, but also a way to decree his Americanness by the infiltration of American mass culture into European life in the beginning of the Twentieth-Century.

**c. Poe's and Eliot's Criticism of "The Genteel Tradition":**

In Poe as in Eliot the cultivation of prosodic and other poetic effects signals not only the liberation of verse and the freedom to write verse freely, but also a revolt against the literary culture of the United States, and of New England in particular. Poe's "The City in the Sea" and Eliot's "Prufrock and Other Observations" constitute good examples of the rejection of the "genteel tradition", not only in terms of style, but content, as well. Hence, the same devices, in Poe as in Eliot, are used to come out with a new type of poetry, revolutionary and rebellious against the literary culture of the United States, and of New England, in particular, "The genteel tradition".

To combat "The genteel tradition," a term coined by critic George Santayana (1863–1952) or provincialism and the literary establishment of certain late Nineteenth-Century American writers, especially New Englanders who, emphasized conventionality in order to control social, religious, moral, and literary standards, Poe through satire criticized the New-England culture and its stultifying European adoption of pre-conceived cultural foci in his verse.

Poe's "The City in the Sea" describes "a strange city lying alone / Far down within the dim West."<sup>374</sup> By locating the city in the West, Poe is responding to the traditional themes found in Classical and Renaissance literature, and adopted by the American culture. One of these themes is the theme of the rising glory of America. America, after being chosen by European settlers, as the most suitable locus to plant civilization, was going to be the subject, as well as the propaganda of a prolific literature. This theme was first anticipated by George Berkeley, in his poem "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America." It is one of the

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374 Poe, *The Complete Works*, 57.

greatest and earliest literary expressions of the heliotropic movement in the English language.

Its last and best-known stanza foretells:

Westward the course of empire takes its way;

The four first acts already past,

A fifth shall close the drama with the day:

Time's noblest offspring in the last. <sup>375</sup>

In fact, the future glory of America that was anticipated, and predicted, long ago before its settling, by most Europeans in theory, knew its real concretization, through the Westward Expansion that the New World knew throughout the centuries. This expansionist and imperialist strain in the American economic, social, and political behavior, has received strong support by many American writers into the present time. It finds its explanation in the ancient Greek and Roman notion of the Westward course of empire. Such a theme has always been sustained and entertained since, by most American writers, through ages, from the Colonial period, to the Twentieth-Century. Philip Freneau, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge extolled the rising glory of America as early as 1771 in their poem "The Rising Glory of America." And such a theme has never ceased to flourish since then with Walt Whitman's "Passage to India" and Hart Crane's "The Bridge."

Poe, while satirizing the commonplace Eighteenth-Century European notion of the Western movement and progress, and its American socializing adoption, travesties the "translation" theme, and the city he describes. Though located in the "West," the city can also be the land of the setting sun and endings rather than the land of beginnings and hope, and consequently not a land of progress and civilization, but a region where both the good and the bad come for "eternal rest":

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375 . George Berkeley, quoted in Henry Marie Brackenridge, *North American Pamphlet on South American Affairs* (London : publisher not identified, 1818), 63.

Far down within the dim West,  
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best  
Have gone to their eternal rest.<sup>376</sup>

By travesty and subverting the mythological theme of the “*translatio imperii*” and “*studii*,” Poe is criticizing seriously the Nineteenth-Century culture of progress, and the poetic legacy of New England. He denies the American notion of progress set in the West: “There shrines and palaces and towers/ (Time eaten towers that tremble not!) /Resemble nothing that is ours”<sup>377</sup> and is seriously contesting its adoption by American literature. As a forebear of Eliot’s modernist reaction to the stultifying Nineteenth-Century American culture, with its Romantic tradition of the fireside poets, he instead offers Gothicism.

**d. Poe, Eliot: Gothicism Versus “The Genteel Tradition”:**

First, Gothicism, or the use of fearful and sad elements in poetry is then, what makes Poe’s poetry so distinctive. In “The City in the Sea,” he uses typical gothic themes such as death, loneliness and melancholy, catastrophe and collapse. Since death, for him, is so beautiful a thing, Poe makes the speaker of the poem sing of death with the rhymes of his poem. Death is presented as a real person here and resides in a tower from where he can see everything. He is ruling and dominating everything and the city itself is ruled by death. As the city is doomed to Death, anyway it surrenders to it silently, without any protest. This is to proclaim the superiority of Death over everything: human and non-human.

The story, “The City in the Sea” tells, takes place in an abandoned city in the West, ruled by death. The poem then tells the reader about its descent into the sea and hell. Like most of Poe’s poems, such as “Annabel Lee,” and “The Raven,” which speak of death, this one had a very dark and sad tone to it. Poe achieves this Gothic atmosphere mainly by word choice and

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<sup>376</sup> Poe, *Complete Works*, 57.  
<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

imagery. He describes the city as filled with “many a marvelous shrine”(line 21) and other amazing pieces of architecture, but also describes the “melancholy waters”(line 11) and the graves that litter the city. This creates a beautiful but gloomy and disturbing picture of the city. He uses words such as alone, melancholy, marvelous, lurid, resignedly, and silently, to create this tone within the poem:

There shrines and palaces and towers  
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)  
Resemble nothing that is ours.  
Around, by lifting winds forgot,  
Resignedly beneath the sky  
The melancholy waters lie.<sup>378</sup>

“The City in the Sea” rejects the Romantic ideals of “The Fireside Poets” or what Poe calls “The Frogpondians” and “The Genteel Tradition.” In exchange, he adopts new gothic elements. First, Poe creates a Gothic setting with the isolation of the city, its close connection with Death, the sinking sun in the west, and the silent sea. In addition, the overall horror mood of the poem is greatly intensified by the gazing look of the personified Death, the light coming from beneath the sea and the breathless graves. The image of the city as such, and all the above-cited Gothic elements are characteristic of the apocalyptic poetry that would be the stamp of most modernist poets, and of Eliot, in his early urban poems” *The Preludes*”, and in the description of the Unreal City in *The Waste Land*.

Like Poe, Eliot also parodies the American notions of pride, and grandeur attached to the nation. Eliot did not praise America in patriotic nor nationalist poems as many of his contemporaries did. Robert Frost, for instance, is best remembered for his poem “For John F. Kennedy, His Inauguration”. In this poem, Frost gives a very modern vision of the traditional

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378. Poe, *Complete Works*, 61.

and classic concept of exceptionalism or “Manifest Destiny,” where he affiliates himself to the long-established Puritan tradition, and where the Americans are viewed as exceptional people, endowed with specific power, hence predestined to lead the world into the Millennium. Praising the economic, political and cultural exploits, the United States of America have achieved, since their foundation, Frost proclaims that a new age was born, when he writes: “new age of the ages was born / Right down to now in glory upon glory.”<sup>379</sup>

Blessed by God, and attained through the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race, and the imposition of their language and culture, a new age was born, as the poet confirms: “God nodded his approval of as good / So much those heroes knew and understood.”<sup>380</sup>

In “The Gift Outright,” which received special attention when Frost recited it at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961, Frost is expounding the theme of the rising glory of America, and eulogizing America and its heroic exploits, showing his pride about the history of America, and heralding his nationalism. Eliot, on the contrary, is not concerned with the fame or the grandeur of America, and when he refers to America, and Americans, his attention is directed towards their flaws and weaknesses. In his early poetry and in “From Prufrock and Other Observations” (1917) as the title foregrounds, Eliot observes, then ridicules the American high-bourgeois society, criticizing its values and the dull life it leads.

“The Boston Evening Transcript” as the title suggests is a poem about the evening newspaper readership of Boston. But, the category of people who reads The Boston Evening Transcript is described as self-content and distinctly inert and lifeless in the following lines:

When evening quickens faintly in the street,  
Wakening the appetites of life in some  
And to others bringing the Boston Evening Transcript. (CPTSE, 20)

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379. Robert Frost: *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays* (London: Library of America, 1995), 436.  
380. *Ibid.*, 435.

Here, “life” is connected with some but not with the “other”, those who read the Boston Evening Transcript are lifeless. The subject-matter of “The Boston Evening Transcript” and the reference to Francois de la Rochefoucauld, a Seventeenth-Century French writer, best remembered for his *Reflections on Aphorisms and Ethical Maxims* are indicative of Eliot’s fascination with European culture and disdain for the American society:

I mount the steps and ring the bell, turning  
Wearily, as one would turn to nod good-bye to Rochefoucauld,  
And I say, “Cousin Harriet, here is the Boston Evening Transcript.” (CPTSE, 20)

In “Cousin Nancy,” another identifiable poem as critical and satirizing of New-England manners, describes Miss Nancy as someone who:

Smoked danced all the modern dances  
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it  
But they knew that it was modern. (CPTSE, 22)

Nancy’s knowing “all the modern dances,” cigarette smoking, and horse riding suggest the failure of a young woman rebelling against a deadening society whose members were stubbornly and fiercely opposing any change:

...The glazed shelves kept watch  
Mattew and Waldo guardians of the faith  
The army of unalterable law. (CPTSE, 22)

As Terri Mester states “Cousin Nancy” is “one of a series of satirical vignettes on contemporary mores and New England manners, presumably between relatives and people the poet knew in Boston and Cambridge.”<sup>381</sup>

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381. Lee Oser, *Movement and Modernism: Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Williams, and Early Twentieth-century Dance* (Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 70.

Miss Nancy Ellicot...

Rode across...The barren New England hills

And broke them. (CPTSE, 22)

“Aunt Helen,” another ironic American poem, establishing altogether with “Cousin Nancy” and “The Boston Evening Transcript” the trilogy of “the satirical vignettes” shows how the boring and deadening world of Boston, and New England outraged Eliot’s sensibilities and directed his caricaturing the “genteel tradition.”

These three early poems powerfully foreground the customs, beliefs, and behaviors of New England’s inhabitants and are meant to provide a closer insight, and a severe criticism, of especially the mannerisms and mores of the New England’s upper-middle class social, and cultural milieu.

**d. Poe’s Urban landscape Model:**

Despite the fact that many models have been cited for Eliot’s urban landscapes such as Baudelaire’s, for instance, Poe’s example, though it has been overlooked, is uniquely revealing. In fact, reading the following lines from “The Waste Land”, one can observe that Eliot assumes a Poe-like manner to depict the city, reminiscent of “The City in the Sea”:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight

And fiddled whisper music on those strays

And bathed with baby faces in the violet light

Whistled, and beat wings

And crawled head downward down a blackened wall

And upside down in air were towers

Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours

And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells. (CPTSE, 192)

Besides intensive rhyming conveying this infernal gothic atmosphere of collapse, and this sense of intense melancholy, reminiscent of the atmosphere felt in “The City in the Sea,” the passage uses similar words appearing in each of the two poems, “The Waste Land” and “The City in the Sea.” Here is the passage from the “The City in the Sea” where words such as “wall,” “air,” “violet,” “hours,” and “towers” show that “The Waste Land” has a lot in common with “The City in the Sea”:

No rays from the holy heaven come down  
On the long night-time of that town;  
But light from out the lurid sea  
Streams up the turrets silently—  
Gleams up the pinnacles far and free—  
Up domes—up spires—up kingly halls—  
Up fanes—up Babylon-like walls—  
Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers  
Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers—  
Up many and many a marvellous shrine  
Whose wreathed friezes intertwine  
The viol, the violet, and the vine.<sup>382</sup>

Fascinated in the same way as Baudelaire is by the magnetism of the city life of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, Poe and Eliot show an extreme obsession with the description of the town. However, Poe’s and Eliot’s urban experience is different from Baudelaire’s or other European poets. While European models with their loci provided a firm grounding, and offered paradigms of urban understanding, Poe and Eliot encounter cities with little or no historical and mythological past, local traditions of art, or architectural and

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382. Poe, *The Complete Works*, 57.

archeological interest, on the contrary. Because American towns are young and new, compared to the European ones, they are consequently places which can offer no historical foundation on which to form an urban experience. Then, uncertain by the American city's socio-historical life, Eliot followed Poe in "turning inward, to his own psychological and artistic resources in order to orient himself in the world."<sup>383</sup> Eliot, in the absence of supportive assistance, and experimental backing to connect with an American historical past, grounds his urban experience, by turning inward, and basing his description of the town solely on observation: "The winter evening settles down / With smells of steaks in passage ways / Six o'clock"(CPTSE, 13).

The result is this strange immediacy we feel and which is heightened by the object-centered vision of the "grimy scraps," (CPTSE, 13) and "withered leaves" (CPTSE, 13) when the winter evening "settles down," (CPTSE, 13) and "morning comes to consciousness" (CPTSE, 13). The poet describes a place where he does not even provide any reason or justification why he happens to be there. Even the title does not say much, nor is very helpful in directing the reader.

"Preludes" (1919) is a particularly interesting example to illustrate not only Eliot's urban landscape, but to disclose his buried Americanness, as well. When all four "Preludes" are considered together they reveal quite specific American traces or Americanisms that would disappear deliberately after Eliot's first collection. The deletion of American signposts, "Dorchester" and "Roxbury" in successive drafts adds to the effect of walking into an entirely strange and new world.P8.

From the early drafts of 'Preludes' (1911) B.C.Southam informs us that the poem is organized according to four images: one in Paris and three in Boston. For example, 'Preludes' of 1917 does not specify the city. However, the early drafts of 'Preludes' (1911) include a

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383. Lee Oser, *T.S. Eliot and American Poetry* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 7.

reference to Boston. In Eliot's early poems, the locale is a city we cannot name, as Hugh Kenner suggests in "The Urban Apocalypse." It is either a city or several cities. The removal of these specific names reveals Eliot's intention to achieve a sense of anonymity, and secrecy; and not impersonality as he pretends that his poems were not based on personal experience and should not be read as personal poems. It also reveals Eliot's intention to create a generic, common, broad, and unidentified urban experience, not recognizable in a particular town, and specifically his home town. The use of a more general landscape or city helps him achieve a sense of namelessness, anonymity, and secrecy as he has to describe the newly sordid, dreary landscapes that transformed his old subjective world of emotions as a child, into something unbearable, shameful and dishonorable to speak of.

His "personal landscape" was composed of "landscapes", and mainly inspired by St Louis, his hometown. In an essay entitled "The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet," he published along with the poem "The Dry Salvages" in 1941, he could confess that his family by devotion, and faithfulness, lived in the house that his grandfather had built, and did not want to leave it: "In St Louis, we lived on in a neighborhood which had become shabby to a degree of slumminess, after all our friends and acquaintances had moved further west. . . . So it was, that for nine months of the year my scenery was almost exclusively urban, and a good deal of it seedily, drably urban at that."<sup>384</sup>

In addition to St Louis, his personal landscape was made up of a combination of American and European locales, as he acknowledged when he said: "My urban imagery was that of St Louis, upon which that of Paris and London have been superimposed."<sup>385</sup> Eliot himself confessed that his poetry "shows traces of every environment" in which he had lived. His "personal landscape" was not particularly American nor regional, such as Robert Frost, whose

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384. Eric Sigg, "Eliot as a Product of America," *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. A. David Moody (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28.

385. T. S. Eliot, "The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet." *Daedalus*, 126(1), (1997). 355 .

almost entire poetry centers on New Hampshire and Vermont in New-England. In this case, he becomes closer to Wallace Stevens who writes about European and American locales alike with the exception that he does not bring to the fore the American place-names. We can discern that Eliot uses the city in order to reflect on his urban experience regardless of the specificity of the place or location. In other words, Eliot sought to account of a poetic generic urban experience, and not to describe a specific locale. Living in London, or in any other capital in the world could be at the origin of shaping the same urban experience regardless of the specific living place. What was more important for Eliot is the sense of connectedness with (rather lack of it) or isolation from the life in any town that counted more. Thus, despite the impersonal description of the setting in *Prelude II*, it recalls as in *Prelude III* an American background, and the poem, though written in Paris in 1911, conveys an American atmosphere by describing a scene which could be American as such in its evocation of the morning vision:

... the light crept up between the shutters  
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,  
You had such a vision of the street  
As the street hardly understands. (CPTSE, 13)

The urban imagery describing an unnamed city, in *Prelude IV*, further evokes an atmosphere of squalor and desolation that can be applied to any city, but which can be also typical of an industrial city as *St Louis: Skies / That fade behind a city block*. After a short-lived morning-song which recalls “*The City in the Sea*”, Eliot in “*Prelude III*” reveals a contradiction between the woman’s vision of the street and the street itself by using the demonic (eyes blinded) quite naturally which Poe had already supplied him with a working model. In this way, “*Preludes*” breaks strangely from Nineteenth-Century American optimism and U.S locales, as Poe had done, to prepare us for the sordid city of London in “*The Waste Land*.”

**e. Poe, Eliot: Gothicism and the Psychology of Horror:**

In the context of the influence of Poe and Gothicism on Eliot, Grover Smith offers trenchant insights into the “psychology of horror”<sup>386</sup> in both writers. In his study *T.S. Eliot and the Use of Memory*, Smith argues that Poe had a “significant”<sup>387</sup> and “transforming”<sup>388</sup> impact on Eliot. Smith draws attention to the affinity between the opening strophe of “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” and Poe’s “For Annie,” for instance. The image of the fevered brain depicted in this poem may be inspired by Eliot’s reading of Edgar Allan Poe, whose influence, according to Grover Smith, Eliot tried to suppress. Like “The Love Song of St. Sebastian,” “For Annie” also foregrounds the “brain” wrecked with anxiety:

The sickness—the nausea  
The pitiless pain—  
Have ceased, with the fever  
That maddened my brain—  
With the fever called ‘Living’  
That burned in my brain.<sup>389</sup>

Eliot shares with Poe the same grim tone and endless anxiety that permeate their works. Both of the poets’ celebratory manners of speaking about death seem to show that they wish to escape from this life. It is safe to say that Eliot, like Poe is a poet of doom. Thus, the Poe archetype of the living- death provided in” *The City in the Sea* “is mirrored in the sections of “A Game of Chess,” and “What the Thunder Said” of “The Waste Land” and in “The Hollow Men.” The wish-death feeling also is found in Eliot’s poems “The Love Song of St. Sebastian, and “The Death of St. Narcissus.” Lyndall Gordon, in a biography written on Eliot, provides us with a key, and incites us to see the poetry and the life as complementary parts of one design, a consuming search for salvation because “as more is gradually known of Eliot’s life, the clearer

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386. Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot and the Use of Memory* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996), 40.

387. *Ibid.*, 49.

388. *Ibid.*

389. Poe, *Complete Works*, 70.

it seems that the ‘impersonal’ facade of his poetry—the multiple faces and voices masks an often quite literal reworking of personal experience.”<sup>390</sup>

Like Whitman, and later Eliot, Poe was afraid of social contempt and could not expose openly his feelings, nor speak openly about sexuality, gender identity and relationships. So, he turned inward to find a way of speaking about the unspeakable. This recourse to the inner workings of one’s memory and imagination, and painful psychological states of mind is what Eliot inherits from Poe. Before discussing how Eliot uses Poe archetype of the living- death provided in “The City in the Sea” in the second part of this chapter, let us first consider the second most important influence on Eliot: Whitman.

#### **A. Eliot, Whitman, and The American Tradition:**

Eliot resisted Whitman’s full impact on modern poetry, and ignored his stature as a seminal figure in modernism, until, like Poe, had been discovered by the French writers, and had been given a French appearance not an American one. Because it is the Frenchman Charles Baudelaire, and not the American Walt Whitman, whom Eliot regarded as the most important contributor to modern literature, for a long time no possible connection could have been made between Whitman, the national bard of the United States, and Eliot, the International poet, trying to reach an intercontinental audience. As each of the two poets followed different and quite opposed views on poetry, Eliot being too reverential to the “European mind,” and the historical past of Europe, while Whitman, ahistorical, encouraging a break with the European tradition and the creation of a new American poetics, the two were viewed antithetical to one another.

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390. Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot’s Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).9

Nonetheless, a host of critics, such as, Hugh Kenner, Eleanor Cook, Harold Bloom, Helen Vendler, Cleo MC Nelly Kearns, A. D. Moody, Grover Smith, Sidney Musgrove, Philip Hobsbaum, and Richard Chase have eventually found similarities between Whitman’s and Eliot’s poems, and have observed and studied the intertextual relationships linking them.

Even though Eliot never admitted his connections with Whitman, there are in his poetry, nevertheless, some indications of anxiety towards this predecessor. In his Introduction to the 1928 edition of Ezra Pound’s *Selected Poems*, Eliot wrote: “I did not read Whitman until much later [than 1908, 1909] in life and had to conquer an aversion to his form, as well as to much of his matter.”<sup>391</sup> One of the strange aspects of Eliot’s attitude toward Whitman is his repeated insistence that Whitman could neither have influenced directly Pound, Eliot’s mentor and editor, and indirectly nor himself. In “Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry” (1917) Eliot wrote: “Whitman is certainly not an influence; there is not a trace of him anywhere; Whitman and Mr. Pound are antipodean to each other.”<sup>392</sup> Pound himself described Whitman derisively in 1909, by observing that “his crudity is an exceeding great stench but it is America.”<sup>393</sup> This is, in fact even stranger enough when we know, on the other hand that, he admitted in the same essay of just such an affinity, by writing that “Mentally I am a Walt Whitman who has learned to wear a collar and a dress shirt.”<sup>394</sup> Later, in *Lustra Poems of 1913-1915*, Pound famously declared in “A Pact” that there is a deal between himself and Whitman:

I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman

I have detested you long enough

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391 . T.S. Eliot quoted in, Harold Bloom, *T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land* (New York Infobase Publishing, 2007 ),

392. Ibid.

393. Ezra Pound, quoted in *Shelley Fisher Fishkin*, *Writing America: Literary Landmarks from Walden Pond to Wounded Knee* ( New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 24.

394. Ibid.

...It was you that broke the new wood

Now is a time for carving.<sup>395</sup>

Consequently, to claim that there is not a trace of Whitman in Pound's poetry, from Eliot's part, constitutes a kind of declaration that casts itself into doubt, especially when some critics have found several traces of Whitman in Pound wrote: "The only poetic voice that [Pound] can command ... is the voice of Whitman."<sup>396</sup> Eliot would return to the matter in his Introduction to Ezra Pound: *Selected Poems* (1928), and retorted: "I am ... certain—it is indeed obvious—that Pound owes nothing to Whitman."<sup>397</sup> He added, "Now Pound's originality is genuine in that his versification is a logical development of the verse of his English predecessors. Whitman's originality is both genuine and spurious. It is genuine in so far as it is a logical development of certain English prose; Whitman was a great prose writer. It is spurious in so far as Whitman wrote in a way that asserted that his great prose was a new form of verse. (And I am ignoring in this connection the large part of clap-trap in Whitman's content.)"<sup>398</sup>

However, although Eliot's feelings about Whitman were neither friendly nor constructive, they shifted dramatically with time. In the end, Eliot thought more of Whitman than he cared to admit, acknowledging in his 1926 essay "Whitman and Tennyson" that Whitman was "a great representative . . . of an America which no longer exists."<sup>399</sup> He even made one striking exception: "When Whitman speaks of the lilacs," Eliot said, "his theories and beliefs drop away like a needless pretext."<sup>400</sup> And we can indeed feel the impact of not only Whitman's lilacs, his cityscape, city imagery, and city life of "Song of Myself" on Eliot's urban poetry, but Whitman's themes of sexuality, also.

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395. Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New Jersey: New Directions Publishing, 1957), 27.

396. Donald Davie quoted in Bloom, *T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land*, 51.

397. T.S. Eliot, "Introduction: 1928." *The Selected Poems of Ezra Pound*. (London: Faber, 1948), 10.

398. *Ibid.*, 11.

399. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia 1994* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 203.

400. *Ibid.*

## a. The Whitmanian Influence on Eliot's Urban Poetry:

### 1. The City as a Poetic Model: Isolation and Despair:

In his article, "Whitman and the Comic Spirit," Richard Chase states that "It is probably true that more than anyone else, more than Blake or Baudelaire, Whitman made the city poetically available to literature."<sup>401</sup> He argues that "It is true that the horror of Eliot's London, as of Baudelaire's Paris, is unknown in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, but it is Whitman's descriptions of the city that made possible Eliot's *Waste Land*."<sup>402</sup>

As a matter of fact, countless images of city life described in the following lines from Whitman's poem, "Song of Myself," have been echoed in modern poetry generally, and in Eliot's poetry, particularly:

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,  
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the  
shod horses on the granite floor,  
The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls,  
The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd mobs,  
The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital,  
The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,  
The excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to  
the centre of the crowd.<sup>403</sup>

Harold Bloom, for his part "locates the authentic precursor of the *Waste Land* in the greatest and most American of all our poets, Walt Whitman."<sup>404</sup> In the Introduction of his book

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401 Richard Chase, "Whitman and the Comic Spirit," *The Americanness of Walt Whitman*, ed. Department of American Studies, Amherst College (Rockville: Wildside Press LLC, 2009), 122.

402. Ibid.

403. Walt Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman: Leaves of Grass* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1902),

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404. Harold Bloom, "Editor's notes "Harold Bloom, T.S. *Eliot's The Waste Land*, vii.

T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Bloom states that Whitman is "a fluid, insidious element", a poet who "insinuates, charms, and influences."<sup>405</sup> Indicating that Whitman might have inspired Eliot, he further hints that *The Waste Land*'s images of despair and desolation recall Whitman's "Song of Myself":

Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,  
Of the moon that descends the steeps of the souging twilight,  
Toss, sparkles of day and dusk -- toss on the black stems that decay in the muck,  
Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.<sup>406</sup>

Eliot appears then to follow his precursors, Poe, and Whitman in their expression of despair and alienation from town. Whitman in "Song of Myself," but in other poems as well multiplies the images of despair. But in "A Hand Mirror" Whitman displays not only despair and alienation, but the vision of total self-rejection, also:

HOLD it up sternly! See this it sends back! (Who is it? Is it you?)  
Outside fair costume--within ashes and filth,  
No more a flashing eye--no more a sonorous voice or springy step;  
Now some slave's eye, voice, hands, step,  
A drunkard's breath, unwholesome eater's face, venerealee's flesh,  
Lungs rotting away piecemeal, stomach sour and cankerous,  
Joints rheumatic, bowels clogged with abomination.<sup>407</sup>

**b. Eliot's Anxiety toward Whitman:**

At this point, it is worth observing that the deliberate erasure of American traces (Americanisms) in Eliot's early poetry, will be used for deliberate effects especially in his late

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405.Ibid., 1.

406 Whitman, *The Complete Writings*, 107.

407. Ibid, 30.

poetry, and in “The Dry Salvages,” particularly, where Eliot associates consciously America, and Walt Whitman in his poem. In “The love-song of Prufrock ,” for instance, written in 1917, the word “ dooryards,” (CPTSE, 6) is used unconsciously: “After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets” (CPTSE, 6). Doorway in “The rank ailanthus of the April dooryard” (CPTSE, 121) from “The Dry Salvages” is a direct allusion to Walt Whitman: When Eliot introduced the same birdsong into the “Waste Land” as Whitman did in his poem “When Lilacs” he was not only echoing Whitman, but alluding to him, and therefore placing himself quite firmly in the American tradition. Whitman in “When Lilacs” writes:

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,  
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,  
And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of  
companions,  
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,  
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,  
To the solemn shadowy cedars and the ghostly pines so still.  
The gray-brown bird I know received us comrades three  
And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.<sup>408</sup>

Eliot, clearly making allusion to Whitman questions in “The Waste Land”: “Who is the third who walks always beside you?” (CPTSE, 67), which resonates with Whitman’s “Lilacs,” in which the “I” most remarkably walks down to where the hermit-thrush sings, accompanied by two companions walking beside him, having in mind the thought of death and the knowledge of death. Additionally, the hermit thrush's song in the pine trees in the “What the Thunder Said”

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408. Whitman, *Complete Writings*, 101.

section of Eliot's *The Waste Land* is but an echo of bird songs in Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"<sup>409</sup> and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."<sup>410</sup>

However, Whitman's catalog of sufferings, self-accusations, and vices, felt in a big city, are just preparing the reader for the darker, and inner intensities of his psychological problems, and revealing one important aspect of his personality, and identity, found in the great Sea- Drift elegies, and "Lilacs" poems that are echoed everywhere in Eliot's verse, but particularly in "The Death of St Narcissus", "The Waste Land" and "The Dry Salvages".

Other symbols such as bells used with Whitman's "tolling tolling bells perpetual clang"<sup>411</sup> are also going on tolling reminiscent bells in *The Waste Land* as they do in "The Dry Salvages," too. Thus, the "crape-veil'd women"<sup>412</sup> singing their dirges through the night for Lincoln in "When Lilacs" are hardly to be distinguished from Eliot's "murmur of maternal lamentation" (CPTSE, 67) of "The Waste Land". Eliot is, also able to sum up all of Whitman's extraordinary poem "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" in the single line: "These fragments I have shored against my ruin" (CPTSE, 69). The fragments are not only the verse paragraphs that constitute the text of *The Waste Land* but crucially are also Whitman's floating sea-drift, where "Tufts of straw, sands, fragments" are literally "shored" against Whitman's ruins:

Me and mine, loose windrows, little corpses,  
Froth, snowy white, and bubbles,  
(See, from my dead lips the ooze exuding at last,  
See, the prismatic colors glistening and rolling,  
Tufts of straw, sands, fragments.<sup>413</sup>

### c. Eliot, Whitman and the Elegiac Mode:

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409. Ibid.,6.

410. Ibid.,94.

411. Ibid., 96.

412. Ibid.

413. Ibid., 16.

David Moody, in his preface to *Tracing T.S. Eliot's Spirit* affirms that Eliot's "early experiences remained the vital taproot of his poetry."<sup>414</sup> Moody informs us that if Eliot had not suppressed from "The Waste Land," for instance, two drafts consisting of two long passages, one dealing with Boston night-life, and the other with the fate of the crew of a Gloucester fishing boat, he would have been connected explicitly with America. But, he preferred to cancel these too American details, and to set the poem with its wide range of cultural references in England and Europe, instead to give it an international turn. However, the reference to the hermit thrush's singing in the pine trees is an indication of Eliot's anxiety toward Whitman.

For Moody, the most specific contribution to American poetry comes from the importance of the "water-dripping song" hermit-thrush's singing in the pine trees in *The Waste Land* for it is inspired by Whitman's American bird songs "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs" . In fact, if on the surface, "The Waste Land" is largely evocative of the European culture, beneath that surface, there is another inner layer more representative of the American life, and which finds expression in subtle representations, like the American hermit-thrush: "But sound of water over a rock/ Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees/ Drip drop drip drop drop drop / But there is no water" (CPTSE, 67). But it is in "Ash Wednesday" and "Marina" that Eliot detaches himself completely from the Old World to devote himself to the new life, rooted in his New World experience, and accounted of in these poems.

#### **d. Eliot's Americanness: Childhood Memories as Poetic Material:**

"Ash –Wednesday" and "Marina" are exemplar poems, where Eliot turns to his childhood remembrances and has recourse to the American experience to write poetry. These two poems, in fact, constitute a pivoting point at which Eliot detaches his poetry from "the Mind of Europe"

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414. Anthony David Moody, "Preface," *Tracing T. S. Eliot's Spirit: Essays on his Poetry and Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, xvii.

and the European tradition, and returns to his old or first life, molded and shaped by his New World child experiences. What is instructive is that they account for Eliot's development as a poet from his early and middle poetry to this later poetry. The following lines from part VI of "Ash Wednesday" recall his memories as a boy and therefore point out his Americanness:

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices  
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices  
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel  
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell  
Quickens to recover  
The cry of quail and the whirling plover  
And the blind eye creates  
The empty forms between the ivory gates  
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth. (CPTSE, 94)

These lines, as Eliot once wrote: "A writer's art must be based on the accumulated sensations of the first twenty-one years"<sup>415</sup> seem to come directly from Eliot's childhood memories, and express his accumulated sensations. Although the range of his American material is limited to his boyhood, and consists of a few childhood memories, the latter made-up the framework of his entire poetry. Eliot speaks of those memories and experiences as a child, when he writes: "There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time: the simple experience (not so simple, for an exceptional child, as it looks) might lie dormant in his mind for twenty years, and re-appear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure. There is so much memory in imagination."<sup>416</sup>

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415.T.S. Eliot, quoted in Anthony David Moody, "Preface," *Tracing T. S. Eliot's Spirit*, 11.  
416. Ibid.

This same memory is found surfacing in “The Dry Salvages” with the description of the sea and the title comes from the name of a marine rock formation off the coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts, where he spent time at as a child: “The pools where it offers to our curiosity / The more delicate algae and the sea anemone” (CPTSE, 197) .

In this way, Eliot expressed and interpreted “the deepest, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate.”<sup>417</sup> By relying particularly on images laid down in his childhood, he could bring those mysterious feelings to consciousness. Eliot could say quite justly therefore, that “in its sources, its emotional springs, his poetry “comes from America.”<sup>418</sup>

Possibly the most purely American of Eliot’s poems is “Marina”. In fact, Marina” ‘s images are closely associated with “Ash Wednesday” because it originated in the drafting of “Ash Wednesday”. In a letter dated 24 July 1930 Eliot wrote to Mc Knight Kauffer, that “ the scenery in Which Marina is dressed up is Casco Bay, Maine.”<sup>419</sup> “Marina” meaningfully and suitably uses its New-England coastal imagery to announce a new world and a new life:

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands

What water lapping the bow

And scent of pine and the wood thrush singing through the frog. (CPTSE, 105)

It ends wishing to resign from the known life for the new life announced by the wood thrush calling his “timbers upon granite islands ” (CPTSE, 106) , though there have been also “whispers and small laughter between leaves” (CPTSE, 105). The meaning of these American images becomes explicit in “The Dry Salvages.”

This quartet begins with Eliot’s big river; the only time he used the Mississippi in his poetry in spite of his saying that it had had such a powerful effect upon him. Indeed, of major

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417. Ibid.,132.

418. Ibid.,11.

419. Ibid., 17.

significance in his remembrance of his youth was The Mississippi River. In 1930, Eliot wrote: “The river... made a deep impression on me, and it was a great treat to be taken down to the Eads Bridge in flood time...I find that as one gets in middle life the strength of early associations and the intensity of early impressions become more evident, and many little things, long forgotten, recur.”<sup>420</sup> He also wrote: “I feel that there is something in having passed one’s childhood beside the big river, which is incommunicable to those who have not. Of course my people were Northerners and New Englanders, and of course, I have spent many years out of America altogether but the Missouri and the Mississippi have made a deeper impression on me than any other part of the world.”<sup>421</sup>

Eliot referred once to the Mississippi river as “The river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows and chicken coops” (CPTSE, 195). The image of the drowned bodies is another example that illustrates how his personal experience and childhood remembrances in America permeate his work. In fact, “Eliot heard about, or may even have witnessed”<sup>422</sup> of the Missouri river that flooded several times during his childhood causing human losses. Historically, many slaves were sold down the river to be taken to the sugar-cane plantations on the lower Mississippi where hard-working conditions awaited them. Even their drowning was an ordinary event at that time.

When he refers to it again in “the Four Quartets,” the odd thing is that instead of locating it in its actual geographical position, Eliot displaces it and it comes out on the coast of

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420. T.S. Eliot, quoted in Julia Maniates Reibetanz, *A Reading of Eliot's Four Quartets* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 102.

421. T.S. Eliot quoted in Anthony David Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

422. Sigg, “Eliot as a Product of America,” 24.

Massachusetts. For Eliot, the local is dissolved in the geography of his imagination and mind to reveal a universal meaning:

Here or there does not matter

We must be still and moving

Of the petrel and the porpoise. (CPTSE, 190)

The sea is also the major image in “The Dry Salvages.” Introduced in the closing lines of “East Cocker,” it effectively dismisses the Old World and its sense of history. This theme is taken up in “The Dry Salvages” after the opening river passage, and it is sustained and developed through to part IV: “(Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory)” (CPTSE, 179).

The two quartets in effect form one continuous meditation, with the sea of the New World carrying us beyond the earth of the Old World, toward the “life of significant soil.” Both the river and the sea are made to mean death, and then that meaning is altered, so that death becomes the annunciation of another order of life. In this Eliot is shaping his American experience by his Catholic sensibility.

In “The Dry Salvages,” there is the translation of the secular sea of Massachusetts into that of the “Lady , whose shrine stands on the promontory . . . Figlia del tuo figlio”:

IV

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,

Pray for all those who are in ships, those

Whose business has to do with fish, and

Those concerned with every lawful traffic

And those who conduct them.

Repeat a prayer also on behalf of

Women who have seen their sons or husbands

Setting forth, and not returning:

Figlia del tuo figlio,

Queen of Heaven. (CPTSE, 197)

(IV) is effected by the attempt to conceive the unconceivable in these lines from the third section: “At the moment which is not of action or inaction / Which shall fructify in the lives of others” (CPTSE, 197). This passage is not only an annunciation of what the Incarnation might mean in the lives of individuals, but also an attempt to have the mind actually conceiving the meaning. “The Dry Salvages” might be called New England quartet, not only because it returns to his American sources, but because it discovers a new meaning in them, a meaning which goes back to the religious origins of New England: “In my end is my beginning” the poet wrote in East Cocker. And “In my beginning is my end” wrote Eliot echoing and modifying Whitman who wrote in the 1855 edition of “Leaves of Grass”: “I do not talk of the beginning or the end.”<sup>423</sup>

It goes back with a difference, because it seeks a world that is new in every moment. When Eliot goes on to speak of history in “Little Gidding,” it is no more the history of America than the Old World of East Cocker that he has in mind. It is in the history of the spirit which would find and create a new world, and which is defined in the tongues of fire and in the images of fire. It is intimated also in the hidden laughter of children in the foliage, children associated with birds and taking the place of the hermit thrush.

The children’s voices are heard in “Burnt Norton” and again in the closing lines of “Little Gidding”: “At the source of the longest river / The voice of the hidden waterfalls/ And the children in the apple-tree” (CPTSE, 208) telling of a “condition of complete simplicity/ That complex and mysterious” (CPTSE, 208). Of course, America alone did not provide him with all the answers to the decline of Western civilization, and the depravity of the Old World, but it enlarged his experience, next to Catholicism, and Classicism,

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423. Whitman, *Complete Writings*, 35.

f. **Eliot: Poet of the American Puritan Temperament and the American Puritan tradition of “The Waste Land”:**

Definitely, there is at least one quality in Eliot’s work which should be recognized as American. It is his habit of skepticism, which surely has its roots in the American Puritan tradition, as Edmund Wilson was to observe. Wilson was probably one of the first among the critics who insisted on the fact that Eliot was indelibly American. In March 1926, he wrote in *The New Republic*: “Mr Eliot has lived abroad so long that we rarely think of him as an American And he is never written about from the point of view of his relation to other American authors. Yet one suspects that his real significance is less that of a Prophet of European disintegration than a poet of the American Puritan Temperament.”<sup>424</sup>

He further associates him with other American writers and equates his “Waste Land” concern and aesthetic way of rendering it similar to his American compatriots: “Compare him with Hawthorne, Henry James, E. A. Robinson and Edith Wharton: all these writers have their Waste Land, which is the aesthetic and emotional waste land of the Puritan character and their chief force lies in the intensity with which they communicate emotions of deprivation and Chagrin.”<sup>425</sup>

Without a doubt, we feel that there is a thread linking Eliot not only to his American contemporaries only as Wilson remarks, but to his predecessors also, those Puritan writers whose jeremiads or “waste lands” could be heard from William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation* to all the others, and Whitman particularly. By making allusion to The Lamentations of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, Bradford introduced the Puritan Jeremiad, a primary type of Puritan writing and an interpretative account of hardships and troubles along with an anguished

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424. Edmund Wilson quoted in Boris Ford, *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: American literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 369.

425. Ibid.

call for return to the lost purity of earlier times, and that can also be heard in most contemporary writers, and in Eliot, in particular.

However, for Pound who stimulated the writing of a modern international poetry, and promoted and edited Eliot's work, the American Puritan temperament represented rather a handicap. In a letter to William Carlos Williams, he diagnoses it as a disease. What is significant in this letter is the analysis on Eliot, Williams and himself, Pound makes. It offers, certainly, one of the most illuminating categorizations of Paleo- modernism, and international literature on the one hand. On the other hand, it clarifies Eliot's predicament at seeking to be an international poet, and betrays comments on Eliot's Americanness, or impossible erasure of his American background whatever his will to eradicate any American influence on his work. Addressing Williams, Pound wrote: "There is a blood poison in America; you can idealize the place ( easier now that Europe is so damd shaky) all you like, but you haven't a drop of the cursed blood in you, and you don't need to fight the disease day and night; you never have had to. Eliot has it perhaps worse than I have--- poor devil. " <sup>426</sup>

Pound suggests that Americans like himself and Eliot, face the problem of being an American as a "virus, the bacillus of the land in my blood."<sup>427</sup> Thus, being descended from an Anglo-Saxon and Puritan background prejudice them to a dilemma: to have to struggle incessantly with the malediction of the American "environment." The disease of Americanism is so incapacitating that it contaminates the poet, even when he has left America and moved to Europe.

Eliot himself agreed that the impact of one's cultural heritage is of permanent influence on the development of an individual and that it was primarily due to his mother and his grandfather that he received the most important part of his New- England cultural education,

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426. Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1971),

427. *Ibid.*, 124.

when he remarked: “The primary channel of transmission of culture is the family: no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree of culture which he acquired from his early environment.”<sup>428</sup>

In *T. S. Eliot: A Critical Study*, Amar Nath Dwivedi further confirms that Edmund Wilson is of the opinion that the sterility of “the Waste Land” is “the sterility of the Puritan Temperament.”<sup>429</sup> Finally, Wilson concludes that “The terrible dreariness of the great modern cities is the atmosphere in which the Waste Land is cast. And yet, the Waste Land has another aspect : it is a “place not merely of desolation, but of anarchy, and doubt.”<sup>430</sup>

The last word, “doubt” resonates with “the Puritan Temperament” which ingrained skepticism, and doubt, which undeniably, Eliot observed in his contemporaries, Henry Adams, George Santayana, and Irving Babbit, and applied it throughout all his poetry.

However, skepticism in Eliot’s poetry, therefore, does not involve showing the poet’s affiliation to a particular school of skeptic philosophy, but only the construction of a skeptic tone that becomes penetrating in his poetry, where no definitive meaning can be arrived at, but there is a constant suggestion of several possibilities. But how one could account of this typical Eliotan skepticism?

#### **g. Eliotian Skepticism in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”:**

This constant and persistent Eliotian skeptical questioning is a recurrent motif in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and many other poems, such as “Portrait of a Lady,” and testifies further of Eliot’s American temperament, inherited from his Puritan upbringing. However, this Eliotian skepticism is not only a communal heritage from the Puritans as much as it is a personal tendency of seeing things in life, and reflecting them into poetry. Thus, it is

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428. T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 158.

429. Amar Nath Dwivedi, *T. S. Eliot: A Critical Study* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishing and Distributing), 64.  
430. *Ibid.*,19.

only by relating the poet's private life, and lived experiences to his work that we can discern his American temperament.

Skepticism as a state of being in uncertainty or doubt is what many of Eliot's poems achieve by constantly emphasizing the instability and intermittence of the self. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is a poem that particularly displays such a theme. From the opening lines of the poem, the poet is building up and maintaining an atmosphere of indeterminacy. Nothing is fixed, determined, and unquestionable and the persona's or Prufrock's 'overwhelming question' remains an unasked question: "Oh, do not ask, / 'What is it?' Let us go and make our visit." What Prufrock says or tries to express in his highly wordy manner gets reduced to: It is impossible to say just what I mean!

The most important thing in this poem is not what the persona says, but the persona's inability to say anything clearly. Ironically, the persona's elaborate monologue is meant to convey nothing in affirmative or positive terms. And it is precisely this negative characteristic of Eliot's persona, which suffuses the poem with doubt and skepticism that shows his American temperament.

Consequently, the inability to act is a common issue for Prufrock who has a tendency to doubt his action: "And should I then presume?/ And how should I begin?" (CPTSE, 5). The speaker of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is trapped in his own mind, so full of hesitation and doubt that he is unable to act, and all his efforts exist only in his imagination:

There will be time ...

And time yet for a hundred indecisions

And for a hundred visions and revisions

Before the taking of a toast and tea

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"

Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?  
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions  
which a minute will reverse . (CPTSE, 4)

This sort of indecision as the speaker wonders whether he should eat a piece of fruit, make a radical change, and start anew, or if he has even the strength to keep living betrays a state of physical and mental stasis. Prufrock can be understood as someone who is unable to express himself, to decide, to take action, in a way inhibited, shy, introverted and self-conscious.

Prufrock is especially uncomfortable in front of women as with a certain sarcastic note, he cannot decide whether he “dare to eat a peach” (CPTSE, 7) in front of the sophisticated women. We come to think that his anxieties are of a sexual order, and are represented in a number of feminized descriptions, as “his arms and legs are thin” (CPTSE, 4).

Furthermore, Prufrock is unable to articulate his important question .The persona, Prufrock is, for instance, described as a man who is uncertain how to perform the masculine role in social interactions between men and women, and even whether he wishes or dares to do so. Hence, he is unable to utter the right word or take any decisive step in his life.As Prufrock is struggling for masculinity, he is experiencing a crisis because gender in this poem is not natural, instinctive, innate, and unreflective.

On the contrary to any ordinary man, Prufrock, probably as an ageing lover, or for other unstated reasons, struggles to ask a woman to marry him and instead procrastinates in order to gain time or to make time pass. The repetition of the line “There will be time” (CPTSE, 4). helps him to take some distance from the time of imagining an action to its realization. Yet his lack of self-confidence indicates that this time might never come.

Instead we witness the crisis of masculinity: “I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker” (CPTSE, 6). The verb flicker signals Prufrock’s vanishing sexual desire and, at the same time, his ageing. Having classified himself as “no great matter” (CPTSE, 6), Prufrock associates women with boredom and desire mixed with revulsion.

In fact, Eliot was charged of misogyny because of his adverse portrayal of women. And many critics explained these misogynist feelings and anti-feminist attitude psycho-analytically by advancing the thesis that Eliot himself might have suffered from sexual deviations.

According to Miller, “the poem portrays a man who cannot feel desire for women; the question of same-sex desire is not confronted in the poem except by reference, obliquely; some might well conclude that it is the main theme, even though not overtly sounded, in the poem.”

<sup>431</sup> Yet we wonder if Prufrock has any homosexual desire, as there is no explicit moment in the poem where it is stated. What can be clearly seen is that his sexual identity is hidden, not even understood by Prufrock himself. This all results in a fear of rejection, leading to boredom: “I have known them all already, known them all / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons” (CPTSE, 4). Prufrock becomes bored by self-existence, as he “measured out [his] life with coffee spoons” (CPTSE, 4). His existential misery is paralleled with his indecisiveness as he is not sure whether “would it have been worth it, after all” (CPTSE, 6).

Here lies a major difference between Eliot’s and Whitman’s treatment of gender and sexuality. Whereas Whitman is fully aware of his homosexual identity and even celebrates it in his “Calamus Poems,” Eliot approaches the issue in a subtle way and indirection.

We see, for instance that Prufrock cannot realize himself as a lover. Unable to fully understand his sexuality, Prufrock questions his ability to attract women: “They will say: How his hair is growing thin!” (CPTSE, 4). In particular, Prufrock seems to be obsessed with social

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431. James Miller, *The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005):156

judgment, perhaps because of his split gender identity, While, Whitman celebrates same-sex love and proclaims: “ I am ashamed, but I am what I am.”<sup>432</sup>

He does not fear social critique while Prufrock is more afraid of criticism that leaves him “sprawling on a pin” (CPTSE, 5). Prufrock also exhibits an unusual fear of female eyes that are normally associated with beauty: “I have known the eyes already, known them all / The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase” (CPTSE, 5). Prufrock distances himself from feminine sexuality, and at the end of the poem refers to magical creatures mermaids: “I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. / I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each (CPTSE, 7). .

Prufrock experiences a complex psychological crisis, and it is mainly caused by his inability to communicate with women. Therefore, women seem responsible for Prufrock’s sexual hesitation. He is disillusioned about the world he lives in, mainly because he believes no one understands him, and he cannot confess openly, looking into his lover’s eyes.

Prufrock suffers from social isolation, indecisiveness and problematic relationships with women, which were perhaps caused by his inability to interpret his sexual identity. He is incapacitated by overanalyzing his deepest anxieties.

Following Gordon’s approach to the reading of Eliot’s, all of Eliot’s poetry is molded by his lived experience. And the attitudes of someone who doubts, and someone who hesitates to take decisions or actions that permeate Eliot’s poetry can all be considered reflections of his personal experiences. As such, it becomes impossible to study the poetry without any reference to his life.

#### **h. Eliot, Whitman and the Elegiac Mode:**

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432. Whitman, *Complete Writings*, 299.

We already know that Eliot has employed the conventional image of lilacs connoting sensuality or romance in other poems, earlier in “Portrait of a Lady” (published in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, 1917) and later, in “Ash Wednesday,” but in “The Wasteland,” the image of lilacs he presents is strikingly new and highly allusive to Whitman. Therefore, the presence of the “lilacs” is neither accidental nor innocent. He is consciously making allusion to the Walt Whitman poem, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.” Here is Whitman’s description of lilacs:

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,  
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,  
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.  
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,  
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,  
And thought of him I love.<sup>433</sup>

Lilacs, traditionally a symbol of the renewal, and rebirth of the earth in spring, are now with Whitman’s semiotic innovation, associated with mourning, anguish and death and when we recall the opening lines of “The Waste Land,” we can indeed hear the impact Whitman’s lilacs had on Eliot in the way lilacs bred out of the dead land :

April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain. (CPTSE, 53)

For Eliot, too “Lilacs” connote with death, cruelty, memory, and unattainable desire. Being in *The Waste Land*, the presence of “lilacs” demonstrates that the direct echoes of Whitman are undeniable, and proves that Eliot is overdetermined by Whitman.

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433. *Complete Writings*, 299.

Both these poems, with their elegiac tones, never name the person being mourned. Whitman's poem has been read as a passionate elegy on the death of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, assassinated in the spring of 1865 when the lilacs were blooming. Though, most readers assumed Whitman was writing about Lincoln, Whitman's great elegy never names the mourned person and we never hear the name of "him I loved". This is so, another reading of the poem is provided notably by biographical criticism. Therefore, another important element to underline concerns Whitman's personal and sexual life. In a 1926 review of Emory Holloway's biography of Whitman, the question about Whitman's ambivalent sexuality was raised following Holloway's discovery that a "Children of Adam" poem addressed to a woman had been in manuscript originally addressed to a man. Whitman, who self-censored his poems by changing love for men into love for women, and wrote in journals of his love for streetcar conductor Peter Doyle in numbered code so as not to betray the excess of his passion, was in fact, a poet heralding "manly love". So, the poem on Lincoln, who himself had a queer identity, is highly suggestive and provides a homoerotic interpretation.

Yet, all the likenesses between the two poets' poetry summed up in their identical use of symbolism related to lilacs, dooryards, bird song, and bells, and their similar handling of sexuality themes is only a first-level working of the influence process. Deeper is Eliot's troubled introjection of his American predecessor and inescapable elegiac poet, Whitman.

Therefore, when we come to consider Eliot and his relation to Walt Whitman, there are two issues which arise and that I want to discuss in this section: first, the question of influence, and, second the question of affinity. For, in addition to the stylistic and thematic influence representative of the American tradition, that Whitman exerted on Eliot, with their common American images of mocking bird, lilac, and the voice of the hermit-thrush, and the elegiac tone we see in their poems, there is a second order affinity which refers enigmatically to the psychology of the two poets. A deeper insight on the issue of the conscious and unconscious

adoption of Whitman's ideas or attitudes by Eliot will be the subject of the next section. Though many critics have up to now revealed both poets' concern with sex and sexuality, and detected the connection between the use of lilacs and the homoerotic undertones in both poets, few of them have leaned on how both poets deal with the private/ public cultural spheres, and how they relate esoteric, obscure, impenetrable, and personal experiences to exoteric, general, and public experiences. In the following section, I am going to demonstrate how these two poets negotiate the cultural private/ public self, express personal feelings, and address issues of gender identity. Above all, I want to affirm that Eliot's alienation is psychological rather than social or political, while Whitman's is primarily social and political.

### **B. Eliot, Whitman and Sexuality:**

Richard Chase remarks that "there can be no doubt that "Song of Myself" made sex a possible subject for American literature, and in this respect, Whitman wrought a great revolution."<sup>434</sup> "Song of Myself," indeed, was revolutionary for it was considered scandalous in some circles with its frank discussion of sexuality, body parts, and bodily fluids. For Nineteenth-Century and early Twentieth-Century culture's oppressive views on taboos, such as, homosexuality, writers had to invent a way to speak of the unspeakable. Some showed reserve and control or others, such as Eliot took masks, as his theory of "Impersonality". The expression of the self in an impersonal way, allows Eliot to use many voices so that his real voice can be unrecognizable among the many. This polyvocality, especially of *The Waste Land*, mainly creates many individual voices that are distinct from the narrative voice and from the 'authorial voice' of the poet. This serves the purpose of blurring the lines between what Eliot tries to communicate in his personal voice and what the personas attempt to convey. In this way, the author's opinion is drowned in the midst of the multitude of voices. As readers, we have to read between the lines of literature for oblique queer references.

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434. Chase, "Whitman and the Comic Spirit," *The Americanness of Walt Whitman*, 112

### **a.Eliot-Gender Issues And Sexuality In The Waste Land:**

In a modernist text such as “The Waste Land,” sexuality seems to lose romance, sentimentality, and meaning. In Eliot’s case such a loss seems connected with his personal experience. By featuring various narrative voices which cannot always be identified unmistakably, especially in terms of the speaker’s gender, the poem presents a deliberate blurring of traditional, patriarchal, hierarchical and heterosexual gender distinctions. The poem's intricate dealing with gender, desire, and sexuality, is its widespread ambiguity, more specifically the ambiguity of gender with its unclear distinctions-of male-and female characters and voices. The male/female love relationships are examined here to show how gender and sexuality are represented by Eliot. The focus is therefore on Marie, the hyacinth girl, the Fisher King and Phlebas / Eugenides, the couple and Lil and Philomel, as well as Tiresias and the typist.

The first person encountered in ‘The Burial of the Dead’ is Marie. She is presented as a female archetype and contrasts with the also archetypal female prostitute we meet later in the poem. Despite the description of the vivid image implying sexuality, Marie spends “much of the night” (CPTSE, 53) reading. Strikingly, there is no pronoun rendering the speaker male or female. Though this singularity is ubiquitous throughout the poem, one has to assume the speaker is male. So, while the clearly gendered characters are female, Marie, the typist, (except Tiresias), on the contrary, the speaker is presumed to be male. The reader has to deduce the speaker is male because he acts in ways that are perceived male.

After the passage from line 19 to 34 showing fragmented images of desolation, another passage outlined by quotations from Richard Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde*, and dealing with adultery and loss, makes the hyacinth girl appear. At first glance, the lines in the first section of the poem, “The Burial of the Dead” seem to be pretty unambiguous: “You gave me Hyacinths first a year ago, / They called me the hyacinth girl” (CPTSE, 54). But if we consider the mythological implications of the boy Hyacinthus, the hyacinth girl’s gender becomes

ambiguous. The image of the hyacinth, phallic in shape, is a fertility symbol. It stems from the Greek myth of Hyacinthus: after Apollo, who was in love with the boy Hyacinthus, and when he accidentally killed him the flower grows from his blood. It has been suggested that due to the fact that the flower originally stems from a male body, the hyacinth girl is in fact male, or at least androgynous, thus proposing a homoerotic reading of the passage.

The “supposed” girl recalls an assumed sexual encounter in a garden: “You gave me hyacinths first a year ago.” The speaker, again lacking a male pronoun, recalls the garden incident which left him speechless and blind. The passage is highly sensual and sexually suggestive: Her arms full of flowers of fertility and her hair wet with life-giving rain, the sexually willing girl leaves the speaker emotionally and sexually paralyzed. The sense of failure to connect because there is an unhappy ending to their meeting is further underlined by the closing Wagner quotation “Oed’ und leer das Meer” (CPTSE, 53). The attribution of gender roles is facilitated by the implied conventional roles because the personal pronouns do not say a lot about their gender identity. The male speaker initiates the act by giving flowers, whereas the female is rendered subordinate by the reference “girl”:

Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  
Od’ und leer das Meer. (CPTSE, 54)

The character of Phlebas / Eugenides is associated with Shakespeare’s Ferdinand in *The Tempest*, whose father, King Alonso, drowned. The much debated “Those are the pearls that were his eyes (CPTSE, 57). is also taken from *The Tempest* where it is part of Ariel’s song. In

The Waste Land it is associated with Phlebas and can be read in homoerotic terms. The speaker's implied (sexual) idealisation of Phlebas possibly echoes Eliot's dead friend Verdenal.

In "Death by Water," the speaker mourns Phlebas. The tone is melancholic, morbid, elegiac and strikingly tender. When concerned with female victims, the mood of the poem is rather aggressive and guilty; now that the victim is male it is soft, which again suggests a homoerotic interpretation. Recent critics found many elements of Eliot's poetry conspicuously misogynist and homophobic. In "The Waste Land" one rather finds notions of homoerotic desire, most distinctly in the image of "the pearls that were his eyes." The homoerotic undertone led already during Eliot's lifetime to homosexual presumptions and received public attention because of the fact that Eliot was panicking and legally suppressed Peter's article. Later, critics went as far as suggesting Eliot led some kind of double life.

Perhaps one of the most explicit examples in The Waste Land of different kinds of ambiguity is a bisexual seer, Tiresias - an "old man with wrinkled dugs" (CPTSE, 61). Eliot himself in his "Notes on 'The Waste Land'" he says that Tiresias is not a "spectator and not indeed a 'character' ... yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest" has been triggered off by (CPTSE, 72). Eliot goes on to explain that the characters of the poem melt into each other, that all the men are actually one man, "and so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias" (CPTSE, 72). The poem's central character, Tiresias, is a hermaphrodite—and his powers of prophesy and transformation are, in some sense, due to his male and female genitalia. With Tiresias, Eliot creates a character which represents confused or ambiguous sexuality, represented by the two genders coming together in one body. This specific deviant and non-standard sexual representation is neither trivial nor futile from Eliot's part, but discloses obliquely the repressed desire and homosexual feelings that the text's homoerotic subtext conveys.

In "The Waste Land," some of the characters, as the ones we have just seen are sexually frustrated because of their ambiguous sexuality and their repressed desires; others are dysfunctional, unable to cope with either reproductive or nonproductive sexuality.

The Waste Land also portrays rape, prostitution, and abortion. In the third section, "The Fire Sermon," for instance, the failure of love involves the sexual encounter between the young man carbuncular and the typist. The scene is close to a scene of rape:

The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,  
Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
Which are still unrequited, if undesired.  
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
His vanity requires no response,  
And makes a welcome of indifference. (CPTSE, 62)

The woman does not show any reciprocity nor resistance to the man's "assault":

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,  
Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:  
'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'  
When lovely woman stoops to folly and Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone. (CPTSE, 62)

This deviant and non-standard representation of sexuality points at a lack of emotion and love towards women. Eliot's representation of male / female relationship lacking romance and sentimentality is symptomatic of misogyny and indifference towards women. Here lies a big difference between Whitman's overt and extreme celebration of sexuality and Eliot's view of

its degradation from the spiritual, emotional, and physical significance. How different is this mechanical and almost automatic act completely devoid of feeling from Whitman's declaration that "there is something in staying close to men and women, and looking on them, and in the contact / and odor of them that pleases the soul well"<sup>435</sup> from "I Sing the Body Electric"! When Eliot is lamenting the loss of connection and human relationships and blames that loss on modernization, Whitman's purpose of life is, on the other hand, to experience and connect with fellow human beings.

Likewise, in another poem "The Love Song of St Sebastian," Sebastian's outburst of emotions belie his deep-seated misogyny. James Miller, who psychoanalyses the speaker, assumes that "he is, like Pruffock, a man who cannot love women in any normal sense; and beyond Pruffock, he is, like Sweeney . . . a man who despises women for their sexuality and wants to do them in."<sup>436</sup> Though he seems in love with the woman, within Sebastian, there lurks a vicious hatred for the feminine. As in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Pruffock," there is no indication of love in this poem. Its title is also ironic, because there is no romanticism but only sadomasochism and murder. In conclusion, male/female relationships in Eliot's poems never procure any pleasure. Heterosexuality is associated with masochism, sadistic sexual violence, and pain. At the heart of the poems is a striking battle between male and female. Violence in the poems is an exteriorization of a profound hatred for the body, the kind of nausea that Poe feels in "For Annie." Their repressed forbidden wishes result in violence and murder.

In the same way, Eliot in the poem, "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" which depicts a male speaker's sadomasochistic relation with a lady, attests to misogyny and the deviant sexuality that marks Eliot's early poems. His passion is a mere pretense or even an alibi for sexual violence. In fact, as a sadomasochistic fantasy of flagellation and murder "The Love

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435. Whitman, *Complete Writings*, 117.

436. Miller, *Making of an American Poet*, 6.

"Song of St. Sebastian" is layered with misogyny, and Sebastian is burdened by a profound feeling of horror and insecurity towards the lady:

I would come in a shirt of hair  
I would come with a lamp in the night  
And sit at the foot of your stair;  
I would flog myself until I bled,  
And after hour on hour of prayer  
And torture and delight  
Until my blood should ring the lamp  
And glisten in the light.<sup>437</sup>

Sex in this and almost all of Eliot's poems is never associated with pleasure or love: it is anxious, sordid, urgent, unwanted, and unfulfilled. The speaker experiences enormous pleasure in killing the woman. He loves this woman only when he punishes her and makes her suffer. The last lines of the poem resume his masochism:

You would love me because I should have strangled you  
And because of my infamy;  
And I should love you the more because I mangled you  
And because you were no longer beautiful  
To anyone but me. (CPTSE, 62)<sup>438</sup>

Writing 50 years after Whitman, Eliot showed more reserve and control. Eliot demonstrated subtly that he could express the most completely personal emotions and experiences without critics, and the wide public connecting them to his private feelings, opinions, or life. What he was particularly concerned to avoid in his poetry was the details of

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437. T.S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot Volume I: Collected and Uncollected Poems* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2015 ), 265.

438. *Ibid.*, 266.

biography to lead the reader away from him and from experiencing the emotions he elicits. By means of careful and judicious omission of gendered references, and multiple voices he was able to express his “self” and his psychological crisis.

**b. Whitman’s expression of the self and Sexuality:**

Unlike Eliot, Whitman was completely unashamed about human eroticism and sexuality. He thought sex was natural, and not something to laugh or blush about. “Song of Myself” is loaded with sexual images, particularly of the homoerotic variety. Whitman sends his expression of love outward. “I am the mate and companion of people,”<sup>439</sup> he states his poetics embodies individuality, expansiveness, and freedom, and he is celebrating and chanting himself. The poem opens with the line:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself”. Whitman adds:”

I am satisfied---I see, dance, laugh, sing;

As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the  
night.”<sup>440</sup>

These romantic characteristics of cheerfulness, exuberance, and optimism contrast sharply with Eliot’s obscurity, ellipsism, and pessimism.

Nowadays, scholars make a big deal about all this homoeroticism, often trying to prove that Whitman was gay. A concrete example to provide some evidence of the important role such sexuality played in his poetry will be Section 11 from “Song of Myself,” which is one of the most famous and important in the poem It’s also one of the most erotic. Although section 11 describes a 28-year-old woman who watches 28 men bathing naked in the river, many

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439. Whitman, *Complete Writings*, 41.

440. *Ibid.*, 99.

scholars believe that Whitman expressed his own feelings and desires through the gaze of the hidden woman. As she watches them from behind her window blinds, she imagines that she is bathing with them in the river, as the “twenty-ninth bather.”<sup>441</sup> As “An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies”<sup>442</sup> and “It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs” her gaze is erotically charged :

Which of the young men does she like the best?  
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.  
Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,  
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.  
Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,  
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.<sup>443</sup>

This section is so intensely homoerotic that Chase writes: “It is sex, too, although of an inverted kind that allows Whitman to write the following unsurpassable lines in which love is at once so sublimely generalized and perfectly particularized”<sup>444</sup> :

And ( I know) that a kelson of the creation is love,  
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,  
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,  
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.<sup>445</sup>

In the 1860 edition, of *Leaves of Grass*, he collected those poems that are concerned with sexuality into the cluster “Enfans d'Adam” (“Children of Adam”) and those that celebrate manly love into “Calamus.” In particular the Calamus poems, written after a failed and very likely homosexual relationship, contain passages that were interpreted to represent same-sex love,

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441. Ibid., 45.

442. Ibid.

443. Ibid.

444. Chase, “Whitman and the Comic Spirit,” *The Americanness of Walt Whitman*, 112

445. Whitman, *Complete Writings*, 38.

homoeroticism, and what Whitman called “adhesive love.” The title of the poems alone conveys homosexual connotations, since the calamus plant is associated with Kalamos.

Whitman proposes a model of comradeship by which a specific type of affection same-sex as opposed to opposite-sex love may transcend conditions of isolation and separation:

Mind you the timid models of the rest, the  
majority ?  
Long I minded them, but hence I will not--for  
I have adopted models for myself, and now  
offer them to The Lands.<sup>446</sup>

The “adopted models” that the poet now offers to the “Lands” are symbolized by the calamus root. This “Calamus” model “focuses on the theme of adhesiveness, which Whitman describes as ‘Intense and loving comradeship, the personal attachment of man to man.’”<sup>447</sup> The poet asks in poem no. 4, “who but I should understand lovers and all their sorrow and joy?”<sup>448</sup> We are thereby informed that only those comrades who discern the secret will possess that “growth” that is conceived in the “margins.” The “Calamus” confession then, is primarily for those whose love embraces desires that exist in the margins and are similar to those of the “Calamus” speaker. This passion allows him to move away from his general audience toward the intimate reader / lover who, because of similar same-sex affinities, will understand his message. As Whitman sends his expression of love outward, he offers his song with the hope that others will respond and that a dialogue will be established between him and the reader:

Among the men and women, the multitude,  
I perceive one picking me out by secret and divine signs,

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446. *Ibid.*, 38.

447. Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 179.

448. *Ibid.* 142.

. . .Some are baffled— But that one is not— that one knows me.<sup>449</sup>

Despite the emotional hardships and the cold hostility of society towards man-to-man affection, the poet affirms that this affection cannot easily be destroyed, not even in death:

Perennial roots, tall leaves— O the winter shall not freeze you, delicate leaves,  
Every year shall you bloom again—  
Out from where you retired, you shall emerge again.<sup>450</sup>

The poet's message will last until the time arrives when its songs can be realized. The "secret" of comrades will one day be exposed and "bloom" with "immortal reverberations through the States."<sup>451</sup> Even if for the present this secret remains in the margins where it has been growing, and withdrawn from society, the day will certainly come where man-to-man affection can flourish in a sexually liberating union of love and death:

Yet you are beautiful to me you faint-tinged roots— you make me think of Death,  
Death is beautiful from you— (what indeed is finally beautiful except death and love?)  
O I think it is not for life I am chanting here my chant of lovers— I think it must be for Death.<sup>452</sup>

In poem no. 5 the speaker foresees a day in which manly lovers will be able to greet one another openly with kisses to the lips and when the love of comrades will spread across the nation solving "every one of the problems of freedom."<sup>453</sup> He describes how a new model "shall circulate through The States"<sup>454</sup> making it "customary in all directions, in the houses and streets, to see manly affection"<sup>455</sup> In this light, the poet's message of comradeship can be seen to extend

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449. Ibid., 161.

450. Ibid., 138.

451. Ibid., 139.

452. Ibid., 138.

453. Ibid., 297.

454. Ibid., 297.

455. Ibid., 297.

not only beyond the grave, but as “an example to lovers, to take permanent shape and will through The States.”<sup>456</sup>

Whitman's model of comradeship, then, can be seen working on at least two levels-- personal and social— Whitman by speaking about private and personal things wants to give them a more generalized turn. He shapes his personal poems about same-sex love into a political protest against having to suffer, like countless others, in silence. Because, he is not alone to express such feelings and there are many other people in his case, he calls for a “brotherhood of lovers.” Where such attachments will create a communal sense of living together and why not help to unite a dividing nation into a more democratic and egalitarian one.

Betsy Erkkila, in *Whitman the Political Poet*, supports this notion exhibited in many of the “Calamus” poems:

. . . Whitman moves away from the pond side and back to the center of American culture, legitimizing his calamus emotions as part of the public culture of democracy and as a means of welding the divided nation. His comrades and lovers become, in effect, republican freemen in the affectionate dress of phrenological adhesiveness.

Whitman, writing in his 1871 *Democratic Vistas*, discussed this second aspect of his model of comradeship:

Intense and loving comradeship, the personal and passionate attachment of man to man— which,                      hard to define, underlies the lessons and ideals of the profound saviors of every land and age, and which seems to promise, when thoroughly develop'd, cultivated and recognized in manners and literature, the most substantial hope and safety of the future of these States, will then be fully express'd.<sup>457</sup>

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456. *Ibid.*, 139.

457. Walt Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman: The Complete Prose Works*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1902), 131.

Thus, Whitman is proposing a future form of democracy based upon an extending web of manly affection. The “Calamus” model and its message of comradeship, therefore includes ideals of charity, democracy, and equality. The focus of “Calamus” gradually moves from the intimate and personal to the interplay between the individual and the collective society. His “Calamus” message calls for embracing a new type of friendship extended to the human race.

As Carla Verdino-Sullwold and Thomas Hampson have stated, “this represents ...the love of comrades--of men loving other men, but even more importantly, of men loving mankind, of the solidarity and brotherhood of those striving together as kindred spirits. And for those souls who resist the confines of convention, the fetters of the parlor, and who insist on an energetic, unique expression of love that defies any boundaries, be they sexual, political, or spiritual, the poems become an affirmation of the right of the democratic whole to be comprised of innumerable unique parts which somehow— through solidarity and love--coalesce.”<sup>458</sup>

Michael Moon argues that Whitman’s “Calamus” poems represent attempts by Whitman to release “prohibited desires. . . .from encryption.”<sup>459</sup> His desire for release represents Whitman's “far reaching and revisionary politics,”<sup>460</sup> which are “fraught with difficulties, including the always-present threat of persecution and reprisal exerted by the dominant culture.”<sup>461</sup> The poems move from private to public, jumping from the personal to a more general vision of a new democracy.

As we have seen, then, in the “Calamus” poems the poet attempts to establish a model of comradeship that is defined as a “brotherhood” of men seeking the realization of man to man attachment in the public life . These poems’ substance extension into the public sphere is what

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458. Carla Maria Verdino-Siillwold and Thomas Hampson, “The Frailest Leaves of Me: A Study of the Text and Music for Whitman’s ‘To What You Said,’” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 12:3 (Winter 1995): 146.

459. Michael Moon, *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in “Leaves of Grass”* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 159.

460. *Ibid.*

461. *Ibid.*

makes him different from Eliot's restriction to the private sphere. Whitman by speaking about private and personal things wants to give them a more generalized turn. He shapes his personal poems about same-sex love into a political protest against having to suffer, like countless others, in silence.

In summary, Chapter Five navigates the complexities of Eliot's relationship with the American literary tradition, highlighting the evolving scholarly perspective that increasingly recognizes and explores his Americanness. The interplay between Eliot, Poe, and Whitman serves as a lens to decipher the intricate layers of influence, rebellion, and dialogue within the context of American poetry.

## **Chapter Six: Stevens and the European Tradition**

In the fourth chapter, critics and notably Harold Bloom and Helen Vender, have insisted on Stevens' Americanness, and thus directed the interpretation of his works as being intrinsically American. Was not Stevens himself asserting that "man is the intelligence of his soil" (WSCPP, 22); thus, he has come to appear to us as the fulfillment of Whitman's and Emerson's aspiration to be that American writer, whose work arises out of engagement with his nation and its people, its environment and its reality, and who inscribes himself naturally in the American tradition. His love, pride, and confidence in whatever is American and in American art especially, have been discussed in the fourth chapter in some of his poems which are 'in the American grain', and obey Emersonian and Whitmanian desire to free American artists from the European cultural domination. As shown in the fourth chapter, even when they avoid any specific mention to America, certainly, many of Stevens' poems disclose his American sensibility.

However, besides his love and engagement to his country, and even though he never went to Europe, Stevens showed a particular interest and curiosity to Europe. We know from his correspondence, for instance, that he collected French paintings, and postcards, and corresponded with friends from different parts of the world, mainly Ireland, France and Cuba.

His relation to Europe, in particular, is, indeed, one of the most singular and unique relations compared to that of his contemporary American writers, who visited Europe frequently or even established themselves permanently there as Pound and Eliot did.

As an Americanist, Stevens naturally thought about his identity, and eventually realized how difficult it was attempting to get along without Europe. He wrote to Henry Church on 6 August 1946: “One never realizes how completely we seem to belong to Europe until we attempt to get along without it”(LWS, 531). Undeniably, Europe for someone like Stevens who had often shown aversion to it, and did his best to be truly American \_\_\_since for him there is nothing else to do apart from being American\_\_\_ as paradoxical and ironical as it seems to be, the incidence of Europe, and the reference to European places, persons, and all sorts of items quite call to attention.

From his personal history, we learn that he had Dutch and German ancestors, read European literature and studied French, German, Latin, Greek in school, and French and German at Harvard. As a matter of evidence, his work mirrors and revels a dozen cultures (German Deutch, Swedish, Swiss, Irish, Spanish, Brazilian, Russian and Chinese ). As a matter of evidence, his work mirrors and revels different cultures, celebrating, for example, the “dark Brazilians in their cafes, / Musing immaculate, pampean dits “(WSCPP , 994) or “that old Chinese /Sat tittivating by their mountain pools / Or in the Yangtse studied out their beards”(WSCPP , 11). He also contemplated the fate of “Lions in Sweden” and delighted in “compound[ing] the imagination’s Latin with / The lingua franca et jocundissima” (WSCPP, 343).

Despite the variety of the cultures Stevens referred to in his poetry, in this chapter, I am going to consider just the most important European cultures, the Italian, English, and French, classical and modern and their influence on Stevens’ poetry. Since Stevens’ poetry is written in

response to the European tradition, and to Eliot mainly, the same influences that inspired Eliot will be studied here to facilitate the comparison of both poets' poetry.

The combination of British and French poetry that characterizes Pound and Eliot is the fundamental informing indication that Stevens' poetry is as cosmopolitan as their poetry. It is true that Stevens seeks to create a typically fresh American poetry, away from the European tradition, he considers inappropriate and distant to the American context, nevertheless, Classical and Modern European traces, though not visible, from the outset, are present in his work.

Accordingly, this chapter seeks to highlight the European cultural impact on Stevens' poetry. Because even though Stevens sought to dissociate his work from the European modernists, by mudding the waters, as ironical as it seems to be, he has often been identified and rather associated with them, and his poems are full of allusions to and echoes of the Italian Dante, the British poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, the French poets Baudelaire and Mallarmé, in exactly the same way as those of the internationalist poet, Eliot.

Even when Stevens' poetry represents a serious attempt to forge a distinctively American poetry, nativist and home-grown, it, nevertheless, does not come from nowhere nor does it spring like a spontaneous generation: it is written in response to the European tradition, and conventions, and to Eliot, the classicist, mainly. As such, it is as full of allusions to Classical mythology, Metaphysical poetry, French Symbolism and Romanticism exactly as Eliot poetry is.

Thus, this chapter studies Stevens' most significant absorption of the European influence on his work, its assimilation, and transformation into a new kind of poetry, hybrid, half American and half European. It demonstrates also how Stevens is in fact, able to assimilate and transform subtly European material, mainly British and French, but also Classical and Italian that it becomes hardly recognizable at first sight.

As Eliot, he turns to the same European sources and literary traditions to write his poetry to the only difference that Stevens has covered his tracks so subtly that it becomes impossible to recognize the origin of his poems. To achieve the goal of clouding the issue, and throwing his readers off the scent, he resorts to Schlovsky's process of defamiliarization to transform the habitual into the unhabitual, the common into the extraordinary, and the known into the unknown. Through this technic of refurbishing the European source he succeeds in disengaging his own poetry from the familiar European poetry. This reveals among other things, that though Stevens is anxious of being influenced by the European culture, and does consciously his best to avoid its influence, he is nonetheless engrossed in it.

European references to places and persons, as in Eliot's poetry, often figure in his poems, as in a reference to "Nietzsche in Basel" (WSCPP, 299) or in "The Auroras of Autumn" about "Danes in Denmark": "We were as Danes in Denmark all day long" (WSCPP, 361). Reading Stevens' poetry makes us travel then, from America to many European countries. The passion for Europe that Stevens indulged throughout his lifetime in correspondence, and notebooks would have important consequences for his poetry that is not only American, but Transatlantic also.

Hence, by exploring ways in which he could bring Europe to himself and to his poetry, without even going there, he succeeded in constructing a poetics that involves in particular, a larger complex of literary, artistic and cultural influences, other than American, and therefore cosmopolitan. In this way, since his poetry reflects an awareness of transnational events and issues, and mirrors international concerns too, it is no less different than the poetry of those internationalist poets, like Eliot.

A good example of how he incorporates several letters and postcards from friends in Europe and transforms them into his poetry is "Evening in New Haven." Canto XXVIII, precisely serves as a good illustration of how Europe became part of his poetics. Here is the

first part of the canto, where not only America, but Italy Sweden, Germany, and France are invoked and constitute the poetic substance of the poem:

If it should be true that reality exists  
In the mind: the tin plate, the loaf of bread on it,  
The long-bladed knife, the little to drink and her  
Misericordia, it follows that  
Real and unreal are two in one: New Haven  
Before and after one arrives or, say,  
Bergamo on a postcard,  
Rome after dark,  
Sweden described,  
Salzburg with shade as eyes  
Or Paris in conversation at a café. (WSCPP , 414)

Here, he is close to Eliot who, as an internationalist poet invokes European cities in *The Waste Land*:

Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria,  
Vienna, London,  
Unreal. (CPTSE, 77)

“Description Without Place” (1945), is a poem in which there are no American references, and where all the proper names are European except “Pablo Neruda in Ceylon” (WSCPP, 298) shows Stevens’s European interest. Stevens chooses the example of Queen Anne, specifically “Of England” (WSCPP, 298) and mentions Calvin, Nietzsche, Lenin, a Spanish “Museo Olimpico”( WSCPP , 298), the evangelist John and ends with constant references to Spain as his model place. Nietzsche is in Basel, living in a foreign country, as are Lenin and Neruda. Lenin is by a real lake and both of him and Nietzsche are in Switzerland.

Lenin's lake is either that of Zurich or Geneva. Such references to European places are a strong evidence of the influence of Europe on Stevens' poetry, and an invitation to reading his poetry as cosmopolitan.

For someone who has often been categorized as being expressly American and devoted to national matters, an equally long list could be made of foreign place-names, wines, painters, writers, citations, foreign words and phrases, especially French, that appear in his poems.

The first part of this chapter shows how Stevens as an anti-classicist resorts in due course to Classical Mythology and how he deconstructs myths in order to give them a new meaning, more appropriate and truer to the American context. Stevens' kind of modern Odyssey in "The Comedian as the Letter C" relates the journey of Crispin like that of the classical hero, Ulysses or the hero quest of the *Holy Grail legend*, yet in an unexpected and Americanized version.

The second part examines Stevens' intertextual relationship with the Italian Dante Alighieri, and the interest shown by both poets in the common themes of death and suffering that inhabit their poems. To the difference that, when Dante gives a religious and serious meaning to death and associates suffering with Hell and Paradise, Stevens defamiliarizes the old and traditional meaning of death to give it a new trivial and derisive meaning for the Twentieth-Century new reality and significance. The third part considers the influence of the English culture on Stevens' poetry who was profoundly convinced that "Nothing could be more inappropriate to American literature than its English source since the Americans are not British in sensibility" (OPWS 176). Despite this conviction, the influence of The Metaphysical poets on his poetry was detected early in his work. He is indebted to the English culture and especially to Donne, from whom he borrows especially, his use of metaphor and the Carpe Diem motif .

The fourth part looks at the influence of the French culture and its effect on Stevens' work. His connection with the French Symbolists is highlighted, and his affinity with Baudelaire and the City Poetry is illustrated .

### **A. Stevens and Classical Mythology: In search for An American Mythology:**

Throughout his poetry Stevens has a great deal to say about myths, and his position toward them is one of rejection, at least under their original form and meaning. Stevens felt the need to decreate things, a term he borrows from Sigmund Veil, to strip them from their original use, or in Schlovsky's words to estrange them from their habitual form to give them a fresh, new application and meaning apposite to the American context.

While Eliot in his essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," praises James Joyce's use of the Classical myth of Odysseus in his book, *Ulysses* as a way of giving meaning to futile contemporary history, and claims that every modern poet should use the same mythic method for its relevance to modern times, on the contrary, Stevens uses myth to deride its authenticity and authority on the American reality. For him, Eliotian reliance particularly, on mythology to understand and explain the present through the past, is inappropriate to modern times, and particularly inadequate to the American situation. So, skeptical about the European past, Stevens repudiates the reliability of the myths in the present time and particularly to the American circumstances.

While Greek and Latin mythologies include the intervention of gods and supernatural forces, Stevens' poetry has to discard them. Thus, cut from traditional preconceptions on the past, his poetry seeks to account of the American condition, in a newfangled and unique way. In his poem "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," the speaker urges the ephebe, an apprentice-poet "to become an ignorant man" (WSCPP, 329) and to see the world in "an ignorant eye" (WSCPP, 329) without the interference of Classical mythology:

Let purple Phoebus lie in umber harvest,

Let Phoebus slumber and die in autumn umber,

Phoebus is dead, ephebe. (WSCPP, 329)

For Stevens, Classical mythology, despite its universal attributes and timeless references may distress the imagination. For this reason, poetry must spring out of emptiness or nothingness or even blankness, and the poet must ignore all the past constructions, and stale formulations to look for new ways of representation. He says in *The Necessary Angel* that poetry could not “ever invent an ancient world full of figures that had been known and become endeared for its reader for centuries” (WSCPP, 731) Sebastian Gardner argues that Stevens fights “to break cleanly with the past, and does not either recycle old mythologies, or attempt to model a new, personalized mythology on the old.”<sup>462</sup> Therefore, his mission as an American poet, ensuing Emerson’s call that American artists must “We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds”<sup>463</sup> is to redefine American culture and create from American roots and away from Europe a distinct and original American poetry.

During a period in which many poets attempted to write modern epics, Stevens published in 1923, “The Comedian as the Letter C” from his first volume of poetry, *Harmonium*. Eliot published *The Waste Land*, Pound *The Cantos*, Crane *The Bridge*, and Williams *Paterson*, at about the same period. Although Stevens ‘search for an American voice can be discerned in his endeavor to write this American epic, and, in many respects Stevens’ epic poem is unlike the others he, nevertheless, resorts to the same mythic structure, follows the same literary epic tradition, and takes inspiration from British models. Here, his method replicates faithfully Eliot’s Classical and internationalist approach to literary Modernism based on established Western, and Eastern traditions, and religious sources. Though Stevens accesses to the same sources, and tracks the same literary tradition, he works his epic poem with a great many subtle

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462. Sebastian Gardner, “Wallace Stevens and Metaphysics: The Plain Sense of Things,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 3 (1994): 325.

463. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Comprising His Essays, 2 Vols.* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1866), 189.

differences: to show the inappropriateness of the myths to the American situation, and to parody Eliot, mainly.

**a. Stevens and the Modern American Epic: “The Comedian as the Letter C”**

Being himself so steeped in the English tradition, and as the only models to write epics were offered to him by English poets such as Keats’s *Endymion* ( 1817),or Browning’s *Sordello* ( 1840 ), he is nevertheless stuck not knowing literally how he could represent American life which seems so stripped down by comparison to the flourishes of European art, all the way from the Renaissance onwards. Deprived from a viable American tradition, he wondered how he would account for American reality.

Helen Vendler is one critic, who, in “On Extended Wings” affirms and confirms that Browning’s “*Sordello*” was a source of inspiration for Stevens to write “*The Comedian as the Letter C*.” There are in fact many similarities between the two poems’ use of syntax, diction, and themes. Lionel Stevenson, further sheds light on the poem’s central theme, and the poet’s life-long preoccupation for meta-poetry. Stevenson describes *Sordello*, as “a poem about a poet writing a poem about a poet writing poems.”<sup>464</sup> If then, ” *Sordello*” is about” a poet writing a poem about a poet writing poems”, and since Stevens’s character Crispin and the narrator of “*The Comedian*” can be identified as one character, a poet mocking himself, therefore the poem can be read as Stevens’ own poetic growth and his search for a poetic niche. It is in a sense about Stevens’ relation to art, and his own development as a poet.

One of Stevens’ intentions in writing the poem was in his own words to be essentially an “anti-mythological poem,” and nowhere does he acknowledge his debt for any mythological

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464. David Kwinn, “Browning’s ‘*Sordello*’: The Problem of the Poet, *South Atlantic Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 2 ( 1974), 3.

source, or other source. However as in any epic, it is not difficult to identify the classical hero quest, such as that of Ulysses, or the Grail Legend for instance, with its three classical phases of initiation, departure, and return, at least on the structural level. Nonetheless on the semantic level, Stevens' motives for the quest are quite different from that of the traditional epic hero.

In comparing the adventures of Crispin with those of the classical hero quest of the Grail Legend it is evident that both stories conform to Campbell's structure of the three stages of departure, initiation, and return. The heroes in both stories, live dark moments, while experiencing hardships, and face temptations. Both stories end with rewarding expectations. For Crispin it is both the foundation of a new colony, in Carolina and its settlement, and the foundation of a family and the procreation of four daughters. For the hero of The Grail Legend it is healing and rebirth. However, as an American anti-classicist poet, Stevens makes use of Classical mythology expressly to question its significance and application to the New World and the American society. He, therefore subverts the use of the classical myth to give it a new meaning within the American reality. By keeping the same mythical structure but opening the door for new understandings to it, he succeeded in this way, to redefine the American aesthetics away from the Classical European tradition and interpretation.

## **b. Mythology of Self Versus Classical Mythology :**

### **1. Departure: From Traditional Religious sin to Physical Transgression of Nature:**

At first sight, Crispin has little in common with the mythic heroes, who are god-like, heroic, and noble. Crispin is the epic "hero," but not in the classical way. He looks more to a modern anti-hero, who lives a life without the slightest adventure. Furthermore, this central figure, far from being a hero, who accomplishes heroic deeds and engages in battles, is, on the opposite, an every-day man, even a comic figure, a clown, a buffoon in the Eighteenth- Century French tradition, as the name Crispin itself, hints at its French origin. Being belittled and

trivialized from the beginning, nothing spectacular, noble, or heroic is expected to come from Crispin, since the poem ends as it starts “benignly. . . . Curiously enough, he is presented to us as a barber, a servant, an everyman : Socrates of snails, . . . valet in the tempest . . . insatiable egoist . . . auditor of insects.” Apparently the narrator is satirizing the hero.

Though impiety and sin constitute traditionally the motives for the journey, the meaning and nature of Crispin’s sin is very different. Traditionally, the classical hero is sinful of transgression to gods. Here, Crispin is sinful for transgressing the physical environment. Because Crispin thinks that with his intelligence he can control his environment, he treats nature with great disregard. Therefore, Crispin’s quest is very different from the traditional quest pattern in its motives for departure, and return, especially.

As a European emigrant sailing from Bordeaux ( France ) to Yucatan, ( The New World) Crispin, at the beginning of the poem, subscribes to most of the European myths ,built into and accepted by the American culture too. So, he is proud and secure, being at home among “salad-beds and honest quilts”, and believes that” man is the intelligence of his soil”. As the first lines of the poem present Crispin’s first poetic formula: “Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil, / The sovereign ghost.” (WSCPP, 22) At this stage, he is fully persuaded to be the master of his environment, and thinks that he controls and dominates his surroundings as they are subject to his own intelligence.

In this case, Crispin, who believes that man is the intelligence of his soil, his weakness is essentially that of “mythology of self” (WSCPP, 23) . His flaw is that of egotism. Thus the preponderant weakness that burdens Crispin as he sails for the New World is essentially the false and illusionary notions of the romance, and the myths that he carries with him from Europe, and that would be destroyed at sea: “Severance Was clear. /The last distortion of romance /Forsook the insatiable egotist” (WSCPP, 24).

As such, much of Crispin's false romanticism is discarded as he sails from Bordeaux. For this reason, Crispin is presented on the American continent as an alien in search of himself and of meaning to give to his new existence because Stevens believes that it is necessary to scry Crispin of all these European myths before he can initiate any kind of meaningful encounter with reality. Thus, in "The World without Imagination" and "Concerning the Thunderstorms of Yucatan," Parts I and II of the poem, we have Crispin in his most desperate and deliberate attempts to strip himself of these falsehoods, and myths and to replace them with the strictest and most uncompromising view of reality. Crispin, like Stevens, is a poet and the concern of their quest both is to discover or find the appropriate aesthetics for the New World that would adjust their imagination to the new reality.

## **2. Initiation: Poetic Quest in search for new poetic expression/ from romanticism to realism:**

As it is customary in classical epics, where many hindrances and difficulties confront the heroes' journey, Crispin, in the same way, must experience many trials and temptations throughout his journey. To adjust his imagination to the new reality, Stevens makes Crispin also know hardships to undergo changes. However, he manages to do so by introducing many improvisations.

The first trial Crispin faces is the flood which is a battle with nature instead of being with supernatural forces as it is the case for traditional epics. This direct confrontation with nature serves to put him in a situation where his self-confidence and pride to the physical world are at a stake. When Crispin goes to sea, he is hardly "sovereign ghost" of this environment, because there at sea, he encounters confused, vast, wild, natural forces. The solemnity he had at home, where he was accustomed to homely objects that he could control and order is immediately dispersed. As a result, "Crispin [is] washed away by magnitude" (WSCPP, 23) . Here his romantic illusions fall away. He senses a reality in reality, and he must do with it. Always in quest of the truth, the naked essence—and of poetry, he finds that his "old mythology of self"

has been “Blotched out beyond unblotching.” “Socrates/Of snails . . . musician of pears . . . wig of things, . . . nincompated pedagogue”! Now he is perplexed in the middle of the deep sea voyage he cannot fathom and where his personality and his “mythology of self” (WSCPP, 22) are dissolved:

What counted was mythology of self,  
Blotched out beyond unblotching. Crispin,  
The lutanist of fleas, the knave, the thane,  
The ribboned stick, the bellowing breeches, cloak  
Of China, cap of Spain, imperative haw  
Of hum, inquisitorial botanist,  
And general lexicographer of mute  
And maidenly greenhorns, now beheld himself,  
A skinny sailor peering in the sea-glass. (WSCPP, 22)

This is a kind of raw, and elemental reality, he is faced with, and his imagination is inadequate defense against such an impersonal and objective reality. He is “washed away by magnitude.” (WSCPP, 22) He confronts “the veritable ding an sich,” (WSCPP, 23) something “vocable,” (WSCPP, 23) but beyond his speech to name, something “visible,” (WSCPP, 23) with almost no trace of himself reflected in it. Crispin was made new:

The imagination, here, could not evade,  
In poems of plums, the strict austerity  
Of one vast, subjugating, final tone. (WSCPP, 24)

Thus, we learn that Crispin, horrified by his own false romance of the past, will close his mind to all romance. The image of the plum, to reappear with special significance later in the poem, here is presented as an image of poetry, will not be tolerated. Images of poetry, after all, are projections of the imagination, and for Crispin there will be only “the strict austerity.”

There is nothing left of the carefree romantic but “some starker, barer self / In a starker, barer world.” (WSCPP, 23) Crispin’s proud faith in man’s intelligence is dashed; Triton is dissolved in the sea.

The reference to Triton sanctions once more Stevens’ recourse to classical mythology. Triton, half-fish, half-man, the son of the sea-god Poseidon and Amphitrite, is an important figure in Greek mythology representing the purging power of the sea. The symbol of the sea itself as a reforming force is not new in American literature. Traditionally, the power of water has been that either of restoring and renewing as in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, or of destruction and annihilation as in Hermann Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Its use as such is one of the central motifs of “The Waste Land.”

In the first section of “The Waste Land,” “The Burial of the Dead,” Eliot uses water not as a symbol of renewal and restoration, but as a symbol of death by introducing the reader to a prophetess Madame Sosostris reputed “to be the wisest woman in Europe” (CPTSE, 64), yet with little skill to foretell the future. Her prophecy “fear death by water” (CPTSE, 64) appears in the fourth section to sanction her blindness to admit the restorative power of water:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,  
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell  
And the profit and loss.  
A current under sea  
Picked his bones in whispers. (CPTSE, 75)

Phlebas appears as the drowned sailor who was rather destroyed by the force of water as the bones of his dead body still sway under water. As a result, Phlebas is not resurrected and stands as an emblem of failed spiritual redemption. For Stevens, the great cleansing agent and

the first means of Crispin's long process of decreation is also the sea: "Crispin at sea / Created In his day, and touch of doubt" (CPTSE, 985) .

The personification of the sea is in the figure of the water god, Triton. Triton is used by Stevens to allude to the state of purification that Crispin went through, and his changing conception of reality. Being closely associated with the myth of the Triton and its energetic force to cleanse and purify from sins, Crispin is a modern Triton too. The perilous sea journey that Crispin experiences serves to purify him from his Romantic pride as the master of the world to the extent that he can reformulate completely the dictum with which he began his voyage that "man is the intelligence of his soil" (WSCPP, 12) into "Note. His soil is man's intelligence / That's better" (WSCPP, 29).

However, Stevens uses this classical myth in a defamiliarized way, deprived of its traditional qualities and without the expected reverence. Triton was, of course, the son of Neptune and distinguished himself as his father's trumpeter. Thus is Triton alluded to by Milton in "Comus" in "Triton's windshell," and the "Herald of the sea" in "Lycidas." For Crispin, however, Triton is not "dissolved in shifting" (WSCPP, 23) there will be no trumpeting; he is himself Much trumpeted (WSCPP, 987) instead. Triton is described in "old age" (WSCPP, 23) . "Triton, nothing; left of him,/ Except in faint, memorial gesturings." (WSCPP, 23). In fact, there is "nothing left of him" (WSCPP, 23) that made him such a meaningful deity once. In the modern world, he is "negligible Triton" (WSCPP, 986) and his influence on Crispin is nil; Compared to the ancient Triton, Stevens' hero is now an inconsequential "watery realist" (WSCPP, 23) with no evidence of trumpet.

Finally, the perilous sea journey that Crispin makes is such an instructive experience that serves not only to purify him from his pretensions and Romantic pride as the master of the world, but to teach him a lesson that poetry lives in the wealth of the earth and not in the poetry of man's imagination. Here without imagination, man confronts life:

Against his pipping sounds a trumpet cried

Celestial sneering boisterously.

.....

. . . The last distortion of romance

Forsook the insatiable egotist. (WSCPP, 23-24)

The magnitude of the sea, and the isolation from his original environment, an environment of which he had presumed himself the intelligence, have mutually contributed to give Crispin a new view of himself. This view is suggested by the ability to go behind the “ billowing breeches, cloak / Of china, cap of Spain”(WSCPP, 22) and realize that the over-dressed and cosmopolitan sailor who wears them is “ skinny,” (WSCPP, 22) that is he is forced to rely on a sea-glass, to proceed in the waters which surround him. And even equipped with a sea-glass, he sees no end to his ordeal. Here is an environment, a “ soil “of which no man can claim to own its“ intelligence”:

The salt hung on his spirit like a frost,

The dead brine melted in him like a dew

Of winter, until nothing of himself

Remained, except some starker, barer self

In a starker, barer world, in which the sun

Was not the sun because it never shone

With bland complaisance on pale parasols,

Beetled, in chapels, on the chaste bouquets.

Against his pipping sounds a trumpet cried

Celestial sneering boisterously. Crispin

Became an introspective voyager. (WSCPP, 22)

This initial state of change which has been effected in Crispin is a state which leaves him psychologically and mentally unadorned, “some starker, barer self” (WSCPP, 986). However, he has to pursue his quest, and meet many other temptations and trials. For this, he must adapt himself to the new reality, and adopt a new outlook to make a new intelligence prevail:

What was the purpose of his pilgrimage,  
Whatever shape it took in Crispin’s mind,  
If not, when all is said, to drive away  
The shadow of his fellows from the skies,  
And, from their stale intelligence released,  
To make a new intelligence prevail? (WSCPP, 30)

Harold Bloom suggests that “the shadow of his fellows” that Stevens was trying to drive away was specifically Walt Whitman's influence, and that he did not succeed in transcending that influence. Another plausible interpretation is that Stevens is throwing light on his theory of poetry which rejects all conformity to any established and old literary traditions and strives to create an independent and culturally relevant poetry to the present and America. For such reasons, he is trying to drive away from poets’ “stale intelligence” (WSCPP, 30) such as Pound and Eliot who follow Bishops’ books.

However, before Crispin comes to accept that “his soil is man’s intelligence” (WSCPP, 29) which makes him closer to the American reality, he has first to strip himself of the outdated scraps of the European culture, and purge himself from the European tradition. This *sine qua non* condition, though not openly stated at the beginning of the poem is hinted at while the poem unfolds and at different points in the poem as in the following lines from the fourth section:

These bland excursions into time to come,  
Related in romance to backward flights,

However prodigal, however proud,  
Contained in their afflatus the reproach  
That first drove Crispin to his wandering.  
He could not be content with counterfeit,  
With masquerade of thought, with hapless words  
That must belie the racking masquerade,  
With fictive flourishes that preordained  
His passion's permit, hang of coat, degree  
Of buttons, measure of his salt. (WSCPP, 31)

However, before being ready for the real change, throughout his voyage, Crispin has to face many other temptations that may distract him from his will to adopt a new approach to reality. After the experience of the sea, he finds himself on the land of Yucatan. Though the place is exotic, inviting for inspiration, the poets, there called Mayan sonneteers, are still following an unrealistic and decadent poetic tradition:

In Yucatan, the Maya sonneteers  
Of the Caribbean amphitheatre,  
In spite of hawk and falcon, green toucan  
And jay, still to the night-bird made their plea,  
As if raspberry tanagers in palms,  
High up in orange air, were barbarous. (WSCPP, 24)

The lines, "In spite of hawk and falcon, green toucan / And jay, still to the night-bird made their plea" suggest that although other exotic and local birds such as the hawk, the falcon, and the toucan can be used as poetic symbols, Mayan sonneteers still turn to the romantic Keatsian nightingale, and so are still faithful to a tradition, unconnected and inappropriate to their own reality. In this context, Hi Simon suggests the "Mayan sonneteers" are "the minor

romantics who are still dealing with sentimental conventions and ignoring the crude splendors of the contemporary when Crispin entered the literary scene.”<sup>465</sup> “Mayan sonneteers,” for Harold Bloom, “may include such Harvard poets as Trumbull Skickney, George Cabot Lodge, and even Santayana,”<sup>466</sup> who ignore “the exotic American reality.”<sup>467</sup> Whatsoever interpretation can be right on the exact identification of Mayan sonneteers, most critics stress the discrepancy between their aesthetics and their ignorance of the American surroundings. Stevens rejects this poetic model which discounts the real, and makes abstraction of what is local, near, and handy. For Stevens, the true poet must concern himself with his surroundings, first.

Again, Crispin is confronted with another natural phenomenon. As he passes through the streets of Yucatan, he is surprised by an approaching thunderstorm. There is more realization ahead, however, for Crispin. When the thunder speaks, and the wind “came bluntly thundering, more terrible/ Than the revenge of music of bassoons,” (WSCPP, 26) a storm out of Mexico sends him fleeing to the sanctuary of the cathedral where he endures the storm there:

. . . Crispin, here, took flight.  
An annotator has his scruples, too.  
He knelt in the cathedral with the rest,  
This connoisseur of elemental fate,  
Aware of exquisite thought. . . . (WSCPP, 24)

The coward Crispin is crouching in the cathedral, determined, stimulated, and excited. The storm is receding. After all, this has been an elemental revelation indeed, sufficient to inspire him both physically and poetically:

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465. Hi Simon, quoted in Edward Marx, *The Idea of a Colony: Cross-Culturalism in Modern Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 145.

466. Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 75.

467. *Ibid.*

. . . This was the span  
Of force, the quintessential fact, the note  
Of Vulcan, that a valet seeks to own,  
The thing that makes him envious in phrase.  
In which the thunder, lapsing in its clap,  
Let down gigantic quavers of its voice,  
For Crispin to vociferate again. (WSCPP, 26- 27)

The thunder may make the night watch in the cathedral terrifying precisely because there is the suggestion that the supernatural does not exist. The whimpering signboard and the heated pane are lifeless and inanimate, empty of meaning; the thunder with its sound and fury brings the knowledge that the trifles of the opulent earth, the notes taken at the cabildo, the parrot squawks, all come to meaningless” bloomings” when confronted with the” quintessential fact”. Crispin finds that

His mind was free  
And more than free, elate, intent, profound  
And studious of a self -possessing him,  
That was not in him in the crusty  
From which he sailed. (WSCPP, 26)

In the thunderstorm, he perceives the magnitude of an ultimate energy “the span of force” (WSCPP, 26) which is the quintessential fact of reality. It is this fact that now he desires to express in speech:

. . . Beyond him, westward, lay  
The mountainous ridges, purple balustrades,  
In which the thunder, lapsing in its clap,  
Let down gigantic quavers of its voice,

For Crispin to vociferate again. (WSCPP, 27)

The reference to the cathedral and the myths of Christianity, demonstrate once more that Stevens, as we have shown already many times in his poetry, is convinced that religion is without a strong hold in the twentieth-Century than it was in the past. The time when religion, specifically Christianity, was meaningful for Americans, and when the church guided and motivated their behavior, ended. The reference to the cathedral and the insistence on its emptiness suggest that his representation is, therefore, sarcastic and not a religious one. As we already know that in Stevens' world, there is no room for the supernatural nor the religious, then its use is ironic, and different from the traditional approach to and ordeal of the Chapel Perilous where, in the Grail legend, the questing knight undergoes a night of supernatural terror before the achievement of his quest the next day.

At this point, it is worth observing that the presence of the cathedral and its emptiness recall once again Eliot's chapel perilous of Section "What the Thunder Said" of "The Waste Land" and reflect Eliot's Classical and internationalist approach to literary Modernism based on established Western, and Eastern traditions, and even on Indian culture as it is the case here. Eliot is well-known for his mythic method of juxtaposing classical and mythological figures with characters from contemporary history to draw a parallel between the secular chaotic and disordered modern times and the religious orderly and stable past.

The section on the cathedral in Stevens' poem compellingly recalls the reader of the quester entering the chapel perilous in Eliot's "The Wasteland." One of the themes employed by Eliot in that section is the traditional approach to and ordeal of the Chapel Perilous where, in the Grail legend, the questing knight undergoes a night of supernatural terror before the achievement of his quest the next day. But even when the empty chapel in Eliot's fifth section "What the Thunder Said" contains nothing: "There is an empty chapel, only the wind's home" (CPTSE, 68) and seems to provide the quester with no solution, "In a flash of lightning. Then

a damp gust/ Bringing rain....Then spoke the thunder / ... Datta / Dayadhvam /" Damyata" (CPTSE, 69) . The solution in Eliot's poem is rather given from a voice in the form of advice recommending to give, to sympathize, and to control. The answer seems to come from heavens then, as thunder in all mythologies stands for the voice of God. The thunder reveals itself and voices the three spiritual key assets "Datta" (CPTSE, 69), "Dayadhvam" (CPTSE, 69) and "Damyata" (CPTSE, 69) portentous of the Hindu ideals of "give," "sympathize," and "control." These three words the thunder proposes are evocative enough of the Upanishad or the mythical heritage of Indian culture. Undeniably, "to give," "to control," and "to sympathize" fit in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and relate to the three dictums God delivers to his disciples. The answer is religious, albeit not Christian nor European, but coming from a distant country, India. This is the sort of international poetic approach which relies on a tradition of metaphysical essence, yet distant temporally and spaciouly from the American culture. It is the exact type of poetry that Stevens abhors. For him such remote intellectual and geographical sources fail to afford the appropriate conditions for the realization of a distinctly American poetry and, account neither truly nor effectively of the American Modernist situation.

Finally, for Stevens, who dissociates willfully himself from the appeals of the internationalist poetics made prominent by Eliot's classicism and veneration for history and religion, his emancipation, on the contrary, from religion and all metaphysical questioning enables him to write a poetry liberated from European manacles, religious notions of heaven and hell, and ready to embrace the world of the real. Likewise, with such freedom and power gained from the thunderstorm, Crispin is ready to cope with reality again.

### **3. Return: Settling in America and the process of Americanization**

The final transformation of the comedian takes place as he approaches Carolina, and once more it is "reality" which strikes the imagination and alters Crispin's "aesthetic". Travelling to North Carolina, then, "helps him round his rude aesthetic out" (WSCPP, 29) by savoring rankness like a sensualist:

It purified him. It made him see how much  
Of what he saw he never saw at all.

Tilting up his nose, He inhaled the rancid rosin

.....

Of what he saw he never saw at all. (WSCPP, 29)

The setting of Carolina with its polluted river exhaling disgusting smells in an industrial, urban and modern town does not seem to annoy the poet's wish to establish himself there permanently. He accepts to share the ordinary life in this very quotidian reality:

A river bore. The vessel inward. is

Tilting up his nose,

He inhaled the rancid rosin, burly smells

Of dampened lumber, emanations blown

From warehouse doors, the gustiness of ropes

Decays of sacks, and all the arrant stinks

That helped him round his rude aesthetic out.

He savored rankness like a sensualist.

He marked the marshy ground around the dock,

The crawling railroad spur, the rotten fence,

Curriculum for the marvellous sophomore. (WSCPP, 29)

The above lines depict both Stevens' and Crispin's mere acceptance of the quotidian, or the dirty aspects of reality. They show, above all, Crispin's as well as Stevens' readiness and ability to adjust themselves to their new circumstances, and accept their fate. In their resignation of admitting things as they are and compliant to them, the process of their Americanization is taking place. What seems worth highlighting again is that in this section of the poem where

Crispin approaches Carolina, a few lines effectively parody the opening lines of “The Waste Land”:

April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
/Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain. (CPTSE, 63)

Throughout his poem Eliot accuses ironically and violently a sterile society that chooses death, loves death, and where there is little life or hope for life. Since April instead of announcing spring, as the season of rebirth and renewal, becomes “the cruelest month”, then even the happiest season of the year is perceived in Stevens’ words as “A time abhorrent to the nihilist” (WSCPP, 29). In the desert of this poem, the grieving tone reveals Eliot, as an angry poet, unable to perceive the beauty and renewal of nature, and too much concerned with nailing his age with a sledgehammer. For Stevens, spring is healthy and vital, on the contrary:

He came. The poetic hero without palms  
Or jugglery, without regalia.  
And as he came he saw that it was spring,  
A time abhorrent to the nihilist  
Or searcher for the fecund minimum.  
. . . The spring,  
Irised in dew and early fragrances,  
Was gemmy marionette to him that sought  
A sinewy nakedness. . . . (WSCPP, 29)

Stevens is not upset. Here is the secret to man’s meaning and his task : the prosodist perfects his style, discovers “the essential prose,” more real, more elemental than poetry. Crispin becomes immensely pleased with his discovery of Carolina and of the environment that

offers him “the essential prose” (WSCPP, 29). As poet and aesthete he exults in his discovery and determines to establish there a colony for other aspiring poets. Crispin's self-satisfaction is captured in the tone of the narration as he enthusiastically resolves “To make a new Intelligence prevail” (WSCPP, 30). Having found the ideal world of prose he once again embraces poetry, “Central hymns,” (WSCPP, 30) where the members of his colony will join him as

Celebrants

Of rankest trivia

Hence the reverberations in the words

Of his first central hymns, the celebrants

Of rankest trivia, tests of the strength

Of his aesthetic, his philosophy,

The more invidious, the more desired. (WSCPP, 30)

In many ways, Crispin's plan for the colony denotes a very particular end to Stevens epic. The stage of return is not to the home country, or to the point of departure as it is the case in traditional epics. Instead, Stevens chooses to make Crispin found a colony and establish himself there permanently by marrying a blonde and having four daughters. However, as in any epic the end is rewarding. In the case of Crispin, it is a happy ending. Crispin finds the ideal climate in a springtime setting. It is here that he lays the groundwork for a poetic colony which will embrace the world of the environmentally real. Married to a “prismy blonde” (WSCPP, 34), Crispin finds himself the “magister of a single room” (WSCPP, 34). Each morning, he is “still curious” (WSCPP, 34) about the meaning of things though less anxious, and more confident:

Yeoman and grub, but with a fig in sight,

And cream for the fig and silver for the cream,

A blonde to tip the silver and to taste

The rapey gouts.

Good star, how that to be

Annealed them in their cabin ribaldries!

Still curious. (WSCPP, 34)

Crispin becomes a father of four “chits” or daughters in a purely natural logic:

The chits came for his jiggling, bluet-eyed,

Hands without touch yet touching poignantly

Leaving no room upon his cloudy knee. (WSCPP, 35)

At this point, another comparison with Eliot’s second section “A Game of Chess” of *The Waste Land* is noteworthy. If procreation in Stevens’ poem reflects poetic fertility, stability and happiness, in Eliot’s “Wasteland,” birth is a sign of suffering, and a probable cause for family disintegration. Giving birth to five children, Lil “nearly died of [the birth of] young George” (CPTSE, 58). As a result, her health and youth are affected. Though she is only thirty- one she looks much older with her dentition.

Her husband Albert is disgusted with her “antique” (CPTSE, 58) looks and threatens to abandon her for another woman who is still able to give him a “good time” (CPTSE, 58). Her physical appearance is menacing to destroy her family life. Under such an intimidating and hostile situation, she resorts to take “pills”(CPTSE, 58) to get an abortion. Instead of being a source of family union, love consolidation, and mutual happiness, the natural function of reproduction is accompanied with pain, abortion, and family dislocation as symptomatic of the sterility of the modern city, and the relationships of its inhabitants.

To conclude, the journey from Bordeaux to Carolina has been both a reformative and educational experience. Immediately following this encounter with ugly and decaying “reality” Crispin has been purified of his romantic notions and his presumptuous pride in man and man’s imagination to the extent that he can reverse completely the note with which he began his

voyage. "Nota: his soil is man's intelligence. / That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find"  
(WSCPP, 29).

By realizing that the American soil and setting can provide a valuable source for art, and by accepting the American surroundings, as fundamental prerequisites and subject-matter for creative exploration, the American art can be found "more exquisite than any tumbling verse" (WSCPP, 29). The true American artist instead of playing "upon the psaltery or lyre of Europe" will manage to play "on the unpretentious guitar or banjo." 226 As a realist, Crispin will not be lured to make Carolina "polar-purple (WSCPP, 27), with his imagination, but will restrict himself to look at things as they are in reality, and not be afraid of calling them by their proper name: Abhorring Turk as Esquimau, the lute / As the marimba, the magnolia as rose (WSCPP, 30).

At last, he seems to understand the role he has to play: he will not project his own self-conscious and imaginary views on life and his poetry will deliberately reflect the real as basically it is constructed from the anti-romantic. In order to cover the essential prose (WSCPP, 28), he understands the need for the imagination to work consciously upon reality. Finally, after this encounter with a harsh reality, Crispin is so purged from his Romantic conception of reality that he can reverse the motto with which he began his voyage. Now his motto is no longer "man is the intelligence of his soil" but "his soil is man's intelligence." Thus, he recognizes that the external reality is the source of his creativity and the reason of his internal change and growth:

Nota: his soil is man's intelligence.

That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find.

Crispin in one laconic phrase laid bare

His cloudy drift and planned a colony. (WSCPP, 29)

Though his life continues “benignly,” (WSCPP, 37) Crispin, nevertheless concludes “fadedly” (WSCPP, 37). Crispin has set for himself the highest poetic ends, only to relapse into the most banal ones. Although frustrated and unfulfilled, he remains ambitious and hopeful.

When the colony becomes too ambitious for Crispin, he chooses instead to give up his aesthetic search and abandons himself to reality immediately and directly. He accepts, in this way, both the physical and visible world within its infinite variety, and his fate by marrying and, begetting four daughters. Thus, Crispin has been humbled, has learned that poetry begins and ends in the prosperity of the earth, and not in the poverty of man’s spirit. Armed with that new knowledge, he casts romance, founds a colony, marries, and has children. In short, Crispin becomes fruitful and creative as the result of the transformations he has undergone. The “general lexicographer of mute and maidenly greenhorns” (WSCPP, 22) has grown into a new role, that of father to daughters with curls. The end of Crispin’s journeying is the discovery that external reality, man’s soil, is the source of creativity and the cause of man’s internal change and growth.

The poetic expression of the ordinary specificities of the New World, though celebrating the “rankest trivia” bitterly, is for Stevens preferable than experiencing things counterfeit by the stale imagination, influenced, and falsified by European models of thought. Crispin’s new vision of reality is quintessentially American:

Hence the reverberations in the words  
Of his first central hymns, the celebrants  
Of rankest trivia, tests of the strength  
Of his aesthetic, his philosophy,  
The more invidious, the more desired. (WSCPP, 30)

## **B. The Italian Influence:**

When the French and English influence on the work of Stevens has been widely and satisfactorily confirmed by a lot of critics, the influence of the world master, Dante Alighieri on Stevens's poetry remains almost scarce. And since Dante has exerted a tremendous influence on many writers and poets from the previous centuries from John Milton, Geoffrey Chaucer to modern times with James Joyce and Seamus Heaney, Stevens seems to be no exception either. Because Dante, being extremely religious, and Stevens agnostic, critics devoted little attention to the common religious themes (of death and pain) that the two poets handle. Therefore, few critics link Dante to Stevens, and no thorough study of the relationship between the two poets has been registered. We have, however, the observation of some who notice that although Stevens is agnostic, he resorts in his poetry to Christianity and Christian mythology. Stevens' poetry, as Jacqueline Vaught Brogan points out, is "discussed in relation to the Bible."<sup>468</sup> Nonetheless, Stevens, as a secular poet, employs Christianity not to restore the medieval religious authority of the church as Dante and Eliot did, but on the contrary, to reject that authority and replace it with a redeeming poetic ideal. Even though Stevens shares with both Eliot and Dante the necessity to generate order out of disorder, Stevens' secular attitude is characteristic of someone who uses religion to challenge the established view that Christianity can fill the spiritual void experienced by modern societies. This part examines, then, how Stevens subverts the traditional and religious notions of evil, pain, and paradise and substitute to them new meanings, by naturalizing them and estranging them from their original ideology. It also presents Stevens' poetry as an endeavor to secularize Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. This secularizing can take place only by rejecting the traditional notions of evil and pain carried by Dante and assigning to them a new meaning and a new role.

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468. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, *The Violence Within / The Violence Without* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 46.

Following the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky and many other modernists, Stevens thinks that art removes objects from the automatism of perception through the tactic of making strange a device central to avant-garde aesthetics throughout the Twentieth-Century, and to Stevens, specifically. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.”<sup>469</sup>

Because our ability to recognize the actual and familiar is severely hampered by habit, and received ideas, in Shklovsky’s words, “Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war.”<sup>470</sup> Thus, the goal of art is to “refresh” our sensation of life, to render the familiar strange and therefore newly perceptible, by resisting ready-made language, clichés, and handed-down descriptions, for “the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important.”<sup>471</sup>

To express such a notion, Stevens repeatedly relies on a strikingly similar concept and trope—the idea that one must strip away all one ever knew, become ignorant again, and start over, approaching the world as if one were seeing it for the first time. It is an especially central impulse behind the everyday poetics of Stevens, such as in “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” where Stevens orders the “ephebe” to perceive things with a fresh eye and experience them without being affected by received ideas: “You must become an ignorant man again / And see the sun again with an ignorant eye / And see it clearly in the idea of it” (WSCPP, 329). The

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469. Viktor Shklovsky, quoted in Patricia Waugh, *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216.

470. Viktor Shklovsky, quoted in Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 118.

471. Viktor Shklovsky, quoted in Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 196.

need to reject old associations, names, and definitions is a crucial motive behind all of Stevens' poetry and finds its most powerful expression in "The Man with the Blue Guitar":

Throw away the lights, the definitions,  
And say of what you see in the dark  
That it is this or that it is that,  
But do not use the rotted names. (WSCPP, 150)

Again Stevens' use of "varnish and dirt" when he explains in a letter what he means by "the first idea" at the outset of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction": "If you take the varnish and dirt of generations off a picture, you see it in its first idea. If you think about the world without its varnish and dirt, you are a thinker of the first idea" (LWS, 427). For Stevens, poetry is an attempt to scrape away that accumulated soot and dirt: "The poem refreshes life so that we share, / For a moment, the first idea" (WSCPP, 330). This is what Stevens does in many if not all his poems. In this section, after looking, first at the similarities in form and content that bind Stevens to Dante, I will demonstrate, then, how Stevens revisits and revises Dante's "Purgatorio," and offers through defamiliarization, instead a new understanding and meaning to the old metaphysical concepts of death, evil, pain, and paradise. He even proposes as a substitute for Dante's metaphysical paradise, the living world as an earthly paradise.

#### **a. Stylistic Similarities between Dante and Stevens: the use of Terza Rima and Cryptography:**

In his article "Seeking the Sibyl of 'Harmonium': Wallace Stevens and Sybil Gage", T. William Ford attracts our attention on the influence exerted on Stevens's especially very early poetry by Dante in terms of subject-matter and style. The influence of Dante on Stevens' characteristic three-line stanza or Terza Rima, Ford observes is easily noticeable in many of his poems. The impact of Dante on Stevens, he consents, has been pointed up already by some scholars, such as Glen MacLeod, Robert Buttell, and Joan Richardson, who have shown that

Arensberg, with his interest in modern art, cryptography, and Dante, was an influence on Stevens' early poetic development. But more important, perhaps, was "Arensberg's interest in Dante, which led not only to Arensberg's own translations of the *Divine Comedy* in terza rima, but also to the publication of *The Cryptography of Dante*, in 1921."<sup>472</sup>

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as well as Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, had become sacred texts for the Arensberg circle, and, as noted by Richardson, its members were composing poems with ciphers, secret messages, wordplay, and similar puzzles. p13 Ford points out rightly that during 1913 and early 1914, Stevens had been reworking some of the "June Book" poems and was also experimenting with Dantean terza rima in several poems, including "Dolls." Although Stevens did not publish "Dolls," he preserved it in manuscript, and it eventually appeared in Buttell's *The Making of Harmonium*.

"Dolls," written in Terza Rima, is indeed, a poem that shows Stevens at work both experimenting with wordplay and hidden messages, and echoing Dante. Even though this appears to be one of his earliest attempts at wordplay, it will anticipate another poem "Anecdote of the Jar," published some years later in 1919, where Ford discovers the connection between Beatrice's name in "Anecdote of the Jar" coupled with the use of the phrase "took dominion" and takes this as proof that Stevens was inserting hidden messages in his poems. This might have been the first complete poem inspired by Stevens' new muse, in the same way that Dante was inspired by Beatrice he could not name. Stevens has cryptically identified Sybil Gage, a young and beautiful girl, as his newfound muse.

The first tercet immediately establishes this as a wordplay poem. "Eve" may refer to the feminine, the woman that generates the poetic impulse within the poet. But the phrase "Eve,

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472. Glen G. MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Company: The Harmonium Years, 1913-1923* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 48.

within me” plays on Stevens’ own name and suggests that this poem is personal, and might contain further hidden meanings or messages.

The thought of Eve, within me, is a doll  
That does what I desire, as, to perplex,  
With apple-buds, the husband in her sire.  
There’s a pious caliph, now, who prays and sees  
A vermeil cheek. He is half-conscious of  
The quaint seduction of a scented veil.  
Playing with dolls? A solid game, greybeards.  
Think of the cherubim and seraphim,  
And of Another, whom I must not name. (WSCPP, 517)

The line “Think of the cherubim and seraphim,” (WSCPP, 517) of the third tercet of “Dolls,” places us in the Paradise of Dante, where he is united with Beatrice. However, it is this third tercet that is of particular interest in deciphering the hidden message and connecting Dante to Stevens. The final line, “And of Another, whom I cannot name,” (WSCPP, 517) is the most mysterious. The obvious reading will be that of placing God, that “Another, whom I cannot name” in a blasphemous context, and therefore not being able to articulate his name. Here, God plays with his creatures as though they were his dolls. However, as known to Stevens, there could also be an embedded code one that suggests Stevens has found his muse and though, in Dantean tradition, he cannot name her directly, he cannot in fact reveal her identity. Stevens has identified Sybil Gage as his newfound muse. Though the muse’s name is concealed in “Dolls,” it is likely that Stevens is alluding to Sybil Gage.

There are undoubtedly more examples of this sort of wordplay and cipher in Stevens’ poetry. Another evidence that Stevens was experimenting with wordplay and hidden text, while echoing Dante will be, as pointed out by Ford, found in “Anecdote of the Jar.” He had probably

read Dante's *A New Life*, where the poet speaks of his initial meeting with the nine-year-old Beatrice Portinari, including the Latin phrase "ecce deus fortior me, qui beniens dominabitur mihi" [the god of love, greater than I, came and took dominion over me]. This was Dante's first meeting with his muse. In "Anecdote of the Jar," Stevens plays on the name Portinari and Dante's presence reverberates through the following lines:

The jar was round upon the ground

And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere. (WSCPP, 61)

This wordplay on the name Portinari which gives Port- in- air (i) seems obvious enough for Ford, who finds out that the name of Beatrice Portinari, Dante's muse in conjunction with the phrase "took dominion" are obvious proofs of Dante's presence in Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar", and that Stevens was inserting hidden messages in his poem. In her biography of Stevens, Alison Johnson, also suggests that Stevens employed the use of ciphers and hidden messages at an early stage of his poetry experimentation.

Including the name of one of the most famous muses of all time may have allowed Stevens to insert the name of his own muse. Johnson also believes this woman was Sybil Gage and perhaps referenced as "Eve" in the poem "Dolls." Most scholars believe that Elsie, Stevens' future wife served as muse for "Dolls," but Stevens, disappointed at Elsie's less than pleased reaction to the poem, replaced her with his own "inner paramour".

#### **b. Thematic Similarities: - The Theme of Evil and Pain:**

Instead of embracing traditional religion like Eliot and Dante did, Stevens, on the contrary, discards any effort to naturalize the traditional beliefs. Instead, he suggests poetry as a substitute to religion. In a letter to Hi Simons, Stevens wrote, "It is a habit of mind with me to be thinking of some substitute for religion. . . . My trouble, and the trouble of a great many

people, is the loss of belief in the sort of God in Whom we were all brought up to believe” (LWS, 348).

Instead of being a source of despair and disillusionment, as it was for many modernists at the beginning of the Twentieth-Century, and Eliot, for instance, that loss of belief in God per se opened up for Stevens new opportunities: to think of poetry as a substitute to religion.

The end of religion is marked in Stevens’ poetry by the neglect of the solace and comfort supplied by Christianity, and the rejection of metaphysical illusions by a quite secular attitude. This latter, instead, centers on our attentiveness to the existence of a physical world, and awareness of it as a reality. Stevens’ denial of the supernatural and his concern with the physical world delineates him from Dante and Eliot whose transcendental poetry goes beyond reality and seeks to reach the divine. In his poem “The Men that Are Falling,” Stevens writes of a man who “loved earth, not heaven, enough to die” (WSCPP, 174).

Such a secular poetry which gives primacy to the living world and refurbishes the meaning of the earth as opposed to Dante’s metaphysical world, necessitates the imposition of the human mind to manage this world: “The great poems of heaven and hell have been written, and the great poem of the earth remains to be written” (WSCPP, 730), writes Stevens to confirm this view. In this vein, many of Stevens’ poems, most notably “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman” and “Sunday Morning” deal with the end of the Christian era, or question the validity of the Christian church; Since, for Stevens, the Christian religion has become “an exhausted culture” (WSCPP, 914), the “holy hush of ancient sacrifice” (WSCPP, 53) must be thrown off in favor of the voluptuous “beauty of the earth” (WSCPP, 53), where poetry as a supreme fiction can replace it .

Hence, differing from Dante and Eliot, Stevens found in the living world, a way to develop an earthly poetics to replace the spiritual consolation that once was part of the religious sphere. He was after living in the everyday world and finding “God in the object itself”

(WSCPP, 405). He succeeded in including heaven as a part of earth, in this way. In a journal entry of August 1902, he articulated his incompatible views on divinity and his will to replace it by an earthly poetics:

Last night I spent an hour in the dark transept of St Patrick's Cathedral where I go now and then in my more lonely moods. An old argument with me is that the true religious force in the world is not the church but the world itself: the mysterious callings of Nature and our responses. What incessant murmurs fill that ever-laboring, tireless church! But to-day in my walk I thought that after all there is no conflict of forces but rather a contrast. In the cathedral I felt one presence; on the highway I felt another. Two different deities presented themselves.... The priest in me worshipped one God at one shrine; the poet another God at another shrine. (LWS, 29)

Unlike Dante's metaphysical world of *The Divine Comedy*, Stevens' earthly or worldly poetics seeks to fill the spiritual vacuum created by the loss of traditional religion. In fact, many poems, such as "The Emperor of Ice-cream," "Esthétique du Mal" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" echo Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Karl P. Wentersdorf and Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, are among the few critics who have related Dante to Stevens in studying Stevens' work. In his article "Dante Alighieri, and the Emperor," Wentersdorf, discusses "Stevens' allusions to one of the greatest of all repositories of religious metaphor – *The Commedia* of Dante Alighieri."<sup>473</sup>

The Post-Religious world requires a new secular understanding of evil and pain. Stevens challenges the metaphysical meaning that Dante and Eliot assign to the religious notions of evil and pain as being spiritual trials, or evidence of a distancing from God. Stevens' secular poetics,

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473. Karl P. Wentersdorf, "Wallace Stevens, Dante Alighieri, and the Emperor," *Twentieth Century Literature* 13, no. 4. (1968):197.

instead, convinces people to accept evil and pain as parts of this world, and since this world is their only home despite its evil and pain, they have no other alternative than to tolerate it. This is what Stevens means when he says that “the imperfect is our paradise” (WSCPP, 179). For him the sense of evil must not be seen in relation to religious definitions.

“Outside of Wedlock” is a poem where Stevens recasts the significance of evil away from the old religious beliefs and assumptions, forsaking the: “the voice of all our ancestors. / The père Benjamin, the mère Blandenah, / and “Saying we have forgot them, they never lived” (WSCPP, 593).

The following lines with their new symbolism evidence the rejection of the traditional sense of evil that belongs to a former religious imaginary world for a new one:

The poor piano forte  
Whimpers when the moon above  
East Hartford Wakes us to the emotion, grand fortissimo,  
Of our sense of evil,  
Of our sense that time has been  
Like water running in a gutter  
Through an alley to nowhere,  
Without beginning or the concept of an end. (WSCPP, 593)

The description of evil is given a new significance different from the religious agenda that evil is something to purge with time. Here, the symbols of time and water are estranged from their conventional meaning and given a new one. Evil is described as the formlessness of time, the sense of a world without design, a world with neither a “beginning” nor an “end”. Unlike Eliot who in “Four Quartets” sets the pursuit of the spiritual quest in the natural time to reach the “timeless moment” (CPTSE, 201) or the time of redemption, Stevens does not think that Evil can be overcome through the meaningful shape of time. The Christian redemptive

function of water is refuted by Stevens, also. When In Eliot's "The Wasteland," rain and water suggest the cleansing of sins, the washing away of offenses, and the start of a new future, in Stevens' poem, the dirty water that runs in a gutter leads to nowhere. The end of religion opens onto a modern and secular understanding of pain and evil that contrasts with Dante's and Eliot's.

Stevens' understanding of evil is best mirrored in his long poem, "Esthétique du Mal." As a matter of evidence, James S. Hans views it "as one of few modern articulations of the nature of evil."<sup>474</sup> These modern articulations, according to Ronald Sukenick, are the result of the poet's attempt "to discover an attitude in face of evils inherent in reality without the consolation of the supernatural belief."<sup>475</sup> The eight canto encapsulates the essential ideas of the poem: "The death of Satan was a tragedy / For the imagination" (WSCPP, 281). Charles Altieri explains that "once Satan dies the imagination is no longer free to attribute evil to the machinations of a metaphysical personage. The imagination must face the possibility that evil is not caused by an outward agency: evil is simply an aspect of the secular world that neither needs nor invites the poet's supplements."<sup>476</sup> Altieri's clarification makes clear that the post-religious world enforces upon us not only a secular approach and a new comprehension of the traditional notion of evil, but a new imagination to interpret it.

If Dante and Eliot consider evil and pain as spiritual trials, due to man's separation from God and a necessary ascetic discipline through which one gains religious knowledge, wisdom, felicity and attains divine salvation, Stevens' worldly notion of evil and pain, on the contrary, discards any recourse to God. He, rather assumes that Christianity, and religion in general, have overstated the notion of this world as evil. Since that pain and evil are part of this world and

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474. James S. Hans, *The Value (s) of Literature* (New York: State university of New York Press, 1990), 80.

475. Sukenick, *Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure*, 122.

476. Charles Altieri, "Why Angel Surrounded by Paysans Concludes 'The Auroras of Autumn,'" *Wallace Stevens Journal* 32, no.2 (2008): 163.

that there is no other place where humans can live, we have just to accept them and include them as being necessary elements making part of the large immanent reality, which is our physical world. Consequently, forsaking Dante's metaphysical world or "Inferno", and rejecting the metaphysical meanings assigned by Dante and Eliot to evil and pain, Stevens' secular poetics views this world as our unique home, and evil and pain as needed prerequisites for life.

As living in this world presumes that we must experience evil, and suffering, therefore humans, instead of trying to transcend them, they will have to accept, and tolerate them. Again, pain is not a trial, a challenge to the spirit, or a sign of the fallen world. It is the mark of the world experienced in the intensity of its immanence.

What is important for Stevens is people should have the freedom to face evil and pain without the help of a "too human God" because pain remains a human experience :

The fault lies with an over-human god,  
Who by sympathy has made himself a man  
And is not to be distinguished, when we cry  
Because we suffer. . . . If only he would not pity us so much,  
Weaken our fate, relieve us of woe both great  
And small, a constant fellow of destiny,  
A too, too human god, self-pity's kin  
And uncourageous genesis. . . . It seems  
As if the health of the world might be enough. (WSCPP, 278)

An "over-human god" 's pity has weakened people's ability to appreciate and find satisfactions in the physical world. What is required instead is a "faithful reality" without the sympathy of that "too human god." "If there must be a god in the house," writes Stevens, "let

him be one / That will not hear us when we speak: a coolness, / A vermilioned nothingness” (WSCPP, 278). If there must be a god in this world, let him dwell quietly”(WSCPP, 288).

Free from the traditional concept of evil and pain our (secular) world or what Stevens calls “terra infidel” is now “ both heaven and hell” , combining the once characteristic qualities attributed to the metaphysical world of heaven and hell:

Or what hell was, since now both heaven and hell  
Are one, and here,  
O terra infidel. (WSCPP, 278)

By demythologizing and transforming the notions of Heaven and Hell, and acquitting Satan from causing evil and pain, the following canto challenges openly the metaphysics of evil found in *The Divine Comedy*. Eleanor Cook says that “Stevens’ tercet faintly evokes his [Dante’s] *Terza Rima* in sound or sense.”<sup>477</sup> Michael O’ Neill, for his part, confirms that this passage “evokes and bids farewell to Dante’s world view.”<sup>478</sup> Written in Dante’s *terza rima*, this canto however suggests that God is no longer present to relieve humans from their suffering:

... It seems  
As if the health of the world might be enough.  
It seems as if the honey of common summer  
Might be enough, as if the golden combs  
Were a part of a sustenance itself enough,  
As if hell, so modified, had disappeared,  
As if pain, no longer satanic mimicry,

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477. Eleanor Cook, *A Reader Guide to Wallace Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 184.

478. Michael O’ Neill, “The Death of Satan: Stevens’s *Esthétique du Mal*, Evil and the Romantic Imagination,” *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, eds. Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), 230.

Could be borne, as if we were sure to find our way. (WSCPP, 278-9)

“In an age of disbelief, it is for the poet to supply the satisfactions of belief, in his measure and in his style” (WSCPP, 748).

Stevens’ “The Emperor of Ice- Cream” is a poem which employs as its title already suggests, the motif of the Emperor, as a figure of a high social order and a woman with death. In an anonymous article, entitled “Death and the Emperor in Dante, Browning, Dickinson and Stevens”, published by the florin website, and originally published in *Studies in Medievalism II* (1983), 67-72, edited by Leslie J. Workman, and Kathleen Verduin, the writer draws our attention on the borrowing by the one poet from the work of the other, (Dante) and the impact of a fifteenth century popular theme in art: the figure of Death confronting individuals of differing social ranks, including among their figures that of the Emperor. Establishing an intertextual relationship between these writers, this article allows me to see not only the impact of Dante on these writers, but on Stevens, particularly. However, the theme of Death and the Emperor in the poetry of fourteenth-century Dante Alighieri, nineteenth-century Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Dickinson and twentieth-century Wallace Stevens is instead the confrontation of an Emperor, not so much with Death as with a woman. Each poet makes use of the theme of death, yet each has it undergo a metamorphosis into something new and strange. The multiple borrowing, is indicative of its relevance from the Fifteenth-Century up to the Twentieth-Century. If in Dante’s work, a widow whose son is murdered, demands justice to the Emperor, in Stevens’ poem “The Emperor of Ice- Cream”, the subject of death is perceived differently, and given a new interpretation. In Stevens’ case death has lost its solemn character, and has become trivial and insignificant.

In “The Emperor of Ice- Cream,” the setting is that of a funeral for a dead woman. The first stanza takes place in the kitchen, and the second stanza in the bedroom of the same house. In the first stanza, a muscular cigar roller will be called on to whip up the ice cream. The funeral

will be informal. The young women can wear their regular daily outfits. The flowers, delivered by local boys, can be wrapped in month-old newspapers.

In the second stanza, we move on to the bedroom. The body also has to be prepared. The embroidered sheet from the dresser will be used to cover her face. If her knobby, old feet stick out, it will remind us that she is truly dead:

Take from the dresser of deal  
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet  
On which she embroidered fantails once  
And spread it so as to cover her face.  
If her horny feet protrude, they come  
To show how cold she is, and dumb.  
Let the light affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (WSCPP, 50)

Calling attention mockingly to the dead woman's poverty where "the cheap dresser deal lack (s) several glass knobs"<sup>479</sup> and where her "horny feet protrude"<sup>480</sup> uncovered by an old embroidered sheet, the narrator rather denigrates the dead woman and with her death also. Nevertheless, in its imperial conquest of the fear of death, turning the funeral into a merry and funny (people are being served ice-cream at the funeral) even clownish situation, the poem leaves its reader smiling at the idea of death.

Stevens has already questioned the role of religion and art in the Modern world of chaos in many of his poems such as "Sunday Morning" and "The High-Toned Old Christian Woman". For him, poetry can offer a sort of alternative paradise, so he expressed the necessity to find "the need of some imperishable bliss "(WSCPP, 55) a need to believe in some sort of

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479. Charles Doyle, *Wallace Stevens* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 102.

480. *Ibid.*

substitute. The replacement of religion by art allows individuals to cope with everyday life, to create their “supreme fiction” by transforming themselves and their world anew into something sustainable. Instead of submitting oneself to self-punishment in life like the “disaffected flagellants” of “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman,” individuals should enjoy what life has to offer despite death and the fears of life. Death, after all, is “the mother of beauty” (WSCPP, 55). Even if death is painful, it is death that makes life meaningful because life must be lived. As Stevens states in “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” “Let be be finale of seem” (WSCPP, 50). It is death, the death of the woman that should stand-in for the celebration of life—for people to “Call the roller of big cigars. . . and bid him whip” (WSCPP, 50) ice cream, for people to “dawdle in such dress” (WSCPP, 50) and boys to “Bring flowers” (WSCPP, 50). Death is inevitable, so individuals must let it “be” (WSCPP, 50).

At a funeral, people should wear black suits and dresses, but here, the speaker tells us to “let the wenches dawdle in such dress/ As they are used to wear” (WSCPP, 50). Moreover, it’s very funny to see “the boys / Bring flowers in last month’s newspapers” (WSCPP, 50), not in a good wrapping paper. There is no solemnity in this line. Stevens even seems to mock human solemn events related or associated with the mystic world after death.

People must face death for what it is—a culmination of life—and realize that the only thing that truly matters “is the emperor of ice-cream” (WSCPP, 50).—the pleasures of life. By facing this truth that life ends and people are not immortal, the imagination of the poet, as well as that of the people can transcend reality by seeking oblivion through death. It is the creation of poetry and the participation with poetry that allows poetry to triumph over death.

In this poem, Stevens thinks of the ephemeral features of life as the most beautiful, and seems to admit no existence of an ideal transcendental world, or the eternal, mystical world after our death:

Let the wenches dawdle in such dress

As they are used to wear, and let the boys  
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.  
Let be be finale of seem.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (WSCPP, 50)

Stevens' poetry is a struggle to return to the physical world without reference to the religious Christian metaphysical elements and to offer poetry as an alternative to Christianity. This considerable divergence from Eliot and Dante is due to his understanding of evil and pain. Dante's and Eliot's poetry declares that there is evil and pain in this world and the role of the poet is to purge it. For them, pain and evil is what prevents people from being in this world, and what makes them seek certain consolatory beliefs in the supernatural. But Stevens' poetry strives to transform the meaning of evil so that it can be accepted as part of the real world rather than a problem that needs to be purged.

Dante's influence on Stevens is also pertinent in the similar use of the Stairs, albeit ironic that Stevens reworks in order to reverse the Dantean proposition that the stairs suggest the transposition from a physical world of earthly pursuits to a more uplifting spiritual world. "Aside on the Oboe" is a poem by Stevens that recalls Dante's imaginary stairs. However, Stevens' intentions are antithetical to Dante's. Stevens in this poem announces that "the final belief / must be in fiction" (WSCPP, 226). He proposes, instead, to abandon the metaphysical illusions supplied by the old beliefs, and believe in fiction, offered by the poet as the maker of fiction who comprehends and explicates things not religiously but humanly:

He is the transporence of the place in which  
He is and in his poems we find peace.  
He sets this peddler's pies and cries in summer,  
The glass man, cold and numbered dewily cries,  
"Thou art not August unless I make thee so.

“Clandestine steps upon imagined stairs

Climb through the night, because his cuckoos call. (WSCPP, 227)

In opposition to other obsolete superstitions and religious fictions, Stevens refreshes our conception of life by the use of the “sea-side” as a metaphor of life buttressing the idea of man’s life. The maker of fiction, in his freshness, through “Immaculate imagery” (WSCPP, 226) “still walks in dew” and “mutters milky lines” (WSCPP, 226). At this point, the poem carries the idea of an intact and new conception of life. Despite his deprivation from divine qualities, he shares with God the power to create:

If you say on hautboy man is not enough

Can never stand as god, is ever wrong. (WSCPP, 2267)

In her discussion of the influence of Dante on Stevens, Brogan concentrates only on Stevens’ “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” to suggest the possibility to read each section of Stevens’ poem in concord with and in opposition to its corresponding book in Dante’s trilogy. The section “Must be Abstract” opposes the concrete and historically bound Hell that Dante envisions in “Inferno” which refers to people who really existed and alludes to certain events that really took place. “Must change” is the reversal of the religious assumption so present in Dante’s text. While Dante’s purgatory purifies the sinful souls of those who have died penitent, Stevens’ change aims at satisfying the modern secularized mind purifying the imagination from the metaphysical and theological assumptions. Moreover, poetry must also be a source of pleasure much as Dante’s paradise was but with secular rather than sacred beatitude.<sup>481</sup>

#### **A. Influence : John Donne, Eliot, and Stevens The English**

The beginning of the twentieth century shows increasing interest in the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, mainly because of the pioneering work of the literary scholar H.J.C. Grierson and the interest of T.S. Eliot. Thus, Donne’s poetry experienced a remarkable

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481. Brogan, *Violence Within / The Violence Without*, 46.

revival, and numerous critical works about this topic appeared. We can mention at least a collection of critical essays edited by Theodore Spencer called *A Garland for John Donne*, published on the commemoration of Donne's death, including contributions from Mario Praz, George Williamson, Mary Paton Ramsay and of course also from T. S. Eliot.

Eliot participated vividly by writing essays on the topic. Stevens is no exception, and showed deep interest in Donne. Eliot's and Stevens' interest in the poetry of John Donne is linked with the questions of their time. According to Eliot, who cannot accept any kind of emotion without its control by the intellect, one of the flaws of Romanticism was the fact that it saw "the supreme good in supreme thrill."<sup>482</sup>

John Donne appealed to the Modernist poets for the "unification of sensibility"<sup>483</sup> which implies a recreation of thought into feeling. Eliot blames the "dissociation of sensibility"<sup>484</sup> that Milton and Dryden had brought in the seventeenth century. Subsequent English poetry had lost that immediacy. By the time of Tennyson and Browning, Eliot's Victorian precursors, a sentimental age had set in, in which feeling had been given primacy over, rather than balance with, thought. Hi Simons considers that "Stevens' compositions are conceits quite of the Metaphysical order and Stevens is one of the originators of the Metaphysical trend in the poetry of our time."<sup>485</sup> In his discussion of Stevens' use of imagery, Bart Eeckhout notes that

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482. Irving Babbitt, quoted in Victor Brombert, *The Hidden Reader: Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Baudelaire, Flaubert* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 193.

483. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," 248.

484. *Ibid.*, 248. Eliot uses the expression "the dissociation of sensibility" in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets," but he never clarifies it. Pelagia Goulimari, in *his Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to Postcolonialism* defines it as the "failure to connect the sensible and the intelligible." In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham, defines Eliot's "the dissociation of sensibility" as the failure to connect the sensible and the intelligible, experience and abstract conception, science and theology."

485. *Ibid.*, 182.

“Stevens’ use of the kind of geographical imagery so common also with John Donne in the era of great seafaring discoveries.”<sup>486</sup>

According to Eliot, the poetry of his age should discard Romanticism, go back to the metaphysical poets and look for the inspiration in their work. As his definition in *The Clark Lectures* suggests, it is the task of metaphysical poets to transmute a thought into feeling. However, in comparison to the poetry of John Donne and his school, the poetry of Eliot’s age must be more difficult as there are more urges in the world of the twentieth century than in the world of the seventeenth century. That is why “the poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.”<sup>487</sup>

Likewise, Stevens’ poetry is known for its obscure and difficult language. Many of his poems often question the possibility of real communication, by taking language itself as their focus. So, many of Wallace Stevens' poems are a reflection, directly or indirectly, on language itself. The difficulty of the language of many of his poems can be seen in his frequent use of unusual, archaic, and foreign words. It is most evident, however, in his use of and reflections on metaphor, a word which itself appears in the titles of more than a dozen of his poems, such as “Metaphors of a Magnifico” and “The Motive for Metaphor” to quote just two of them.

Stevens thinks of metaphor as a way of understanding the world, but rejects inherited metaphors, so deeply ingrained in American ways of thinking, and handed down from the European culture. And here is Steven's theory that asserts the necessity of always beginning anew, and discarding the past with its stale knowledge. The two metaphors which repeatedly

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486. Bart Eeckhout, *Wallace Stevens and the Limits of Reading and Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press 2002), 225.

487 . T.S. Eliot, quoted in Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry*, 19.

come up in Stevens' poems are the Christian metaphor of the human world as a fallen place, contrasted with paradise, and the Romantic metaphor of nature as a spiritual source. As he doesn't believe in the truth of either of these metaphors, he sees poetry as one of the central challenges to come up with new and creative forms of expression using language.

As Metaphysical poetry uses witty, elaborate, highly intelligent metaphors and paradoxes called "metaphysical conceits" to examine deep philosophical topics such as existence and religion, Stevens adopts the same formal stylistic devices, as Donne does. And here, he seems closer to Donne for its use of paradox, wordplay, and humor. Donne and Stevens, both studied law and were poets, and dealt with serious subjects in a humorous and light manner. In fact, there seem to be two sides to John Donne's works: his religious poetry that contemplated death and God's omnipresence, and his love poetry. Stevens' verse also reveals that he is obsessed with endless binarism, the relationship between the real and the imaginary, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the secular and the religious, the divine and the profane.

#### **a. Stevens and the Metaphysical Poetry:**

##### **1. Donne, Stevens, and The Use of Conceits:**

It is true that both Donne and Stevens connect between the ordinary and extraordinary, the world of experience and the world of thought, or, in theological terms, between the immanent and transcendent, which is a peculiar feature of metaphysical poetry. Even when Stevens's poems show his deep influence by the Metaphysical school in using conceits similar to the metaphysical ones, and comparing two things which do not usually go together to create a surprising metaphor, his use, however, is quite different, sophisticated, innovative, and original. If in a metaphysical conceit, an unconventional comparison is made between a spiritual element and something physical to create an intelligent extended metaphor, Stevens seems to excel in this practice. This attests of his theory of defamiliarization that is to make things fresh

and start anew. This section explores how Metaphysical conceits in Stevens's poem "Sunday Morning" (1925) are used by comparing them to Donne's poem "The Flea" (1633).

First, let us look at Donne's poem "The Flea," which draws an analogy between the flea, the small insect and marital union. The flea sucked the blood of both lovers, and thus it is a symbol of this intimate act. The whole poem is trying to persuade the reader about this similarity. In this respect, the role of the conceit is indispensable, and the comparison of a flea and marital union is witty, surprising and pleasing. Standing on a word play, this comparison makes the poem well-meaning and goodhearted. To convince the woman that they are already joined both physically and spiritually because of the flea biting them both, in lines 10 to 13 of the poem, the flea bite represents a sexual relationship, and is compared to both a "marriage bed" and a "marriage temple":

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, nay more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is. (SPJD, 81)

Stevens's verse is likewise a good example of secular and sacred poetry which shows a great interest in conceits for the unexpected and the quaintness of their comparisons. "Sunday Morning", for example, is a poem which makes use of conceits to account of the loss of religious faith. The poet shares a meditating woman's nostalgia for belief. As she muses on life and death, religion and the beauty of the world, Stevens draws a parallelism between Paradise and life on earth by contrasting and comparing them. For this effect, he uses contrasting themes: life and death, and belief and doubt. Throughout the poem, a philosophical dialogue between this unnamed woman's search for spiritual fulfillment and Stevens's poetic persona is chronicled. The two inspect two contrasting ideologies: that of Christianity and of paganism, as the woman must decide which will help her find the spiritual solace she is seeking.

## **2. Christianity and Paganism:**

Unlike the Romantics, who turned to nature as a source of spiritual wisdom and came to worship it as pantheists, Stevens promotes paganism or an earth-based belief. For him: “The great poems of heaven and hell have been written, and the great poem of the earth remains to be written” (WSCPP, 730).

As a pagan, he encourages the woman to devote herself to an intense relationship with nature, because sensual pleasures supplant any satisfaction gained from the dead religions of the past. He insists that she could find divinity through a connection to the splendor of the earth. Her earthly pleasures, which he enumerates in this stanza through images of the seasons, should be as cherished as “the thought of heaven” (WSCPP, 53).

### **c. Life and Death:**

The first stanza introduces, the lady arising on a Sunday morning in her “peignoir,” or dressing gown, and taking her breakfast on a terrace, at home. Rather than going to Church, she prefers to enjoy the physical beauty of nature instead:

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late  
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,  
And the green freedom of a cockatoo  
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate  
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice. (WSCPP, 53)

To contrast between life and death, the first sentence employs already a number of words that are bursting with life, color, and vitality, words associated with nature, such as “oranges,” “green,” “freedom,” “sunny,” “cockatoo”. The same sentence also features words and phrases, some explicitly linked to religion, that conjure opposing thoughts of stasis and death, such as “complacencies,” “dissipate,” “holy hush,” “ancient sacrifice.” Here, in a simple and stark

opposition, Stevens already sets out his argument between life, associated with nature, and death, associated with religion.

Throughout the poem, the speaker's strongest argument to urge the woman to devote herself to an intense relationship with nature comes in the form of an examination of death and life. He continually associates Christianity and the religions of the past with death. In the first stanza, he notes the darkness of "that old catastrophe" (WSCPP, 53), the crucifixion of Christ, and of the "dominion of the blood and sepulchre" (WSCPP, 53), the important Christian ritual of communion where believers drink the blood and eat the body of Christ. He also finds death in the static nature of heaven where ripe fruit never falls and the "boughs hang always heavy in that perfect sky" (WSCPP, 53). In this immutable world, with its "dividing and indifferent blue" (WSCPP, 54), dividing and indifferent blue she will never, he insists, be able to make an emotional connection. The speaker points out that a celebration of nature, by contrast, is a celebration of life, even as he acknowledges its cyclical patterns of death and rebirth. He argues that the very fact of inevitable change fills the present with a stronger sense of vibrancy and poignancy. Thus, this form of "death is the mother of beauty" (WSCPP, 55) and so should be accepted as a crucial part of an appreciation of the moment.

Reaffirming his position that sensual pleasures supersede any contentment gained from the dead religions of the past, he presents his argument through association and juxtaposition, continually finding alternate ways to present the same point of view. The cumulative effect of the repeated images results in a convincing argument against a devotion to the tenets of Christianity and for a dedication to an appreciation of and communion with the beauty of nature.

The reference to the "holy hush of ancient sacrifice" (WSCPP, 53) suggests that the day is Sunday, a holy day. At first, she feels happy spending Sunday morning at home, surrounded by the comfort and beauty of her physical environment. But soon, guilt over her dismissal of traditional Christian rituals on Sunday undermines her pleasure, and she becomes filled with

spiritual anxiety, not knowing which road she should take to spiritual fulfillment. However, as she dreams, the pleasure she experiences this morning is soon extinguished by “the dark encroachment of that old catastrophe,” a reference to the crucifixion of Christ:

She dreams a little, and she feels the dark  
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,  
As a calm darkness among water-lights.  
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings  
Seem things in some procession of the dead. (WSCPP, 53)

After this first stanza, the poem becomes a dialogue between her voice and that of the poet, between the woman’s philosophical questionings and his assertion that she can find satisfaction only through a personal, intense communion with the natural world. She recognizes that the secular beauty she appreciates is not eternal, and so the colorful oranges and parrot, earlier appearing so full of life, now “seem things in some procession of the dead”:

Winding across wide water, without sound.  
The day is like wide water, without sound,  
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet  
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,  
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre. (WSCPP, 53)

As she is travelling by “her dreaming feet” to the “dominion of the blood and sepulchre,” she becomes caught up in Christian creed, recalling the ritualistic ceremony in celebration of the Last Supper and Christ’s burial. The blood refers to the wine and the sepulchre to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that contained the tomb where Christ’s body was laid on Good Friday. Thus, the sensual pleasure of the late morning coffee and oranges has been replaced by the spiritual satisfaction of the bread and wine communion.

The voice of the poet questions the woman's decision to turn her back on the beauty of the natural world and devote herself to her religion. He insists that she could find divinity through a connection to the splendor of the earth. Her earthly pleasures, which he enumerates in this stanza through images of the seasons, should be as cherished as "the thought of heaven" (WSCPP, 53). The poet exhorts her to appreciate the very transience of her world since it encompasses the pleasures and pains of living. These passions, not the superstitions that live in "silent shadows and in dreams," are "the measures destined for her soul."

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?

What is divinity if it can come

Only in silent shadows and in dreams?

Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,

In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else

In any balm or beauty of the earth,

Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

Divinity must live within herself:

Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;

Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued

Elations when the forest blooms; gusty

Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;

All pleasures and all pains, remembering

The bough of summer and the winter branch.

These are the measures destined for her soul. (WSCPP, 54)

In the third stanza, the speaker expands his focus on religion to the Greek god Jove who had no traditional family to nurture him and no natural connections to the "sweet land." The speaker links this ancient myth to the birth of Christ through the reference to the star that guided

the shepherds and wise men to Bethlehem. Both myths, he suggests, are disconnected from human reality. As humanity finds the divine in the natural world, the sky will appear “friendlier” (WSCPP, 53), no longer marking the division between heaven and earth.

The woman’s voice returns at the beginning of the next two stanzas as she questions the poet’s argument that earthly pleasures will provide spiritual fulfillment. While nature fills her with contentment, she wonders whether she can find paradise there. Here, the poet reasserts and clarifies his position. In his response, he acknowledges the impermanence of the world but argues that the bliss she experiences observing the beauty of nature is everlasting through immediate observance of the spring and through the vividness of her memory. Christian theology, with its “chimera of the grave” (WSCPP, 54) (its dark dreams of the crucifixion of Christ) or even its “melodious isles” (WSCPP, 54) will not endure as will the magnificence of nature for her.

She complains that even while experiencing contentment in her relationship to the natural world, she feels “the need of some imperishable bliss” (WSCPP, 55), which Christianity insists can be found only in complete devotion to the church. The poet counters, “death is the mother of beauty” (WSCPP, 55), the need of some imperishable bliss asserting that she can only experience true satisfaction through the appreciation of that which is impermanent. To prove his point, he describes the passions of youth, symbolized by the ripening of plums and pears. When death “strews the leaves of sure obliteration on our paths” (WSCPP, 55), lovers’ desires will be heightened as they realize the importance of the moment.

In stanza six, the poet continues his argument that death is the mother of beauty, juxtaposing it with a counter vision of the stasis of heaven, with its ripe fruit that never falls, hanging heavy in “that perfect sky” (WSCPP, 55). The rivers there never pour out into the seas or touch the shores. In contrast, “our perishing earth” (WSCPP, 55), of beginnings and endings

is colored with “inarticulate” (WSCPP, 55), pangs and delicious tastes and odors of pear and plum, where she lounges during “silken weavings” (WSCPP, 55) of afternoons.

The next stanza suggests an alternative to traditional worship. The poet describes a pagan, almost savage, celebration of the earth, as a ring of men chant sensuous songs praising the beauty of a summer morning. They do not worship a specific god, but the earth for them has the same intense power that had previously been associated with the Christian God, and thus they are devoted to it. As they strip naked in an act of merging their energies with those of nature, they experience paradise. Their chant encompasses all the elements of nature, “the windy lake” (WSCPP, 56) and angelic trees as their songs echo off the hills long after they leave. The poet symbolizes this “heavenly fellowship” (WSCPP, 56) between nature and the men by noting the “dew upon their feet” (WSCPP, 56) the windy lake as they dance and chant.

The voice of the poet and that of the woman come together in acceptance of an alternate form of worship in the final stanza of the poem. The single voice here notes the inevitability of decay and death and understands that an appreciation of that mutability enriches present experience. The woman acknowledges that Jesus’ tomb was not endowed with mystical spirits, that it only contained his grave. She now turns to the natural world, with its “old chaos of the sun” (WSCPP, 56) and its understanding of days and nights, beginning and ends.

This realignment with the pagan world of earthly pleasures releases her from the bonds of her religion so that she is now “unsponsored” (WSCPP, 56) and free. The natural world is full of the “spontaneous cries” (WSCPP, 56) of its creatures in their beautiful surroundings. The final line reinforces the statement that death is the mother of beauty, as the free flying pigeons, “on extended wings” (WSCPP, 56) rise and fall following no prescribed course but eventually descend into darkness at the close of day.

#### **d. Belief and Doubt:**

The woman in the poem moves back and forth between belief and doubt as she enters into a dialogue with the poet about spiritual fulfillment. At the beginning of the poem, she appears to be content in her newfound appreciation of the earthly pleasures of the natural world. This world with its vivid colors and leisurely breakfasts offers her a sense of freedom in the time she allows herself to appreciate the bounty of nature. Soon, however, doubt over the choice she has made this Sunday morning ruins her serenity. As she appreciates the sensuality of nature, she experiences a growing awareness and dread of its transitory nature. As a result, she becomes filled with spiritual anxiety to the point that she begins to believe that a reversion to Christian rituals and dogma will lead to salvation.

As the speaker tries to convince her to return to her world of earthly delights, she struggles to maintain her belief in traditional theology through a series of questions on the nature of that theology. She wonders whether earth will “seem all of paradise that we shall know” (WSCPP, 54) especially given its impermanence. Nature fills her with contentment, yet she asks, “when the birds are gone, and their warm fields return no more, where, then, is paradise?” (WSCPP, 54) She continually resists the poet’s promotion of a spiritual connection to nature, insisting, “I still feel the need of some imperishable bliss,” (WSCPP, 56) which she had found in a Christian vision of eternity.

The speaker’s voice, however, never wavers from his assertion that she must find divinity within herself, and that this can only be accomplished through a communion with nature. By meeting each question with an imaginative yet logical response, the speaker slowly convinces her to doubt her old beliefs in the divinity of traditional religion. By the end of the poem, she has returned to the position she held at the beginning, again aligning herself with the freedom of birds, “unsponsored” (WSCPP, 56) in her attachment to her natural world.

#### **d. Carpe Diem : Metaphysical Motif in Donne and Stevens:**

Carpe diem, a Latin phrase from Horace's Odes, translates into "seize the day." The phrase became a common literary motif, especially in lyric poetry and in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English love poetry. The most famous poems that incorporate this motif include Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, Andrew Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress," Edward Fitzgerald's "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam," and John Donne's "The Flea". Modern writers have also employed the motif, and Stevens is one of them. However, Stevens puts a modern turn on this traditional carpe diem theme. Like his poetic predecessors, he directs his speaker to advise a woman or invite her to experience sensual pleasures. Since death is inevitable and time is fleeting, the speaker in a poem that uses carpe diem, typically often tries to convince a reluctant woman to join him and live the present moment or "seize the day."

In his presentation of the carpe diem theme, Stevens combines the traditional and modern to create a new kind of exhortation. Stevens's speaker urges the woman in the poem to turn from a devotion to Christianity to a spiritual connection with the natural world. He suggests that a celebration of earthly pleasures can result only if we free ourselves from the strict confines of religion. Most Metaphysical poems reflect this classical and pagan point of view as their speakers try to convince women to give themselves up to sensual experience, yet not to the extent of abandoning religion.

In "The Flea", Donne tries to persuade a woman to share with him the pleasures of love. In "Sunday Morning" this classical tradition is used in a fresh and unexpected way and Stevens reverses the intent of the carpe diem motif. Stevens will assert his point that one should seize the day through a celebration of the natural world, not of traditional Christian theology, to experience true freedom and fulfillment. He also reverses the order of this classical tradition. The woman begins the poem effectively "seizing the day" by not going to church on Sunday, as is traditionally expected of practicing Christians. She instead spends a leisurely morning

lounging in her peignoir, contentedly indulging in the sensual pleasures of breakfast in a “sunny chair” (WSCPP, 53) .

Throughout the poem, Stevens reverses the traditional Christian symbolism by juxtaposing images of the natural world associated with light with the Christian world of darkness. In stark contrast, the natural world, filled with sunlight is composed of “pungent oranges and bright, green wings” (WSCPP, 56) .Thoughts of the death of Christ on this Sunday come in only in darkness, silent like the grave. Christianity’s focus on death is illustrated by its “ancient sacrifice” (WSCPP, 56) and “dominion of the blood and sepulchre” (WSCPP, 61). Throughout the rest of the poem, the poet’s persona engages in a dialogue with the woman, trying to imbue her with a vision of nature that can satisfy her deepest impulses for spiritual and emotional fulfillment.

For the rest of the poem, Stevens turns to the traditional *carpe diem* motif, with the speaker trying to convince the young woman to seize the day. However, the methods he suggests to accomplish this, reflect a modern and original turn where unlike the *geisweit* of his age , the poet is not lamenting like Eliot the loss of faith in traditional religion but rather considering it as an impetus toward individual freedom.

#### **e.The French Influence: Stevens and the Symbolists:**

Stevens’ own repudiating attitude toward any possible literary influence on his poetry made his affiliation to any particular literary school and in particular that of the French Symbolists rather uncertain. His refusal to contemplate the idea of poetic influence of any kind has already been proven with Whitman whose influence he rejects. The same can be said for The French Symbolists. In 1953, Stevens wrote in a letter , “It is a queer thing that so few reviewers seem to realize that one writes poetry because one must. Most of them seem to think that one writes poetry to imitate Mallarmé, or in order to be a member of this or that school. It is quite possible to have a feeling about the world which creates a need that nothing satisfies

except poetry and this has nothing to do with other poets or with anything else.”<sup>488</sup> In another letter, he precisely explained that “if I have [ he has ] picked up anything from [Mallarmé, Verlaine, Lafargue, Valéry and Baudelaire] it has been unconsciously” (LWS, 96). When asked directly what influence the French language had upon him in 1929 by René Taupin, Stevens replied in a generic and sufficiently oblique way: “ La légèreté, la grâce, le son et la couleur du français ont eu sur moi une influence indéniable et une influence précieuse. ”<sup>489</sup>

Despite his refusal to acknowledge any influence on his work, his poems are full with allusions to and echoes of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. It has been noted that the men painting lakes in “Le Monocle de Mon Oncle” alludes to Mallarmé’s “Las de l’Amer Repos.” The more striking example of his French Francophilia and connections comes from Baudelaire. In fact, the refrain of “Sea Surface Full of Clouds” takes its origin from Baudelaire’s “L’Invitation au voyage,” and the young poet in his attic room in “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” refers to Baudelaire’s ‘Paysage’. ‘Esthétique du Mal’ echoes *Les Fleurs du mal*. And these are only a few examples. Stevens often assimilated and transformed his source that it is impossible to identify it with any certainty. Nonetheless, a number of Stevens’ poems, as their titles indicate, including “Montrachet- le Jardin,” “Le Monocle de mon Oncle” and “La Fleurie” “reverberate with French diction, characters , and allude to French poets. Other poems even when their titles do not call to mind directly French connections, France and French constitute their origins, and the presence of the French Symbolist poets is undisputable. In the famous line from *Adagia*, “French and English constitute a single language” (WSCPP, 914), Stevens, linking English and French, asserts, in this way, his profound kinship, if not sheer identity, to both languages. For Stevens, poetry should be mixed, hybrid, and mutually enriched. He poetically fuses the two

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488. Wallace Stevens, quoted in Samuel French Mors, Introduction to *Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Vintage Book, 1959), v.

489. Benamou, Michel. *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) p. xvii;

languages as in, “[C] ompound [ing] the imagination’s Latin with / The lingua franca et jocundissima” (WSCPP, 343). Poetic expressions of this kind abound in Stevens’ poems.

These friendships had a tremendous impact upon Stevens simply by enlarging his scope. Incidentally, Arensberg himself translated Mallarmé’s “Afternoon of the Faun,” which was a translation Stevens expressly said he knew about though he professed not to have read it, in a letter to Hi Simons in 1939 (LWS, 391). But in the same letter Stevens made a taciturn admission that he had read something of each of the poets listed by Simons; Mallarmé, Verlaine, Laforgue, Valéry, and Baudelaire, but did not take from them consciously. One of Stevens’ answers to this same question, however, sheds more light. Stevens’ Letters show that he was widely read in periodicals including French ones, and, apparently, he was informed well enough to be able to get the right book at the right time. To this we might add that in the war-time period, an appetite for art that would transform the old forms was revived in him by his engagement with the artists around the small magazine *Others* which was devoted to experimental art; poetry and theater mostly. If Stevens was to this extent alert to the possibilities of poetry at the time and was able to reply to the debate of the French 1920s on pure poetry, although he was a decade too late for it to be included in the same wave of publicity, would it be conceivable that he miss Valéry? J. Ronald Lane Latimer’s 1935 question to Stevens whether he knew Valéry was answered negatively but shows the nature of the poetic kinship. Latimer might also have asked, how was it that there was so much in common between the two poets’ way of thinking. Stevens’ answer later became typical of him on this subject saying “I have read very little of Valéry” (LWS, 290 ), but he went on to specify in just what way there could have been a common understanding between them

#### **4. Baudelaire’s Presence in Stevens’ Poetry :**

“Dutch Graves in Bucks County” is one of the two poems in *Transport* that allude to Charles Baudelaire, the second being “Esthétique du Mal.” Even though Stevens, as a speaker addresses dead “Pennsylvania Dutch men” (WSCPP, 258), summoning up his ancestral

geographical and literary background, and considering questions of history and continuity, with his well-known interest in genealogy, the poem remains an allusion to Baudelaire.

It opens with a description of modern soldiers at war, “angry men and furious machines (WSCPP, 258), but these are contrasted, in what becomes an allusion in a refrain, with the ancestral Pennsylvania Dutchmen: “And you, my semblables, in sooty residence / Tap skeleton drums inaudibly” (WSCPP, 258) .

“Semblables” (CPTSE, 55) is an obvious allusion to Baudelaire’s “Au Lecteur,” the famous opening poem of *Les Fleurs du mal*. In Baudelaire’s poem, after listing a series of human sins and evils, the speaker ends with the dramatic address to the reader: “Hypocrite lecteur, - mon semblable, - mon frère!” (CPTSE, 55). By calling the reader a brother and a similar, the poet is involving him or her in the acceptance of sin portrayed in the poem.

Hence, the French presence in the poem centers on the repeated allusion to “Au Lecteur” with its implications of hypocrisy and lying, and the accompanying French words of associated deceit in “chimeres” and “On-dit”. Stevens’ diction suggests that attempting to find significance for the present in the past can be deceptive. Early in the poem Stevens refers to the modern war, represented synecdochally, by the expression “on-dit”:

There are circles of weapons in the Sun.

The air attends the brightened guns

As if sounds were forming

Out of themselves, a saying,

An expressive on-dit, a profession. (WSCPP, 258)

“On-dit” is a French phrase that signifies a spoken rumor or even a falsehood, although it mostly has the meaning of gossip or hearsay (Larousse, OED). Furthering the theme of questionable truth and possible deception, Stevens later uses the term “chimeres” in the last

regular refrain of the poem: “the stars, rny semblables, chimeres, / Shine on the very living of those alive” (WSCPP, 261) .

“Chimere” is the Middle English spelling of the Modern English “chimera”. By using the Middle English spelling Stevens is emphasizing the French background of “chimeres” and making it appear more French than “chimera”. This furthers its association with “semblables” and “on dit,” the other French words of deception and dissimulation in the poem. The use of “chimeres” and “on-dit” all emphasize how easy it is for one to be deceived about history and war. In the end, though “Dutch Graves” is a consciously American poem, its use of French words and the allusion to Baudelaire are striking and attest of the French pre-Modernist influence, albeit undeclared on Stevens’ American poetry.

“ Esthétique du Mal” alludes «to Baudelaire too. The title itself recalls Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*. As one of the most recent canonical explorations of sin “mal”, Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* stands as a testimonial document of the treatment of the subject, after Dante. While Stevens addresses and alludes to literary predecessors and contemporaries like, Dante and Eliot, among others, he has to summon them up and allude to them before he dismisses them. Baudelaire comes to mind at the beginning of section IV:

Livres de Toutes Sortes de Fleurs d'après Nature.

All sorts of flowers. That’s the sentimentalist.

When B sat down at the piano and made

A transparence in which we heard music, made music,

In which we heard transparent sounds, did he play

All sorts of notes? Or did he play only one

In an ecstasy of its associates,

Variations in the tones of a single sound,

The last, or sounds so single they seemed one? (WSCPP, 279)

The strong allusion in the title of Stevens' poem and more specifically from the French opening line of the stanza suggest strongly that the identity of "B" is that of Baudelaire. Despite that Baudelaire is seen as outdated, Stevens' use of the French poet as a poetic axis for examinations of historical and aesthetic falsehood and mal in this poem, and "Dutch Graves" suggests that he still has a high opinion of Baudelaire and the lasting resonance of his poetry.

### **5. Urbanization of poetry: The City as Metaphor:**

The French Symbolists like Baudelaire integrate the repugnant aspects of the modern metropolis into their works, to epitomize the costs of urbanization, and industrialization. They use the city as literary material to show their dismay at the transformation of the once green and beautiful nature. Baudelaire per se responds to the changing face of his beloved Paris by taking refuge in recollections of its mythic greatness but also with a sense of exile and alienation. His poem, "The Swan" is a particularly urban poem in which Baudelaire symbolizes this feeling of isolation, similar to the other "Spleen" poems in which the speaker feels that the entire city is against him.

"The Swan" is the fourth poem of the section "Tableaux Parisiens," focusing on the reaction of the poem's speaker to the change resulting from the demolition of sections of old Paris to make way for urban renewal. The poem is infused with the rhythm of Paris changing, and mutation, with the nostalgia for a city turned upside down by the Hausmannian alterations.

In "The Swan," the poet "wanders through the new Place du Carrousel, in front of the Louvre, conscious of the houses and streets that had to be demolished to make way for the new order of things."<sup>490</sup> The poet notices that all that is left from the old Paris is "jumbled "bric- a-brac."<sup>491</sup> The focus in this section is on the suffering of modern Parisian life which Baudelaire finds ugly but attractive.

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490. Ross Chambers, "Baudelaire's Paris," *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, eds. Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43.

491. *Ibid.*, 109.

Among the themes of "The Swan," as well as other Baudelaire poems about Paris in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, are alienation, and despondency. Baudelaire becomes an alien in his native city when urban renewal replaces the familiar sights and landmarks he knew in earlier times. In this new Paris, he feels an exile in his own city. This sense of exile is exemplified by an equally lost swan. The swan, away from its natural environment, does not feel at ease at the urban environment of Paris which is a place of exile. In Paris with its "dry pavement" (FECB, 333), "uneven ground" (FECB, 333), and "dry gutter" (FECB, 333), the swan only "bathed his wings in the dust" (FECB, 333). The swan feels "homesick for his fair native lake" (FECB, 333). Like the swan, which was taken from its native lake, the poet's speaker feels alien in his town:

Paris has changed, but in my grief no change.  
New palaces and scaffoldings and blocks,  
To me, are allegories, nothing strange.  
My memories are heavier than rocks.  
Passing the Louvre, one image makes me sad:  
That swan, like other exiles that we knew,  
Grandly absurd, with gestures of the mad,  
Gnawed by one craving! (FECB, 335)

The new Paris does not erase the poet's "memories" of the Old Paris which, on the contrary, plunges his mind into sadness and melancholy. Now, like the swan, the poet hardly feels any harmony with the new Paris:

As I passed by the new-built Carrousel.  
Old Paris is no more (a town, alas,  
Changes more quickly than man's heart may change);  
Yet in my mind I still can see the booths;  
The heaps of brick and rough-hewn capitals;

The grass; the stones all over-green with moss;

The débris, and the square-set heaps of tiles. (FECB, 335)

As the speaker says, “Mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs” (My dear memories are heavier than rocks) (FECB, 335), we understand that the past remains alive in the memory of Baudelaire who refuses to forget. The fact that, in the poet’s states of mind, -his melancholy and nostalgia,- nothing has changed points to an unwillingness to accept the new circumstances. The refusal to submit to the new reality, and his stubborn resistance to change appear at once as a capacity to transform everything into allegory, yet, constitutes a source of inadaptability and suffering that Stevens rejects.

Even when Stevens learned from the Symbolists how to explore a gloomy urban environment and to translate its experience into poetry, he does it with optimism. Here, he seems to accept modernity as Walt Whitman did in “Passage to India.” His acceptance of a chaotic, yet exciting world which always comes true distances him from those “ city-poets “ who feel alienation, fear , and despair in the urban space. Stevens like Whitman embraces modernity. In fact, the circumstances of daily life in urban settings are the central subject in many of Stevens’ poems. For example, the poem “The Man with the Blue Guitar” brings the poet in front of the reality of the city.

For Stevens, since there is nothing else to do, he, therefore, accepts the modern reality as it is, with its suffering. On the other hand, to make things livable and bearable, he offers the poet’s imagination. As an instrument for the transformation of reality, imagination may surpass and transcend the suffering of urban life. He wrote:

Reality is a cliché

From which we escape by metaphor

It is only au pays de la métaphore

Qu’on est poète. (WSCPP, 920)

By setting up a contrast between reality as imprisonment and the metamorphosing imagination we can escape the constraints of everyday life. Stevens's blue guitar is an instrument of invention, a metaphor for how we construct metaphors. By singing our pleasures and pain, his blue guitar, just like Picasso and Braque do with their paintings, reflects our states of mind. Despite the destroyed shapes and rotted names we continue to try and make sense of the world. Even if reality is sometimes bleak, and we can't change it, we can at least 'patch' the world as best we can. Stevens, is not preaching or moralizing as Eliot does, but simply guiding and helping people live their lives. Thus, Stevens becomes a poet who tries to mend the world and the city, away from the urban ennui of the French Symbolists and who stresses his acceptance "of things as they are" (WSCPP, 135) and their transformation where things "are changed upon the blue guitar" (WSCPP, 135) .

A poem such as "The Man with the Blue Guitar" ( 1937) constitutes in its thirty-three sections, a sort of dialog between a guitarist and an unknown, "they" about the role of the artist in society and the transformative function of art in the modern world: "They said you have a blue guitar / You don't play things as they are. / The man replied : 'Things as they are /Are changed upon the blue guitar' " (WSCPP, 135) .

While reshaping reality; "The Man with the Blue Guitar" locates us directly in the urban industrial waste land of Eliot's Waste Land and Baudelaire's Paris. The poet is struggling boldly and courageously against a hostile environment, no longer green but that of the urban industrial waste land of "sewers" and "electrif[ied] nimbuses":

To create is 'to live at war,  
To chop the sullen psaltery,  
To improve the sewers in Jerusalem,  
To electrify the nimbuses.' (WSCPP, 142)

Although the world the poet has to face is no longer the pastoral world, but the urban industrial waste land of “sewers” and “electrif[ied] nimbuses,” and though the spirituality and the divinity of “Jerusalem” has been encroached by urbanization and its sewers, Stevens does not feel despaired or alienated as Eliot felt in “The Waste Land” or “the Love Song of A. J. Pruffrock”. On the contrary, the decline of spirituality will be an occasion for Stevens to stir his imagination to transform and represent the urban world in a fresh yet still recognizable way. In order to give free rein to his imagination, Stevens needs to focus on a world “without [the] shadows” (WSCPP, 144) of the metaphysical trappings of traditional religion.

When Eliot, like Baudelaire, uses the urban environment to reinforce a feeling of alienation of the modern city, Stevens, on the contrary, attempts to reconcile modern suburban life, its telephone poles and pensioners with the internal, imaginative world of his poetry. Here, without any feeling of Eliotan despair, is the description of the “banal suburb” of Oxidia:

..... On a pole  
Supporting heavy cables, slung  
Through Oxidia, banal suburb,  
One-half of all its installments paid.  
Dew-dapper clapper-traps, blazing  
From crusty stacks above machines. (WSCPP, 149)

In “Preludes,” for instance, Eliot exposes his mania with the urban environment by divulging the existence of a monotonous life and the alienation of its inhabitants. The poem portrays the meaningless life lived both at night and in the morning by the urbanites. The use of sordid and dirty images describing the dreary city reinforces the feeling of misery and depression the residents feel, especially at the end of the day, at “Six o’clock. The burnt-out ends of smoky days” (CPTSE, 13). The first section of the poem, conveys particularly a sad

and unhealthy atmosphere while describing a smoky winter evening in a house in the back of the street:

The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steaks in passageways.  
Six o'clock. The burnt-out ends of smoky days,  
And now a gusty shower wraps  
The grimy scraps Of withered leaves about your feet  
And newspapers from vacant lots;  
The shower beats  
On broken blinds and chimney-pots. (CPTSE, 13)

The desolate and bleak constituents of this urban landscape represented by “Withered leaves,” “newspapers from vacant lots,” “broken blinds,” and “chimney-pots” heap up to emphasize the city-dwellers’ emotional states of disgust about the dirtiness and ugliness of the city life. Even when the morning comes, things are not better; it also brings smells of beers from the streets covered with “sawdust”(CPTSE, 13) and trodden by “muddy feet” (CPTSE, 13) of the crowd. There is no escape for these inhabitants who are trapped in a daily routine. The mechanical movement from home to work through beer kiosk attests of their daily monotonous existence, what Eliot calls a masquerade:

The morning comes to consciousness  
Of faint stale smells of beer  
From the sawdust-trampled street  
With all its muddy feet that press  
To early coffee-stands.  
With the other masquerades  
That time resumes. (CPTSE, 23)

In the third section of the poem, the residents 'sense of hopelessness and unhappiness is reinforced by the appearance of an unknown "you", lying in a private room:

You lay upon your back, and waited;  
You dozed, and watched the night revealing  
The thousand sordid images  
Of which your soul was constituted. (CPTSE, 24)

After spending a restless night haunted by nerve-wracking memories of the "thousand sordid images," the character comes to his senses in the morning. Nonetheless, he feels no desire or appetite for life. Lacking passion and expectation, his existence is meaningless and can be summed up to nothing but mere routine he performs mechanically.

Though Stevens' setting is urban, similar to the urban settings described by Eliot and Baudelaire, the atmosphere felt in each is quite different. This world which is made of elemental and common elements like "The flesh, the bone, the dirt, and the stone" (WSCPP, 144) is far removed from the idealized Romantic notion of the locus Aemonus, yet it is a suburban environment, that Stevens calls "Oxidia" (WSCPP, 149). It is neither the ideal place to live nor one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It is a suburban environment whose trite ideals are articulated in pecuniary terms and whose communication has been abridged to electronic messages transmitted over telephone poles:

From this I shall evolve a man.  
This is his essence: the old fantoche  
Hanging his shawl upon the wind,  
Like something on the stage, puffed out,  
His strutting studied through centuries.  
At last, in spite of his manner, his eye

A-cock at the cross piece on a pole  
Supporting heavy cables, slung  
Through Oxidia, banal suburb,  
One-half of all its installments paid. (WSCPP, 149)

Owing to the poet's imagination, that can transform a banal suburb and ordinary objects as "heavy cables" into a poetic medium, and heighten them to render them tolerable and acceptable, Oxidia becomes the second Olympia:

Ecce, Oxidia is the seed  
Dropped out of this amber-ember pod,  
Oxidia is the soot of fire,  
Oxidia is Olympia. (WSCPP, 149)

The last line "Oxidia is Olympia" implies that Oxidia is no less significant and weighty than Olympia. It is even equal in status and rank to it. And even if, it does not contain archeological treasures of Greek art, such as temples, monuments, altars, theaters, and statues but only sewers, electrified nimbuses, and telephone poles, it may be perceived as precious and valuable as ancient Olympia is for the Greeks.

At this point, another comparison with both Baudelaire's and Eliot's treatment of the city is worth noticing. The same sense of insignificance of human life and estrangement from the city witnessed in "Preludes" can easily be demonstrated in Eliot's city of London in "The Waste Land," too. Oxidia is not the Unreal City that Eliot describes in the "Waste Land." To intensify the "unreal" in the city of London, that is the lack of communication and interaction in modern society, Eliot adopts the Beaudelarian phantasmagorical vision which characterizes Baudelaire's Paris. In the last stanza of the first section, "The Burial of the Dead," of "The Waste Land," "the speaker calls the city of London "Unreal City" (CPTSE, 55). The familiar setting of London becomes strange due to the emotionless and mechanical people that inhabit

the city. The crowd of people that “flowed over London Bridge” (CPTSE,55) consists of people “undone” (CPTSE, 55) by death. What "undoes" these people is not biological death but the mechanical, meaningless death-in-life of their daily routine.

The final section of “The Wasteland,” “What the Thunder Said,” mentions several cities specifically: “Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London” (CPTSE, 77) and calls them all “unreal” (CPTSE, 77). The aim of such grouping is to make the city of London, which is supposed to be familiar to Eliot’s reader, unfamiliar, remote and strange as the other cities.

In essence, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of Wallace Stevens' intricate negotiation between his American identity and the rich tapestry of European cultural influences. It reveals how Stevens, despite his commitment to Americanness, weaves a cosmopolitan thread into his poetry, creating a body of work that transcends national boundaries and engages with a broader, transatlantic literary landscape.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has navigated the intricate landscape of Modernist poetry, particularly the works of Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot, challenging the conventional dichotomies that have historically framed discussions of their literary contributions. The prevalent division between the nationalist Neo-Modernism of Stevens and the internationalist Paleo-Modernism of Eliot, while useful for certain analytical purposes, proves limiting when seeking a more nuanced understanding of their poetic endeavors.

Chapters three and four of this study initially align with the established academic divisions, highlighting the stark differences between Stevens and Eliot, as emphasized by

scholars like Harold Bloom and Hillis Miller. The contrasting tones of Eliot's "Paleface" and Stevens' "Red Skin" poetry, to use Rahv's words, reinforce the prevailing narrative of two diametrically opposed Modernist movements. However, as we delve into chapters five and six, a deliberate shift occurs, steering away from the binary oppositions and opting for a comparative exploration.

By placing Stevens and Eliot side by side, rather than pitting them against each other, a more nuanced perspective emerges. This approach enables a reversal of the conventional proposition that Eliot's poetry is fundamentally opposed to Stevens'. Instead, it becomes evident that both poets, despite their distinct methodologies and poetic theories, respond to the same cultural imperatives of their time — a shared endeavor to revolutionize poetry in the face of unprecedented societal transformations.

While each poet exhibits a unique approach to crafting Modernist poetry, the divergence lies more in their views on the craft of poetry than in their shared responses to the cultural context. Both Stevens and Eliot, deeply rooted in the Romantic tradition and heir to Nineteenth-Century cultural heritage, set out to reformulate poetry to mirror the realities of the Twentieth Century. The challenge was not just to create a national or international poetry, but to embrace both the local and the global dimensions.

Stevens, often associated with a more nationalistic approach, reveals a rich and varied body of work that draws from diverse influences, including French Symbolism, British Romanticism, and American Transcendentalism. Dismissing his poetry as solely nationalistic overlooks a substantial portion of its complexity. Similarly, branding Eliot's poetry as exclusively internationalist neglects his deep-seated connection to American roots, even if concealed by his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism and British citizenship.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the interdependence of the foreign, the European, and the indigenous components in both poets' works. Stevens, despite his intentional geographic

and cultural distance from Europe, weaves an international thread into his poetry. The frequent references to European places, persons, and items challenge the notion that his poetry is solely American. Likewise, Eliot's veneration of European culture and constant allusions to past authors underscore the enduring presence of his American roots, even in the midst of his European affiliations.

In the final analysis, it becomes evident that the binary distinctions between American and European qualities in their poetry are overly reductive. The fusion of indigenous and foreign elements in both Stevens and Eliot's works necessitates a two-way interpretation, embracing an American, national, and international reading simultaneously. As Stevens aptly notes in his lecture on 'The Irrational Element in Poetry,' notions of 'European' and 'American' are, ultimately, 'too general to be serviceable.'

In the hope that this study's proposition of a new reading — one that embraces the intertwined complexities of both poets' works — gains traction, it is anticipated that future examinations of their poetry will evolve beyond simplistic categorizations. This thesis, serving as a stepping stone, invites scholars and enthusiasts alike to engage in a more profound exploration of the multifaceted nature of Modernist poetry and the shared cultural currents that shaped the poetic visions of Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot.

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